

Running Title: Boundaries and celebrity worship

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BOUNDARY FUNCTIONING IN CELEBRITY WORSHIPPERS

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Footnotes

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Abstract

This study examined the hypothesis that the perceptual-personality construct of mental boundaries plays a role in celebrity worship. 147 traditional and nontraditional college students completed the Revised Transliminality Scale, the Boundary Questionnaire, and the Celebrity Attitude Scale, which addresses Entertainment-Social, Intense-Personal, and Borderline-Pathological forms of celebrity worship. Total scores on the two measures of mental boundaries showed significant but low magnitude correlations with total scores on the Celebrity Attitude Scale. Standard multiple regression analyses revealed that younger ages; the tendency for a broad range of ideation, imagery, affect and perception to cross thresholds into or out consciousness; a propensity for childlike ideations; empathy towards children; and an intolerance of ambiguity all contributed significantly to the regression equation to predict benign forms of celebrity worship. More extreme forms of celebrity worship showed similar trends in regression analyses, but the findings also suggested that people endorsing Borderline-Pathological forms of celebrity worship want to socialize and bond with people but feel disconnected from the social milieu to which they belong or have access.

BOUNDARY FUNCTIONING IN CELEBRITY WORSHIPPERS

The adoration of celebrities as idols or role models is a normal part of identity-development in childhood and adolescence (Yue & Cheung, 2000; Greene & Adams-Price, 1990; Raviv, Bar-Tal, Raviv, & Ben-Horin, 1996), but beyond this form of parasocial interaction is the phenomenon whereby individuals become virtually obsessed with one or more celebrities—similar to an erotomanic type of delusional disorder (McCutcheon, Ashe, Houran & Maltby, in press). This behavior is popularly known as celebrity worship. Prevalence rates are not known, but celebrity worship is at least visible enough that the popular media have taken notice. For instance, in a recent issue of a teen fashion magazine a 16-year old girl told of her self-described obsession with a musician and her reaction to the news of the musician's marriage engagement. According to Haynes and Rich (2002), the adolescent was hospitalized because in response to hearing this information she reportedly ran a hot bath and cut herself on her neck, arms, and legs. Thoughts in her mind during this disturbing event included, "She's going to change him if he gets married...I'm not going to live with that" (p. 198). Even upon recovery from her injuries, there was evidence of obsessive thinking:

"I don't care who he dates, sleeps with, marries...I realized I wanted him to be happy, and that that would make me happy...He's the only person I connect with" (Haynes & Rich, 2002, p. 198).

McCutcheon, Lange, and Houran (2002) proposed an "Absorption-Addiction" model to explain such cases of celebrity worship. According to this model, a compromised identity or 'thin' ego-boundary structure facilitates psychological absorption with a celebrity

in an attempt to establish an identity and a sense of fulfillment. The dynamics of the motivational forces driving this absorption might in turn take on an addictive component, leading to more extreme (and perhaps delusional) behaviors to sustain the individual's satisfaction with the parasocial relationship. Several studies (McCutcheon, Lange, & Houran, 2002; Maltby, McCutcheon, Ashe & Houran, 2001; Maltby, Houran, Lange, Ashe & McCutcheon, 2002) based on the Celebrity Attitude Scale are consistent with this proposed model and suggest that there are three increasingly more extreme sets of attitudes and behaviors associated with celebrity worship.

Initially, celebrity worship has Entertainment-Social value and comprises attitudes and behaviors like "My friends and I like to discuss what my favorite celebrity has done," and "Learning the life story of my favorite celebrity is a lot of fun." This stage reflects social aspects to celebrity worship and is consistent with Stever's (1991) observation that fans are attracted to a favorite celebrity because of their perceived ability to entertain and capture our attention. Intermediate levels of celebrity worship, by contrast, are characterized by more Intense-personal feelings, defined by items like "I consider my favorite celebrity to be my soul mate," and "I have frequent thoughts about my celebrity, even when I don't want to." This stage arguably reflects individuals' Intense-Personal and compulsive feelings around the celebrity, akin to the obsessional tendencies of fans often referred to in the literature (Dietz, Matthews, Van Duyne, Martell, Parry, Stewart, Warren & Crowder, 1991; Giles, 2000). The most extreme expression of celebrity worship is labelled Borderline-Pathological, as exemplified by items like "If someone gave me several thousand dollars (pounds) to do with as I please, I would consider spending it on a personal possession (like a napkin or paper plate) once used by my favorite celebrity" and "If I were lucky enough to meet my favorite celebrity, and he/she asked me to do something illegal as a favour I would probably do it."

