

## The Famous Client

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### Abstract

This article will examine the psychology of fame including its relationship to narcissism, are narcissism and fame necessarily related. Also discussed is the new phenomena of the celebrity culture people who are famous for being famous and is this valid. A client who is famous can be seen as qualitatively different to the client who is not famous in terms of the therapist's response to them. What will that response be and how will that response impact the therapeutic relationship are discussed here.

### Key words

Fame, narcissism, psychotherapy, transactional analysis, regression, transference, counter transference

### Introduction

At times a therapist will be asked to counsel a person who is famous or has a very high profile in some way. They vary from politicians, to business people, sporting people, actors and so forth. It presents an interesting situation for the therapist because of the potential for counter transference that of course can impact the efficacy of therapy. There has been some literature that has focussed on the psychology of fame but it has been mostly about the psychological consequence of fame on a person. The negative psychological consequences that fame can lead to. In addition Eric Berne also wrote about fame in the sense of how a group of people need a euhemerus for the development and stability of their group.

However to my knowledge there is no literature on doing psychotherapy with the famous client from the point of view of how does their fame impact the therapist. Of course huge amounts have been written on how clients can impact therapists and the development of counter transference but there is no discussion on the special features of the famous client and how they can effect counter transference.

### Literature review

The psychology of fame has been examined in the past in a variety of ways. For example what are the psychological consequences for a person who does become famous. Estes (1998) states that fame can be used by some to try and overcome feelings of inadequacy and this can lead to the development with an obsession with acquiring public recognition. Giles (2010) says that loneliness and feelings of isolation often result from fame and celebrity over a period of time. Kiwi (2012) reports Michael Jackson as saying that success brings loneliness and that he is one of the loneliest people on earth, so much so that the loneliness hurts. Habermas (1991) reports that some celebrities use their fame as a way to maintain their separateness and inaccessibility with others. In the final analysis famous people have life scripts like everyone else. They go through their lives setting up circumstances and relationships such that they eventually reach their final script payoff just like everyone else. Indeed from the comments just made it could indicate that Michael Jackson had a life script to end up feeling alone.

Another area in which the psychology of fame has been examined is in how celebrity can be used to endorse political candidates and the consequences of doing so, Carroll and Jones (2007). In a similar vein research as been conducted into the role celebrity can play in the area of public health communication. Hilton and Hunt (2010) assessed the

effectiveness of using famous individuals to communicate to the public about public health issues and changing perceptions towards disease.

Eric Berne (1966) also addressed the topic of fame with his discussion of the euhemerus. He states, "The members demand certain qualities of the psychological leader, the one who is likely to survive in the group tradition as a euhemerus. And these are the qualities of a god. The leader is supposed to be omnipotent, omniscient, immortal, invulnerable, irresistible, incorruptible, uneducible, indefatigable and fearless." (p106). The euhemerus is a deceased person who receives such an elevation in status by members of the group to make them mythical like. Often their pictures and statues will be displayed by the group so as to remember this person and the importance they have played in the group. Berne then says there is a process called euhemerization and this is the process where the dead persons status is changed over time by the group members to give them a mythical quality. As the quotation cited above shows the psychological leader who obviously is not deceased can also go through this process of euhemerization and thus end up with a modified version of those qualities before death.

This could be seen as Berne's explanation of how we come to see some famous people through euhemerization. We change them into a godlike non person and elevate them to a status that separates them from 'real' people. To my knowledge there is little to no literature on doing psychotherapy with the famous client. Searches of a number of databases produced no previous material on the topic of the famous person as a psychotherapy client.

### What is fame

Definitions of fame highlight the idea of being known by large numbers of people, as these show:

The state of being known or talked about by many people, especially on account of notable achievements.

The state of being widely known, widely recognised, or of great popular interest.

The state of being known or recognized by many people because of your achievements, skills, etc.

Stoney et al (2020) state: "Who is famous varies across world locations, changes over time, and can be specific to age groups and generations." (p329). Fame is in the eye of the beholder. A person is only famous to an individual if that individual perceives the person to be that way. Famousness is not something that a famous person possesses instead it is a perception of the famous person by others. For instance Duck (1990) notes that famous people for school age boys are mainly sporting heroes, pop stars, actors and TA characters whereas for school age girls they are more likely to be film stars, TV characters, models and pop stars. For children who is famous depends upon the gender of the of the person observing the famous individual not the famous person themselves. A person is only famous to someone if they have been euhemerized by that individual.

