

SOCIAL MEDIA NARCISSISM: AN EXAMINATION OF BLOGS
BY B-LIST CELEBRITIES

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Social Media Narcissism: An examination of blogs by B-list celebrities

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ABSTRACT

The birth of social media into our culture is something that has drastically altered the communication patterns of human behavior. Fifteen years ago, we lived in a world that limited the amount of human interactions that could occur on a daily, weekly, monthly, and annual basis. At times, social networking is a constant barrage of opinions and ideas being formulated on the World Wide Web that in turn could trigger a response of feedback from a viewer. This can be done in an attempt to gain popularity and attention from the people that we interact with online. Buffardi (2008) looked at the different associations that narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) has with social media. Those who suffer from NPD are distinguished to have numerous contacts, but that those relationships remain shallow and immaturely developed. There is also the development of a relationship with an individual for the betterment and self-preservation of one's character in their own eyes. This study analyzes specific blogs, and identifies particular traits and features of an individual who may in fact suffer from NPD, and then in turn portray those features on their blogs.

Keywords: Narcissism, Blogging, Social Media

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Rationale

In October of 1998, Bruce Ableson launched one of the premier social networking sites called OpenDiary.com, or in his own words “the first web site that brought online diary writers together into a community” (Lulu, 2005). The site gave online writers the ability to connect and document anything and everything that they wanted, transforming the art of record keeping to the online forum where it rests today. Open Diary has now hosted over half a million online diaries on their site, and continues to grow with more readership (Washington Post, 2007).

Six months after Open Diary’s introduction, Brad Fitzpatrick started up Live Journal.com, a similar social-networking site (SNS), mainly created to help Fitzpatrick keep in contact with long-lost high school friends and associates. This site followed similar success patterns that Open Diary did, and by the end of 2011, Live Journal was host to over 1.8 million active users (Live Journal, 2012).

In August of 1999, Evan Williams and Meg Hourihan introduced blogger.com, another parallel site to the previously mentioned that gave online surfers the opportunity to publish in a similar fashion as both Open Diary and Live Journal.com. Blogger.com would later be bought out and hosted by Google under a sub-domain name of blogspot.com, and is currently one of the most popular and updated blog-hosting sites on the entire web, currently the 10th most trafficked website in the United States, (Alexa, 2012) allowing users to time-stamp their entries and publish as frequently as they wish.

Social networking took a giant leap forward in 2004 when Mark Zuckerberg designed Facebook.com, which originally was the spawn of a simple website Facemash.com, a ratings website giving students at his Ivy League institution the ability to transform their online personas by clicking “yes” or “no” on whether they thought the image of a fellow classmate was physically attractive or not. Over time Facemash.com evolved into Facebook.com, one of the most successful Social Networking Sites available to the public. With over 800 million registered accounts on Facebook (LA Times, 2011), this website is something that has become a common use for the general public. It is estimated that 41.6% of the American population currently has a Facebook account (Social Media Today, 2011).

These four websites have all been monumental in the growth of society’s opportunity to articulate and communicate with one another, and express thoughts and opinions to millions of fellow users across the globe. This can be seen by the massive growth in users of Facebook over its history. As of August 2008, Facebook had just over 100 million users (Zuckerberg, 2008). A year and a half later, that number had quadrupled in size to over 400 million users (Facebook, 2010). This is just one example of how prevalent and widespread social networking has become. These four websites have monopolized on a younger demographic’s hunger for a simpler and less obstructed way to interact online. This can be seen by offshoot social networking sites that have been introduced to the general public in recent years. Websites such as Foursquare, LinkedIn, Gowalla, and Google Plus, are considered emerging trends with different spins on social networking such as GPS-location updates by mobile phones and group messaging services to those who are a

part of the same social network or website. These four websites may have also engineered a subconscious growth of narcissistic egos that keeps fueling them at an alarming rate. A recent survey in 2011, showed that 47% of all Americans are a part of at least one or more social networking websites (Social Media Today, 2011).

The birth of social media into our culture is something that has drastically altered the communication patterns of human behavior. Fifteen years ago, we lived in a world that limited the amount of human interactions that could occur on a daily, weekly, monthly, and annual basis. Those limits were instilled prior to the birth of such tools as cellular telephones, text messaging, and the Internet, which overnight increased the number of interactions that we could have with another human being. Prior to this digital communication overload, the people that we could surround ourselves with on an interpersonal level were in theory the only outlets that we had for human interaction. The sporadic long-distance telephone call to a remote relative or a high school associate seemed to be the extent of our furthest communication. However, once digital communication became more prevalent, and more and more people began to own smart phones, text messaging services, IM usernames and Facebook accounts, those bars were lifted and communication began to flourish digitally.

The development of the Internet may have had an influence in our interpersonal behaviors because of the removal of boundaries, such as distance, that were made for our general communication patterns. However, online communication for a substantial period of time was headed only in one direction. Barbara Kaye (2005) points this out in her analysis of the Internet: "Although some

Web pages may contain interactive components, such as e-mail and online polls, the Web is largely a one-way source of information” (p. 75). This idea stemmed from prior research done by Lin and Jeffres (1998) discussing how Internet users do not have the capability to interact with a site on the Web, however, the option of being able to post links from one site to another gives the users the ability to connect with one another, giving them a slight form of two-way Internet communication.

The adoption of electronic mail, Internet chat rooms, bulletin boards, and online forums began to pave the way for the concept of two-way communication among users, with the ability to interact with individuals thousands of miles away by the click of a mouse combined with a few quick strikes upon a keyboard. The development and use of online chat rooms and instant messaging assisted the streamlining of two-way communication throughout the late 90’s. Software programs such as Yahoo IM and MSN Messenger are still operated by over 330 million active users (WLMT, 2009).

Two-way Internet communication continued to flourish with the influx of social media websites such as Myspace, Facebook and Twitter giving users the ability to connect and communicate about people who they are following and vice versa. Weblogging, where voiced opinions are transposed into 1’s and 0’s giving authors the opportunity to be heard by users and online participants has followed a similar pattern with the dimensions of two-way online communication, by allowing participants the chance to provide their own personal feedback about a blogpost that they have just read or seen. A uniqueness about blogging that differs from the above mentioned social networking sites is that the layout is not in the fashion

where it is a public forum where everyone witnesses all of the thoughts, status updates and tweets that are posted. Bloggers tend to have a particular number of readers to their individual sites, and if someone goes to a specific blog, more than likely it will not have been found by chance. The users may in fact be specific subscribers to the author of that blog, and are consistently following the posts of that blog. They in turn may or may not give their own personal feedback to any of the blogposts that they read, orchestrating boundaries and limits between themselves the audience, and the blogger.

The inclinations that control our behaviors are self-imposed refusals to respond to a text message, or to not respond negatively or positively to a person's Facebook status or Tweet. Those limitations allow blogging to be viewed in both dimensions of online discussion. Kaye (2005) supports this idea that weblogs have the versatility of being both one-way and two-way styles of communication.

At times, social networking is a constant barrage of opinions and ideas being formulated on the World Wide Web that in turn triggers a natural response of feedback from a viewer. This can be done in an attempt to gain popularity and attention from the people that we interact with online. A person's self-esteem could be boosted or depreciated by the amount of attention that their digital persona is receiving on a consistent basis. This may be altered by the amount of people that are following their blog, or by the number of comments that they have on their latest tweet. The surplus of social networking may in fact have led us to follow a pattern of a potentially egotistical society that is fueled by attention from others. Dye (2007) suggests that the introduction of these social media devices has created

a generation who create their identities by the amount of Internet connections they have and online content they are able to access. This SNS-dictated generation could possibly be victims of induced Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) because of those connections and content.

Buffardi (2008) looked into the dimensions of how narcissism and social networking may in fact be connected. Three distinct associations of narcissism are discussed: First, the positive association that narcissism has with the formation of relationships. It is noted that narcissists tend to be actively engaged in establishing connections with people that they come in contact with on a consistent basis. Second, the negative association that narcissism has with the development of those relationships that have long-term potential, or that have “qualities of closeness, empathy, or emotional warmth” (p. 1304). Those who suffer from NPD are distinguished to have numerous contacts, but that those relationships remain shallow and immaturely developed. Finally, there is the association that an individual with NPD will use their relationships as a chance to build upon self-enhancement strategies. This is seen as the reasoning for any kind of relationship, for the betterment and self-preservation of one’s character in their own eyes.

Those three specific traits of narcissism can be correlated with the features of social networking. Social networking can be positively associated with the formation of online relationships. Individuals may seek out past associates online, and try and make new friends through the Internet, meanwhile their SNS keeps track of how many contacts that they have. Social networking can also be negatively associated with the development of those specific relationships. The reasoning

behind this is because the majority of contacts are frequented only by online connections, leaving very little or if any interpersonal and emotional qualities to develop, it is difficult for someone to have an online relationship mature and progress. Finally, social networking can be associated with the opportunity for self-enhancement strategies. This can be seen by status updates about minor achievements, blogposts asking for audience feedback about lifestyle situations, or tweets about the beautification of one's physical or emotional character.

Buffardi supports the comparison between narcissism and social networking being an environment for people to institute numerous superficial relationships that are calculated and numbered on a person's profile. She also points out how social networking websites are very "controlled" settings. She writes, "Owners have complete power over self-presentation on Web pages, unlike most other social contexts. In particular, one can use personal Web pages to select attractive photographs of oneself or write self-descriptions that are self-promoting" (p. 1304).

