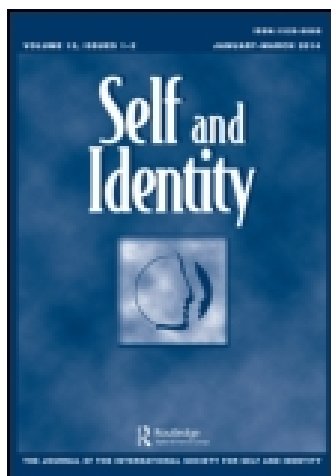


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Self-Esteem Instability and the Desire for Fame

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Self-Esteem Instability and the Desire for Fame

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The desire to become famous was examined among individuals with stable and unstable forms of self-esteem. Participants were 181 female undergraduates who completed measures of self-esteem level and fame interest along with daily measures of state self-esteem (i.e., how an individual feels about oneself at the present moment) for seven consecutive days. Our results show that individuals who possess unstable high self-esteem reported a stronger desire to become famous than did those with stable high self-esteem. These findings suggest the intriguing possibility that individuals with unstable high self-esteem may want to become famous as a means for gaining external validation. Implications of these findings for understanding the connection between self-esteem and the desire for fame are discussed.

Keywords: Fame; Fragile; Self-esteem; Unstable.

The present media obsession with celebrity and entertainment culture reflects the increasing desire among individuals to become famous. We are frequently exposed to celebrities—and their extravagant lifestyles—through an array of media outlets (e.g., television, Internet, magazines). The allure of fame is certainly not new but it has been exacerbated in recent years by expanding media coverage of celebrities as well as outlets that have made it possible for ordinary individuals to find their brief moment in the spotlight by landing a role on the latest reality television show or posting a video on YouTube.com that happens to go viral. These opportunities provide individuals with little discernible talent the opportunity to achieve sudden fame and celebrity status—however fleeting it may be—which appear to be a central aspiration for a growing number of individuals. For example, a study conducted by Uhls and Greenfield (2012) found that 40% of 10–12-year-old children report fame as their number one goal in life (benevolence and achievement fell into the second and third positions, respectively) for reasons that include attention, money, and popularity. The importance of fame in younger generations can be attributed, at least in part, to their lifestyle aspirations and the approval from others that they believe will accompany fame (Uhls & Greenfield, 2012). We believe that one reason that becoming famous is so appealing to individuals—particularly for those with a certain form of high self-esteem—is that it may serve as a means for bolstering and validating their feelings of self-worth. The goal of the present study was to gain a more nuanced understanding of the relationship that exists between self-esteem and the desire to be famous.

Not everyone would be interested in appearing on a reality television show for an opportunity to become famous but it does appear that there is a collective belief that being famous is an important and worthwhile goal that would contribute to a meaningful and

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fulfilling life (Uhls & Greenfield, 2012). Braudy (1986) argues that the desire for fame often emerges from the belief that the achievement of fame will lead to a lifetime of acceptance by others. This suggests that one underlying reason that individuals seek fame is to gain social acceptance and inclusion. In addition, recent empirical examinations of fame have found a number of different motivations for desiring fame that extend beyond a desire for acceptance (e.g., Gountas, Gountas, Reeves, & Moran, 2012; Greenwood, Long, & Dal Cin, 2013). For example, extrinsic motivations such as financial success, attractiveness, and social recognition are often associated with the desire to become famous (Gountas et al., 2012). However, striving to meet extrinsic goals—such as becoming famous—has been shown to be associated with poorer psychological well-being and physical health (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kasser & Ryan, 1993; Sheldon & Kasser, 1998) as well as distracting individuals from the achievement of more intrinsic goals (e.g., self-acceptance) that are associated with personal growth and well-being (Vonk & Smit, 2012).

