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Marginalization, Celebrity, and the Pursuit of Fame

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According to many cultural commentators, the pursuit of fame has become an unhealthy obsession. For example, in an article in *The Huffington Post*, Nora Turriago (2015) claims that a ‘rampant celebrity craze’ is responsible for ‘corrupting previously innocent youth to fixate on one omnipotent desire: to be famous’. Similarly, Adam Pliskin (2014) claims that ‘Generation-Y’s defining characteristic is its obsession with celebrity’, and attributes this ‘insidious’ obsession with an ‘intense desire’ to be famous. These criticisms involve both a descriptive and evaluative claim: that the desire to be famous is widespread amongst a certain group of the population – especially now – and that there is something wrong with pursuing this desire.

The descriptive claim has a reasonable amount of empirical support. For example, a 2012 survey of children in the USA aged between ten and twelve found that forty per cent of participants listed fame as their most important goal for what they wanted to achieve in the future (Uhls and Greenfield 2012). Similarly, a survey by the United Kingdom’s Learning and Skills Council (2006) found that sixteen per cent of those aged between sixteen and nineteen believed they would become famous, and eleven per cent were prepared to abandon formal education in pursuit of that goal. Although, it is also worth noting that other studies suggest that a desire for fame may be less widespread. For example, Oeville Brim’s (2009) research into the pursuit of fame found that while around thirty per cent of participants reported having dreams of becoming famous, only two per cent viewed fame as the most important thing in life. Similarly, research into the priorities of American millennials found that only one per cent viewed becoming famous as their top priority in life, with eighty-seven per cent stating that this was not important to them at all (Pew Research Center 2010).

Regardless of how widespread the desire to be famous is, it clearly exists for some. Our interest is in the evaluative claim that there is something corruptive or insidious with acting on this desire and pursuing fame. Several philosophers share the cultural commentators’ negative view of the pursuit of fame. Although the nature and value of fame is not a topic widely discussed in contemporary philosophical literature, the

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pursuit of fame has been discussed in relation to other ethical considerations, such as the development of character, the nature of the human condition, and the organization of social government. While some have claimed that the pursuit of fame is a valuable form of personal and social expression, such as Margaret Cavendish's claim that under the right conditions the pursuit of fame is an expression of self-love (Boyle 2018: 118-141), most of the evaluations are negative. For example, Mark Rowlands claims that celebrity is a symptom of 'cultural degeneration' (2008: 27), George Santayana claims that pursuing fame is the worst type of vanity (1921: 20-24), and Schopenhauer (2004 [1980]), Spinoza (1949 [1677]), and Montaigne (1910) all claim that the desire to be famous is irrational.

We argue that the pursuit of fame does not necessarily deserve this general negative criticism, and we outline one way in which, in some circumstances and under certain social conditions, this is a valuable pursuit. The existence of famous people from members of marginalized groups can play an important role in combatting marginalization and cultural under-representation. For this to be achieved, it is important that some members of these groups are actively pursuing fame, otherwise it is unlikely that famous celebrities will arise from these groups. The pursuit of fame then, has a valuable role to play in countering marginalization. However, due to the adverse conditions under which fame is often cultivated, fame can be a burden and costly to one's flourishing. In these circumstances, for those who are members of socially oppressed groups, the pursuit of fame is a corrective that often comes with a significant cost.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. In Section One, we outline the arguments given by philosophers for their negative evaluation of the pursuit of fame. In response to this, we propose that in some circumstances the pursuit of fame is instrumentally valuable. We begin our argument in Section Two by outlining three positive functions that fame can serve, providing role models, spokespersons, and hermeneutic resources. These functions are particularly valuable for those from marginalized groups, providing empowering ways to respond to and subvert social discrimination. In Section Three we explain the ways in which certain groups are under-represented in the public eye, resulting in a lack of recognition and respect. We argue that this under-representation ought to be mitigated. The pursuit of fame is valuable

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insofar as it acts a corrective to the injustice that arises because of the marginalization of certain groups from the public eye and celebrity culture.

In Section Four we discuss four problems with the idea that the pursuit of fame and celebrity by members of marginalized groups may function to combat social injustice. First, celebrities from marginalized groups who are viewed as role models, spokespersons or hermeneutic resources, are especially likely to find themselves subject to judgmental and moralistic criticism from the public. Second, the pursuit of fame from members of marginalized groups runs significant risks of elite capture. Third, they are also likely to be subjected to demeaning forms of representation. Fourth, and more generally, the role of being famous can be severely psychologically damaging, causing significant personal burdens for those who pursue fame and ultimately achieve celebrity status. Taking these points together shows that while the pursuit of fame may be useful in mitigating certain forms of social injustice, there are also important reasons to worry about how effective a tool it is, and the costs that arise for those who pursue fame and become celebrities. We conclude our argument in Section Five, noting how the domain of fame and intersectionality influences the extent to which the pursuit of fame is valuable and burdensome.

1. Negative evaluations of the pursuit of fame

A central feature of fame and celebrity is that of being known by the public, not just by those one has a close relationship with, but by a group of people who are strangers who one does not have direct contact with (Lilti 2017: 6). While we might think of fame as arising from the admiration people feel towards one's talents and achievements, celebrity involves being known in a way that extends beyond any specific admirable quality of the person. People may even be famous simply for "being famous", as captured by Daniel Boorstin's claim that celebrities are people 'well-known for their well-knownness' (1962: 57). As a result of being known, famous people and celebrities attract and are paid a great deal of public attention. As Robert Van Krieken claims, the nature of celebrity is 'a quality or status characterized by a capacity to attract attention, generating some "surplus value" or benefit derived from the fact of being well known (highly visible) in itself in at least one public arena' (2012: 10). This means that the attention paid to

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celebrities typically goes beyond their particular talents and achievements, with public fascination regarding their private life and commitments outside of the reason why they are deemed to be famous (Archer et al. 2020: 28). It also means that it is possible to be famous without being a celebrity. One might be well-known for a particular achievement whilst fiercely guarding one's life from public attention. Despite these conceptual distinctions between fame and celebrity, the two normally go together, and in this chapter we will mostly treat them as synonymous. We discuss the pursuit of fame and celebrity together, as the pursuit of being known either for one's achievements or one's life as a whole, in ways that go beyond those who one has a personal relationship with.

