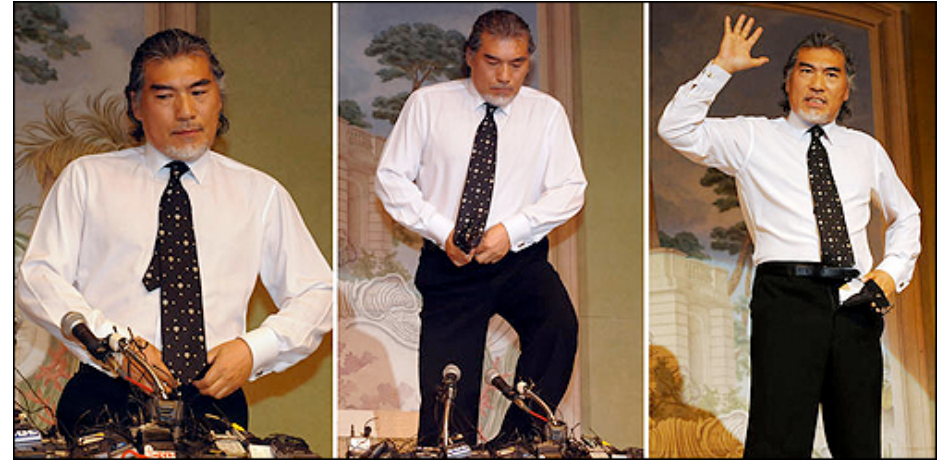


Na Hoon-a and the Poison of Celebrity Rumor

Rumors about the Na Hoon-a started to die down on Friday, when the veteran pop singer in a press conference threatened to take drastic action to prove he was in one piece. But the **saga** revealed the **collective voyeurism** of the **yellow press** in dealing with rumors about celebrities' private lives, and the way such rumors **ramify** on the Internet.

In the press conference, the **crooner** said two actresses who have also fallen victim to **malicious gossip**, Kim Hye-soo and Kim Seon-ah, "would have killed themselves if they were more **weak-willed**." In fact, actress and pop singer U-Nee and TV actress Jeong Da-bin did commit suicide in January and February last year, apparently as a result of malicious online comments and rumors.

This is not Na Hoon-a's first encounter with rumor. In June 1972, he was attacked onstage during a live performance by a 20-something man who claimed to be a fan of rival crooner Nam Jin, sustaining a serious injury to his face. **Entertainment weeklies** began spreading a rumor that Nam Jin was said to be behind the assault; it was only laid to rest five years and three months later, when Nam Jin himself was attacked by the same man.



Pop singer Na Hoon-a stands on a table and unbuckles his belt in a threat to reveal the bare truth about rampant rumors that he had been castrated or dismembered in a love quarrel, during a press conference in Seoul on Friday./Newsis

This time, **rumor mongers** claimed Na was suffering laryngeal cancer and recuperating at the Tongdo Temple in Yangsan, South Gyeongsang Province. One Internet user claimed to have seen him getting surgery. A particularly **persistent rumor** had it that Na had been **castrated** in a love quarrel. Like **Chinese Whispers**, the Internet can spread rumors very quickly and modify their content.

Another victim of Internet gossip, the pop singer Jang Na-ra, on Saturday appeared on OBS Kyeongin TV with her father Joo Ho-sung. "I am shocked by how cruel and **plausible** online messages are. I've seen as many as nine false rumors about my abortion, which of course I've never had," she said.

Prof. Hwang Sang-min of Yonsei University says the basic feature of persistent rumors is probability. "The more plausible and concrete they are, the quicker they spread. The latest rumor was spread in the style of an anonymous press report." Kim Chung-woon, a professor at Myongji University said the Na gossip "is a kind of fan fiction or storytelling."

Rumors and gossip about celebrities are mainly created by young people. But the stories about Na found particular **resonance** among his middle-aged fans. They endlessly **proliferated** on the Internet, at private drinking parties or in gossip among housewives. Lacking anything concrete to talk about, they perhaps spread the stories out of envy of a singer who doesn't seem to age at all despite being in his 60s. Prof. Kim said Na "was an ideal subject for middle-aged men and women to spin their stories. Whether the rumors were false or not was meaningless to them."

During the press conference, the crooner almost dropped his trousers to prove he had not been castrated or **dismembered**. Attorney Kang Ji-weon says, "Rumors, which would have been dismissed as mere gossip in the past are recklessly proliferating on the Internet. This is a very **irresponsible phenomenon**. Our society has to get rid of its morbid enjoyment of malicious gossip about celebrities."

Questions:

1. What can be done to stop these rumours?
2. Does celebrity rumours really 'sell newspapers'?
3. Are you curious about celebrities?