Today, blogging may even be looked at as an opportunity for the development of NPD among social networking participants. A majority of a user's followers of their weblogs tend to be personal friends and acquaintances that have known them before the publication of their blogs, and are following them because they appreciate the value of their postings, or for simple common courtesy. There have however been strategies and techniques in the blogging atmosphere put to use so that the number of followers of an individual's blog will increase dramatically more than just their normal number of friends.

For example, there has been the construction of independent blog awards,

where an unknown user will post a link to a person's blog about how they value and appreciate that blogpost, and that they feel they are deserving of a blog award. The user may then follow the link and retrieve that badge to post on their personal blog. In some instances, the recipient may only be able to receive the award if they formally follow the person's blog who awarded it to them, which in some instances can be seen as a tactic to generate traffic to a site.

Another technique that is used by bloggers to attain followers is the following of random and unknown blogs of users across the Internet. If one follows another person's blog, it is assumed that they in turn will follow the blog that you are the author of, almost to show signs of respect and consideration for the diligence that one had in being a part of the blogging world. Ultimately, the end result of these techniques is to have an increase in the amount of traffic that goes to a person's blog. This could be for monetary value that is generated by companies such as AdSense, which returns earnings to an individual by allowing advertisements upon their blog. The more traffic and hits that a person's blog receives, the more revenue they are then likely to receive as well. These techniques may in fact also be carried out because of the need for more followers of a person's blog to satisfy their NPD characteristics. The increase in self-enhancement and numerous shallow relationships can be associated with techniques that will drive traffic to a person's blog, thus growing the psychological gratifications.

The intent of this study is to analyze specific weblogs and identify particular traits and features of an individual who may in fact suffer from NPD, and then in turn portray those features on their blogs. The intent of this study will also be

looking to see if there has been a development in the type of NPD traits that have existed from the primary creation of a blog, to the most recent and updated blogpost.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There are three different topics that will be reviewed that are pertinent to the study itself: The development and influence of social networking, the specific social networking channel of blogging, and the definitions and traits of narcissism.

Social Networking

Social networking has taken over the online communication realm, not only from a general entertainment perspective, but also from a business, public relations, marketing, and advertising perspective as well. Vorvoreanu (2009) discussed how Facebook.com has become a natural part of the online culture. Ellis (2010) backed the “natural” idea of Facebook by discussing how Facebook plays a key role in the construction of social character, looking at the sheer volume of digital identities and Facebook profiles that have risen annually.

How people use these digital personalities to conduct their lives is something that Selwyn (2009) analyzed when he monitored the lives of 909 students in the U.K. to see how much of their Facebook wall-time was spent focusing strictly on academic and educational purposes. Bosch (2009) dovetailed the purposes of Facebook into the educational sphere by doing an analysis on professors and students at the University of Cape Town, and how they were able to exchange information, and further their educational experience using this social network. She did find that there was a difficulty in achieving some of the highest results, because of the deficiency of information and communication technology (ICT) intelligence and the amount of access time that both teacher and student had to Facebook itself,

meaning that the data could not have been looked at properly because of the lack of monitoring of time and content.

Mazer, Murphy and Simonds (2009), conducted a quantitative analysis to see how students perceive their teachers compared to the amount of self-disclosure that occurs on Facebook. The communication skills that are seen between a teacher and a student are just one of the dimensions when it comes to the communication in any interpersonal relationship. Sheldon and Honeycutt (2009) conducted an analysis of students who have a difficult time communicating offline. They found that Facebook has become an outlet for those who are looking to just “pass time.”

Communication in the social networking world, more specifically in the aspect of relationship formation and maintenance is something that was studied by Steinfeld and Lampe (2009), in their quantitative analysis questioning the reasoning behind people’s usage of Facebook and other social networks. Their conclusion was that Social Networking Sites (SNS) allow students and youth to form friendships and relationships despite the lack of nonverbal communication.

Blogging

Along with Facebook and online interaction, another dimension of Social Networking Sites is the concept of blogging. Initially, when blogs, or Weblogs were first created, there were questions about their purpose, and what drove people to be actively engaged in reading and writing them. Kaye (2005) was one of the frontier investigators to find the reasoning behind them, and pioneered the idea that there were six main motives for blog usage: information seeking, personal convenience, personal fulfillment, political surveillance, social surveillance, as well as the

expression and affiliation to a specific topic. Kaye also found that demographically, the main users and recorders of blogs, were white males with a higher income. Those demographics were in similar cognition with previous studies done on Weblog usage (Greenspan, 2003; Levy, 2002; Rainie, Fox, and Fallows, 2003; Seipp, 2002).

Nelson (2006) looked at the blog publishing industry in comparison to the historically common book publishing industry and found the numbers were overwhelmingly in favor of online diatribes and rhetoric being published online each year. Nelson called those who blog, “influencers” who have the capability of spreading a vast amount of information across the waves of the Internet without needing a legal publishing license and jump through all of the hoops to get their words in the ears and minds of their readers. Docter (2010) also discussed the legal issues and boundaries that exist when a person is blogging, or covering a story from a journalistic perspective. Arguments as to whether journalism privileges should be given to personal bloggers have been argued back and forth pertaining to the disclosure of information.

Ekdale, Kang, Fung, and Perlmutter, (2010) questioned the motives for our society to use blogs to communicate from a personal level, as well as a political level also. These motives were also questioned when various other researchers actively studied the logistics and reasoning behind blog usage in many different fields of study. Marken (2005) wrote “Blogs provide management a fast, effective, and economic means of carrying out two-way communication with many audiences.” (p. 31). Tola (2008) agreed, advocating the usage of blogs in the current world stating

that “blogging is not the future anymore, it is the present” (p.1). All of these studies and discussions, whether political, or scientific, or economically focused agreed that blogs were the up and coming way for people to communicate-via the Internet.

From an interpersonal communication point of view, Stefanone and Chyng-Yang, (2007) looked at the usage of blogs and how they related to motivating goals that are set by bloggers. Sampling a group of students, they questioned the amount of extraversion and self-disclosure that took place among them in order to gain popularity and interpersonal relationships with the group of people who “followed” their respective blogs. Bortree (2005) analyzed elements of self-disclosure by comparing the gender-based average amount of information that was revealed from an independent blogger to their audience. Ellis (2010) also compared the levels of apprehension between the genders, in more of an academic light in her study of the amount of personal information disclosed in blogs.

Buechler (2010) studied the academic purpose of blog usage both in and out of the classroom, discussing how they helped him communicate and discuss academic topics with his students much more effectively. In the classroom, blog usage was seen as a positive aid as Buechler stated that blogs served as an excellent tool to facilitate group decision-making (p. 442). Smith (2010) also examined the blog content of his students concluding that people describe their own individual selves and personalities to a world that they are semi-unfamiliar with, that world being the forum of Internet blogging.

From a cultural perspective, Chen (2010) analyzed the presentation of one’s self in a blog, comparing Taiwan and Japanese blogs and the amount of information

that was self-disclosed to their audiences as well. Lövheim (2011) observed the popularity of blog usage, studying the commercial and professional influx of content on the most popular blogs, compared to the personal blogs that had been gaining momentum and much popularity through the years since blogging had become so prevalent among users of the Internet.

Along with the presentation of one's self, Hong and Sheehy (2010) examined blog content and the professionalism of blogging overall, as they analyzed the content of blog posts nationwide to discuss the possibility of people thinking in their own minds that they were actual journalists. This was supported by a study done by Matheson (2004) when he found "that 34 percent of U.S. bloggers considered their work a form of journalism, and 35 percent reported they often practiced traditional journalistic activities of verifying facts and including links to original sources" (p. 39). Child and Agyeman-Budu (2009) analyzed the frequency of individual blogging among journal-based personal blog writers and found that bloggers who have or practice higher self-monitoring skills applied those same concepts to their self-disclosure on their personal blogs for their own audiences.

Motivations for starting and keeping a blog running has been researched and studied since the original inception of Weblogs in the mid 1990's. Li (2005) found that seven of the main factors could be classified as self-expression, passing time, improving writing skills, socialization, medium appeal, self-documentation, and information. Similar categories were whittled down by Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, and Swartz (2004) as they narrowed the motivations to five; expression of deeply felt emotions, articulation of ideas through writing, documentation of one's personal

life, formation and maintenance of community forums, and the providing commentary and opinions on issues. Trevino (2005) went even further to discuss the motivations for college students to blog, the reasons being their individual power over the personal website, the ability for their audience to actively access their content, and the positive feedback that they would receive mainly on their personal subjects that they used as topics for their blogposts.

Those motivations were brought into consideration as Liu and LaRose used both social cognitive theory, and self-efficacy as a framework to uncover the perceived audience perceptions that bloggers have when they update and post on their own personal blogs. Lampa (2004) formulated the idea that bloggers get their personal audience interaction by the amount of constant posting, commenting, and linked content on to other people's blogs, looking for the same desired effects on their own. A future success pattern was predicted using that idea as Lampa stated "the continued coherence of this online community is dependent upon the strengthening of shared experience and a fortification of what it means to be a blogger" (p. 1). Viegas (2005) mirrored a similar study of blogging motivations finding that the relationship that bloggers have with their readers could be a primary reason for the investigation and continued updates.

