

**Jussie Smollett, Narcissistic Personality Disorder,
and the Choice to Punish or Problem Solve**
by C. Liegh McInnis

I've gone back and forth about discussing the Jussie Smollett issue as the range of emotions swing from sadness to anger regarding his alleged false accusations. When I was first told about the incident, I was, like most, angered but not surprised. Things, like this, happen all the time. Then, as I heard the actual details, I was, like most, skeptical about Smollett's story. Then, my skepticism grew to anger with a knee-jerk of "He needs his ass kicked." If Smollett has, indeed, lied, it is one of the greatest examples of selfishness because he was willing to taint years of work by African Americans and the LGBTQ community for his own self-centered desires. Maybe, he, allegedly, thought he had an air-tight plan that could not "go wrong." But, the sheer amount of egoism or vanity that it takes to create a farce like this with no regard to how it will negatively impact the millions of people who have and continue to be targeted, abused, assaulted, and murdered reflects a person who only cares for himself. Additionally, *Empire* may be cancelled as a result of his behavior. It's difficult for me to fathom that so many people may lose their jobs because of the selfishness of one person...oh wait, yes I can...former JSU President Carolyn Meyers also cost lots of people to lose their jobs as well due to her own...selfishness, but I digress. So, again, my flippant position was "Smollett needs his ass kicked," especially when one female conservative talking head stated, "All alleged hate crimes are fake." It didn't take long for the white supremacists and homophobes to make Smollett the poster child for "fake news." Again, I wanted someone to beat his ass.

Then, while appearing on the "Man-Cave Edition" of the *Women for Progress Show* that airs the last Thursday of each month on 90.1 and is hosted by Dr. Ivory Phillips, Dr. Timothy Quinn, during his regular segment, took his time to use the Smollett case as a teachable moment by addressing Narcissistic Personality Disorder. When Dr. Quinn first began discussing the issue, my initial thought was "Oh, great, here's more medical mumbo jumbo to justify or excuse irresponsible behavior. Smollett don't need no diagnosis; he needs...wait for it...that's right...an ass whipping!" Yet, Dr. Quinn, ever the man of science, used fact to slice through my wall of emotionalism. "NPD—one of several types of personality disorders—is a mental condition in which people have an inflated sense of their own importance, a deep need for excessive attention and admiration, troubled relationships, and a lack of empathy for others. But behind this mask of extreme confidence lies a fragile self-esteem that's vulnerable to the slightest criticism." Like most, I was familiar with narcissism, in general, from the Greek character Narcissus who so loved himself that he spurns all other lovers and kills himself from being unable to bear his own love for himself. Based on this information, I never really thought much about narcissism other than it defined vain or self-absorbed people. Yet, listening to Dr. Quinn, I was made to realize that there is an actual condition/illness in which people feel so poorly about themselves or hate themselves so much that they develop a defense mechanism to hide their own pain by making themselves feel superior to others, which often leads to them minimizing and harming others. And, as we know, hurt people hurt people. In less than five minutes, providing a succinct but abundant amount of information, Dr. Quinn modified, if not changed, my perception of Smollett. I still think his actions are incredibly selfish and irresponsible, but one wonders, based on medical information, just how much pain and/or self-loathing someone must

have to risk everything one has—one's fame, status, money, and career—just for a bit more attention and money. While not quite the same, I remembered the tragic suicide of Robin Williams, a man who spent over fifty years making others happy and could find no happiness of his own. Now, while I think that Smollett should be punished for his crime, I also hope he gets some help, if he, indeed, has a mental or emotional condition. Yes, Smollett's action has made life more difficult for the many people who are mistreated and abused daily but are never believed. Still, if we want to lessen, if not stop, more Smollett's from doing the same, we must find a way to balance punishment with rehabilitation, something that Smollett nor many other people placed in America's prisons rarely receive.