It is also possible to be well-known for being infamous, that is, for some bad quality or deed. Serial killers like Ted Bundy and Fred West are well-known, but this is due to their extremely negative actions and character. For the purposes of this paper, we will set this kind of notoriety to one side, as although it may be desired by some, it seems harder to make the case for the value of this kind of renown. Our focus is on those who are well-known for some positive quality they are perceived to possess, whether that be a special talent, skill, or responsibility, or simply the fact that many people find their personal lives to be worthy of admiration or perhaps simply of attention. The pursuit of fame and celebrity involves an attempt to become known to those you do not know, and for your public and private life to be subject to public attention.

In the philosophical literature, there tend to be two general responses to the question of whether the pursuit of fame is valuable. Some hold the pursuit of fame to be a vice, while others claim that it is morally neutral and may play a useful instrumental role in the pursuit of other more significant values. We deal with each response in turn.

The first kind of response is to view the pursuit of fame as a moral or cognitive vice. Santayana, for example, describes the love of fame as the 'highest form of vanity' (1921: 22). While it makes sense to seek a good reputation amongst those we know, Santayana claims there is little benefit to be gained from having a good reputation amongst those we never interact with. The only reason to desire this is vanity. Others view the pursuit of fame as involving the vice of irrationality. Schopenhauer, for example, claims

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that fame is addictive and so one's desire for fame will never be satisfied, as 'the more you drink the thirstier you become' (2004 [1890]: 28). This suggests that pursuing fame is irrational, as it will only lead to frustration and dissatisfaction. Moreover, as Spinoza argues, the fame one does achieve is likely to be short-lived unless one puts great effort into maintaining it, thus, 'those who glory in the good opinion of the multitude anxiously and with daily care strive, labor and struggle to preserve this fame' (1949 [1677]: 230). The pursuit of fame, then, is irrational as it is unsatisfying, short-lived, and highly dependent on luck.

However, others hold that the pursuit of fame is not pernicious enough to be considered a vice, but it is also not something that is valuable enough to be encouraged or especially cultivated in its own right. Instead, the pursuit of fame is considered as instrumentally useful in the service of some other, more meaningful pursuit. David Hume, for example, argues that the desire for fame amounts to a desire to be praised (1967 [1739]: II.i.11). The pleasure we take in this praise is the result of our tendency to be sympathetic, aligning our feelings with the feelings of others. When others express their positive feelings about us through praise, this helps us to have a positive feeling about ourselves and gives us evidence that we deserve to feel good about ourselves. But, according to Hume, praise should only be enjoyable when it is deserved. It is not fame we should desire, then, but deserved praise. Fame is only a consequence of, or useful motivation for the seeking of deserved praise from those around us; by itself, fame is meaningless and holds no value. Similarly, Joshua Halberstam argues that fame can fulfil 'the need many feel to have made a mark on the world' (1984: 98). This desire can be a useful additional source of motivation to pursue worthwhile goals. However, it can become vicious when the desire for fame is prioritized over those worthwhile goals and can also promote the vices of 'sycophancy, dishonest and undue competitiveness' (Ibid., 99). In this way, fame is only valuable if it acts as a motivation to create a meaningful life and legacy.

In what follows, we do not aim to endorse or refute the plausibility of these already existing philosophical positions regarding the value of pursuing fame. Many of the views explained above may require further empirical rather than philosophical investigation, and the plausibility of our own argument does not rest on the truth of these claims. Instead, we aim to use these views as a point of departure, to argue that unlike the first set of views, the pursuit of fame is not necessarily a vice, and can in some

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circumstances be valuable. Importantly, we put forward an argument that follows a similar structure to the second set of views just described, stating that the pursuit of fame is instrumentally valuable. We argue that in some cases, the pursuit of fame is valuable not in the service of creating a legacy or meaningful life, nor as a result of deserved praise from others, but rather as a corrective to the social injustice experienced by marginalized groups who are systemically under-represented in the public eye.

For this argument to be compelling, especially given the negative evaluations of the pursuit of fame, it is necessary to highlight why the aim of being famous or being a celebrity might be valuable in the first place, particularly for members of marginalized groups. In the next section we outline three ways in which pursuing fame is valuable.

2. The positive functions of fame and celebrity

We suggest that being famous can serve at least three positive functions: (i) providing a role model for people who may otherwise lack them, (ii) acting as a spokesperson for those whose voice rarely captures public attention, and (iii) serving as an important hermeneutic resource. We deal with each of these positive functions of fame in turn.

First, being famous can allow people to serve a valuable function as role models for people to emulate (Hammond et al. 2022, see also chapters in this volume by Osman and Harrison, and Croce et al.). The wide publicity and attention given to the lives of those in the public eye allows us to use them as exemplars for our own lives, as their public image is readily available and accessible in the social domain. As Sharon Marcus (2019: 170) points out, celebrities provide a paradigmatic example of the kinds of people others try to imitate: ‘By presenting themselves as distinctive types whose images and stories could easily be multiplied, celebrities made themselves available for imitation.’ As Carrie Teresa (2019: 9) also notes, at the beginning of the 20th Century, journalists working for Black press publications in the USA helped to construct Black celebrities in order ‘to empower readers and fans by promoting exemplary figures to whose achievements they themselves could aspire’. Promoting black celebrities was seen as a way of empowering Black Americans by giving them aspirational role models.