Empirical investigations into the desire for fame are still in their earliest stages but it has been suggested that self-esteem level may be at least partially responsible for individual differences in the desire for fame (Evans & Wilson, 1999; Giles, 2000). That is, self-esteem may be connected to the desire for fame because individuals with high levels of self-esteem or those with somewhat low levels of self-esteem may desire fame to validate their positive self-views (in the case of those with high self-esteem) or as a way to gain confidence (in the case of those with low self-esteem). More simply, it may be that individuals with different forms of self-esteem find certain aspects of becoming famous appealing because some aspects of fame may serve as a way to validate or enhance already positive self-views, whereas other aspects of fame may serve as a means to improve negative feelings of worth. Recent studies have provided support for the idea that there is a connection between the ways that individuals view themselves and their interest in becoming famous. For example, a study by Maltby (2010) found that high levels of self-esteem were associated with certain aspects of the desire for fame (e.g., desire for a celebrity lifestyle), whereas low levels of self-esteem were associated with the desire to be famous in order to compensate for perceived vulnerabilities. The reason for these connections between self-esteem level and the motivations underlying a desire for fame may be due to individuals believing that their social worth will increase if they are famous. This possibility is consistent with the sociometer model that argues that self-esteem has status-tracking properties such that individuals experience increases in their self-esteem when they believe their relational value has increased (e.g., Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Extensions to the basic sociometer model argue that feelings of self-worth may track the status of an individual on other dimensions beyond relational value (Kirkpatrick & Ellis, 2001), which may include a domain-specific sociometer that is attuned to fame (see Henrich & Gil-White, 2001, for a similar argument concerning prestige). That is, individuals may desire fame, in part, because they believe it will increase their social value and make them feel better about themselves.

It is often suggested that famous individuals are at least somewhat narcissistic. In fact, narcissism is commonly used as an explanation for the erratic behaviors that are sometimes exhibited by celebrities (e.g., Grigordias, 2005). Greenwood et al. (2013) extended these findings by exploring the associations that narcissism had with the desire for fame. This study found that narcissistic personality features—which are linked with high levels of self-esteem (Brown & Zeigler-Hill, 2004)—were associated with a greater desire for status, recognition, and the perceived likelihood of becoming famous (see Maltby, 2010, for similar results). Consistent with these results, Young and Pinsky (2006) found that celebrities tend to report higher levels of narcissism than individuals who are not famous. The psychodynamic mask model of narcissism (see Bosson et al., 2008, for a

review) would suggest that the desire for fame among narcissistic individuals may reflect their desire to bolster their underlying negative attitudes about themselves which are disguised by their outward appearance of grandiosity. Taken together, these previous findings for self-esteem and narcissism suggest that one reason individuals may want to become famous is that they fear who they are and what they are doing with their lives is simply not good enough. This suggests that self-esteem may play a vital role in the desire to be famous such that individuals with tenuous feelings of self-worth may want to be famous in the hope that fame will provide them with a source of external validation.

The vast majority of research concerning self-esteem has focused exclusively on self-esteem level (i.e., whether self-esteem is high or low). This has certainly been a productive area of inquiry that has shed some light on the connections between feelings of self-worth and a variety of life outcomes but there is a rapidly growing consensus that there is more to self-esteem than simply whether it is high or low (Kernis, 2003). For example, mounting evidence suggests that high self-esteem is a heterogeneous construct that consists of both a *secure* and *fragile* form (see Jordan & Zeigler-Hill, 2013, for a review). Individuals with secure high self-esteem are thought to possess positive attitudes toward the self that are realistic, well-anchored, and resistant to threat. As a result, these individuals are able to experience both success and failure in their daily lives without these experiences dramatically altering their feelings of worth. In contrast, individuals with fragile high self-esteem possess feelings of self-worth that are vulnerable to challenge, require constant validation, and rely to some extent on self-deception. Individuals with this fragile form of high self-esteem are often preoccupied with protecting and enhancing their vulnerable feelings of self-worth. In an effort to distinguish between secure and fragile forms of high self-esteem, researchers have considered the following markers of self-esteem fragility: contingent self-esteem (i.e., individuals believe they must meet certain standards in order to feel good about themselves; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001), discrepancies between implicit and explicit self-esteem (i.e., high explicit self-esteem but low implicit self-esteem; Bosson, Brown, Zeigler-Hill, & Swann, 2003; Zeigler-Hill & Jordan, 2010, for a review), and self-esteem instability (i.e., feelings of self-worth that change considerably over time; see Kernis, 2005, for a review). The idea that each of these markers of self-esteem fragility is an indicator of the same underlying construct is supported by previous studies that have found associations between these markers (e.g., Zeigler-Hill, 2006; see Jordan & Zeigler-Hill, 2013, for a review).