Narcissism

The overload and compression of Social Networking Sites, as well as the influx of blogging into the online social media, raise questions as to the behavioral patterns of human beings who thrive in a "me-first" forum. That mentality seems to follow similar patterns with the mental disorder known as narcissism. Over the

years, narcissism, has been heavily discussed and analyzed in the psychology field. It was not formally classified and recognized as an official disorder until the American Psychiatric Association (1980) brought it forth in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Disorders (DSM-III). Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is currently defined by the American Psychiatric Association (1994) as a “pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy” (p.714). The DSM-IV denotes that narcissists are “very sensitive to injury” that their self-esteem “is almost invariably very fragile” and that they are “preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success” and “require excessive admiration” (pp. 714-717).

Development of narcissism can be something that is caused by social interactions, or may also be instigated by certain parenting techniques and behaviors. Millon, Grossman, Millon, Meagher, and Ramnath (2004) discussed how narcissism can be nurtured and grown by an overvaluing of a child’s accolades and accomplishments, and that they in turn give reinforcement that is not actually based upon the child’s behaviors, and their consequences. Capron (2004) compared narcissism with different parenting styles, and broke down four categories from which narcissistic traits can emerge among youth; overindulgence, overdomineering, overprotection, and overpermissiveness. Twenge (2006) went even further as he studied the parenting and cultural influence on today’s youth, when he labeled Americans who were born in the 1970’s, 80’s, and 90’s, as those who are a part of “Generation Me”, and in essence felt more entitled, more egotistical, and more confident than the previous generation before them.

One of the most widely used and acclaimed foundations of narcissism evaluation comes from Raskin and Terry (1988) who developed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) which is a 40-item assessment that measures the amount of characteristics and traits that are self-reported by an individual. Heavily used in the comparison of the field of social personality and behavioral research, the NPI has been used as the framework for many researchers regarding NPD. Miller and Campbell (2008) compared the NPI with the Personality Diagnostic Questionnaire (PDQ-4) to see how narcissism differed among individuals. Pincus, Pimentel, Ansell, Cain, Wright, and Levy (2009) compiled a crossing more pathological examination, the Pathological Narcissism Inventory (PNI).

From an online social networking site standpoint, Mendelson, and Papacharissi (2010) looked at the increasing trends of narcissism developing among adolescents from a visual point of view, and how the amount of narcissistic qualities and traits were increasing due to SNS users display of personal photographs on their home pages. Buffardi (2008) complimented that study by analyzing self-narcissism evaluations from SNS users. Other narcissism qualities and traits through social networking were found, as Buffardi wrote, "Narcissism is related to a higher number of social relationships, self-promoting self-presentation, and the perception of having a large number of agentic characteristics" (p. 1310).

Malikhao and Servaes (2011) saw those characteristics and behaviors developing into an attitude of high individualism by the younger generation, which would in turn develop into overconfident narcissism. Overall, Mehdizadeh defined narcissism as a "pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and an

exaggerated sense of self-importance for possible self to be expressed” (p. 358). Adding that narcissists do not focus on interpersonal intimacy, warmth, or other positive aspects of relational outcomes. Instead, they use relationships to “appear popular and successful, and they seek attractive, high status” (p. 358).

Wright, O’Leary, and Balkin (1989) looked into the continued social development of NPD, leading them to believe that there are very negative side effects and outcomes from NPD, mainly depression. Research was done to categorize that depression, with Blatt and Zuroff (1992) concluding that there are two major classes of depression; introverted, and dependent. Introverted depression is associated with feelings of self-judgment, inferiority, feelings of worthlessness, guilt and failure. Introverted depression is also most closely associated with narcissism and egotistical behavior because of people’s continual strive for perfection and accomplishment in the eyes of others, and that they would in turn be judgmental and aggressive to those who surround them.

Anastasopolous (2007) noted that adolescents “often see the hedonistic, self-destructive characteristics that their narcissistic type of depression might take on. These are the moments when, through acting out, they feel they become grandiose, tragic heroes because they cannot be the heroes that the ego-ideal is pressing them to be” (p. 349). A comparison with research done by Ladame (1987) found that depressive and narcissistic adolescents do not have an even balance of self and object representation, which in turn would aid them in the regulation of their interpersonal relationships with actual external objects in their own lives.

Millon (2006) researched the different types of psychological issues that we as a society deal with consistently. He explains this by breaking each of the psychological disorders into 15 separate categories: Schizoid, Schizotypal, Avoidant, Dependent, Hypo manic, Histrionic, Masochistic, Melancholic, Sadistic, Anti-Social, Negativistic, Borderline, Compulsive, Paranoid, and Narcissistic. He suggests that there are varying forms of psychological problems that exist by either a “true” form of a singular personality disorder, as well as offshoots of those disorders by a combination of multiple extremes.

Millon’s focus on Narcissism brought into focus four different types of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD). There is the true form of NPD, followed by three different sub-types, which are combinations of other disorders on his chart. The elitist, or pure form of narcissism states that the individual “feels privileged and empowered by virtue of special childhood status and pseudo achievements, entitled façade bears little relation to reality, seeks favored and good life, is upwardly mobile, cultivates special status and advantages by association.”

The three other subtypes are: Compensatory, which is a combination of narcissism, negativism, and avoidant characteristics; Amorous, which is a combination of histrionic and narcissism characteristics; and Unprincipled, which is a combination of anti-social and narcissism characteristics. Each of these has their own niche in Millon’s research of specific personality disorders, and there are individuals who he suggests can be classified into one of the four sub-types. There have been breakthroughs in the comparison between NPD and social networking, as indicated by research done by Mendelson, Papacharissi, and

Buffardi, however the research conducted was strictly done focusing on websites such as Facebook.com. Further studies on the correlation between narcissism and blog content were not available for review. Likewise, Ekdale, Kang, Fung, and Perlmutter researched the motivating factors that trigger a person to consistently update their blogs, however their research was done strictly from a communication perspective, not from a psychological perspective to include characteristics of those who suffer from NPD.

This study's focus will be narrowed down to two specific topics in both fields of psychology and communication. Rather than looking at social media as a whole, the precise form of weblogging will be analyzed. This will be done with the combination of looking at a precise psychological disorder, NPD to see if there is evidence on a weblog, of someone who has characteristics of that disorder.

Therefore the combination of the information given in the literature review merged with the limitations in conducted comparisons between narcissism and social networking, leads to the following research question:

RQ1: What characteristics that define NPD can be located on the individual blogs of those who could be classified as elitists?

Chapter 3: Method

Content Analysis

There are multiple perspectives and opinions for what defines a content analysis. Weber (1990) wrote “content analysis is a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text” (p. 9). Holsti (1969) made reference to how content analysis allows the researchers to draw judgments “by objectively and systematically” classifying the material that is presented to them (p. 14). Krippendorff (2004) described it as a “research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (p. 18). Stempel (2003) had a very unique point of view as he suggested that content analysis is something that is instilled in our minds early on, and an action that we subconsciously do with everything that surrounds us in our daily lives. As we are exposed to multiple forms of communication with our peers and acquaintances, we draw conclusions and judge what is being communicated to us almost instinctively. He wrote that this type of analysis is something that “we all do informally and rather frequently-draw conclusions from observations of content” (p. 209).

The process to which those conclusions are drawn is something that is very detailed and precise to be able to achieve the best possible results. Krippendorff (2004) wrote that “content analysts infer answers to particular research questions from their texts. Their inferences are merely more systematic, explicitly informed, and (ideally) verifiable than what ordinary readers do with texts” (p. 25). Fico, Lacy and Riffe (2008) identified the five-step process that makes up a content analysis:

Unitization, Sampling, Operationalization, Reliability, and Validity. The unitization, sampling, and operationalization for this analysis will be discussed more in depth throughout the remainder of this section. The reliability of this study will be the framework of the coding process that has been organized by Theodore Millon. The validity lies in the interpretation of the data itself being taken from the weblogs that have been selected. All five of the steps are keys to completing a successful content analysis and must be designed and structured to fit the research accordingly. As Fico, Lacy, and Riffe wrote, "Each of these steps is critical to the quality of the research, and the decisions made at each step must be defended" (p. 119).

Coding Process

Throughout the coding process, there are precise methods that are used to identify and target the content that is being analyzed. A researcher must lay out a specific framework of categories to be used that will be able to classify the text. For this research, those categories came from the subcategories that Theodore Millon used to identify Narcissistic Personality Disorder.

In his analysis of personality subtypes, Theodore Millon defined the characteristics that make up the pure form of NPD, or the "Elitist" classification. An NPD-Elitist is someone who "feels privileged and empowered by virtue of special childhood status and pseudo achievements, entitled façade bears little relation to reality, seeks to favored and good life, is upwardly mobile, cultivates special status and advantages by association" (Millon, 2006).