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As the example given by Teresa emphasizes, one way in which role models may help marginalized groups is by encouraging other members of the group to emulate or imitate them. As enlightenment philosophers, such as Adam Smith (1759) and Moses Mendelssohn (1772), and contemporary philosophers like Kristjan Kristjánsson (2006) and Linda Zagzebski (2017) have argued, admiration for a person brings with it a desire to become admirable ourselves by acting in similar ways. This suggestion is supported by a range of psychological studies which suggest that there is a positive connection between feeling admiration for someone and desiring to emulate them (see for example Algoe and Haidt 2009, Aquino et al. 2011, Immordino-Yang & Sylvan 2010, van de Ven et al. 2019).

Having positive models to emulate can be especially important for members of marginalized groups. One reason for this is that people are more likely to be inspired to emulate others that they find relatable (Han et al 2022). This suggests that an absence of public figures who share someone's marginalized social identity will make it less likely for someone to be inspired to emulate a public figure (Klimstra et al 2023). Moreover, positive role models can serve as an important counterweight to demeaning representations and stereotypes. As Teresa (2019: 9) emphasizes, in Jim Crow-era America, Black Americans tended to be depicted in the media through 'ridiculous, demeaning and negative stereotypes' such as the figure of the minstrel. In such a context, Black Americans were deprived of public figures they could aspire to emulate, and Black celebrity journalism played an important role in providing such figures for Black Americans. Beyond this, Teresa argues that the presence of successful Black American role models commanding public attention served as a challenge to these demeaning representations and the racist ideology underlying them: 'By simply pursuing fame, these noteworthy individuals were engaging in a subversive act, challenging American racial ideology that determined who could rise and who could not' (Ibid., 25).

Although the pursuit of fame has the potential to act as a subversive response to racial discrimination, Marcus highlights how women and Black Americans were mocked when they engaged in celebrity emulation. This can be taken to highlight the benefit of using celebrities as exemplars to emulate: 'Perhaps the clearest sign that imitating celebrities might benefit the imitators was how eager many white

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men were to restrict the pleasures and advantages of celebrity imitation to themselves' (2019: 170). In other words, imitating a celebrity role model is empowering, and that is why white men or those in power sought to restrict it for themselves. Mocking those from marginalized groups who were inspired by famous people they could take as aspirational role models, was a way of limiting who could function as a role model in the public sphere. As such, role modelling is acknowledged as an important function of fame, to the extent that gatekeeping this function has been used to further discriminate against marginalized groups. By pursuing fame, those from marginalized groups can subvert this discrimination, engage in role modelling and experience the benefits that this brings.

Another valuable function that being famous often serves is as acting as spokesperson for members of marginalized groups. As Archer et al. (2020) argue, those in the public eye possess 'epistemic power', which is the ability to influence what people think, believe and know. This ability to influence others makes famous people well-positioned to act as representatives for marginalized groups. For example, the UK footballer Marcus Rashford was able to use his celebrity status to campaign for greater access to free school meals for children from low-income families during the Covid-19 lockdowns in the UK. Having experienced childhood poverty himself, Rashford was well-positioned to speak on behalf of those facing poverty, while his status as a famous footballer meant he was able to attract significant attention to problem of food poverty. While an ordinary parent experiencing food poverty may find it difficult to attract the media's attention, Rashford's platform as a famous footballer gave him access to interviews in newspapers, magazines, radio and television, as well as the ability to communicate with large numbers of people directly through social media.

In their study on celebrity advocacy, Atkinson and DeWitt (2019: 94-5) claim that 'celebrities increase the likelihood of political events being covered by the mainstream media', and that they are able to act as advocates on account of their access to those in power. For example, as a result of her fame and social media platform, Kim Kardashian has been able to instigate public awareness surrounding criminal justice reform in the United States (Harris 2020). Similarly, the celebrity status of Britney Spears has initiated concern in the mainstream media regarding the problematic aspects of conservatorship cases

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(Hopkins 2022). This shows a beneficial role that fame can play in society, as being famous can bring with it the ability to garner attention and advocate for issues facing marginalized and oppressed groups that would otherwise be ignored.

Finally, as well as being role models and spokespersons, those who are famous often serve as important hermeneutic resources. When explaining above the nature of fame and role modelling, we outlined that there is a positive connection between the admiration felt by fans towards a famous person, and the desire to emulate them. This is particularly the case when the famous person is relatable and shares one's social identity. This also allows those who are famous to serve as a hermeneutic resource for their fans. When members of the public recognize something of themselves in a celebrity, this can help them to find meaning in, and make sense of their own lives. Psychologists Yue Meng-Lewis et al. (2021) conducted a range of semi-structured interviews with people living in southern England about their experience of admiring famous people. The participants of the study reported that admiring someone famous helped give them hope to get through difficult times in their lives, encouraged them to engage in self-expanding activities, and helped them to develop their self-image. Importantly for our purposes, the participants also noted that 'perceived relevance' was one of the factors that influenced who they admired, and that this included demographic features like gender, ethnicity, and nationality. This means that identifying with a celebrity and seeing oneself reflected by them – for example, through the representation of gender and race – may make members of the public more likely to admire the celebrity and consider them important to how they create meaning in their life.

This meaning-making is particularly significant for those who consider themselves as fans of a particular famous person or celebrity. The relationship between celebrities and fans has been shown to be significant to the fostering of socialization and community formation (Gunter 2015, Rojek 2012, Street et al. 2013). Celebrities have the potential to form what is often called a 'parasocial relationship' with their fans (Horton and Wohl 1956).¹ These a-symmetrical and non-reciprocal relationships are ones in which fans consider themselves to know a celebrity personally and intimately, while the celebrity does not necessarily reciprocate the extent of this personal knowledge or affection towards their fans. In these

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relationships, fans often form an emotional attachment to the celebrity and become invested in their well-being, forming loyal communities and groups with a goal of protecting and promoting the celebrity's interests (Robb and Archer 2022: 47-9).