People can become known by large groups of others for a wide variety of reasons. For instance as the definitions above show some become famous for having great skills and as a result of those skills achieving great heights. Examples of this can be in literature, dance, the arts, sport and so on. Others become famous not because of any skill but

because they are born into fame, for example children born into royal families of a particular country. It may be the children born to already famous people and therefore they become famous as a result of that. Or they use the fame of their parent to engender their own fame such as Nicole Riche, the daughter of Lionel Richie or the children of Ozzy Osbourne.

Others become famous not because of any skills they have or great achievements they have made but because they do such terrible and horrible things that it gets great public attention. Examples could be Pablo Escobar, Adolf Hitler or Charles Manson. Indeed I worked in a prison for a number of years and counselled a number of people who were very widely known (famous) in the country where we lived because of the crimes they had committed.

In more recent times with the advent of social media we are afforded almost a numerical scale of how famous some people are. For example we have a list of the most followed people on Instagram. (20th August, 2021). (Source Wikipedia).

1. Cristiano Ronaldo - footballer - 331 million
2. Dwayne Johnson - actor - 264 million
3. Ariana Grande - actress - 261 million
4. Kylie Jenner - celebrity - 260 million
5. Lionel Messi - footballer - 254 million
6. Selena Gomez - actress - 254 million
7. Kim Kardashian - celebrity - 246 million
8. Beyonce - musician - 201 million
9. Justin Bieber - musician - 191 million
10. Kendall Jenner - celebrity - 183 million

On this list are the usual people one would expect such as footballers and musicians but there is an interesting addition in more recent times with people like Kim Kardashian and Kendall Jenner. These people are seen as representing a modern day phenomena in this era of celebrity. Farlex (2017) cites the idiom of - famous for being famous - someone who is well-known only for being a fixture in the media, rather than having a particular talent or achievement. This is seen as the modern day phenomena of the celebrity culture with the trait of famous for being famous.

These people are therefore not consistent with the meanings cited above for the definition of fame, being those who have special skills or have made some kind of special achievement. However these celebrity figures are known, talked about and recognised by very large numbers of people so in this sense they meet the criteria for being famous. On this point I do not agree with the usual criticisms of some of those celebrities who are considered as only famous for being famous. For instance Celedonia and Williams (2006) say, "It seems as though fame is no longer an indicator of exceptional achievement." (p216) and that fame is much easier to achieve now because of the internet, television and so forth.

This assertion is rejected, in at least some instances such as with Kim Kardashian, who is often portrayed as the public face of the modern day celebrity culture. It is suggested here that such people like Kim Kardashian do have a very special and unique set of skills. They could be seen to have excellent skills in marketing and have the unique ability to assess the psychological needs and wants of large numbers of the general public. This is a skill often attributed to the successful politician, having a sense or ability to read the public

mood and wants. What large numbers of the current public are wanting and then being able to deliver on or satisfy that need. These are a very unique set of skills that puts them apart from the vast majority of the rest of the population. Kim Kardashian does not have 246 million Instagram followers by luck or by accident, she has managed this situation very skilfully. She is a skilful business woman and has derived her fame from that skill set. She is not famous, just for being famous.

### Fame and narcissism

Another interesting aspect of fame is its correlation with narcissism. Celedonia and Williams (2006) say that fame is attractive to the narcissistic person because fame can give the individual a sense of immortality versus a sense of self that is much more ephemeral or temporary. The American Psychiatric Association (1980) lists five central aspects of narcissism with one being, "Exhibitionism: the person requires constant attention and admiration." (p317). The famous person is going to get a lot of ongoing and repeated attention and admiration. So fame is going to be attractive to people with some narcissistic traits.

Of course there is much more to narcissism than just this single feature such as a lack of empathy, a sense of entitlement and fantasies of unlimited success, power, beauty and so forth. One cannot say that famous people are going to be narcissistic personalities. However a person who voluntarily and repeatedly engages in activities that are going to get them large amounts of attention and admiration could be seen as having some narcissistic qualities. Thus it could be said that the personality of the famous person will range from having a few features of narcissism to a full blown narcissistic personality disorder.

### Responses to the famous person

Meeting a famous person is different to meeting a more unknown person. Therefore people's reactions will tend to be different. Words like awe, adoration, respect, reverence, fear and so forth come to mind. As a result of their fame and reputation the way a person responds to the famous person will tend to be different to the way they respond to non famous people. In psychological terms this could be described as a regression. Figure 1 could be the ego state structure of regression

Upon meeting the famous individual the person may change from their usual ego state structure of three fully functioning ego states to a state of regression where the Child ego state dominates the personality and the Adult and Parent are much less influential in the personality at that time. Observation of videos of fans meeting a rock star clearly present them as being in a highly regressed state. They present in a childlike way sometimes a highly childlike way as with the screaming female teenage fan of rock stars.

