



Fame and the social self: The need to belong, narcissism, and relatedness predict the appeal of fame

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ABSTRACT

The present online survey study (Amazon's MTurk; $n = 371$) investigated links between three different social self-concepts (the need to belong, narcissism, and relatedness) and the appeal of fame. We examined fame attitudes using a newly-devised fame appeal scale (yielding three factors: Visibility, Status and Prosocial), as well as with two items probing frequency of fame fantasizing and perceived realism of becoming famous. Results show that higher belongingness needs were associated with increased appeal of all three fame factors, as well as increased frequency of fantasizing about fame (accounting for age and gender). Narcissism was associated with increased appeal of Visibility and Status, more time spent engaged in fame fantasy, and greater perceived realism of future fame. Finally, Relatedness predicted increased appeal of the Prosocial fame factor only. Findings illuminate the socioemotional underpinnings of fame appeal and the individual differences that may render certain aspects of fame particularly alluring.

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1. Introduction

We are not only gregarious animals, liking to be in sight of our fellows, but we have an innate propensity to get ourselves noticed, and noticed favorably, by our kind (James, 1893, p. 179).

The present media landscape is increasingly saturated with images of fame and celebrity. From television to magazines to websites and blogs, we are chronically confronted with other people's glamorous lifestyles, wardrobes, romantic partners and success stories. Further, we are living in a cultural moment in which ostensibly anyone can achieve sudden fame via the latest reality television show or YouTube.com video (or via celebrity scent osmosis with Lady Gaga's perfume: *Fame*). While the allure of fame is certainly not a new phenomenon, the ubiquity and perceived accessibility of fame seems to be at an all time high. Thus, it seems prudent to empirically interrogate why fame may be appealing and for whom. The present study investigates trends in views of self in concert with views of fame in an adult sample.

Specifically, we explore three constructs that tap individuals' sense of self in relation to others: the extent to which individuals are preoccupied with inclusion (i.e., the Need to Belong, Leary,

Kelly, Cottrell, & Schreindorfer, 2005); the extent to which individuals feel superior to others (Narcissism, Konrath, Meier, & Bushman, 2013); and, the extent to which individuals feel securely connected to others (i.e., the Relatedness subscale of Deci & Ryan's, 2000, Basic Psychological Needs scale). We reasoned that these constructs captured three distinct if related views of self in a social context, which would help clarify social psychological motivations for fame. A desire to fit in, a belief in self-importance, and a sense of positive social connection might each be linked to a greater or less extent with particular appeals of fame. We examine the latter via a newly-devised scale that incorporates various motives—from being recognized, to being wealthy, to having the ability to help others.

1.1. Need to belong

The need to belong, or to feel positively and consistently connected to others, has been conceptualized as a fundamental human need that underlies various cultural institutions, from religion to marriage, and is associated with emotional well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This affiliative motivation may have primitive, powerful roots. Many scholars agree that throughout human history, being a member of a cohesive social group could mean the difference between life and death from any number of outside threats. The extent to which physical survival hinged on successful social bonds is also supported by recent research in social neuroscience. For example, reminding people of recent rejection

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experiences activates areas of the brain associated not only with emotional pain, but with physical pain (Kross, Berman, Mischel, Smith, & Wager, 2011). We are apparently biologically prepared to attend to and avoid social rejection much in the same way that we are motivated to attend to and avoid physical pain.

If being seen and valued are of paramount importance to human survival—physical and emotional—it is intuitive to imagine that fame, and the visibility and value it confers, may be considered the ultimate vehicle by which to accomplish these goals. Indeed, Baumeister and Leary (1995) point out that in modern society, the fundamental need to belong may manifest in a “fundamental quest for fame” (p. 521)—motivated by the fantasy that fame may come with the promise of lifelong social inclusion. In a related vein, recent scholarship has shown that fame may be particularly appealing to those whose primitive anxieties about death have been aroused. In three different studies, Greenberg, Kosloff, Solomon, Cohen, and Landau (2010) found that priming people with death anxiety increased interest in becoming famous, having a star named after them, and increased liking for a painting that was attributed to Johnny Depp (vs. a lesser known artist). The explanation for these findings, according to the authors, is that being famous provides a form of symbolic immortality.

The need to belong can be conceptualized as both a fundamental human need and as an individual difference that captures the extent to which individuals are preoccupied with social inclusion (e.g., “I want other people to accept me”; Leary et al., 2005). Individuals with heightened inclusion needs may find fame and celebrity particularly appealing because of the social value fame confers. Indeed, related research shows that increased belongingness needs predicted increased imagined intimacy with media figures (Greenwood & Long, 2011). Famous others may function as idealized “friends” with whom to affiliate; such affiliations may also temporarily soothe inclusion needs (Derrick, Gabriel, & Hugenberg, 2009). To our knowledge, however, no one has yet assessed the need to belong in concert with an interest in fame *per se*. Our study is designed to test this prediction.

