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The promotion and presentation of the self: celebrity as marker of presentational media

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This article explores how the celebrity discourse of the self both presages and works as a pedagogical tool for the burgeoning world of presentational media and its users that is now an elemental part of new media culture. What is often understood as social media via social network sites is also a form of presentation of the self and produces this new hybrid among the personal, interpersonal and the mediated – what I am calling ‘presentational media’. Via Facebook, MySpace, Friendster and Twitter individuals engage in an expression of the self that, like the celebrity discourse of the self, is not entirely interpersonal in nature nor is it entirely highly mediated or representational. This middle ground of self-expression – again partially mediated and partially interpersonal (and theoretically drawing from Erving Goffman’s work) – has produced an expansion of the intertextual zone that has been the bedrock of the celebrity industry for more than half a century and now is the very centre of the social media networks of the internet and mobile media. The article investigates this convergence of presentation of the self through a study of social network patterns of presentation of celebrities and the very overcoded similarity in the patterns of self-presentation of millions of users. It relates these forms of presentation to the longer discourse of the self that informed the production of celebrity for most of the last century.

Keywords: intercommunication; presentational media; social networks; celebrity; Facebook; Twitter

Introduction

Over the last 15 years, there have been two moments where the regular decrying of the vacuity of celebrity culture appeared to gain some traction. One can recall the outrage of fellow celebrities after Diana’s death in 1997 and the chorus of the famous proclaiming that the hounding of celebrities must stop: the invasion of privacy had just crossed well beyond the boundary of propriety and entered into the illegality of harassment (Roberts 1997). Similarly, in post 9-11 America in particular, there was the month in 2001 of the new sobriety in popular culture where celebrity represented everything that was excessively insignificant. Adding to the new sobriety was the parade of celebrities led by George Clooney and Tom Hanks presenting their serious support for the real heroes of America – the fire-fighters and the police who gave their lives to save others while the Twin Towers collapsed (Beach 2001). In both these cases, celebrity culture represented a new unwanted excess that needed to be reined into the structure of a civil society. And in both these cases, apart from a temporary chastising blip, celebrity culture continued and perhaps even intensified in new ways and permutations.

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The question I want to answer here is why: why does celebrity and celebrity culture continue to hold its fascination? A corollary question I want to address is, given the shifted structure of media and entertainment industries in the twenty-first century, what do celebrities continue to address that is so essential to contemporary culture? These questions have to be prefaced by the fact that the lament contained in these two moments detailed above is not anomalous. It is ever-present and helps to maintain the duality with which we hold the overwhelming production of celebrity: collectively, we disdain the public focus on celebrity at the same time as we continue to watch, discuss and participate and thereby ensure the maintenance of a celebrity industry.

The first dimension of an answer to the questions is that celebrity has been and is increasingly a pedagogical tool and specifically a pedagogical aid in the discourse of the self. For much of the twentieth century, celebrities served as beacons of the public world. They helped define the *Zeitgeist* of any particular moment – ‘a structure of feeling’ that relied in part on its mediation through film, radio, popular music and television. Thus, the stories of how women’s hairstyles of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s were determined by the screen icons of the Hollywood industry in the United States represents a basic example of how their representations moved into the cultural world. Similarly, Clarke Gable’s singlet or JFK’s hatless inauguration also shaped sartorial style, at least in the United States. There are examples of the power of screen icons to embody a mood – James Dean, for instance, through his role in *Rebel without a Cause* (1955), embodied a general fear of the angst in 1950s youth culture. The examples of this representative power of celebrities are legion as well as diverse. The impact of music videos in the 1980s, for instance, provided a panoply of styles and attitude that migrated transnationally with surprising force. Certain celebrities were able to capitalise on these changes in origins and powers of representation. For example, Madonna became an expert at translating subcultural style for its wider mediation through popular music, performance and music videos for more than two decades. In turn, her appropriation of subcultural style percolated through popular culture and fashion.