Interestingly enough this provides some insights into the myth of Narcissus and his relationship to the nymph called Echo. This story told by the Roman poet Ovid tells of the forest nymph Echo who angers the goddess Juno. As a result Echo is punished for talking too much and is deprived of her free expression. From then on, she could only ever repeat the last few words of what others have just spoken. In the myth Echo meets Narcissus and becomes infatuated with him but she could only ever repeat the last words she heard Narcissus say. As a result Narcissus shuns her.

People who goes into regression will tend to become Echo like. The reduction in Adult ego state stops them from speaking in their normal way. That is thinking clearly about what is

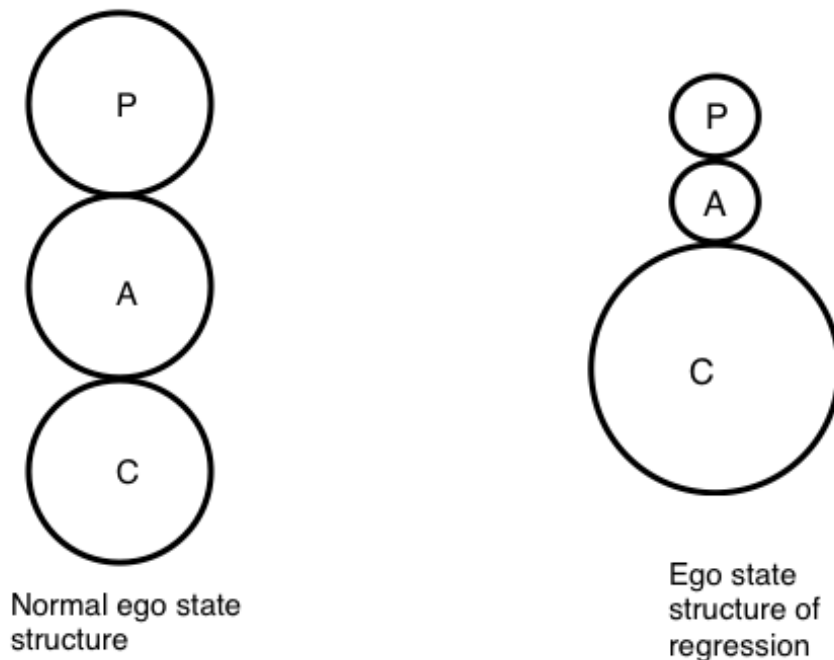


Figure 1.

going on and speaking in a way which reflects that cognitive functioning. Instead their speech will be based on reduced thinking and will be more childlike, such as was the speech of Echo. Of course an Echo like person could appeal to the narcissistic person. As Ferris (2044) notes with fame comes power and privilege, the famous are treated in special and extra-ordinary ways by others. The person who takes the Echo like position in the relationship will be particularly likely to treat the famous other in special and extra-ordinary ways. They fit well together and this a the danger for the famous person and their life script. If you end up with most of your relationships being with Echo types then your life is filled with people who are not 'real' and therefore intimacy will be harder to achieve in relationships. This could account for the comments reported to Michael Jackson above, that he felt so alone it hurt. There can be little intimacy and connection with an Echo type person.

#### The therapist and the famous client

As was mentioned above fame is in the eye of the beholder. If a client approaches a therapist for treatment and the therapist does view that client as famous then there will be a tendency for them to go into regression and take the Echo role in the therapeutic relationship with the client. This is displayed in figure 2.

The psychological ego state structure of the therapist is hidden behind the social level structure that is see by the client. The therapist attempts to maintain the social level ego state structure in transactions with the client. However in reaction to the client the therapist may develop a regression and therefore will have the psychological level ego state structure hidden behind and influencing their transactions with the client. This could explain the counter transference that the therapist has with the client at that point. This is what the therapist is wanting to avoid. If this happens then the therapist will begin to develop a narcissus - echo style of relationship with the client.