From Millon's definition, there will be five categories created for the coding process: Celebrity Status, High-Profile Relationships, Mobility, Self-Praise, and

Unique Interpretation of Reality. Celebrity Status will be classified by any reference to a favored and/or above average lifestyle based upon prior accomplishments or achievements, or reference to the monetary value of their physical properties. High-Profile Relationships will be classified by any reference to associations or connections that they have with acquaintances who can be viewed as a type of popular public figure. Mobility will be classified by any reference to long vacations or business trips across the country or the world that are a focus in their life. Self-Praise will be classified by any reference to an accomplishment in their life that they openly acknowledge to their audience for completing. This may also be seen by any rhetorical questions asking their audience to validate their success. Unique Interpretation of Reality will be classified by any reference to an experience of personal conflict in their lives, showing an extreme amount of emotional divergence in regards to a situation that appears to be a daily or regular occurrence.

Each of these categories will be used to classify and analyze the content from the selected blog posts. If the content may be classified into multiple codes, (i.e. a request for a reader to validate the remarkable five-star hotel they stayed in while vacationing with fellow actors; Self-Praise, Mobility, Celebrity Status) the content will be analyzed to see what is the most dominant of the traits that can be recognized. If there appears to be not a favoring one way or another to a specific trait, then the first reference to a specific code will be used for the analysis.

The subject's blogs will be looked at and compared to see the different traits of NPD that they may or may not exemplify in their blog postings. A comparison between the subjects' blogs will be done to see how NPD has been developing over

their blogging history, as well as what traits they both show, and on the contrary, what traits they differ on. This will be done in relation with RQ1.

Participants of the Analysis

There have been two subjects that have been selected for this content analysis, both of whom appear to have traits that qualify them as someone who could suffer from an elitist form of NPD. These traits have been identified by their blogging profile's "About Me" subsection that details who they are, and who they want their readers to view them as. In the biographical info page on their sites, both of the subjects have expressed feelings of celebrity status, high-profile relationships, mobility, self-praise, and imitation of reality.

Xiaxue

Wendy Cheng Yan Yan, or "Xiaxue", is a 27-year-old Asian professional blogger who lives in Singapore. Her talents as a writer have been noted as she has received multiple honors in 2009 and 2011, from the Nuffnang Asia Pacific Blog Awards, including Region's Best Blog, Most Influential Blog, and Best Original Blog Design (NAPBAS, 2011). She has also received Best Asian Blog by The Weblog Awards in 2004 (Weblog, 2004).

From a social networking perspective, Xiaxue is one of the most prominent and popular online icons. Currently, she has 5,638 followers of her personal blogging site, averaging close to 300,000 hits per week. Xiaxue publishes on average one post every 2.63 days (Xiaxue, 2012). Xiaxue also receives much attention through other SNS channels such as Facebook and Twitter. On her Facebook fan

page Xiaxue has over 70,000 fans, (Facebook, 2012) as well as over 92,000 followers on Twitter (Twitter, 2012).

Xiaxue's notoriety has become so proficient that she uses her blog, facebook, and twitter accounts to generate revenue from advertisements, both corporate and independent. Her popularity has bypassed the normal avenues of blog marketing companies such as Google AdSense, which is a software program designed to allow bloggers the ability to post advertisements on their blogs for online businesses. Revenue is then generated by the amount of traffic that clicks on their websites. The more popularity that an individual's blog gains, the more exposure that the audience has to those advertisements, which then generates more revenue for the host administrator of that blog. Xiaxue has elevated her reputation to the point where she manages her own personal marketing, with prices ranging from \$300 to \$3,500 for advertisements on any of her three social networking sites. Also for the cost of \$4,000, Xiaxue will create a personalized ten-minute YouTube video for her clients (Xiaxue, 2012).

Wil Wheaton

Wil Wheaton is a 29-year old actor who has embraced the social media world and seen much success in his publications. Wheaton is a former child star actor who is known for his performances in *Toy Soldiers*, *Stand By Me*, and *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (iMDB, 2012). He has used his celebrity accolades to help market and advertise his published books, as well as his blog.

Online, Wil Wheaton has been an active participant in the blogging world, with his first website, wilwheaton.net having its first posting in July of 2001.

Wheaton was an avid blogger and stayed consistent with his postings when in September 2005, he would publish his second blog, wilwheatondotnet: In Exile. He has continued to publish on a steady pace, with an average of one post every 1.15 days (WWDN, 2012).

Wheaton has also seen similar social networking success as Xixue has with both his Facebook and Twitter pages, with his achievements and familiar face in the acting sphere help market his online identity. Currently, Wheaton has over 11,600 friends on his Facebook page (Facebook, 2012), as well as over 1.9 million followers on Twitter (Twitter, 2012). Wheaton has also been active in his personal podcast, “Radio Free Burrito” which he has been producing since October of 2008. He describes the motivation for his podcast in its historical development when he says, “Even when I was at the height of my acting success, my dream of broadcasting never entirely went away. I was never able to make it into actual radio, but when the Internet made podcasting possible, I seized the opportunity to play music, tell stories, and finally satisfy my delusions of DJ grandeur” (WWDN, 2012). Through his podcasts, blog, facebook fan page, and twitter account, Wheaton has been consistently using a multi-pronged approach in helping launch his online character to his fans.

Selected Texts used in the Analysis

Both Xixue’s and Wil Wheaton’s current blog (WWDN: In Exile) have been selected for this study, and are roughly the same age, therefore generational differences will not be taken into consideration. There have been seven different months selected from both of their blogs ranging from 2005 to 2011. The months

have been selected based on the similarity in the number of postings that each of the subjects have published on their blog for that month. The specific months have also been selected based on one month per year.

The first month selected is the first month on the archives of Wil Wheaton: In Exile, September of 2005; also the first month that he had adjusted his blogging from wilwheaton.net to his current blog that he is using today. In September 2005, Xixue had 20 posts, Wheaton had five posts. The next five months selected are those where both Xixue and Wheaton appear to publish roughly the same amount of posts, therefore making it possible to look at the content as objective as possible. The next five months that have been selected are January of 2006, Xixue: 16 posts, Wheaton: 20 posts; March of 2007, Xixue: nine posts, Wheaton: 40 posts; July of 2008, Xixue: 11 posts, Wheaton: 26 posts; June of 2009, Xixue: 10 posts, Wheaton: 16 posts; and October of 2010, Xixue: nine posts, Wheaton: eight posts. The last month selected for the study is the most recent complete month of their blogging, December of 2011, Xixue: 11 posts, Wheaton: seven posts. This month has also been selected for an analysis of the increase or decrease of NPD content on their blogs.

Variables in the study that will not be accounted for are the gender differences that exist between Wheaton and Xixue, as well as the cultural differences with Wheaton being a resident of the U.S.A., and Xixue being a resident of Singapore.

This study will be a more qualitative content analysis. The content analysis will be done from the coding of data that is interpreted to be NPD content.

However, the data will not be analyzed from a quantitative perspective. The statistical analysis of the NPD content will not be taken into consideration. This study will be done from a more qualitative perspective, with the intent being to understand the reasoning behind the posting of NPD content on an individual's weblog. The reasoning for this type of analysis is for two main causes. First, the texts used for this study are unique because of the precise type of communication methods being analyzed, in this case, weblogs. Second, this will be an exploratory application of theory, with the data being analyzed in a semi-rhetorical criticism fashion, that being the lengthy blogposts that have been published online. However, the data being analyzed will be linking their reasoning of communication with that of someone who may potentially suffer from a psychological personality disorder.

Chapter 4: Results

The results of this study were a compilation of the seven months that were selected, and were coded in the following categories: self-praise, celebrity status, high-profile relationships, mobility, and unique interpretation of reality. Primary and general examples were selected from both Wheaton and Xixue's blogs.

Self-Praise

Self-Praise was classified by any reference to an accomplishment in their life that they openly acknowledge to their audience. This was also seen by any rhetorical questions asking their audience to validate their success. Out of the five categories that were listed for this study, this was by far the most common content found on both Wheaton and Xixue's blogs.

One of the most common ways that Xixue exhibited this code was by her description and praising of her outward physical appearance. This seemed to be something that Xixue did multiple times throughout every month that was selected. She often praised certain features of her physical appearance such as her hair, or her complexion, and would then tie her self-approval with the approval of others around her that admired her beauty. In one post, she made the statements: "You know, I've thought that I have a really cute butt." and "My gorgeous pink hair thanks to Mosche!!" to which she completed the approval with the reference to another person's admiration in which she wrote, " Nat totally checked me out years ago!! Hahaha!! I'm hot!" (June, 2009). Xixue's admiration was articulated as she stated that her beauty was an accomplishment in her own life. She then pointed this out to her audience that a third party also recognized her physical accomplishments

by the admiration that they expressed in looking at her.

A summation of her thoughts about her physical appearance was best expressed when she responded to a reader's comment about a blogpost that she had previously written about her personal beauty. In her reply to the fan she wrote:

I imagine I must have looked damn crazy and definitely would not have sex with myself if I weren't me. I'd have sex with myself when I am not crazy though. I'm pretty hot (March, 2007).

Wheaton showed that he also had feelings of self-praise, but his were more related to outside achievements that he had worked for, and were not necessarily associated with his physical appearance. There were instances in which he advocated to his fans about the latest release of his self-produced podcast, *Radio Free-Burrito* (January, 2006). He also mentioned the work that he did for television shows such as *CSI* or *Leverage*, asking fans to come and support the work that he did and be fans of the show (January, 2006). Wheaton also talked about the publicity that some of his work was receiving online. In one instance, he wrote how a publication of his, *Wheaton's Books in the Wild*, was gaining attention on Flickr and had an increase in membership (July, 2008).