The present study focuses on self-esteem instability, which refers to fluctuations in moment-to-moment feelings of self-worth over time. Accounting for both self-esteem level and self-esteem instability is important because it allows researchers to identify those individuals who possess secure and fragile forms of high self-esteem. That is, individuals who possess high levels of self-esteem that are stable over time (i.e., stable high self-esteem) are believed to be secure in their feelings of self-worth because their positive attitudes about themselves appear to be well-anchored and do not fluctuate a great deal based on external circumstances. In contrast, individuals who report generally high levels of self-esteem but experience considerable fluctuations in their feelings of self-worth over time (i.e., unstable high self-esteem) are thought to possess a relatively fragile form of high self-esteem because these frequent changes in their self-esteem suggest that the positive views expressed by these individuals are at least somewhat uncertain.

Self-esteem instability has been found—both by itself and in conjunction with self-esteem level—to be associated with a variety of important life outcomes including anger (Kernis, Grannemann, & Barclay, 1989), aggression (Zeigler-Hill, Enjaian, Holden, & Southard, 2014), defensiveness (Zeigler-Hill, Chadha, & Osterman, 2008), interpersonal style (Zeigler-Hill, Clark, & Beckman, 2011), humor style (Vaughan, Zeigler-Hill, &

Arnau, *in press*), academic outcomes (Zeigler-Hill et al., 2013), and psychopathology (e.g., Zeigler-Hill & Wallace, 2012; see Jordan & Zeigler-Hill, 2013, for a review). These results are consistent with the view that unstable high self-esteem reflects vulnerable feelings of self-worth that require external validation as well as some degree of self-deception (see Kernis, 2003, for a review). Unstable high self-esteem is thought to be associated with a wide array of negative outcomes (e.g., poor psychological adjustment, defensiveness) because this form of high self-esteem may lack the protective mechanisms that seem to shield those with stable high self-esteem from experiencing these outcomes. These results suggest that self-esteem instability is an important moderator of the associations that self-esteem level has with an array of life outcomes. Our goal for the present study was to examine whether self-esteem instability also moderates the association that self-esteem level has with the desire for fame.

Overview and Predictions

The goal of the present study was to examine whether self-esteem instability moderated the association between self-esteem level and the desire for fame. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Maltby, 2010), we expected self-esteem level to be positively associated with many aspects of the desire for fame (i.e., celebrity lifestyle, perceived suitability, intensity, and drive) such that individuals who possess more positive attitudes about themselves would want to be famous. That is, we thought that individuals with high levels of self-esteem would be interested in becoming famous because they believe that they are suitable for the notoriety and attention of fame. We expected self-esteem level to be negatively associated with the vulnerability aspect of the desire for fame because it captures the extent to which individuals desire fame in order to overcome or mask their perceived weaknesses and vulnerabilities. That is, individuals with low self-esteem may desire fame because they believe that being famous would help them overcome their low feelings of self-worth and provide them with an opportunity to be accepted by others. This prediction was also consistent with the results of Maltby (2010) which found that individuals with low levels of self-esteem were more likely to report a desire for fame to compensate for their perceived vulnerabilities. Our novel prediction was that we expected self-esteem instability to moderate the associations that self-esteem level had with the desire for fame such that individuals with unstable high self-esteem would report a greater interest in becoming famous than would be found among those with stable high self-esteem. The rationale for this prediction was that individuals with unstable high self-esteem may desire fame as a means for validating their tenuous feelings of self-worth. In essence, individuals with unstable high self-esteem may believe that the social recognition that accompanies fame will bolster and maintain how they feel about themselves. This idea is consistent with research showing that individuals with unstable high self-esteem adopt self-enhancement styles that are self-aggrandizing and self-promoting (see Kernis, 2003, for a review). Our prediction is consistent with the view that unstable high self-esteem may be more accurately conceptualized as a personality process rather than as a static condition or trait. That is, individuals with unstable high self-esteem are highly motivated to protect, maintain, and enhance their feelings of self-worth using a variety of strategies and we believe that the pursuit of fame may serve as one of these strategies. Our predictions for those individuals with low levels of self-esteem were less clear. We expected individuals with low self-esteem to report a desire for fame as a way to overcome their perceived vulnerabilities regardless of the stability of their self-esteem but we were uncertain about the pattern that would emerge among those with low self-esteem for the other reasons to seek fame.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants were 433 female undergraduates at a university in the Midwestern region of the USA who were enrolled in psychology courses and participated in exchange for partial fulfillment of a research participation requirement. Participants completed measures of self-esteem level and fame interest—along with other measures that are not directly relevant to the present study (e.g., basic personality features)—via a secure website.¹ Participants were offered additional research credit for completing a measure of state self-esteem each evening for seven consecutive days via the Internet. In order to assess self-esteem instability, it is essential that participants complete several measures of state self-esteem. As a result, a minimum number of completed state self-esteem measures must be established in order to determine which participants to include in the final analyses. We only included participants in the final analyses who contributed data for four or more days which are consistent with previous studies (e.g., Zeigler-Hill et al., 2013; Zeigler-Hill & Wallace, 2012). Of the 433 initial participants, 181 participants completed the daily measures for four or more days and contributed a total 1192 daily reports (i.e., an average of 6.59 reports for each participant). The mean age was 20.55 years ($SD = 4.64$) and their racial/ethnic composition was 80% White, 8% Black, and 12% Other. The participants in the final sample (i.e., those who completed at least four of the daily measures of state self-esteem) did not differ from the excluded participants with regard to their level of self-esteem ($t[431] = .32$, $p = .75$) but our final sample did report less desire for fame than those who were excluded ($ts[431] > 2.83$, $ps < .02$).