This domain is thought to reflect an individual's social-pathological attitudes and behaviors that are held as a result of worshiping a celebrity.

The recent development of two scales that measure various 'boundaries in the mind' allows us to examine the relation of identity/boundary issues to attitudes and behaviors indicative of celebrity worship. The Revised Transliminality Scale (Lange, Thalbourne, Houran & Storm, 2000) is a Rasch (1960/1980) scaled version of a scale originally proposed by Thalbourne (1998) to measure the construct of transliminality—the hypothesized tendency for psychological material to cross thresholds into or out of consciousness. Specifically, Lange et al. (2000) showed that there was a common dimension underlying seven psychological domains: Hyperesthesia, (fleeting) Hypomanic or Manic Experience, Fantasy-Proneness, Absorption, Positive (and perhaps obsessional) Attitude Towards Dream Interpretation, Mystical Experience, and Magical Ideation. Thus, transliminality refers to a broad range of ideation, imagery, affect and perception. Thalbourne (2000) recently published a comprehensive review of various correlates of transliminality, and additional psychometric data are presented in Lange et al. (2000).

Hartmann's (1991) Boundary Questionnaire shows a moderately strong correlation with the Revised Transliminality Scale (Houran, Thalbourne, & Hartmann, in press), but the Boundary Questionnaire arguably measures a wider range of the boundary construct. Hartmann and his colleagues (Hartmann, Rosen, & Rand, 1998) described his Boundary Questionnaire as "...an instrument developed to measure personality differences in boundary structure; the concept of thick and thin boundaries involves the degree of separateness (thick boundaries) versus connection (thin boundaries) between a broad range of mental functions, processes, and entities..." (p. 32). We refer interested readers to

Hartmann, Harrison and Zborowski (2001) for a review of the boundary construct, as well as validation studies and subsequent research findings with the Boundary Questionnaire.

Method

Participants

Data derive from a convenience sample of 147 respondents ($M_{age} = 20.9$ yrs., $SD = 2.8$, range = 18-39 yrs.), composed of 66 men and 81 women. Participants were traditional and non-traditional aged college students who volunteered for a study on “personality and attitudes toward celebrities.” The students individually completed three scales that we administered in counterbalanced order, and they did not receive extra credit for their participation.

Measures

1. The Celebrity Attitude Scale (McCutcheon et al., 2002; Maltby et al., 2001) measures the favorableness of attitudes toward one’s favorite celebrity. The version used here was the 23-item revision employed by Maltby et al. (2002). The response format comprises a 5-point Likert scale with anchors being “strongly agree” (equal to 5) and “strongly disagree” (equal to 1). The scale measures the three ‘stages’ of celebrity worship (via subscales) that were identified through advanced dimensionality tests (McCutcheon et al., 2002). In particular, items included in the three subscales measure aspects of Entertainment-Social, Intense-Personal, and Borderline-Pathological attitudes and behaviors. Cronbach’s alpha for this version was .86. This scale also has good validity. For example, total scores correlate positively with favorableness of attitudes toward celebrities in general (McCutcheon et al., 2002).

2. The Revised Transliminality Scale (Lange et al., 2000) is a Rasch (1960/1980) scaled version of Thalbourne's (1998) original 29-item, true/false scale (Form B) that purportedly measures the tendency for psychological material to cross thresholds into or out of consciousness. While all 29 items are administered, twelve items from the original scale are excluded from the scoring of the test due to age and gender biases (see Houran, Thalbourne, & Lange, in press). High scores represent higher levels of transliminality. The Rasch reliability of this scale is .82, which translates to a KR-20 reliability coefficient of .85.
3. The 136-item Boundary Questionnaire (Hartmann, 1991) purportedly measures twelve different domains or categories of boundaries (Hartmann, Harrison, Bevis, Hurwitz, Holevas, & Dawani, 1987; Hartmann, 1989, 1991): Sleep/Wake/Dream, Unusual Experiences, Thoughts/Feelings/Moods, Childhood/Adolescence/Adulthood, Interpersonal, Sensitivity, Neat/Exact/Precise, Edges/Lines/Clothing, Opinions about Children/Others, Opinions about Organizations/Relationships, Opinions about Peoples/Nations/Groups, and Opinions about Beauty/Truth. Table 1 lists sample items from each of these twelve categories. The response format for each question (e.g., "I am very sensitive to other people's feelings") is anchored by '0' (not at all) and '4' (very much so). Approximately two thirds of the items are phrased so that full endorsement (very much so) indicates a 'thin' boundary, and the remaining items are phrased so that 'very much so' indicates a 'thick' boundary (e.g., "For me, things are black and white; there are no shades of grey"). To score the test, the answer-values of the 'thick' items are reversed. Therefore, for each of the twelve categories, high scores reflect thinner boundaries. In addition to the twelve individual category scores, all of the scaled answers can be added to produce what