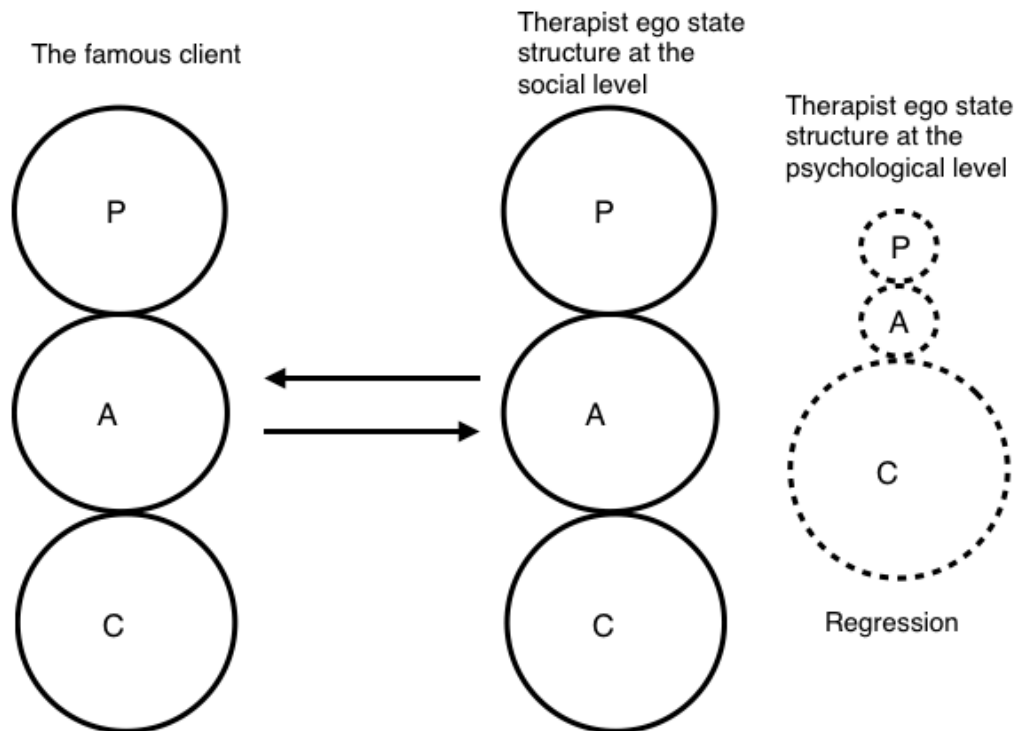


Figure 2

Of course the degree of regression will vary depending on the personality of the therapist and the therapeutic situation. It will also depend on how confident and strong the therapist is in their role as a therapist in the relationship with the client. This occurs in all situations where the therapist experiences some kind of counter transference feelings towards the client whether that be jealousy, anger and so on. If the feelings are recognised as being there by the therapist but are of only a minor nature then it does not really matter in terms of them negatively effecting the therapeutic process. The therapist is strong and confident in their role as a therapist so that these moderate counter transference feelings can be managed by them. If however the feelings are stronger then the therapist must take more serious action and either resolve these feelings with some kind of supervision or refer the client.

By the time they get to the therapy room the famous person will know the Echo type relationship very well. It will feel natural to them and they may even relate to the therapist in such a way as to promote this. As Little (2013) has shown a client in psychotherapy will seek two opposing types of relationships with the therapist. The feared relationship and the needed relationship. As White (2011) has shown with his idea of the suicidal ambivalence all people have a contradictory set of thoughts and feelings in them. We have the thanatos or destructive forces in us and the eros or constructive and life promoting forces inside us. The Adapted Child of the client will display the destructive forces of thanatos in their psyche and the Free Child will display the constructive forces of eros. The Free Child of the client will endeavour to establish the needed relationship with the therapist so that finally the unmet needs from childhood can be met. At the very same time the Adapted Child of the client will do things to try and pressure the therapist into the feared relationship, so that their original unmet needs with mother and father remain unmet.

For example the famous client may ask for some kind of special treatment. They will be very used to being treated in special ways as compared to others. They may make requests such as to have the therapy sessions at an different location than the therapist usually does. They may request the therapist work at times and on days when they usually do not or to have the length of sessions changed and so forth. These maybe an unconscious move by the client to set up the feared relationship with the therapist by having them move into the Echo role and therefore their early relational needs remain unmet.