Measures

Self-Esteem Level

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) is a 10-item measure of global self-esteem (e.g., “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself”). Participants were instructed to complete the instrument according to how they typically or generally feel about themselves. Responses were made on scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). This instrument is regarded as a well-validated and reliable measure of global self-esteem (i.e., Blaskovich & Tomaka, 1991). The internal consistency of this measure for the present study was $\alpha = .89$.

Self-Esteem Instability

Self-esteem instability was measured using an approach that was adapted from the procedure initially developed by Kernis et al. (1989; see Kernis, 2005, for a review). Participants were asked to complete a modified version of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale at the end of each day for seven consecutive days via the Internet. This instrument was modified to capture state self-esteem by asking participants to provide the response that best reflected how they felt at that particular moment rather than how they typically or generally felt about themselves. Responses to these items were made on scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 10 (*strongly agree*). The majority of past studies concerning self-esteem instability have relied on the within-subject standard deviation across the repeated assessments of state-esteem as the index of self-esteem instability with higher standard deviations indicating higher self-esteem instability (see Kernis, 2005, for a review). However, researchers have raised concerns about using the within-subject

standard deviation as an indicator of intraindividual variability (Baird, Le, & Lucas, 2006). To address this concern, the present study used the *corrected standard deviation* suggested by Baird et al. (2006) as the index of self-esteem instability. This procedure involves predicting the within-subject standard deviation of state self-esteem from the linear and quadratic effects of the average state self-esteem score for each participant and saving the residual as an indicator of self-esteem instability that is not confounded with mean-level information.

Fame Interest

Interest in fame was measured with the Fame Interest scale (Maltby, 2010). The Fame Interest scale consists of 42 items to which participants provide ratings of agreement on scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The Fame Interest scale assesses the following six domains of possible interest in fame: celebrity lifestyle (seven items; e.g., “I want to see my picture in magazines” [$\alpha = .90$]), perceived suitability (seven items; e.g., “I should be famous because of my unique character” [$\alpha = .91$]), altruistic (seven items; e.g., “I want to be famous so I can make a contribution to society” [$\alpha = .96$]), intensity (seven items; e.g., “I would do anything to be famous” [$\alpha = .88$]), drive (seven items; e.g., “My life’s ambition has been to be famous” [$\alpha = .93$]), and vulnerability (seven items; e.g., “Being famous would bring some meaning to my life” [$\alpha = .94$]). The Fame Interest subscales have been found to possess adequate psychometric properties in previous studies (e.g., Maltby, 2010).