These parasocial relationships often work to promote the interests of the celebrity and maintain their celebrity status, but they can also provide meaningful benefits for the fans. Those within fan communities report that they experience a sense of belonging and community, a feeling that is heightened when certain celebrities make an effort to foster relationships with their fans. In a study of Lady Gaga's fan base, Click, Lee and Holladay (2013) report that Lady Gaga's interaction with her fans – who call themselves 'Little Monsters' – encourage a sense of community based on self-acceptance and the celebration of difference. Many Little Monsters feel rejected by mainstream culture and find acceptance in the community of Lady Gaga fans. In this way, by fostering relationships with their fans, celebrities have the potential to offer and encourage community-building in certain groups of the public.

While community-building is one way in which celebrities serve as a hermeneutic resource, it is also possible to use famous people as a way to make sense of one's identity even if the celebrity is one that is publicly despised, or if individual members of the public consider themselves as "anti-fans". The anti-fan, rather than actively admiring and praising a celebrity, will actively disregard or "hate" a celebrity (see Click 2019, Hind 2007). Despite this hate, a celebrity still has the potential to serve as a hermeneutic resource. As Archer and Sie (2023) have argued, gossiping about the lives of celebrities, either positively or negatively, can act as a significant way in which we debate and negotiate our moral norms, and as a way of identifying different styles of living. Whether celebrities are hated or admired, they can act as a resource for members of the public to make sense of what they do and do not identify with, and the kinds of lives that they do or do not want to live.

Using famous people as a hermeneutic resource is particularly significant for those who are part of marginalized groups in society. As we will show in more detail in the next section, dominant social groups are often over-represented in the public eye, and this higher level of representation means that their ways of life, identity-formation and community-building are given more attention, value and worth. Given that

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perceived relevance is an important factor for the extent to which one identifies with someone in the public eye, those who are part of marginalized groups will be less likely to use famous people as hermeneutic resources. This means that those from marginalized groups will miss out on key resources that contribute to the formation of identity and community, and support meaning-making. Considering the importance of these aspects of our lives, this exclusion and marginalization is a social injustice that ought to be corrected.² By pursuing fame, those from marginalized groups increase the potential that they have to act as a hermeneutic resource for others, and promote attention paid to previously under-represented ways of life and meaning-making.

In contrast to the negative evaluations often levelled at the pursuit of fame as outlined in the previous section, we have argued that pursuing fame is not necessarily negative, insofar as being famous has the potential to provide three positive functions that are especially beneficial for those from marginalized groups. Being famous comes with the potential to act as a role model, a spokesperson, and as a hermeneutic resource for others. All three of these benefits also have the potential to mitigate some negative effects of social injustice experienced by those from marginalized groups. Role modelling can serve as an empowering subversive response to demeaning representations and stereotypes, and as spokespersons those who are famous can advocate for issues facing marginalized and oppressed groups that may be otherwise ignored. Finally, as a hermeneutic resource, those who are famous can contribute to community-building, identity-formation and meaning-making, promoting previously under-represented identities and ways of life.

However, as we will argue in the next section, those from marginalized groups are systemically under-represented in the public eye and in celebrity culture. Given the value of fame, especially for those who are part of marginalized groups, we suggest that this under-representation results in a certain form of social injustice that ought to be corrected. As such, the pursuit of fame has instrumental collective value, insofar as it serves to promote visibility and representation for marginalized groups, and mitigates problematic under-representation in the public eye.

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3. Fame, marginalization, and under-representation

The lack of diversity in the public eye is well documented, and the criticism of under-representation increasingly dominates public conversation about fame and celebrity. Take the American film industry, for example, which generates many famous people and celebrities, often dictating the state of play of contemporary celebrity culture. In a study of 1,300 films made by major US production companies between 2007 and 2019, the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative (2020) found that: women made up less than five per cent of the directors, there were 2.2 male characters for every female character, seventeen per cent of leading roles were non-white compared to 39.9 per cent of the US population, and of the 26,618 characters in films made in that time-period, only four were transgender with a total screen time of two minutes. The situation appears even worse when we look to representation at major cultural awards. In 2016, all twenty acting nominations for the Oscars were white (Buckley 2016), which led the hashtag #Oscarssowhite to trend on Twitter, raising awareness of this lack of diversity. There are similar findings in the music industry, another source of contemporary celebrity and fame: at the Grammy awards between 2013 and 2020, women made up only 9.8 per cent of nominations for the award “Record of the Year”, and only 8.5 per cent for the award “Album of the Year” (Smith et al. 2021). Similarly, a study of 900 popular songs released between 2012 and 2020 found that women made up only 21.6 per cent of artists, 12.6 per cent of songwriters and 2.6 per cent of producers (Smith et al. 2021).

When it comes to other domains of fame, there is a similar under-representation of marginalized or minority groups. For example, in a study by Camilla Christoffersen (2021), it was found that only seven per cent of influencers in Portugal are non-White, and in the same year, MSL (2021) reported that seventy-seven per cent of Black influencers are considered as nano- or micro-influencers (with less than 50,000 followers), and only twenty-three per cent of Black influencers are considered to be macro-influencers (with over 50,000 followers). When it comes to politicians, another category of people in the public eye, research by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2023) found that in 2023 only 26.7 per cent of parliamentary representatives were women, and a research brief for the UK Parliament’s House of Commons Library

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found that after the 2019 general election, ten per cent of members of parliament were from a ‘minority ethnic background’ (Uberoi and Carthew 2023: 4).