Hartmann (1991) termed a 'Sumbound' or total score. Again, higher scores indicate thinness of boundaries. Cronbach's alpha for the Boundary Questionnaire is .93.

[Table 1 about here]

Results

Preliminaries

Table 2 gives the descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) for the research measures. In support of convergent validity, a partial correlation controlling for age and gender simultaneously showed that scores on the Revised Transliminality Scale correlated .52 ($p < .001$) with total scores on the Boundary Questionnaire. Furthermore, as expected, partial correlations controlling for age and gender showed that total scores on the Celebrity Attitude Scale correlated .27 ($p < .001$) with scores on the Revised Transliminality Scale and .26 ($p < .001$) with total scores on the Boundary Questionnaire.

[Table 2 about here]

Main Findings

To better understand the preliminary findings, we performed three standard multiple regression analyses to assess the predictability of scores on the three subscales (Entertainment-Social, Intense-Personal, and Borderline-Pathological) of the Celebrity Attitude Scale from the independent variables of age (men = 1, women = 2), gender, scores on the Revised Transliminality Scale, and scores on the twelve categories of the Boundary Questionnaire. In a standard multiple regression all independent variables enter the

regression equation simultaneously; which is the recommended method when there are insufficient theoretical grounds for controlling the order of entry of variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996).

'Entertainment-Social' Celebrity Worship

The multiple correlation R for the regression was significantly different from zero, $R = .67$, $R^2 = .15$, $F(15, 131) = 7.19$, $p < .001$; that is, scores on the Entertainment-Social subscale of the Celebrity Attitude Scale were significantly related to the set of independent variables. Altogether, 45% (or 39% adjusted, Adjusted $R^2 = .39$) of the variability in scores on the Entertainment-Social subscale was predicted by scores on the measures of Transliminality, the twelve categories of the Boundary Questionnaire, gender, and age. Six of the independent variables contributed significantly to the prediction of Entertainment-Social scores (given here are the beta coefficients and the squared semipartial correlations): Age ($p = .008$, $\beta = -.23$, $sr^2 = .030$), Transliminality ($p = .054$, $\beta = .19$, $sr^2 = .017$), Childhood/Adolescence/Adult ($p = .000$, $\beta = .38$, $sr^2 = .055$), Neat/Exact/Precise ($p = .023$, $\beta = -.38$, $sr^2 = .020$), Edges/Lines/Clothing ($p = .002$, $\beta = -.52$, $sr^2 = .039$), and Opinions re: Children, etc ($p = .002$, $\beta = .31$, $sr^2 = .040$).

By way of explanation, sr^2 refers to the squared semipartial correlation. This coefficient represents the contribution of a given independent variable to R^2 when the contribution of other independent variables is removed from both the dependent variable and the particular independent variable. Thus, a semipartial correlation coefficient is a useful indicator of the unique contribution of the independent variable to the total variance of the dependent variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). In addition, given that the twelve categories of the Boundary Questionnaire intercorrelate, it is important to inspect so-called tolerance

statistics (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996) and ensure that intercorrelations among predictor variables do not compromise the analyses. All tolerance statistics in the regression were above zero, so multicollinearity of the predictor variables was of no practical concern (Darlington, 1990).