The pedagogy of the celebrity has served very particular purposes throughout the twentieth century. Celebrity taught generations how to engage and use consumer culture to ‘make’ oneself. In a number of treatises on advertising and consumer culture, cultural critics have identified how the individual had to be taught how to consume and to recognise the value of consumption for their own benefit (for example, Leiss *et al.* 2005, Story 1999, Toland and Mueller 2003). Instead of making clothes, it was much easier to have them made for you and use wages – as Ewen (1975) has explained as wage slavery – to capture the latest fashion and the most recent style. Shops provided the pathways to a consumer world which represented possibility and potential as much as a participation in a wider and connected culture (Schudson 1984) that was cross-linked with entertainment culture and its stars. What is less developed in these critiques of consumer culture is that pedagogic work performed to transform a more traditional culture into a consumer culture was very much dependent upon celebrities and their capacity to embody the transformative power writ large of consumer culture. Also generally missing in the studies of advertising and consumer culture was a further key element in that this transformation of the individual into consumer is not the shift to consumption from production but a shift to a wider and more pervasive *production* of the self. The production of the self implies the mutability of the production process, as it is built from the array of possible forms of consumption and expression that these types of consumption provided for the individual.

Because of celebrity’s centrality in what can be defined as self-production, the elaborate celebrity gossip can be seen as providing a continuity of discourse around the

presentation of the self for public consumption. The pedagogy of the celebrity in the twentieth century can be read as a very elaborate morality tale that mapped a private world into a public world. What we have described above is the ideal self that celebrities were able to proffer and ultimately led to their capacity to effectively sell a wide variety of products. This reading of celebrity identifies only a partial story of how celebrities taught the world. The narratives of divorce, of drunkenness, of aspects of personal lawlessness, of violence, of affairs and of misbehaving offspring, among many other stories, served to articulate a different public sphere than that constructed through the official histories of a culture. Implied in the celebrity discourse of gossip was an interpersonal dimension – what was often defined in newspaper coverage as the human feature – of the organisation of our culture. Gossip, in particular, circulated around celebrities as an explanation of personality that went beyond their onscreen personae and moved them into a public ‘community’ of recognisable figures who revealed at least part of their private experiences to heighten the affective connection to an audience.

Gossip has been studied from a number of perspectives. On one level, gossip has represented a form of social cohesion, a means by which group membership is enacted, reclaimed, and produced forms of exclusion (Gluckman 1963). De Backer, for instance, divides gossip into two functions: reputation gossip, where the status of a person is redrawn based on the information circulated in a community, and strategy learning gossip, where one learns social cues and preferred behaviour through the information gleaned about others (2005, in de Backer *et al.* 2007, p. 335). Other studies have focused upon how, among adolescents in particular, there is a form of reinforcement within a group of attitudes through gossip exchanges (Eder and Enke 1991). One of the key features of gossip as a discourse is that it is a structure of speech engagement or conversation that speaks about others specifically when they are not present.

This non-presence of the object of the gossip has actually made celebrity gossip perhaps one of the easiest and readily available forms of gossip. In the studies of celebrity gossip, researchers of 1970s’ and 1980s’ American tabloid gossip refer to the way in which it helps to produce social order in the populace through its representations of the problems and unhappiness of the rich and famous, despite their wealth and the adulation they attract from others (Levin *et al.* 1988). The use of celebrity gossip, then, is an extension of the uses of gossip in a community as a form of social control. Celebrity gossip, however, slips the yoke of the local and has often allowed debates to move seamlessly into a national or in some cases international debate while at the same time dealing with issues related to intimacy, family, and what has been regarded as the personal and private realm. What has to be understood about celebrity gossip throughout the twentieth century is that it has operated on two levels:

- first, there has been the reportage that has appeared as a form of information for readers in tabloids, newspapers, television programmes and magazines – in other words, it is structured and highly mediated; and
- secondly, there has been the deployment of celebrity gossip through personal conversation and evaluation that constantly moves the highly mediated into the interpersonal dimensions of everyday interchange. The movement of this kind of celebrity gossip information into the interpersonal is accentuated precisely because of the often personal nature of the information presented about celebrities.

Celebrity gossip is one of the principal components of an elaborate celebrity discourse that continued and intensified for most of the last century. It was a discourse that spanned from

the official and the sanctioned to the transgressive and the titillating, with many layers and levels of revelation between these two ends of the spectrum of what constituted the public self of the celebrity. Critically, it was used by an audience to make sense of the intersection of their public and private worlds and how that intersection related to the production of the self. De Backer *et al.* have identified how celebrity gossip can operate for younger people as a form of social learning – in other words, as a way to work out how they should dress, act and engage (De Backer *et al.* 2007, pp. 345–346). Their study also revealed that with older adults, celebrities were used in what can be called parasocial activities: the celebrity is integrated as if they are part of a social network for conversation purposes, but their parasociality means that this integration into the interpersonal is entirely one way, where the celebrity is obviously not truly part of the social network, but only in a mediated form (De Backer *et al.* 2007, pp. 340, 347–348).