Results

The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for the measures are presented in Table 1. Moderational analyses were conducted to determine whether self-esteem instability qualified the associations between self-esteem level and the dimensions of fame interest. This was accomplished by conducting a series of multiple regression analyses in which each of the six dimensions of fame interest were regressed onto self-esteem level and self-esteem instability. For these analyses, the continuous predictor variables were centered for the purpose of testing interactions (Aiken & West, 1991). The main effects of self-esteem level and self-esteem instability were entered along with their two-way interaction term. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 2. Simple slopes tests (Aiken & West, 1991) were conducted to probe the interactions that emerged from these

TABLE 1 Intercorrelations and Descriptive Statistics for Self-Esteem Level, Self-Esteem Instability, and Fame

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Self-esteem level	—							
2. Self-esteem instability	— .10	—						
3. Celebrity lifestyle	— .02	.12	—					
4. Perceived suitability	.18*	.05	.64***	—				
5. Altruistic	.04	.03	.60***	.62***	—			
6. Intensity	— .10	.03	.65***	.58***	.37***	—		
7. Drive	— .09	.07	.59***	.53***	.29***	.76***	—	
8. Vulnerability	— .19*	.09	.66***	.53***	.44***	.81***	.74***	—
<i>M</i>	3.95	.00	1.68	1.73	2.37	1.40	1.26	1.43
<i>SD</i>	.70	.99	.80	.86	1.28	.60	.54	.68

* $p < .05$; *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 2 Regressions of Fame Interest on Self-Esteem Level and Self-Esteem Instability

	Celebrity lifestyle		Perceived suitability		Altruistic		Intensity		Drive		Vulnerability	
	R^2	β	R^2	β	R^2	β	R^2	β	R^2	β	R^2	β
Model	.04*		.07*		.04*		.03		.03		.05	
Self-esteem level (SEL)		-.02		.18*		.03		-.10		-.09		-.18*
Self-esteem instability (SEI)		.17*		.13		.10		.07		.10		.10
SEL \times SEI		.16*		.19*		.21*		.15		.13		.10

* $p < .05$.

analyses. These simple slopes were conducted first using values one standard deviation above the mean for self-esteem instability to describe individuals with unstable self-esteem and one standard deviation below the mean to describe those with stable self-esteem. Additional simple slopes tests were then conducted using values one standard deviation above the mean for self-esteem level to describe individuals with high self-esteem and one standard deviation below the mean to describe those with low self-esteem.

Celebrity Lifestyle

A main effect did not emerge for self-esteem level ($\beta = -.02$, $t[177] = -.22$, $p = .83$). However, a main effect did emerge for self-esteem instability ($\beta = .17$, $t[177] = 2.20$, $p = .03$) that was qualified by the two-way interaction of self-esteem level \times self-esteem instability ($\beta = .16$, $t[177] = 2.06$, $p = .04$). The predicted values for this interaction are presented in Panel A of Figure 1. Simple slopes tests found that the slope of the line representing the association between self-esteem level and celebrity lifestyle was not