The marginalization of certain groups of people in the public eye is an important problem for social justice, as it subjects groups that are already under-represented and marginalized in society to further reduced visibility and a lack of social recognition. As Michelle Wallace (2016: 215) argues, in ‘fields such as film, theatre and TV news commentary, black feminist (or female) creativity is virtually invisible. ... It is a scheme in which black women, as a class, are systematically denied the most visible forms of discursive and intellectual subjectivity.’ The marginalization we have pointed to does not constitute complete invisibility, as those who are female, non-white, and transgender do have some form of representation in these industries. Moreover, there may be other areas of public life where marginalized groups are better represented. Nevertheless, we take it that the severe under-representation that we have outlined in at least these domains is an important form of marginalization that gives rise to a lack of recognition and respect that ought to be corrected.

Receiving recognition involves being positively affirmed and acknowledged by others. Axel Honneth’s (1996) influential account of recognition holds that it comes in three forms: love, respect and esteem. Given that the world of fame and celebrity is constituted in part by celebrating and paying attention to those who are most loved, respected and esteemed, marginalizing oppressed people from the public sphere amounts to a denial of recognition. It could be argued that not all celebrities are loved, respected or positively affirmed, and that the well-knownness of some celebrities might be undeserved – due to mistaken attribution of talent, skill or success – or that they are famous due to being despised or hated by the public. In these cases, a lack of recognition may not seem like a negative consequence that needs mitigation. Irrespective of whether a celebrity deserves positive affirmation and attention, the examples we have outlined show that when recognition is deserved or at least warranted,³ this recognition is often distributed in a way that marginalizes and under-represents certain groups. This matters for the individuals who are denied recognition as they miss out on the valuable goods of love, respect, esteem and positive affirmation.

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Stephen Darwall's (1977) account of respect provides two further useful distinctions, that of 'recognition respect' and 'appraisal respect'. On Darwall's view, the lack of recognition we have just described can be understood as a denial of appraisal respect, a lack of positive recognition for a person's deserved characteristics or pursuits. When we fail to give warranted positive appraisal to a person by excluding them from the public sphere, this amounts to a denial of appraisal respect. However, the under-representation of those from marginalized groups also gives rise to recognition respect, as a failure to recognize or give proper weight to the fact that they are persons of equal dignity in the public sphere. Insofar as people are excluded from the public eye as a result of their belonging to a marginalized or minority group, the discrimination and exclusion amounts to a denial of recognition respect, failing to acknowledge their equal worth as persons.

The under-representation of certain marginalized groups from the public eye does not just harm those who aspire to be famous, but also has a more general impact on members of these marginalized groups. Teresa argues that 'we all deserve to have someone who, in public, can validate our human experience, speak truth to power, and give us something to dream of becoming. That's what celebrities, at their best can do' (2019: xii). Marginalizing oppressed groups from the public eye deprives group members of this public validation of their identity. As Dorinne Kondo similarly claims, the marginalization of non-white people in theatre, film and other forms of culture matters because people have a need to see others like them in the public sphere: 'We all look to be mirrored; we all desire recognition. Minoritarian subjects remain too often excluded from fully rounded public existence' (2018: 12).

In addition, the lack of diversity of those in the public eye can be seen as an example of what Essed and Goldberg (2002) call 'cloning culture'. Within the public sphere more generally, and the culture industry more specifically, there is a 'sameness' and lack of representation that works to reproduce and proliferate systemic oppression and social injustice. This sameness promotes the way in which we consume goods, form our identities, norms of appearance, and our tastes (Koggel 2008: 202–203). If certain groups are invisible or lack representation in the public sphere, this excludes these groups from being able to

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influence the way in which we form identities, norms and values, which further exacerbates the social injustice and oppression that is experienced by those who are marginalized.

As such, groups that are generally marginalized in society are also likely to find themselves marginalized in the public eye, depriving these groups of representation, recognition and respect. This makes marginalizing a group of people within the public sphere an important form of collective discrimination that ought to be corrected. Of course, this raises the question of what level of representation is needed and in which spheres, and what counts as the normative baseline to assess an appropriate level of group visibility and social recognition.⁴ For instance, according to some interpretations of relational egalitarianism, a level of representation might be considered unjust insofar as it amounts to an inequality of social standing, or if it hinders individuals to treat each other as equals (see Miller 1997). According to Elizabeth Anderson (2012), marginalization and discrimination are considered unjust insofar as they result in a hierarchy of domination, esteem or social standing.

For the purposes of this chapter, we leave aside the question of which theory most plausibly captures the normative baseline for unjust marginalization and oppression in the public sphere. Instead, we argue that given the under-representation of certain groups that has already been documented, and given the appropriate measure of the extent to which the marginalization of certain groups counts as an injustice, this injustice ought to be corrected. Considering the value of fame that we have outlined in Section Two, we suggest that the pursuit of fame can act as a valuable corrective for marginalization and cultural under-representation. However, despite the positive benefits of pursuing fame, it is important to be aware of the ways in which fame and celebrity culture can problematize and override these benefits. In the next section we outline four potential problems that arise when members of marginalized groups pursue fame.

4. The cost of fame

The first reason why one might object to the value of pursuing fame, is that celebrities from marginalized groups who are viewed as role models, spokespeople or hermeneutic resources are likely to find themselves subject to judgmental and moralistic criticism from the public. A celebrity who is also part of a marginalized

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group faces the challenge of their public image being taken by the wider public as representative for that group's collective identity. The celebrity might not consider themselves to be acting as a representative in this way, or as responsible for expressing the group's collective identity. Yet despite this, the celebrity's behaviour has the potential to be constrained and judged by the responsibility that is attached onto the celebrity's image by the public. This means that the social benefits that arise from members of marginalized groups pursuing fame may also give rise to significant individual costs for those that achieve fame.