'Intense-Personal' Celebrity Worship

Scores on the Intense-Personal subscale were significantly related to the set of independent variables, $R = .63$, $R^2 = .40$, $F(15, 131) = 5.82$, $p < .001$. 40% (or 33% adjusted, Adjusted $R^2 = .33$) of the variability in scores on the Intense-Personal subscale was predicted by scores on the measures of Transliminality, the twelve categories of the Boundary Questionnaire, gender, and age. Six of independent variables contributed significantly to the prediction of Intense-Personal scores: Age ($p = .009$, $\beta = -.24$, $sr^2 = .033$), Transliminality ($p = .035$, $\beta = .22$, $sr^2 = .022$), Childhood/Adolescence/Adult ($p = .000$, $\beta = .39$, $sr^2 = .059$), Edges/Lines/Clothing ($p = .006$, $\beta = -.50$, $sr^2 = .038$), Organizations/Relationships ($p = .016$, $\beta = .62$, $sr^2 = .027$), and Opinions re: Beauty/Truth ($p = .048$, $\beta = -.28$, $sr^2 = .018$). We found no problems with multicollinearity of the independent variables.

'Borderline-Pathological' Celebrity Worship

Scores on the Borderline-Pathological subscale were significantly related to the set of independent variables, $R = .49$, $R^2 = .24$, $F(15, 131) = 2.78$, $p < .001$. 24% (or 16% adjusted, Adjusted $R^2 = .16$) of the variability in scores on the Borderline-Pathological subscale was predicted by scores on the measures of Transliminality, the twelve categories of the Boundary Questionnaire, gender, and age. Out of the sixteen independent variables, we

found that five of the categories of the Boundary Questionnaire contributed significantly to the prediction of Borderline Pathological scores: Childhood/Adolescence/Adult ($p = .022$, $\beta = .39$, $sr^2 = .030$), Interpersonal ($p = .024$, $\beta = -.28$, $sr^2 = .029$), Edges/Lines/Clothing ($p = .013$, $\beta = -.51$, $sr^2 = .037$), Opinions re: Children, etc ($p = .046$, $\beta = .24$, $sr^2 = .023$), and Organizations/Relationships ($p = .029$, $\beta = .64$, $sr^2 = .027$). Again, we found no problems with multicollinearity of the independent variables.

Discussion

Our findings support the view that boundary functioning, as proposed by McCutcheon et al.'s (2002) Absorption-Addiction model, plays a role in celebrity worship. Initial and intermediate levels of celebrity worship—defined by the Entertainment-Social and Intense-Personal subscales of the Celebrity Attitude Scale—coincided with younger ages, the tendency for a broad range of ideation, imagery, affect and perception to cross thresholds into or out consciousness (transliminality), as well as a heightened degree of childlike ideations, empathy towards children, and a set of attitudes that can be described variously as an intolerance of ambiguity, a concreteness in thinking, or a need for structure and organization. More extreme forms of celebrity worship such as exemplified by the items on the Borderline-Pathological subscale of the Celebrity Attitude Scale showed similar trends, as well as interesting differences.

In addition to endorsement of and empathy towards childlike ideations and the need for certain types of structure and concreteness, we found that this latter domain of celebrity worship was best predicted by the curious mixture of 'thicker' boundaries with respect to behaviors in interpersonal relationships but 'thinner' boundaries regarding attitudes pertaining to organizations and relationships. In other words, it seems that people endorsing

Borderline-Pathological forms of celebrity worship tend not to empathize with or otherwise feel connected to individuals within their available social circles, yet they express the view that one should be open, sharing, flexible, and accepting with others. This suggests that these individuals want to socialize and bond with people but feel disconnected from the social milieu to which they belong or have access.

It is unclear why this situation would exist, but we speculate that trust issues are involved. In particular, a common predictor of each of the three subscales of the Celebrity Attitude Scale was high scores on the Boundary Questionnaire category of Childhood/Adolescence/Adulthood. Questions in this category include “I had a difficult and complicated childhood” and “I had a difficult and complicated adolescence.” We do not know for certain the types of childhood problems that our respondents associated with these questions, but childhood trauma has been linked with the development of fantasy proneness (Lynn & Rhue, 1988; Rhue & Lynn, 1987; Lawrence, Edwards, Barraclough, Church & Hetherington, 1995; Irwin, 1999). Therefore, we hypothesize that many celebrity worshippers have experienced various childhood traumatic events, which subsequently have encouraged the propensity for these individuals to become engrossed in fantasy—in these cases, the fantasy of celebrity and parasocial relationships. This view is consistent with the fact that the adolescent in the introduction to this paper who was “obsessed” with her favorite celebrity claimed that she was sexually abused when she was younger (Haynes & Rich, 2002, p. 198).