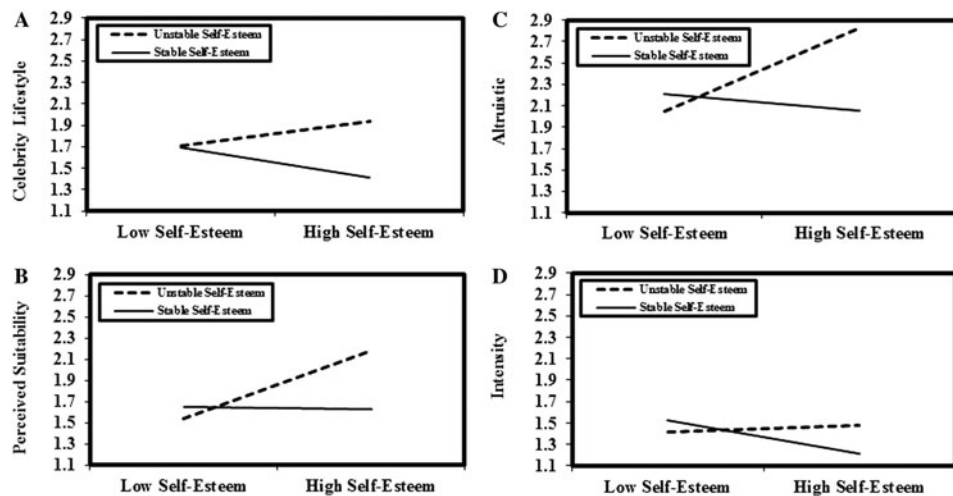


FIGURE 1 Predicted values for celebrity lifestyle (Panel A), perceived suitability (Panel B), altruistic (Panel C), and intensity (Panel D) illustrating the interaction of self-esteem level and self-esteem instability at values that are one standard deviation above and below their respective means.

significant for individuals with unstable self-esteem ($\beta = .15$, $t[177] = 1.37$, $p = .17$) or stable self-esteem ($\beta = -.18$, $t[177] = 1.62$, $p = .11$). In contrast, the association between self-esteem instability and celebrity lifestyle was significant for individuals with high levels of self-esteem ($\beta = .33$, $t[177] = 2.63$, $p = .01$) but not for those with low levels of self-esteem ($\beta = .01$, $t[177] = .12$, $p = .91$). These results suggest that individuals who possess unstable high self-esteem reported a greater desire for a celebrity lifestyle than those with stable high self-esteem.

Perceived Suitability

A main effect emerged for self-esteem level ($\beta = .18$, $t[177] = 2.49$, $p = .01$) but not for self-esteem instability ($\beta = .13$, $t[177] = 1.69$, $p = .09$). The main effect for self-esteem level was qualified by the two-way interaction of self-esteem level \times self-esteem instability that emerged ($\beta = .19$, $t[177] = 2.48$, $p = .01$). The predicted values for this interaction are presented in Panel B of Figure 1. Simple slopes tests were then conducted which found that the slopes of the lines representing the association between self-esteem level and perceived suitability for fame was significant for those with unstable self-esteem ($\beta = .37$, $t[177] = 3.58$, $p < .001$) but not for those with stable self-esteem ($\beta = -.01$, $t[177] = -.08$, $p = .94$). Additional simple slopes tests revealed that the association between self-esteem instability and perceived suitability for fame was significant for those with high levels of self-esteem ($\beta = .32$, $t[177] = 2.57$, $p = .01$) but not for those with low levels of self-esteem ($\beta = -.06$, $t[177] = -.68$, $p = .50$). These results show that individuals with unstable high self-esteem perceived themselves to be more suitable for achieving fame compared to those with stable high self-esteem or either form of low self-esteem.

Altruistic

The analysis concerning altruistic reasons for fame interest found no main effects for self-esteem level ($\beta = .03$, $t[177] = .45$, $p = .65$) or self-esteem instability ($\beta = .10$, $t[177] = 1.24$, $p = .21$). However, the interaction of self-esteem level \times self-esteem instability did emerge from this analysis ($\beta = .21$, $t[177] = 2.70$, $p = .01$). The pattern of predicted values for this interaction is displayed in Panel C of Figure 1. The slope of the line representing the association between self-esteem level and altruistic reasons for an interest in fame was significant for individuals with unstable self-esteem ($\beta = .24$, $t[177] = 2.31$, $p = .02$) but not for those with stable self-esteem ($\beta = -.18$, $t[177] = -1.62$, $p = .12$). Simple slopes tests also revealed that the association between self-esteem instability and altruistic reasons for an interest in fame was significant for individuals with high levels of self-esteem ($\beta = .31$, $t[177] = 2.43$, $p = .02$) but not for those with low levels of self-esteem ($\beta = -.11$, $t[177] = -1.25$, $p = .22$). These findings show that individuals with unstable high self-esteem reported more altruistic reasons for fame interest than those with stable high self-esteem or either form of low self-esteem.