For instance, when it comes to the representation of Black women in celebrity culture, Samantha Pinto claims that famous Black women end up being treated as 'racial icons' that 'stand for too much', considered as embodying the collective experience of Black women in general (2020a: 3). Famous Black women are likely to, as Pinto argues 'maintain uncomfortable relationships to existing political discourses of race, rights, and representation', and as such are not only famous, but 'infamous' public figures (Ibid., 5-6, 204). This infamy comes from the way in which these celebrities are co-opted and 'disciplined' into doing the 'hard and vulnerable work' of representing the oppression, injustice, and the resistance against this oppression, yet at the same time recognizing that such collective representation asks too much of them (Ibid., 8, 24). The celebrity is consequently 'venerated' as being a champion of the marginalized group to which they are assigned as representative, yet 'denigrated' when they fail to uphold this assigned, often unchosen, responsibility.

For a celebrity who is part of a marginalized group, their fame potentially puts them in the position of being publicly scrutinized and discriminated against. There are several reasons for this. First, famous people are, by definition, subject to a higher degree of public scrutiny. In the case of famous people who are members of marginalized groups that are more likely to be scrutinized and discriminated against in the first place, this additional scrutiny leads to additional social pressure and discrimination. This is particularly likely to occur if they fail to act according to the socially accepted norms that are attached to someone who is a famous representative of their group's collective identity. For those who embody a number of different marginalized identities, this is particularly problematic. Beyoncé, for example, is both Black and female, and is held to different and often contradictory social norms given the intersection of her race and sex. To

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begin with, in her early career, Beyoncé was publicly criticized for not engaging with race politics and taking on the responsibility as a representative of Black audiences. Instead, she was critiqued as problematically appealing to white audiences and focusing on the light-hearted themes of white pop-culture (Pinto 2020a: 204). In her later career, Beyoncé received public backlash for her engagement with race politics in the content of her music, and for making public her personal political commitments (Pinto 2020b). This means that Beyoncé received public criticism for a perceived failing to act according to the social norms expected of a collective representative of a marginalized group, and for both acting, and then failing to act, according to the social norms projected onto female pop-artists, who are expected to remain politically silent.

And so, even though the fame of someone who belongs to an oppressed group would work to counteract the lack of representation and marginalization of these groups in celebrity culture, the public pressure, criticism, and discrimination that potentially comes with this representation does not indicate that fame would be an overall good for the famous person. Of course, these costs should be balanced against the potential benefits that someone might gain from fame, such as wealth or positive appreciation for one's achievements. Nevertheless, it is important to note the important costs that come with fame, especially for members of marginalized groups.

A second worry that could be raised against our claim that the pursuit of fame can be valuable for those in marginalized groups, is that the benefits gained through the pursuit of fame will be vulnerable to elite capture. As Olúfẹmi O. Táíwò (2022: 21) describes it, 'Elite capture happens when the advantaged few steer resources and institutions that could serve the many toward their own narrower interests and aims.' When it comes to issues concerning identity politics, elite capture involves elite members of marginalized groups directing the political goals of these groups, so that they only represent the interests of these elites rather than the interests of the group as a whole (Ibid., 32). The worry with elite capture in relation to the pursuit of fame, is that pursuing fame might be an ineffective way to rectify the problem of marginalization, as it is an approach that seems to be vulnerable to elite capture. The lucky few who achieve fame are well-positioned to use their status to pursue their own interests rather than the interests of all

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members of the marginalized group. Given the negative consequences that might arise from the elite capture of fame, the problems with under-representation and marginalization will not be successfully mitigated by the pursuit of fame. If this is the case, then there seems no reason to think that fame is something a virtuous member of marginalized groups would – or should – pursue.

While it does seem reasonable to worry about elite capture when it comes to marginalization and fame, the claim that celebrity influence will lead to elite capture requires empirical evidence to support it. There is some evidence that celebrity can assist non-governmental organizations in influencing government policy (Dougherty and Phillips 2023), but more evidence would be needed to show that celebrities consistently use their influence to promote elite interests. Nevertheless, as we have already discussed, we should be wary about taking the voices of famous members of marginalized groups as representative of the interests or desires of the group. Nor should we think that if we could solve the problem of marginalization in celebrity culture then we would have solved all or even the most important problems associated with marginalization. Despite these worries, the underrepresentation of marginalized groups in celebrity culture is important in its own right and ought to be corrected, as it involves depriving the wider group – and not just the elites – of recognition, role models, and an important tool for finding meaning in life. While we should be vigilant about famous members of marginalized groups redirecting attention towards issues that only serve the interests of elite members of the group, it is nevertheless the case that under-representation in celebrity culture matters, even to those members of the marginalized group who do not become famous themselves.

Another reason why the pursuit of fame may not be valuable for those from marginalized groups relates to the way in which they are likely to be subjected to demeaning forms of representation.⁵ As we have noted above in relation to role modelling, when in the public eye, the manner of representation in public culture often contributes to a marginalized groups' oppression. Teresa emphasizes the discriminatory representation of Black Americans in the media (2019: 9), and there are countless other examples of problematic public representation, such as the portrayal of Black people using blackface (Zheng & Steer 2023), and the unwarranted depictions of terrorism and Islamophobia aimed at Muslims (Gottschalk &

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Greenberg 2018). While the pursuit of fame by those from marginalized groups promises to increase representation and visibility of those groups, the discrimination and demeaning way in which famous members of those groups are represented has the potential to contribute to the oppression faced by those groups, fuelling problematic stereotypes. The benefits accrued by acting as a role model or hermeneutic resource are diminished if the celebrity from an oppressed group is publicly demeaned in a way that encourages negative stereotypes and demeans the positive impact of admiring, emulating, and identifying with the celebrity.