On the surface, to understand the continued resonance and value of celebrity discourse in a changed media culture appears difficult. After all, celebrities are a production of the self specifically dependent upon a very elaborate and powerful media culture. They are elemental components of *representational* culture (Marshall 2006, pp. 636–637). With their dependence upon television, film, radio and the press for their influence even at this parasocial level, it would appear that the dispersal quality of on-line culture and its transformation of the power of traditional media to represent and embody interests and desires, celebrity as a moniker of identity, individuality and the consumer self may also be waning. However, what can be identified in this century-long discourse are some specific elements which are incredibly valuable to the emergence of on-line culture. I will highlight each of these elements and then explain how they are elemental to the production of the on-line self. In order to unpack the production of the on-line self and how it is informed by celebrity culture, I am going to use the way that particular celebrities are presenting themselves in this era of *presentational culture* to, in a very real sense, re-present and re-construct themselves with the benefit of this continued negotiation of the self that celebrity culture has articulated, leading up to the emergence of on-line culture and identity.

The technological and cultural change: social networks to presentational media

Some of the key changes in the way that we find, explore and share entertainment and information have produced this shifted constitution of our culture. It is not that television and film as examples of representational media do not continue to produce quite profound structure for our culture; it is more accurate to say that that influence is just less profound and less relentlessly omnipresent and perhaps more remediated through on-line pathways. Key changes have happened relatively recently. In the last half-decade, internet usage in all its manifestations is now challenging and in some cases surpassing television viewing in many countries in Australasia, North America and Europe (Gorman, 2008, Nielsen, 2008; Microsoft, 2009).¹ From the early part of this century, a very profound change in on-line use was developing. Social network sites began to develop that were built on forms of social exchange, such as internet relay chat, e-mail and instant messaging, and partially blended with the kinds of social interchange that had emerged with weblogs, or blogs. Certain countries such as Korea embraced particular forms of social media – in their case, the Mini- Hompy from Cyworld – that began to be used by more than a fraction of youth culture and became a pervasive form of interpersonal, and what could be called social, communication (TechCrunch 2009). Various forms of social networks developed in other parts of the world, loosely modelled on constructing and networking groups of friends into patterns of continuous engagement and sharing. Simultaneously massive

multi-player on-line games grew from the late 1990s that also produced environments for constructing circles of friends that would band together in pursuit of certain game objectives as well as converse in in-character and out-of-character modes. Since 2004, there have been various social network sites that have become the channel through which these rings of social and friendship exchanges have flourished, some designed for children, but most designed for young adult usage. Friendster and MySpace both have occupied important places in the development of social networks in the English-speaking world. Facebook has captured a very large number of users, and like its Korean counterpart has pervaded the culture from its origins in university life to now encompassing a comprehensive connection to all demographic groups (Facebook 2009). More recently, Twitter has been able to capture a slightly different constitution of connection through its short messaging, linking to other sites of interest and becoming part of a more mobile on-line culture. Professional networking sites such as LinkedIn have developed simultaneously to other sharing and exhibition sites such as YouTube for video, Flickr for images and Digg and Delicious for broader on-line information sharing and following.

On-line social network sites are interesting for what they allow the user to do – what are often called a technology's 'affordances'. They are very much connected to a desire to produce (Burnett and Marshall 2003, pp. 70–78, Marshall 2004, pp. 10–11), as they have simplified the process of constructing a website and ensuring that that website has some sort of audience – a constitution of a public – for any user. It is these two dimensions – a form of cultural production and a form of public engagement and exchange – that make social networks simultaneously a media *and* communication form. What makes them very much connected to celebrity is that as much as they are about an exchange and dissemination of thoughts and links to other media and on-line sources, they are a constitutive and organic production of the self. That self-production is the very core of celebrity activity and it now serves as a rubric and template for the organisation and production of the on-line self which has become at the very least an important component of our presentation of ourselves to the world.

Performance of the self

Performance is a critical component in any public figure's identity. For the politician, as strong and popular as his/her policies might be, the actual performance in a public forum is often a factor in how policies are received by a public. Celebrities perform in their primary art form – as actors, musicians, singers, athlete – as well as the extra-textual dimensions of interviews, advertisements/commercial endorsements, award nights and premieres. These elements of performance are the professional or producerly elements that are closest to their status as, or at least as conveyors of, cultural commodities.

There remain other dimensions of performance of their public everyday lives. Celebrities are under constant and regular surveillance and thus their more mundane and sometimes more personal activities are the subject of a gaze. The gaze provided by the paparazzi and distributed to magazines, television programmes and on-line sites makes their often everyday activities a kind of performance to be read further.