1.2. Narcissism

Much scholarly and popular discussion has focused on the rise of narcissism in American culture (e.g., Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Although psychologists continue to clarify the definitional nuances of narcissism (grandiose vs. vulnerable subtypes; unstable vs. truly high self-esteem), it is typically characterized by an explicit perception of superiority over others and is often linked to anti-social tendencies such as aggression and lower levels of empathy (Bushman & Thomaes, 2011). Explanations for this increase are diverse and speculative, but scholars have noted a comorbid emphasis on self-aggrandizement in both social and entertainment media (Konrath, O'Brien, & Hsing, 2010; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). A cultural climate that celebrates self-promotion may not only render fame appealing to those hoping to fit in, but to those hoping to stand out. Perhaps not surprisingly, narcissism has been found to predict an interest in fame (Maltby, 2010) and in extrinsic aspirations (including a desire for fame and wealth) more broadly construed (Kasser & Ryan, 1996).

One of the most elaborate recent investigations of fame interest was undertaken by Maltby (2010), who found that narcissism was positively correlated with Intensity (e.g., “Very little matters to me apart from being famous”) Celebrity Lifestyle (e.g., “I want to be rich”), Drive (e.g., “I work hard everyday to be famous”), and Perceived Suitability (e.g., “I’ve got what it takes to be famous”). Narcissism was not correlated significantly with altruistic motives for fame, nor was it correlated with an acknowledged interest in fame due to personal feelings of vulnerability (e.g., “I want to be famous because then people would notice me”). The present study repli-

cates and extends Maltby's (2010) work by reassessing associations between narcissism and fame interest and constructing a new, streamlined fame measure. Maltby's (2010) utilized 42 items and six subscales, which proved difficult to simplify due to high overlap among them; we aimed for greater parsimony by generating fewer, more focused items with the goal of capturing fewer distinct factors. Further, rather than ask participants to report on a personal investment in fame, we ask about the broader perceived appeal of fame, which taps normative motivations. We also build on Maltby's (2010) work by contextualizing narcissistic links to fame appeal with less overtly attention-seeking tendencies: the need to belong and our final self-concept construct, a positive sense of feeling connected to others.

1.3. Relatedness

Relatedness has been conceptualized as one of three “basic psychological needs” by Deci and Ryan's (2000), along with feelings of autonomy and competence, all of which are indicators of a healthy socio-emotional life. Scoring high on relatedness, unlike scoring high on belongingness needs, does not indicate anxiety about social exclusion, but rather a sense of security with one's social network and the degree to which one is valued by others. Research has found that daily feelings of relatedness—feeling understood and having meaningful interactions with social partners—were associated with positive mood, vitality and well-being (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000). Further, when one's relational needs are met, one may be less motivated to attain extrinsic goals such as image, fame, and wealth (Deci & Ryan, 2000)—the latter of which have been shown to be associated with lower levels of emotional health and well-being (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Compared to individuals with inclusion anxiety or with heightened perceptions of their own superiority, individuals whose social and emotional needs are met by their existing social networks may not feel the need to fantasize about being seen and valued on a grander scale.

1.4. The present study

The present study seeks to clarify how specific views of self are associated with specific dimensions of fame appeal. The goals of the present study were two-fold: (1) to devise a streamlined measure of fame appeal, and, (2) to determine whether and how the need to belong, narcissism and relatedness predict specific facets of fame appeal. With respect to the first goal, we generated a series of items aimed to capture various motives: to be seen/recognized, to have status/wealth, to help others or be a role model, and to have power/control over one's life. Although we were engaged in exploratory scale development, we designed the scale with anticipated conceptual groupings in mind, which were used to generate relevant hypotheses.

We predicted that increased belonging needs would predict increased appeal of all aspects of fame because fame *per se* may be a powerful draw for those with a strong desire to be a valued group member. However, in step with prior research, we predicted that narcissism would be linked to self-promotional aspects of fame such as recognition and status. Conversely, we predicted that relatedness would be associated with other-oriented motives for fame, if any. Individuals who feel meaningfully connected to others in their social networks may be less likely to crave opportunities for superficial forms of recognition or status. Finally, we predicted that increased belongingness needs would be associated with fantasizing about fame, though not necessarily with perceived realism of fame, whereas narcissism would predict both fantasizing and perceived realism of becoming famous one day.

We anticipated that women would score higher on belonging needs, as was previously found (Greenwood & Long, 2011), as well

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