As a final worry, there is good reason to think that pursuing fame cannot be considered valuable, due to the negative consequences and significant personal burdens for the person who achieves fame (see Archer and Robb 2022). There are at least two reasons why the pursuit of fame contributes negatively to a person's flourishing. First, as we have already laid out in Section One, the pursuit of fame has the potential to be irrational, and consequently causing psychological harm. Fame is claimed to be addictive, such that when the initial desire for fame is satisfied, this leads to a desire for even more fame and its by-products, such as wealth, adoration and privilege (Rockwell and Giles 2008, see also Pacovská's contribution to this volume). This addiction can cause psychological damage, and lead to the proliferation of vices such as vanity, dishonesty and inappropriate competitiveness. This casts doubt on the claim that pursuing fame is valuable, even if it functions as a corrective against social injustice.

Second, once the pursuit of fame has been successfully achieved, the famous person will have to navigate the complex and often damaging relationship between their private and public lives. The divide between a celebrity's public image and private life is central to the experience of being a celebrity (Lilti 2017: 32, Rojek 2001: 11). Often celebrities create a public persona to protect their private lives from being commodified and objectified by the public (Rockwell and Giles 2009). This is seen explicitly in the examples of celebrity artist Banksy, who hides their identity altogether, and musician Sia, who initially chose to cover her face in public by wearing a paper bag over her head. But this creation of a split public image is also seen implicitly in some celebrities who intentionally try to limit the parts of their lives that they want made public, such as supermodel Gigi Hadid's choice to not share images of her daughter on

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social media, or Beyoncé's creation of a brand that strategically exposes only certain aspects of her life to the public (Pinto 2020a: 204).

Despite the coping mechanism that is promised by the creation of public personas, many celebrities report that the split between their public and private selves is alienating. In many cases, the celebrity will lose control of their public image, as it is shaped by the imagination and appropriation of their fans, as well as their managers and sponsors who 'brand' the celebrity to fit with commercial interests (Marcus 2019). Consequently, this public persona becomes so far removed from the celebrity's personal life that the celebrity feels alienated from who they "really" are, losing their sense of identity (Giles 2000: 85, Rojek 2001, Rockwell and Giles 2009). This alienation can lead to harmful psychological effects for the celebrity, with many celebrities often seeking refuge from the gaze of the public through substance abuse, isolation and distrust in others (Rockwell and Giles 2008). As a result, the pursuit of fame seems to be detrimental to the well-being of those who do successfully achieve public renown. Given these harmful psychological effects experienced by celebrities, it again seems implausible to consider the pursuit of fame as valuable.

It is important not to overstate this point, because fame is also likely to bring many advantages. Fame is a form of positive recognition which is valuable for its own sake. It can also be instrumentally valuable, providing access to financial opportunities, friendships, romantic partners, fancy parties, and career progression. Nevertheless, we should take seriously the claims that celebrities make about the negative impact of fame, particularly for members of marginalized groups. These claims give us at least some reason to doubt that fame has a positive impact on well-being.

Due to the psychological harm and public discrimination that is often experienced by celebrities, and especially celebrities who belong to marginalized groups, in many cases the pursuit of fame cannot be said to contribute to one's personal flourishing. This provides a good objection to the claim that pursuing fame is valuable, even though the public recognition and representation that comes with fame can act as a corrective to the lack of representation and marginalization faced by many oppressed groups in celebrity culture. This means that even though the pursuit of fame has the potential to be valuable in the service of correcting social injustice, doing so will often be burdensome for a celebrity's flourishing and well-being.

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5. Celebrity culture and intersectionality

In response to the view that the pursuit of fame is corruptive and insidious, we have argued that the pursuit of fame has the potential to function as a corrective to the social injustice of marginalization. The existence of famous people from marginalized groups has instrumental value, as they can act as role models, spokespersons and hermeneutic resources for other members of those groups. Given the important roles famous people can play, it is important that some people from marginalized groups pursue fame, as otherwise it is unlikely that famous people will arise from these groups. For members of these groups, the pursuit of fame amounts to the pursuit of resisting the injustice of under-representation and lack of recognition in celebrity culture. By contrast, the pursuit of fame is not valuable in this way for those who belong to privileged social groups that are often over-represented in celebrity culture, as it would instead have the potential to further proliferate the lack of representation and recognition experienced by those who are marginalized.

We considered four objections that cast doubt on the pursuit of fame as valuable. First, members of marginalized groups who are in the public eye are likely to find themselves as the subject of judgmental, discriminatory and moralistic criticism from the public. Second, the pursuit of fame has the potential to give rise to elite capture, causing further marginalization and inequality among marginalized groups. Third, the representation of marginalized groups in the public eye has the potential to result in demeaning representation, and so the pursuit of fame may result in the further oppression of those who are already negatively portrayed in public. Finally, we considered the objection that the pursuit of fame may not be valuable for those who pursue and achieve fame, due to the negative impact of fame on one's personal well-being and flourishing. We accept that the pursuit of fame may have negative consequences, potentially resulting in psychological harm and public discrimination that is detrimental to a person's well-being and the empowerment of oppressed groups. However, given that the underrepresentation of marginalized groups in certain spheres of celebrity matters in a way that ought to be corrected, these negative consequences do not render the pursuit of fame as unquestionably negative, especially under the non-ideal conditions of systemic discrimination of certain groups.

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The analysis of the value of pursuing fame under the non-ideal conditions of social injustice in celebrity culture can be seen as a more specific instance of the general debate about representation and participation in unethical climates or environments.⁶ The worry here is whether participation in a flawed practice, even to mitigate those flaws, might serve to venerate the practice and proliferate the flaws that are inherent to it. The structure of this worry has been prevalent in the debates on social injustice more generally, for example in relation to feminists who disagree on whether the aim of feminism should be to increase representation of women in positions of power, or whether these positions should be eliminated altogether rather than diversified (see Eisenstein 1979, Holmstrom 2002).