Xiaxue also demonstrated this degree of self-praise when she displayed the significance of her own work. One of the main examples was her blog for which she had received multiple awards. She would then announce the award to her readers. For example in one instance she wrote, "If you follow my tweets you'd already know I won for the Most Influential Blog and Region's Best Blog (again :p)" (December, 2011). Another instance was when she was interviewed about what she thought

was the best blog online in which she replied, “I love my own blog the most, and I think I am like the most fabulous blogger in the whole wide world, winning other people by leaps and bounds” (September, 2005).

These were coded as examples of self-praise because of the reference to their achievements. Wheaton of course referenced his acting and career accomplishments, and Xixue referenced her online blog recognition. These were directly placed in their blogs for the viewers to take in and possibly offer congratulatory remarks in their feedback.

Xixue also took a very unique approach to self-praise when she began posting on her blog very large quantities of pictures that she had taken of herself. This technique she described to her audience was called “cam-whoring”. In many instances, whether she was posting an advertorial for a product, or blogging about a vacation that she was taking, she would post upwards of 50 photographs of herself, at close range on a repeated basis. Xixue also made mention that she spent hours of her own time personally photoshopping the pictures that she had taken of herself, so that her audience would not be displeased with her pictures. In one blogpost, she explained to her readers the reasoning for this process. She wrote, “I love cam-whoring! Why not? Only young once so much take more, more, more photos! And if those photos are ‘chio’ [associated with the word “bu”, is hokkien slang for “pretty female”] it's a great way to get attention online!” (October, 2010).

Cam-whoring was a different way that Xixue used to gain attention on her blog, and also an example of self-praise for her content. By taking multiple images of herself and posting them to her blog, she would also ask for readers approval of

her photos, which was a technique of inquiring for praise about who she is as an individual.

Wheaton also showed a unique form of self-praise in his blog in which he would recount an event that occurred in his life, and then would relay the story to his audience and try and tie a humanitarian principle into his post. In one example he wrote:

When I saw a person waiting to make a left from a side street, I stopped to let him go across in front of us. See, I try to do nice things like that, because I believe the world would be a much better place if everyone made an effort to do little things, like hold doors open, let people with fewer items cut in front in the checkout, say 'thank you' . . . things like that (January, 2006).

This was an example of self-praise because Wheaton did not need to use an example of his personal life of how he was hospitable to another person to show people should be more considerate of those around them. He could have left that out of his blogpost, however, he made sure to reference the kind gesture that he did which was a way to ask his audience to approve of and praise his action, confirming that he was an achieved individual for that action.

Celebrity Status

Celebrity Status was classified by any reference to a favored and/or above average lifestyle based upon prior accomplishments or achievements, or reference to the monetary value of their physical properties. Both subjects, Xiaxue and Wheaton exhibited content in their blogs that fell into this category.

Wheaton would repeatedly reference the number of relationships that he had with other celebrity figures in the acting and musical industries. He would often drop names in casual instances to show the camaraderie and friendships that both parties had between them. For example, in March of 2007, Wheaton wrote a blogpost about his participation at the World Poker Tour, during which he mentioned some of his other celebrity cohorts that he had spent time with at this event:

The World Poker Tour Invitational was a great event. There were tons of celebrities there, including some actors I really respect and admire, like Ron Livingston and Don Cheadle. In fact, at one point, I totally took a pee between Vince Vaughn and Timothy Busfield. Jennifer Tilly sat down three seats to my right, making the table that much hotter and twice as tough. Tomorrow, I will go back to Commerce for the World Poker Tour Invitational, in which I finished 23rd, and was the last celebrity (shh. don't tell anyone, okay?) standing.

By his mentioning of the names Don Cheadle, Vince Vaughn, and Jennifer Tilly, Wheaton put himself in the same class of celebrity that the three actors were in as well. He confirmed this with his statement of being the last “celebrity” remaining in the Poker Tournament, thus establishing to his readers that he was also in the celebrity realm as well.

This celebrity mentality was also supplemented by the number of references that Wheaton had to his past acting achievements in both the motion picture, and television industry. In multiple instances Wheaton referred to some of the more

well known acting endeavors that he had been involved in, including films such as *Stand By Me* and *Toy Soldiers*. Wheaton also had various screenshots and images posted of him when he was a child actor on the television show, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

There were also times in Wheaton's blog when he would devote entire blogposts to some of the modern day acting jobs that he was involved in and helping produce, including minor roles on television shows such as *Leverage*, and *CSI*. Wheaton made a statement recently in his blog that summed up his celebrity and acting career in which he said, "I've been an actor for just over 30 years. I've worked in nearly every environment possible, on all kinds of productions, in all kinds of roles" (October, 2010).

This statement came at the end of a blogpost in which he mentioned how he was in the middle of filming an unnamed television show that would later be released to the public. Wheaton's statement that he had been an actor confirmed to the readers that he in fact was a significantly busy individual who had been a part of multiple productions that many other celebrities often were involved in as well. This confirmed his belief that he too, was also in the classification of a celebrity.

Xiaxue, however had a very different approach to her confirmation of celebrity status. Xiaxue's reputation was not based on any entertainment productions that she had been involved in at all, her main source of celebrity recognition came from her success online as an accomplished Weblogger.

One of Xiaxue's most common forms of celebrity recognition was when she would dedicate entire blogposts to what she referred to as an "advertorial." An

advertorial was when Xixue would endorse a certain type of commercial product, in which she would post pictures, write positive remarks about, and make the effort to show to her readers how excellent that product's services would be to them. In the seven months that were selected for the study, Xixue did advertorials for multiple products. She did advertorials for Turodrique, a designer company, Kimage Hair Studio, and Voxy Nail Portions, (September, 2005), an advertorial for Kotex Hair Pluckers, (July, 2008), an advertorial for Rice Crisps, (October, 2010), and then finally two advertorials for Liese Hair Extensions, and a phone from Nokia. (December, 2011)

All of these were examples of how Xixue felt that her celebrity status gave her the grounds to be an advertiser for other products. She did this by implying to companies that the active number of followers of her blog would read her advertisement of a specific product, and that would then generate revenue based on the fact that more people were hearing about that product. This was combined with the idea that more people would look to purchase that product because she, a celebrity, was endorsing it.

Xixue made reference in multiple instances to how people may come in contact with her manager if they were looking for her to post an advertorial on her blog. In one example, she wrote how if they wanted an advertorial for their company to "Please contact my agency Munkysuperstar" (March, 2007). This reference to her agency referred to how she had the ability to create advertisements that would generate an increase in the monetary value of their product, thus coinciding with what could be coded as "celebrity" value.

There were also instances in which both Xixue and Wheaton openly acknowledged their celebrity status, whether by recounting an instance in their own life, or by the open recognition of their personal achievements. Wheaton showed this by telling a story in which a stranger approached him at an airport and praised him for his acting, to which the fan then asked if he would take a picture with himself and her friends. Wheaton recounted his thoughts after this incident by saying:

It ended up being really cool, and was a moment that profoundly changed the way I dealt with that "celebrity" thing that I was never really comfortable with: though I always thought "celebrity" was bullsh**, it was one of the first times I realized that, even though I didn't think of myself in those terms, there were some people who did, and with that came a certain amount of responsibility (March 2007).

Xixue referenced her celebrity status in a different direction however, in a more negative light. For example, on one occasion she refuted claims made against her that her blog was not a very popular one by choice for readers to read. Xixue devoted an entire blogpost to her success as a blogger, in which she summed up her thoughts with the closing phrase, "Anyway, I am 54th in the damn world! God, I think I shall go hug myself or something" (September, 2005).

Another example of this was seen a few months later when Xixue defended her stance on an issue, and attacked the criticism that she received from her readers about a previous advertorial she had posted. She degraded her audience's position

when she wrote “Do not demand I change my writing for you - it will never happen, because you are insignificant” (January, 2006).

Both of these are examples when Xiaxue was looking for reinforcements of her being a celebrity, one of which was by self-praise when she announced the statistics of her celebrity status by her blog rankings, the second when she lowered her readers value and elevated herself by what she felt was her celebrity reputation. That reputation that she referred to was what Wil Wheaton felt that he had in some of his fans eyes as well.

High-Profile Relationships

High-Profile Relationships was classified by any reference to associations or connections that they have with acquaintances viewed as popular public figures. This was also seen by references to notable groups and organizations.

Wil Wheaton had multiple examples of this in his blog as he would often mention the many different interpersonal relationships that he had with other high-profile individuals. This differed in the fact from celebrity stats in that Wheaton was not just assuming that his audience felt that he was a celebrity and was in the same category as his celebrity acquaintances, but that he stated the direct point that he had developed serious relationships with other high-profile individuals.

Wheaton often referenced back to experiences that he had with many of his high-profile friends. Many of these stories that he recounted he would open up with a statement about what made that specific person important to the rest of the world by what they had done in their life that could be noted by either monetary value, or by popular public opinion. In one example, he wrote: “Way back when I was

eighteen or nineteen, my friend Damion, who wrote and directed *Neverland*" (January, 2006). Another example of this was seen when he opened a blogpost with the statement, "My friend Pauly edits an online literary magazine called *Truckin'*. Pauly always invites me to contribute" (March, 2007).