However, the data also implicate certain ‘thick’ mental boundaries (i.e., categories 7, 8, and 12 of the Boundary Questionnaire) in celebrity worship. This finding parallels previous research indicating that celebrity worship is associated with cognitive deficits and poorer psychological well-being (Maltby, et al., 2001; McCutcheon et al., in press; Maltby,

Houran & McCutcheon, in press). Attitudes akin to an intolerance of ambiguity that are measured by the Boundary Questionnaire may partly contribute to isolative and ambivalent interpersonal relationships, as well as reinforce misinterpretations in parasocial relationships. These deficits in cognitive flexibility—in addition to McCutcheon et al.'s (2002) proposed role of an addictive element—may subsequently assist in the maintenance of the delusional belief. Similar processes have been proposed to explain the etiology of erotomania (see e.g., Fujii, Ahmed, & Takeshita, 1999), so future research should examine whether celebrity worship is a specific expression of an erotomaniac type of delusional disorder, or whether the two phenomena merely serve the same psychological functions.

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Table 1. Categories of the Boundary Questionnaire and Examples of Items

Category 1: Sleep/Dream/Waking

1. When I awake in the morning, I am not sure whether I am really awake for a few minutes.
37. I spend a lot of time daydreaming, fantasizing, or in reverie.

Category 2: Unusual Experiences

61. At times I have felt as if I were coming apart.
100. I have had déjà vu experiences.

Category 3: Thoughts/Feelings/Moods

15. Sometimes I don't know whether I am thinking or feeling.
74. I can easily imagine myself to be an animal or what it might be like to be an animal.

Category 4: Childhood/Adolescence/Adult

4. I am very close to my childhood feelings.
40. I have definite plans for my future. I can lay out pretty well what I expect year by year for the next few years.

Category 5: Interpersonal

53. When I get involved with someone, we sometimes get too close.
103. I am a very open person.

Category 6: Sensitivity

6. I am very sensitive to other people's feelings.
42. I am unusually sensitive to loud noises and bright lights.

Category 7: Neat/Exact/Precise

19. I keep my desk and work table neat and well organized.
43. I am good at keeping accounts and keeping track of my money.

Category 8: Edges/Lines/Clothing

32. I like heavy, solid clothing.
44. I like stories that have a definite beginning, middle, and end.

Category 9: Opinions re: Children, etc.

33. Children and adults have a lot in common. They should give themselves a chance to be together without any strict roles.
56. I think a good teacher must remain in part a child.

Category 10: Organizations/Relationships

10. In an organization, everyone should have a definite place and a specific role.
58. A good relationship is one in which everything is clearly defined and spelled out.

Category 11: Peoples/Nations/Groups

11. People of different nations are basically very much alike.
105. There are no sharp dividing lines between normal people, people with problems, and people who are considered psychotic or crazy.

Category 12: Opinions re: Beauty/Truth

36. Either you are telling the truth or you are lying; that's all there is to it.
76. When I am in a new situation, I try to find out precisely what is going on and what the rules are as soon as possible.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics on Research Measures for the Complete Sample ($N = 147$)

	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Celebrity Attitude Scale—Total	28.55	10.13
Celebrity Attitude Scale subscales		
Entertainment-Social	12.00	5.04
Intense-Personal	12.18	4.27
Borderline-Pathological	4.37	1.81
Revised Transliminality Scale	23.11	4.49
Boundary Questionnaire— Sumbound	252.45	49.86
Boundary Questionnaire subscales		
Category 1: Sleep/Wake/Dream	15.47	8.39
Category 2: Unusual Experiences	24.41	11.98
Category 3: Thoughts/Feelings/Moods	24.89	8.14
Category 4: Childhood/Adolescence/Adulthood	7.33	4.73
Category 5: Interpersonal	19.29	5.35
Category 6: Sensitivity	10.04	4.39
Category 7: Neat/Exact/Precise	13.18	10.75
Category 8: Edges/Lines/Clothing	23.43	12.00
Category 9: Opinions about Children/Others	17.06	5.44
Category 10: Opinions about Organizations/Relationships	13.55	9.01
Category 11: Opinions about Peoples/Nations/Groups	21.55	10.19
Category 12: Opinions about Beauty/Truth	11.14	5.05