Although the more general debate regarding representation and participation in unethical practices is beyond the scope of our discussion here, when it comes to fame and celebrity culture, it's clear that many believe the sphere of celebrity to be an unethical practice, structurally corrupt, serving to reinforce unjust social systems, proliferating inequality, unfairness and discrimination. In the introduction we mentioned several negative views about the influence of celebrity in contemporary culture. Importantly, given that many celebrities are famous just "for being famous", such as the Kardashians or many other reality television stars, it could be argued that the influence and attention that is given to many celebrities is disproportionate, without desert, and serves to reinforce problematic social hierarchies. Rowlands (2008) has argued, for instance, that celebrity culture is 'pernicious and ultimately destructive' as a product of 'cultural degeneration'. According to Rowlands, celebrities are formed by a culture in which the public are bored and so look to any kind of novelty to distract them from a life of meaninglessness, and where the public are unable 'to distinguish quality from bullshit' (Ibid., 15, 27, 89, 107). As a result, many celebrities are famous due to mass media campaigns, commercialization and exploitation, rather than acknowledged for their talent or achievements. As Robb and Archer (2022: 34) have summarized the concern, 'celebrity culture is epitomized by people who become famous without any connection to their skills, talents or achievements, or where their original reason for being famous is no longer relevant for their status as a celebrity'.

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The influence of celebrity culture is also considered damaging for the public. As journalist Nazia Parveen has argued in *The Guardian* (2018), the influence of celebrity appears to be harmful for young people's mental health, pressurizing them into living up to 'unobtainable body-image standards' (see also Widdows and MacCallum's contribution to this volume). If the overall system of celebrity is pernicious in this way, then pursuing fame within that system can be thought to reinforce it, by either implicitly or explicitly consenting to its legitimacy and accepting the negative consequences. The person who pursues fame in these conditions could be seen as contributing to a morally questionable social system. Rather than encouraging others to pursue fame, perhaps the most morally acceptable action would be to discourage anyone from pursuing fame at all.

We do not deny that there are many aspects of celebrity culture that are problematic and should be considered as unjust. In fact, the premise of our argument starts by accepting specifically one problematic aspect of celebrity culture, that certain marginalized groups are under-represented and delegitimized, and that this ought to be corrected. Given this injustice, it is another question whether correcting for it requires rejecting the system altogether or working for social change from within the system itself. The suggestion that we offer here is an example of the latter. While we acknowledge the many problems with the culture of celebrity and fame, it is also important to note the many benefits. We have already mentioned how celebrities have the potential to act as positive role models for their fans, providing an exemplar that can be emulated and admired by the public, as well as raising awareness about important social issues, and acting as hermeneutic resources that provide meaning-making and community-building.

An important upshot of our argument is that the pursuit of fame will tend to be more valuable under more adverse conditions of oppression and marginalization. As such, pursuing fame will be more valuable for those who, given intersectional discrimination and oppression, belong to more than one type of marginalized identity. For example, although women are, in general, under-represented in celebrity culture as highlighted in Section Three, this lack of representation is worse for those who are Black and disabled (Pinto 2020a, Goggin and Newall 2004, Ellcessor and Kirkpatrick 2017). Due to the extent to which this

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intersectionality gives rise to marginalization and social injustice, the more valuable the pursuit of fame will likely be for the person who experiences that intersectional oppression.

By extension, this implies that the more valuable the pursuit of fame is, the more burdensome it will likely be for the bearer.⁷ In Section Four we argued that a celebrity who is also part of a marginalized group is often taken to be a public representative of that group's collective identity. As such, they are constrained and judged by that responsibility and the social norms that are attached to the identity that they are taken to represent. For those who belong to more than one type of marginalized identity, the burden of discrimination and scrutiny that comes with this responsibility of representation will likely be more costly, due to the higher levels and distinct nature of the discrimination experienced by those facing intersectional forms of oppression (Crenshaw 1991). The extent of the burden that comes with the pursuit of fame therefore seems to be influenced by the extent of the oppression to which fame is a corrective, and the domain in which the fame is achieved. This means that the more adverse the conditions of oppression, the more valuable the pursuit of fame will be. Yet, the more valuable the pursuit of fame is given the injustice it functions to correct, the more likely it is to be burdensome.⁸

Endnotes

¹ For discussions of the ethical issues arising from these relationships see Medelli (2022), Archer and Robb (forthcoming) and Willard's contribution to this volume.

² It is likely that this form of social injustice counts as 'hermeneutical injustice,' explained by Miranda Fricker (2007: 6) as 'stemming from a gap in collective hermeneutical resources – a gap, that is, in our shared tools of social interpretation – where it is no accident that the cognitive disadvantage created by this gap impinges unequally on different social groups'.

³ There is debate as to whether some celebrities who are "famous for being famous" deserve the affirmation and attention that is given to them by the public. For example, some have argued that this type of celebrity

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is ‘emptied of content’ (Elliot and Boyd 2018), or simply ‘pointless’ (Morgan 2003). On the other hand, Robb and Archer (2022) claim that in many cases these kind of celebrities express certain talents and skills that are worth positive affirmation.

⁴ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

⁵ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

⁶ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

⁷ The domain in which a celebrity is famous may also influence the extent to which the pursuit of fame is valuable and burdensome, as some domains may be less representative of certain marginalized groups than others. Some domains of fame may also exacerbate the burden of fame, with differing levels of tolerance or acceptance of certain marginalized groups and identities.

⁸ Thanks to Michael S. Brady, Matthew Dennis, Carme Isern Mas and Pilar Lopez-Cantero for helpful comments on early drafts of this paper.

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