Intensity

The results concerning the intensity dimension of fame interest found no main effects for self-esteem level ($\beta = -.10$, $t[177] = -1.39$, $p = .17$) or self-esteem instability ($\beta = .07$, $t[177] = .91$, $p = .37$). However, a marginally significant two-way interaction of self-esteem \times self-esteem instability did emerge from the analysis ($\beta = .15$, $t[177] = 1.93$, $p = .06$). The predicted values for this interaction are displayed in Panel D

of Figure 1. Simple slopes tests found that the slope of the line representing the association between self-esteem level and the intensity dimension of fame interest was not significant for individuals with unstable self-esteem ($\beta = .05$, $t[177] = .45$, $p = .65$) but was significant for those with stable self-esteem ($\beta = -.26$, $t[177] = -2.32$, $p = .02$). Further simple slopes tests found that the association between self-esteem instability and the intensity dimension of fame interest was marginally significant for individuals with high levels of self-esteem ($\beta = .22$, $t[177] = 1.75$, $p = .08$) but did not approach conventional levels of significance for those with low levels of self-esteem ($\beta = -.08$, $t[177] = -.88$, $p = .38$). These results suggest that individuals with stable high self-esteem reported marginally lower levels of intense desire for fame than other individuals.

Drive

The results for the analysis concerning the drive for fame failed to find main effects for self-esteem level ($\beta = -.09$, $t[177] = -1.21$, $p = .23$) or self-esteem instability ($\beta = .10$, $t[177] = 1.31$, $p = .19$). The two-way interaction of self-esteem level \times self-esteem instability also failed to emerge ($\beta = .13$, $t[177] = 1.66$, $p = .10$).

Vulnerability

Self-esteem level was associated with vulnerability ($\beta = -.18$, $t[177] = -2.50$, $p = .01$) such that lower levels of self-esteem were associated with more vulnerability. Neither the main effect of self-esteem instability ($\beta = .10$, $t[177] = 1.32$, $p = .19$) nor the interaction of self-esteem level \times self-esteem instability ($\beta = .10$, $t[177] = 1.31$, $p = .19$) emerged from this analysis.

Discussion

The goal of the present study was to examine whether self-esteem instability moderated the association between self-esteem level and the desire to become famous. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Maltby, 2010), self-esteem level was positively associated with the perceived suitability subscale and negatively associated with the vulnerability subscale. It is important to note that the associations we expected self-esteem level to have with the celebrity life-style, intensity, and drive subscales of the Fame Interest scale did not emerge. It is unclear why these associations failed to emerge in the present study but it is possible that it may have been due to the fact that the present sample was composed of college-age women. It may be helpful for future research concerning the link between self-esteem and the desire for fame to include a larger sample that is more diverse in terms of demographic features (e.g., age, sex).

In partial support of our hypotheses, self-esteem instability moderated the associations that self-esteem level had with many aspects of the desire for fame (i.e., celebrity lifestyle, perceived suitability, and altruistic). More specifically, individuals with unstable high self-esteem reported a greater interest in many aspects of becoming famous compared to those with stable high self-esteem. Contrary to our hypotheses, self-esteem instability failed to moderate the association that self-esteem level had with the drive and vulnerability subscales of fame interest and the moderation effect was only marginally significant for the intensity scale. This pattern of results suggests that the association that self-esteem level has with the desire for fame is often moderated by self-esteem instability. We believe that individuals with unstable high self-esteem are more interested in these aspects of fame than those with stable high self-esteem because they believe that becoming famous will

validate their tenuous feelings of worth. This speculation is consistent with the view that unstable high self-esteem may be best conceptualized as a personality process such that individuals with unstable high self-esteem hope to use fame as a means to protect, maintain, and enhance their feelings of worth. It is important to note that the finding regarding altruistic reasons for fame is in line with previous findings which suggest that individuals are likely to endorse altruistic reasons for pursuing fame regardless of their true intentions (Maltby, 2010). However, the fact that the altruistic motivations for fame seem to be quite different from the other reasons to desire fame suggests that further research on this topic is necessary to understand the similarities and differences between these motivations. Our results are consistent with those of previous studies showing that individuals with fragile high self-esteem engage in behaviors such as the derogation of outgroup members (Jordan, Spencer, & Zanna, 2005) and unrealistic optimism (Bosson et al., 2003) which are also considered to be strategies for regulating their feelings of self-worth.

