

Therapist to the super-rich

adapted from an article by Clay Cockrell



- 1 If I had a dollar for every time I've heard the term "first world problems", my bank account would look similar to those of my clients. I work as a psychotherapist and my specialism is ultra-high net worth individuals. Over the years, I have developed a great deal of empathy for those who have far too much. The television programme *Succession*¹⁾ does such a good job of exploring the kinds of toxic excess my clients struggle with that when my wife is watching it, I have to leave the room; it just feels like work.
- 2 What could possibly be challenging about being a billionaire, you might ask. Well, what would it be like if you couldn't trust those close to you? Or if you looked at any new person in your life with deep suspicion? I hear this from my clients all the time: "What do they want from me?"; or "How are they going to manipulate me?"; or "They are probably only friends with me because of my money."
- 3 Then there are the struggles with purpose – the depression that sets in when you feel like you have no reason to get out of bed. Why bother going to work when the business you have built or inherited runs itself without you now? If all your necessities and much more were covered for the rest of your life – you might struggle with a lack of meaning and ambition too. My clients are often bored with life and too many times this leads to them chasing the next high – chemically or otherwise – to fill that void.
- 4 Most of the people I see are much more willing to talk about their sex lives or substance-misuse problems than their bank accounts. Money is seen as dirty and secret. Money is awkward to talk about. Money is wrapped up in guilt, shame, and fear. There is a perception that money can immunise you against mental-health problems when actually, I believe that wealth can make you – and the people closest to you – much more susceptible to them.

- 5 I see family situations like those in *Succession* all the time. People like the series' lead character, Logan Roy, who came from humble beginnings to create an incredibly successful media empire. However, it is evident that he has failed miserably at raising fully functioning children. Too many of my clients want to indulge their children so "they never have to suffer what I had to suffer" while growing up. But the result is that they prevent their children from experiencing the very things that made them successful: sacrifice, hard work, overcoming failure and developing resilience.
- 6 *Succession* is built on the idea of a group of wealthy children vying for who will take the mantle from their father – none of them are able to convince him that they can do it. And that is because they have reached adulthood completely unprepared to take on any responsibility. The wealthy parents I see, often because of their own guilt and shame, are not preparing their children for the challenges of managing their wealth. On numerous occasions the child of a wealthy family has said to me: "We never talked about money. I don't know how much there is or what I'm supposed to do with it. I don't know how to take care of it. It's all so secret and dirty."
- 7 I was raised in a small town in rural Kentucky, solidly in the middle class. And it can be very difficult to watch these individuals struggle with the toxicity of excess, isolation and deep mistrust. *Succession* is a dramatised version of the world they operate in – it is made for television and part of its purpose is to give audiences the pleasure of watching the wealthy struggle. 33

theguardian.com, 2021

noot 1 *Succession* = een Amerikaanse dramaserie die draait om de fictieve familie Roy, eigenaren van een wereldwijd mediabedrijf