Erving Goffman wrote about the presentation of the self and its performative qualities from a sociological perspective more than 50 years ago. In his now highly influential *The presentation of self in everyday life*, Goffman (1959) studied gestures and the way an individual composed a version of him/herself for the world. Performance of the self was a conscious act of the individual and required careful staging to maintain the self – a composed and norm-driven construction of character and performance:

The whole machinery of self-production is cumbersome, of course, and sometimes breaks down, exposing its separate components: back region control; team collusion; audience tact; and so forth. But, well oiled, impressions will flow from it fast enough to put us in the grips of one of our types of reality – the performance will come off and the firm self accorded each performed character will appear to emanate intrinsically from its performer. (Goffman 1959, cited in Lamert and Branaman 1997, p. 23)

What we are witnessing now is the staging of the self as both character and performance in on-line settings. The props and accoutrements of the stage can now be translated to the various profiles, images and messages that are part of a Facebook site. Goffman draws upon Park's insight that the definitional origin of 'person' is a mask (1959, cited in Lamert and Branaman 1997, p. 97), and what is constructed via Facebook but equally through Twitter is a construction of character for a kind of ritual of the performance of the self. It is highly conscious of a potential audience as much as it is a careful preening and production of the self.

For celebrities, as they begin to reconstruct their personae for on-line use, interesting insights are already in play. For the actor Vin Diesel on Facebook it is very important that he reveals something of his professional self in a kind of collaboration of his private self. There is a performance of connection to his 'fans', as one of the Facebook affordances is to have levels and layers of friends. His profile indicates that he has 7,018,079 fans (Diesel 2009) and his 28 September postings indicate that he wanted to share something from a:

special lunch meeting where my father said something so dead on... He said... 'Confidence is the most important thing that you can teach someone... if you can teach them confidence, you don't have to teach them anything else'... Thanks for the love. (Diesel 2009)

Interspersed with these 'personal' posts are the associated images of a lunch meeting and other images, video and production stills. Diesel is constructing a carefully managed Facebook persona that actually indicates that the studio is at least part of its construction. At the same time he personalises his posts, which indicates the use of his Facebook site as a kind of publicly accessible diary – a performance of the actor's everyday life.

The widening dimension of the public self

In the book *Fame games*, one of the chapters deals specifically with the accidental celebrity. The research for that chapter was focused upon the moment when a private individual was suddenly caught in the glare of overwhelming media and by implication public interest (Turner *et al.* 2000, pp. 110–114). The private individual, then, was catapulted into the public spotlight in a media feeding frenzy. Although the intention of that particular research was to identify the way that this was managed by certain individuals and agents, the related point was how the public sphere in the era of representational media was actually much tighter and more centrally controlled and perhaps manipulated. Also, it was also apparent that constructing a public self was not what most people would think was worth producing. Something has changed in the era of social media and presentational culture, and it is worth exploring what appears to be a widening of the public sphere.

Graeme Turner has called this change the 'demotic turn' (Turner 2004, pp. 82–85, 2010), where the media are drawn more and more to the everyday and perhaps the ordinary as a form of extraordinary discourse that is a ritualisation of media openness rather than any democratic turn in the media. Certainly, reality television shows where carefully

auditioned audience members become the object of this relatively new form of docudrama identify the demotic in contemporary culture.

What needs to be nuanced into this reading of the public world is the expanding desire of the populace to be part of a public, but a far different public sphere than that perhaps articulated by Habermas, that formed to legitimise a certain organisation of power (1988, 1992). Through social media, the public self is presented through a new layer of interpersonal conversation that in its mode of address bears little relationship to its representational media past.

Celebrity use of social media articulates this change. There have already been massive campaigns by individuals to produce followers that would rival the largest of television networks. The most famous of these was conducted by the actor Ashton Kutcher, who worked tirelessly on constructing an on-line Twitter presence and challenged CNN to match his number of followers. Indeed, Kutcher passed the 1 million followers mark before CNN: what this campaign underlined was the capacity of an individual to produce a very large media and communication event (Petersen 2009). It also revealed the capacity of an individual, albeit an already well-known personality, to produce this effect through a combination of media and interpersonal communication.