His above mentioned references to both his friends Damion and Pauly were classified as high-profile relationship content because Wheaton pointed out that first, he had friends in his life who he had consistent relationships with, and second, those friends had accomplished significant achievements in their own lives whether they be the directing of Hollywood films, or the managing of a successful magazine.

Xiaxue also displayed these features in her blog as she referenced significant individuals in her own life that were more than just acquaintances to her. In one instance, she referenced a popular television figure and how she had close connections with that person because of who she is. She wrote: "Maia [Lee, of Singapore Idol fame] invited me to attend her album launch at DXO! I knew her a long time ago, actually, when she was still June's sister's singing teacher" (September, 2005). Here, Xiaxue made note that she knew the Singapore Idol star before her rise to fame, and she also stated how she still maintained that relationship with her, thus indicating that she herself, was a high-profile individual.

Another way that Wheaton showed that he had high profile relationships was when he referenced the different organizations and companies that he connected with in either a past or present tense. Some significant ones that he mentioned were when he was invited to the Las Vegas Star Trek convention as a judge (March, 2007), when he was on a publishing panel for the company Pocketbooks (July,

2008), and also when he served on the board of the Screen Actors Guild (June, 2009).

All of these could be seen as Wheaton having a relationship with a significant and high profile organization, which then showed the value that his reputation had to be a part of those organizations. The main reason that these could be classified in high-profile relationships is that Wheaton stated these facts to his audience in the same manner how he stated his relationships with individuals existed, that was discussed previously. The high-profile facts were made to chronologically reference at what point in his life he was at, but at the same time were made to point out to his audience the type of person that he was to be associated with, either those people, or those organizations.

Mobility

Mobility was classified by any reference to long vacations or business trips across the country or the world that were a focus in both Wheaton and Xiaxue's lives, or any reference to living a mobile lifestyle in which they surrounded themselves with technology that gave them more access to communicating with their audience.

Wheaton mentioned this in multiple instances on his blog, many times as a preface to where he was filming a television show, or working on producing and/or writing for his career. In other instances, Wheaton used this to detail some of the things that he did in his own life that went hand in hand with his somewhat extravagant lifestyle, a lifestyle that coincided with the previous two codes of being a celebrity, and being high profile.

For work-related mobility, Wheaton listed the names of the cities he was traveling to for some of his acting roles. For example, he dedicated multiple blogposts to his work on the show *Leverage* in which he would open the posts with a statement of his location in Portland, Oregon (June, 2009). In another instance, he made the statement that “In a couple hours, I’ll be on my way back to Los Angeles for a few days, so I can work on *The Big Bang Theory*...I shoot *Big Bang Theory* on Monday before I go back to Vancouver to finish out the fourth season of *Eureka* (October, 2010).

In other instances, Wheaton referenced his traveling experiences for purpose of pleasure or entertainment. In one example, he discussed how he was taking a red eye flight to the Bahamas to participate in a celebrity poker tournament (June, 2006). In another example, he mentioned how he was taking a quick flight down to San Diego for a short stay at a comic book convention (July, 2008). On a specific blogpost, he recounted a vacation that he took with his wife when he wrote: “Anne and I, long before we were married, and had in fact been dating for less than a year, flew to London for a huge Star Trek convention” (March, 2007).

These were all examples of how Wheaton portrayed to his audience the amount of travel and time that he had spent all over the world for his career purposes, and somewhat excessive personal lifestyle. These could also be coded as a trait of NPD, someone who feels that they are upwardly mobile in their way of life.

Xiaxue followed in a similar pattern when she posted about her mobility, however, all of her posts were under the subcategory of mobile vacation and not of working means. There were multiple examples where Xiaxue would post about how

she would be leaving on a flight to Los Angeles, as well as Dallas, for a getaway (December, 2011). Or that she went on a four-day road trip with her friends across the Malaysian countryside (March, 2007).

Xiaxue also had blogposts that were overly bombarded with photographs that she had taken while on vacation or a part of her travels. There was a blogpost dedicated to a flashmob that she was a participant of while she was vacationing in Singapore (June, 2009). She used this same technique as she posted numerous photographs of her vacation to Bali (June, 2009), as well as when she was traveling to the Nuffnang Asia Pacific Blog Awards in Singapore (December, 2011).

These references were similar to Wheaton's in the fact that they were all discussing how mobile her lifestyle is, as she traveled across Southern Asia, as well as her trips into the United States for recreational purposes. These all could be classified in the category of mobility.

Another way that mobility was shown by Wheaton was when he discussed how portable his life was as he was on the road working. One example of this was when he discussed the amazement that he had for being able to post blogs in such a timely fashion while on the go. He wrote, "I'm on my lunch break right now, marveling at how weird it is to live in the future, where I can post to my blog from my dressing room" (June, 2009). He would later expound on this by posting, "During production, we could send pictures and updates from the set to Twitter and our blogs, and engage the audience in a direct and intimate way that is unlike anything I've ever done before" (June, 2009).

These occurrences have appeared to have lost their luster since activities

such as this have become very common for most individuals, however, at the time, this was something that Wheaton expounded upon as an advantage to being so mobile, having the lifestyle and capability to be able to relate to his audience about his career and entertainment activities. This also was coded for someone who lived a life that is mobile, and someone who has traits of NPD.

Unique Interpretation of Reality

Unique Interpretation of Reality was classified by any reference to an experience of personal conflict in their lives, showing an extreme amount of emotional divergence in regards to a situation that appeared to be a daily or common occurrence. Unique Interpretation of Reality also had some of the most emotionally charged and emphatic blogposts by both of the subjects because of the inclusion of conflict with other individuals in both of their lives.

Wheaton showed this in small doses on his blog in what appeared to be very minute conflicts. In one instance, he wrote a few paragraphs on the communication issues that existed between himself and his manager for an acting role that he was looking to pursue (July, 2008). In another reference, he vented his frustrations for not being able to blog at his original website, wilwheatondotnet (September, 2005). That emotional reference was also what created the blog that he is currently using, WWdN: In Exile. One particular imitation of reality was when Wheaton proclaimed his anger at the advertisements that he must watch before viewing a purchased DVD. He wrote:

I really hate it when I put a DVD into my DVD player, and before I can actually get to the fu**ing movie I paid to watch, I have to sit through a big bunch of

stupid, time-consuming, not-the-movie bullsh**! (March, 2007).

These can be seen as a unique interpretation of reality because the conflicts that he was upset about were not life-altering issues. Wheaton complained about copyright infringement messages that he was forced to watch before a movie, when those are the same messages that everyone else watches on their own purchased DVD's as well. The reason that these examples were coded as imitations of reality is because he was so emotionally charged about simple and minute problems in his life. Expressing vulgarity about miscommunication with a manager about an acting job, or having a blog malfunction was showing a polar extreme of why his life is more important than everyone else's and why he should not have had to deal with issues such as those.

Xiaxue followed these same patterns when she expressed feelings of frustration for minor conflicts. One example was when she told the story of standing in line for an album release and an elderly gentleman stepped in line with a friend ahead of her. She wrote:

HE CUT MY QUEUE! BLATANTLY! I never ever let people off when they do things like that to me, and I was about to scold him but I was scared that he boxed my fragile nose since he is already so old (maybe 60) and jail to him is nothing (March, 2007).

Other examples included how Xiaxue expressed sharp words about not being able to find a cab in the city of Singapore (March, 2007). She complained about the violation of her privacy that she had to endure while using public transportation in and around her home city. There was even a blogpost dedicated to her anger about

how a waiter would not look at her in the right fashion, and mainly gave attention to her husband while the two of them were out eating in a fancy restaurant (March, 2007).

How she expressed anger about a very small setback in her life was coded in the unique interpretation of reality, because she was relating to her readers how she did not deserve to be treated in such a way. This was an elevation of her personal character and degradation of those around her. In Millon's study, he defined three other sub-categories of pure NPD, one of which is classified as "Compensatory". Compensatory behaviors include negativity, and a lack of self-esteem, creating illusions of being superior to others. Xixue's personal elevation techniques could be classified in the compensatory NPD sub-category. Xixue repeatedly made small conflicts appear as major catastrophes in her blogposts. When in reality, all of these conflicts were things that everyone else around her is forced to deal with in their own lives.

Xixue had more examples of this in the earlier years of her blog posts, in which she would often devote entire blogposts to the negative comments that she would receive from her readers and followers. Often these remarks would come from readers because they disagreed with her viewpoints on certain issues, and would say negative things on her blog about her. Xixue took those remarks personally, and wrote bold responses of both anger and sympathy to her entire audience. In one example she made a call to action for her readers to be on her side on a certain issue when she wrote:

The least my blogders (readers) can do for me is to defend me when I get

wrongly accused, or when people get overtly vicious with their words. It hurts me to see that even stuff like the above get written about me, you readers seem to be doing nothing at all (September, 2005) .

This was seen as a unique interpretation of reality because Xiauxue was openly enraged about the public opinion of her that was negative. She expressed that she was not someone who deserved to be under such scrutiny and looked at in a negative manner. However the negative comments from her fans were only being incited because of blogposts that she had written in the past that had been negative about someone else. This was holding people to a double standard in that regard, where she as the blogger had the right to ridicule someone, but they on the other hand did not have the right to be negative about her.