Recently a high profile media personality came for therapy with me. When he arrived at the session there was another man with him who also came into the therapy room. Prior to the session this had never been mentioned or requested they simply turned up together and came into the room together. Obviously I made enquires as to who this second person was and as it turned out he was kind of a personal assistant to my client. Each day he would travel around with the media person assisting them with his daily activities. Clearly an Echo - narcissus type of relationship between them. I informed them that it was probably best that the personal assistant wasn't in the room for the therapy sessions so he left and never returned again. Any requests for special treatment by the client must be assessed on their merits and if there is no valid reason then the request must be rejected. As mentioned before the request for special treatment by the famous client may be an attempt by their Adapted Child to set up the self defeating feared relationship with the therapist so the therapist goes into the Echo role in the therapeutic relationship. If that happens then the therapy relationship begins to support and further the life script of the client.

### The high achiever

Sometimes the famous person will be a high achiever. The person achieves some skills to an exceptional level and that may be one of the reasons why they have become so well know and famous in the first place. For example in the fields of sport, music, dance, etc one can become amongst the highest achieving in the world if they have the natural skill and then are prepared to do the training. However without the training they wont become exceptional no matter how much natural skill they may have and it is this point that can be relevant to psychotherapy. The training required often involves years of work that can at times be physically painful and can also be immensely boring and repetitive. At times huge levels of training are required over many years.

It is asserted that no one ever won an olympic gold medal just for the medal. No person will put in all the effort and time necessary to train to be able to win the gold medal just for the medal. The Child ego state of the individual simply will not do that, it does not have the relentless motivation to do so. As mentioned before that can involve extreme amounts of time, physical and mental pain, boredom and keeping to a highly rigorous and extremely demanding schedule for years. No Child ego state of any person will endure that just for a gold medal, instead there needs to be other psychological motives behind that.

On the other hand a mother's love and attention is the biggest gold medal of all. Something like that can drive a person to do the extremely demanding work for the years that it is necessary to do. The high achiever most often will have some kind of psychological goal behind them like that, which is motivating them to do what is necessary. That can be the belief that if I win first prize then mother will finally love me and then I will feel safe and secure, I will get my father's attention, they will finally notice me, that will make me feel OK about myself, I wont be rejected, they will finally accept me and so on

endlessly. These psychological goals are enough to motivate a person to do all those years of endless training. This is what they are really hoping to achieve which is underneath the social level goal of the gold medal.

The high achiever may develop this magical thinking and then mistakenly link the psychological outcome with winning the medal. It is up to the therapist to help the person begin to understand what are their unconscious psychological motives behind it all. What is the real motivation for spending all those years doing the rigorous and demanding training. Essentially deconfusing the Child ego state.

Once done the client can then understand they may have a change others contract. The realisation that, "What I am wanting is for mother or father to change and finally give me the relational need that I have been wanting from them all my life". Once this realisation is achieved then the client is in a position to decide if they wish to continue to do that or not. Then to assess the likelihood that mother and father will ever change and give that relational need no matter how much the individual achieves. A complicating factor for the famous person is once they start achieving the parents may indeed start to give them more time and attention. However are they giving their child the attention out of love or because they want to derive some benefit for themselves from their child's fame?

Based on the above points it is noted that psychotherapy breeds mediocrity. The well adjusted person will never make exceptional achievements because they do not have the relentless drive to go through all the 'pain' of training to achieve such goals. As mentioned that drive comes from the unmet relational needs in childhood and the desire to finally get them resolved through the impact that high achievement will have on the parents. The life script will keep the individual seeking resolution of the unmet needs in a way which results in those needs never getting met. The person will play games so those unmet needs never get met and this sense one could call this the game of 'high achiever'. If the individual gives up the game then they finally can get their early needs resolved through other relationships. However the side effect of that is mediocrity because then the high achievement is abandoned.

## Conclusion

Fame it is shown can result from a number of different scenarios including high achievement, doing exceptionally horrific things, being born into fame and in more recent times with the celebrity culture we have fame for being famous. It is shown that a common response to fame is to go into a regression. When one comes into contact with a famous person then they may experience some level of regression. This of course is problematic for a therapist who is asked to treat a famous person. Problem counter transference reactions can happen in the therapist which will interfere with the therapy. This is explained by the therapist taking the role of Echo in the therapeutic relationship with the client.

The famous person is no different from any other person in living out their life script and playing games in order to do so. With some this may include the game of high achiever which is described here. Magical thinking believes that I can finally get mother or father to change and give me the relational needs I crave if I can just achieve enough.

This is a new area of study - psychotherapy with the famous person. Very little if any prior research has been done in this field. This article looks at only one way in which the famous client may impact the therapist so it is highly likely there are more nuances to discover.



The tendency for the therapist to regress is one of probably many psychological effects and more research is required to identify these.

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