We believe that individuals with unstable high self-esteem may desire fame in the hope that it will provide them with a source of external validation and help them manage their feelings of self-worth but it is not clear that being famous actually makes individuals feel better about themselves. Although relatively few studies have examined the actual consequences of fame for self-esteem regulation, the results of the existing studies cast doubt on the idea that being famous provides individuals with greater feelings of security (e.g., Loy & Brown, 1982; Schaller, 1997). For example, college athletes have been found to experience considerable stress related to changes in their self-concept following increases in their level of fame (Adler & Adler, 1989). Our skepticism concerning whether fame would actually reassure those with unstable high self-esteem is due to the fact that fame often leads to higher levels of self-focused attention because famous people are often acutely aware of the fact that others are frequently watching them (Duval & Wicklund, 1972). Our speculation is that constantly being surrounded by an "audience" would not actually provide the reassurance that individuals with unstable high self-esteem are seeking and may actually have the opposite effect by serving as a constant threat to their feelings of self-worth. Recent research examining the use of social networking sites provides some insight that seeking reassurance through public attention on online domains may be problematic (e.g., Clerkin, Smith, & Hames, 2013). For example, Clerkin et al. (2013) found that seeking excessive reassurance via Facebook (e.g., utilizing Facebook status updates as a way to receive feedback from others) led to decreases in social and appearance state self-esteem. This is an empirical issue that deserves further attention in future research.

These findings suggest that it is important to take into account the stability of self-esteem when considering the connection between self-esteem level and the desire for fame. The inclusion of self-esteem instability allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the connection between feelings of self-worth and the desire for fame. It is possible that the pursuit of fame is one strategy that individuals with unstable high self-esteem adopt as a way to bolster their tenuous feelings of self-worth because fame is often equated with status, recognition, and beauty (Gountas et al., 2012). It would be informative for future research to examine whether these findings extend to other markers of fragile high self-esteem (i.e., contingent self-esteem, discrepancies between implicit and explicit self-esteem) in order to gain a better understanding of the similarities and differences between these markers of self-esteem fragility.

The present study had a number of strengths (e.g., more nuanced view of self-esteem) but it is important to acknowledge some of its potential limitations. The first limitation of the present study is that the correlational nature of the data prevents us from determining

the direction of causality between self-esteem and fame desire. Our underlying process model was that unstable high self-esteem would lead to a greater desire to become famous but this cannot be clearly established given the present data. That is, we cannot rule out the possibility that the direction of causality may be bidirectional or reversed. For example, it is unclear if unstable high self-esteem precedes the desire for fame or if the direction of causation is reversed such that a desire for fame contributes to the development of unstable high self-esteem. Related to this limitation is the fact that we assessed self-esteem instability during a period of time that immediately followed our assessment of their desire for fame. The second limitation of the present study is that the generalizability of the findings may be limited to White female college students in the Midwestern region of the USA. We focused exclusively on women in the present study because previous research suggests that women were more likely than men to report being interested in fame as a way to gain status (Greenwood et al., 2013) and use their interest in celebrities as a way to establish their own identities (i.e., celebrity worship; Reeves, Baker, & Truluck, 2012). Future studies should extend the present findings to consider more diverse samples in terms of racial-ethnic background, age, sex, and nationality.

The present study demonstrates that women with unstable high self-esteem have a strong interest in many aspects of becoming famous (i.e., wanting a celebrity lifestyle, perceived suitability for achieving fame, altruistic reasons). That is, women who report high levels of self-esteem but experience frequent fluctuations in their feelings of self-worth possess a strong desire for fame which may serve as a way for them to bolster their uncertain feelings of self-worth. These findings provide additional support for the idea that individuals with unstable high self-esteem adopt strategies—such as the pursuit of fame—to obtain external validation. These findings extend our understanding of the connection between self-esteem level and the desire for fame as well as provide additional support for the importance of distinguishing between stable and unstable forms of high self-esteem.

Note

1. Participants completed measures of self-esteem, personality features (i.e., Narcissistic Personality Inventory [Raskin & Hall, 1979], Pathological Narcissism Inventory [Pincus et al., 2009], Big Five Inventory [John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991], Spitefulness [Marcus, Zeigler-Hill, Mercer, & Norris, 2014], MACH-IV [Christie & Geis, 1970], Levenson Self-Report Psychopathy Scale [Levenson, Kiehl, & Fitzpatrick, 1995]), and the desire for fame in that order.

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