Amorous

Along with the five subcategories of the elitist form of NPD, there was also a large amount of content on Xiauxue's blog that was classified in the amorous category of NPD that Millon defined. Much of this content was shown through sexually descriptive language and extensive blog posts dedicated solely to promiscuous behaviors.

For example, early on in the first months that were selected for this study, (September, 2005 and June, 2006) Xiauxue used an abundance of sexual references and dialogue to describe her lifestyle, as well as events that she went through on both an interpersonal and a social media perspective. In one instance, she transcribed an online conversation that she had with another person about wanting to have sexual intercourse (September, 2005). She also used sexually suggesting

words such as “orgasmic” to describe ordinary situations such as the delivery of a high-class meal that she was receiving at a five-star restaurant (January 2006). A prime example of this content was seen when she devoted an entire blogpost entitled, *Off to JB*, in which she described to her audience about the peak of a woman’s sexual experience. Along with that blogpost she posted a mathematical equation for the amount of orgasms that a woman should have experienced over the span of eight years, provoking the idea that she as a woman, as well as her readers, needed to experience a more rewarding way of life. Another blogpost was devoted solely to a portion of sexually suggestive material that came when she recorded an entire Instant Message conversation between her and another man online, their conversation being entirely devoted to the possibility of sexual intercourse between the two of them if they were together.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The study's research question asked what characteristics and traits that define NPD could be located on an individual's blog. The five main qualities that could be found on both Wheaton and Xixue's blog were also the five traits that were outlined by Millon's study: celebrity status, high-profile relationships, mobility, self-praise, and unique interpretation of reality. Each category for this study was selected because of the characteristics of what Millon defined as a pure or "elitist" personality of someone who deals with NPD.

Out of the five categories for this study, both Wheaton and Xixue exhibited numerous examples of NPD on their blogs ranging in the months selected from 2005 to 2011. Overwhelmingly, the category of self-praise was the most dominant trait shown on their blogs, with examples being coded for every month that was selected for the study. On the contrary, mobility was the least common trait revealed in the study, with both Wheaton and Xixue referencing aspects of their lives that could be classified in the category of mobility the least amount of times, in comparison with the four other categories.

Self-praise may have been the most common trait because it seemed like it would be the most convenient and simplest way to show that one has narcissistic traits. The other four traits take more than just positive words from a person's mouth to exist. For example, to show that one is recognized as a celebrity, they would need validation from another source, such as another celebrity to prove that they are in the same category. This pattern is similar with high-profile relationships. One would need multiple situations, developed friendships, and/or

an affluence of monetary value to be considered someone of high-profile quality. Mobility follows the same trends by needing an abundance of funds, as well as the capability to travel extensively, to show NPD traits in this subcategory. Finally, the majority of the content that was coded in the unique interpretation of reality category was because of conflict created with another individual, thus causing instability in that subject's life, and the expression of negative emotions and frustrations in their blogposts.

When showing characteristics of NPD by self-praise, all one would need essentially is themselves to do so. Abundance of funds, travel opportunities, celebrity relationships, and contrasting second parties are not necessarily needed for narcissists to express the joy and vain emotions that they have for themselves. All of these variables may in fact play a part in the expression of self-praise, but in essence, subjects could exhibit these traits by just glancing into a mirror and elaborating on how they view themselves in a pleasing manner.

For this study, Millon's main theory of the "elitist" category of NPD was used to code the data that was gathered from the subject's blogs. There were, however, three other distinct groups of characteristics that Millon classified as subtypes of NPD: compensatory, amorous, and unprincipled. A fascinating point throughout the study was the way that Xiaxue exhibited her NPD traits. In a majority of her blogposts, she delivered content that was categorized into one of the five selected from the "elitist" group. However, there were also multiple instances in which she delivered content that could have been classified into one of the other three NPD

sub-categories. The other content being most frequently referenced to would be classified in the amorous category of NPD.

Her behavior was an example of how neither Xixue, or Wheaton could be classified into a single subcategory of NPD, and that they may show traits and characteristics of one who is of multiple subcategories of NPD, and could have possibly developed those over the lifetime of their blogs. This stems from the idea that social media could in fact warp an individual's personality by the amount of feedback and responses that they are exposed to on a continual basis. The development of NPD traits that these subjects show may have also evolved in a similar manner as their social media empire did as well. The evolution of character is one of the main points that will be discussed in this section.

Millon defined someone who is classified in the amorous category of NPD as an individual who is "sexually seductive, enticing, beguiling, tantalizing, glib and clever, disinclines real intimacy, indulges hedonistic desires; bewitches and inveigles the needy and naïve; pathological lying and swindling" (Millon, 2006). There were multiple examples of Xixue having content on her blog that could be classified in the amorous category as discussed in the previous section.

The examples used were because of the possibility that Xixue may in fact have traits that were from both the amorous and the elitist categories of NPD. The words that she used in the previously mentioned blogposts were sexually seductive, enticing, and disinclining to actual sexual intimacy because they were in fact based for online communication. The blogposts were also extremely sexual in nature and devoted entirely to provoking thoughts and ideas of a sexual lifestyle. She suggested

to her audience that she was a participant in this way of life, and had a very active sexual life, both of which could be classified in the amorous category of NPD. In one blog post she wrote: "I don't believe that anyone won't be enticed by my breasts. Breasts are so nice" (September, 2005). This can be seen as both elitist because she was using self-praise about her own breasts, but also amorous because she was writing about her own body parts that could be viewed in a sexual perspective. Multiple category examples such as this could be because Xixue was using a dual-pronged approach at getting readers to read and respond to her blog. The sexual phrasing could be acting as an enticement for the readers, followed by the invitation to comment and give feedback about their agreement with her statements.

It was noted that the majority of the sexually descriptive words and content that she used in her blog were posted earlier on in the months that were selected for the study. From 2008 to present, the sexually-suggestive content was near absent from her posts, with the majority of her content being classified in the elitist category of NPD, i.e. celebrity status, high-profile lifestyle, mobility, self-praise, imitation of reality, and not the amorous category as well. This could be because of multiple reasons, such as that she had outgrown the traits in that subcategory of NPD, and had started to develop a character that was a more "pure" narcissist.

Xixue's popularity in the Weblogging world grew exponentially over the ten years that she had been posting. She continued to gain a large number of fans on an annual basis, and received multiple awards and recognition for her publishing. As her blog evolved, her narcissistic personality traits may have evolved with it as well. With the throng of readers taking in and commenting on her blogs, she may have

began to gradually increase the characteristics of someone who would be classified in the elitist category of NPD. A person whose blog only has 50 followers would not feel that they were very popular or recognized. However, a person who has over 6,000 followers of their blog may feel that they are in fact a “celebrity”. That way of thinking is what Millon classified as one of the truest definitions of an elitist. Thus her growth of NPD traits could have stemmed from the growth of her blog.

An idea of how she gained such rapid popularity online is that she may have used sexually provocative words and posts as an advertising tactic to attract readers to her blog early on, in order to increase the size of her audience. The concept that she was “pushing the envelope” on her personal blog to get readers to keep checking back in with her postings is something that could be used for future studies. There is, however, insufficient data to assume that this is something that she was doing on her blog intentionally, and is not in accordance with this study.

Another theme that was seen in both Wheaton and Xiaxue’s blog was the overabundance of self-praise in the content. As mentioned previously, this was by far the most common trait that was seen on their blogs, with a large quantity of their postings referencing their personal accolades and achievements. One common trait that went along with self-praise was asking rhetorical questions to their audience to validate their personal accomplishments discussed in previous blog posts.

There are posts on their blogs that could be viewed as obvious examples of self-praise, however, there is also the possibility that they could be classified as examples of someone who deals with the compensatory traits of NPD that Millon defined. One of the key statements in which Millon described someone who is a part

of the compensatory NPD grouping is that they “seek to counteract or cancel out deep feelings of inferiority and lack of self-esteem” (Millon, 2006). It is suggested that the evidence of both Wheaton and Xiaxue having a low self-esteem could be seen by their semi-rhetorical audience questions. By asking for validation on an accomplishment in their personal lives, they may not have confidence in themselves for what they were doing, and needed a third party to authenticate their personal existence. If a reader were to then respond in a positive manner to their rhetorical questions, it would then confirm in their own minds that their readers recognized their behaviors, and that they in fact would be in the same category of someone who is elite, or privileged. Blogposts such as the comic book script, and the photo shoot as previously mentioned can be seen as examples of this characteristic.

To take this idea of self-praise instigation even further, Wheaton provided multiple examples of when he posted remarks that were self-deprecating and seeking sympathy in nature. For example, in one blogpost he wrote:

If you're like me, and you're married to a fabulous babe, do you ever have those days where your wife is so incredibly beautiful, you feel like a big fat stupid ugly pile of sh**? (March, 2007).

In another instance, he mocked his own self-praise that he had posted about his celebrity status by writing: “I kind of feel like I'm saying, ‘hey! I am so great! Everyone look at how great I am! Woo! Woo! Look at me! Woo!’” (March, 2007). His remarks were taken sarcastic in tone, but were also viewed as a form of sympathy because he wrote them in context asking for readers to validate his accomplishments. This could be a technique in which he was instigating his readers

to respond to his blogpost, listing all of the success that he had received as a child actor/modern day celebrity. That, in itself, could be categorized as a behavior of someone who would be classified in the elitist category of NPD.

These words may also be looked at as content on his blog that would be classified in the compensatory category of NPD, because of Wheaton's attempt of counteracting his own personal feelings of inferiority, and/or his low self-esteem. His reasons for posting negative remarks about himself could be because he does in fact have a low self-esteem, and was looking for his audience to validate his own personal accomplishments in their comments about his blog post.

An idea that could be looked at for future research is to see the development of a subject's NPD traits and characteristics in one category, and to see how they evolve over the course of time into a separate category of NPD, with the increased amount of followers and received feedback on their blogs. For example, would Wil Wheaton's compensatory behavior, in which he lowered his interpersonal value to his audience as a ploy to receive affirmation, have decreased over time with the increase in fans and audience participation that he was receiving? Would that then in turn have increased his elitist traits as well? This is similar to the suggestion made previously that Xiaxue's amount of sexual content on her blog diminished because of the amount of followers that she had, and she seemed to develop more of an elitist form of NPD behaviors. The same suggestion could be made about Wil Wheaton's tactics in this instance as well.

This behavior could also be viewed as an example of Social Exchange Theory, Altman and Taylor (1973). Two main components of this theory are that humans

are in constant search of rewards. Second, humans have varying standards in which they evaluate the costs and rewards in any given situation. Before Wheaton posted a negative comment about himself, he could have been looking at both the costs and the rewards of what he was posting. The costs would be that he would be openly criticizing himself on his blog, exposing his flaws to the thousands of people that stayed updated on his posts. The reward would then be to have his audience respond in a contrasting manner by writing positive comments about him on his blog. Doing so would negate the critical words that he wrote about himself, and would be a form of self-enhancement.

The negative comments that the subjects made were not only aimed at themselves, but were also targeted for their critical readers. Millon stated that negative features are one of the main components that defined the compensatory NPD category. The compensatory classification is something that could in fact be a category of NPD that both Wheaton and Xiaxue suffer from, based on the content of their blogs. The negativistic, or compensatory perspective was shown by the amount of disapproving and belittling remarks that both of them made towards their readers in their posts. In multiple situations, these remarks were made because of negative comments that they had received about blogs they had posted in the past, and were a defense mechanism for not being appreciated.

This idea could also be that they exhibited traits in both the elitist and the compensatory subcategories of NPD. The elitist traits would be that when they posted, they were pursuing their readers to praise their opinions and ideas. However, when they were not receiving the positive remarks from their readers,

feedback that they felt as celebrities they should be receiving, they then altered their responses to a more negative and counteractive approach. The belittling comments that they posted on their blogs were a form of self-enhancement, and a tactic of someone who shows traits of both an elitist, and a compensatory individual with NPD. The comments that their audience made were not monitored however, and could not be taken into consideration for this study.

Limitations

Some of the limitations that existed throughout this study were the process of coding the blogs that were selected. For this study, there was only one subcategory of Millon's NPD personality framework selected, elitist. However, it was seen in their blogs that both Wheaton and Xiaxue exhibited possible traits of those who would could be classified in the other three subcategories of NPD (amorous, compensatory, unprincipled). The other subcategories that Millon lays out have features that are combinations of other personality traits (i.e. compensatory has negativistic, avoidant features). The other subcategories were not focused on, and could be for future studies.

Other limitations may have been the individuals who were selected for the study itself. The elitist category was chosen because Millon defined it as the most pure form of NPD. He described the traits of those who suffered from the elitist form of NPD to be those whose concept of life is an entitled façade, bears little relation to reality, and feels empowered by virtue of special childhood status and pseudo achievements. Those were some of the key factors as to why both Wheaton and Xiaxue were selected. Wheaton was selected because of his previous success as

a child actor, with the entitlement that was potentially generated because of his career. Xiaxue was selected because of her pseudo achievements on her blog with the number of readers, as well as by the awards that she had received online for her blog itself, thus enabling her to be called a celebrity. Both of them were what I felt were prime examples of “B-list” celebrities, who published their blogs on a consistent basis, and had a large amount of followers on their social media sites.

There could have been other individuals selected for this not just by looking at the elitist subcategory. Wordpress, Blogger, Yahoo, and other websites rank their most popular bloggers each year, and post the statistics of how many people follow their blogs, and how many hits they have on an annual basis. Other bloggers who are on the top of their lists could have been selected for this study, and may have been analyzed to see if they also exhibit NPD content on their blogs as well.

Theoretical Contributions

Research had been done in the separate fields of communication and psychology. A specific study was the potential development of narcissism in the realm of online media. Mendelson and Papacharissi (2010), as well as Buffardi and Campbell’s (2008) main focus in their research was on NPD traits seen on websites such as Facebook.com and Myspace.com. There were also studies done by Ekdale, Kang, Fung, and Perlmutter (2010) on the motivating factors for blog postings to be made by participants, studying the motivating factors for continual updates. Their research on blog updates was done solely from a psychological perspective, and not from a communication standpoint.

This study, however, was a combination of both the psychological and communication aspects of social media, analyzing a growing trend of Internet self-publication and discussing the motivations for their postings, more specifically, by taking a particular psychological disorder, NPD, and examining the potential development of its traits in an individual avenue of social media, weblogging. Other social media sites such as Facebook and Myspace could also be some of the main contributing factors in the development of personality disorders, such as NPD, however their particular content was not analyzed for this study.

In his research, Millon laid out 14 main personality disorders that anyone at any given time may develop. This study broke down the fundamentals of NPD and categorized it being made known in personal behavior. Following this, the behaviors were then recognized in blogging itself, and not just analyzed in social media as a whole. Weblogging may be viewed as a much more intricate form of personal disclosure because of the detailed explanations into a persons behavior, and not just a quick two sentence status update as shown on Facebook.

From a communication point of view, social media has become a mainstream form of relationship building and interaction, with Facebook statuses, twitter accounts, and blogs being a gateway for mass amounts of people to stay updated about daily occurrences in an individual's life. This study analyzed the content that the subjects used to communicate with their audience, and also discussed the potential techniques and tactics that could have potentially been used to attract a larger audience.

Psychologically, this study branched out from previous reviews of social media sites that were designed mainly for networking purposes, such as Facebook and Myspace. The area of Weblogging has been used as an extended form of publications, as well as an avenue for potential writers to gain fan bases and audiences by reading material that is more than just a few sentences long. Because of the more in-depth character that could be formed through blogging by lengthy posts made by the authors, there may also be a deeper reach into potential personality disorders such as NPD that may be noticeable on a subject's website. This study was a more in-depth analysis by studying not just the surface of social media status updates, but by going deeper into what could be classified as an online journal, and gave a much greater perspective on a person's individual character with their consistent blogposts.

Future Studies

The Uses and Gratifications Theory suggests that users are engaged in seeking out the types of media and networking that in turn goes on to satisfy our own particular needs. Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) proposed that the audience is goal-orientated, and actively pursuing those gratifications, whatever they may be. Kaye and Johnson (2004) point out that "people actively search out certain media and media content to satisfy particular needs" (p. 199). Variables that compose the theory were shown by Rubin (1994) who lists the factors as "people's needs and motives to communicate, the psychological and social environment, the mass media, functional alternatives to media use, communication behavior, and the consequences of such behavior" (p. 419).

There could in fact be a similarity drawn by the reasoning for a person to use blogging as a tool to gratify their narcissistic personality needs. In some circumstances, individuals may use blogging to gain favor in their eyes by their peers and followers. The potential gratifications that they are seeking could also be the same mannerisms that Millon lists of someone who has NPD.

There may also be future studies that bring more subjects into context, than just two individuals who were classified as B-list celebrities. There is an abundance of trademarked bloggers for specific subjects and topics. Research could be focused on a larger sampling of bloggers who focus their postings on specific topics. By studying more than just the B-list celebrities that were selected for this study, attention could also be focused on the other sub-categories of NPD, unprincipled, amorous, and compensatory.

Wheaton and Xixue were selected for this study because their character traits appeared to closely match the traits listed by Millon for someone who suffers from the elitist form of NPD. However, this is not something that signified them as unique from other bloggers as well. Multiple categories of a “celebrity” could be taken into consideration for future studies. A celebrity would not just have to be someone who gained success as a child actor, or received multiple Weblog awards. They could in fact be classified as an individual who has gained a substantial amount of popularity online, or in the entertainment business. Wheaton and Xixue’s personalities are not expressly different from other B-List celebrities, therefore their behaviors are not exclusive compared to other potential subjects for future analysis.

The intent of this study was to gain a better understanding of how social networking has influenced our society to develop stronger traits and characteristics that are associated with narcissism. Taking online communication tools that are made more and more accessible to us on a constant basis has aided our ability to connect with people all across the globe. However, have the strides that our online culture has made crippled the humility and down-to-earth demeanor that we once had a decade ago? It can be seen from both a B-list Hollywood celebrity, and by an online blogging diva, that narcissism may in fact be a developing problem among individuals whose lives cater around a computer screen, and tally the upvotes, comments, and reception that they receive from a hidden audience of followers. Whether or not disorders such as NPD can be established and developed over time is contingent on the motivational reasoning behind why an individual is even writing a blog in the first place.

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Appendix A

Posts from the following blogs and date ranges were selected as texts of analysis.

WWdN: In Exile (September 2005 – December 2011)

Xiaxue (September 2005 – December 2011)