Other campaigns by celebrities are worthy of note in their movement between representational media and the need for presentational structures in social media. Christina Applegate crusaded to save her television show from being cancelled by constructing a social network army of interest (Stechyson 2009). As she explained, social network sites allow a much more direct connection to fans and can be mobilised quite rapidly. Britney Spears, who does not suffer from a lack of coverage in representational media, has constructed a YouTube channel called BritneyTV that houses all her videos (Spears 2009a). Like many other social media users, Britney has engaged in making herself a subscriber-structured identity through YouTube.

Celebrities are allowing themselves to expose their lives further in order to gain a following and an audience. Neil Diamond, definitively a very popular singer and songwriter from a different era, has invested heavily in a Twitter identity and is working on constructing a particularised public identity in this stage of his career. He has cultivated a paternal and godfather relationship to other younger musicians on-line, discusses his own life and music regularly and has allowed his fans to observe and follow his posts. Here is an example of his posts over the last year that identify his connection to a new generation of performers:

@joshgroban Hi Josh. Hope you liked the TV show. Keep making those great records. All the best, Neil 7:23 PM Aug 18th from web in reply to joshgroban@jonasbrothers Congratulations on your #1 album! 11:46 AM Jun 26th from web Caught Chris Cornell at Webster Hall in NYC on Sat. Night. Love his voice and the band really rocked. I wish he'd have done Kentucky Woman. 7:30 AM Apr 10th from Twitterrific. (Diamond 2009)

In a parallel stream, MCHammer has used social media for a public reconstruction of his fame and has constructed a following of more than 1.5 million on Twitter to reinsert himself in a differently constituted public. Interlaced with his religious messages he replies to tweets from fans and fellow celebrities, and re-tweets comments from others about himself. Below are examples of these two constructions of the self from MC Hammer's Twitter page:

He did It Again !! Woke Us Up !!! Have A Great Day!!! God Bless 1:35 AM Oct 31st from web http://twitpic.com/oqp5r -Who knew one of my childhood heroes @Mchammer would be one of coolest dudes ever and know us (via @benjaminmadden) 10:12 AM Nov 9th from Twetie in reply to benjaminmadden. (Hammer 2009)

Celebrities are engaging in often very sophisticated uses of on-line and social media to produce a different presence. It is an investment in a public self that acknowledges that this engagement has widened to millions of users who generally predated the expanding army of celebrity social media users. The public self, whether through the activities of known personalities or by other social media users, is a recognition that these sites and the exchanges that develop on them are extensions in the production of the self and are vital to the maintenance of one's identity. What is different about this engagement is its interpersonalisation of the public world. Conversation is at the epicentre of postings and is the fibre that holds social networks together over time. The public self is constantly worked upon and updated in its on-line form to both maintain its currency and to acknowledge its centrality to the individual's identity, which is dependent upon its network of connections to sustain the life of the on-line persona.

The intercommunicative self

One of the key elements of celebrity culture and discourse for the last century is its different forms of address. As described above, celebrities presented themselves in their cultural forms as performers, but they also were presented in interview structures and in celebrity gossip settings. All these forms are precursors for the interplay of media and communication that is part of constructing the on-line self. The layered structure of producing the celebrity self for a form of public display and consumption becomes a precursor for the production of the on-line self.

In on-line culture, it is a spectrum of communication registers that produces an array of connected forms. The term 'intercommunication' can be defined as the layering of forms in an inter-related structure that moves between types of interpersonal communication that are integrated with highly mediated presentations. Intercommunication acknowledges a shifted public sphere where the interpersonal is overlaid onto its flows of interpretation and meaning from the outset. Intercommunication as a concept helps us to understand this new mix of representational and presentational culture and how they are interconnected in complex and intricate ways.

The intercommunicative self identifies that, at least in on-line cultures such as social network sites, we are engaged in a multi-layered form of communication that kneads mediated forms with conversation, that allows photos to be the starting-point for reactions and discussions, and that produces, partly because of expediency and partly for the desire to remain connected to someone or a group of people, very simplistic and phatic forms of communication that invite response. The intercommunicative self provides links to YouTube videos or samples of popular music or interesting articles that are extensions of the self's identity that are articulated through friends. The intercommunicative self also acknowledges the necessity of linking one's own identities into some sort of pattern, from Twitter to Facebook, from YouTube and Flickr to MySpace, from blogs to Digg.

Celebrities have quickly embraced the forms of intercommunication through their on-line personae, and because of the resources that they devote to constructing themselves as valuable commodities are able to maintain these profiles. For instance, the rapper and television personality Snoop Dogg ensures that both his Facebook and Twitter sites are alive with material for his fans. Twitter cross-lists to Facebook and is used to maintain the presence of Snoop Dogg, and further aligns with his official website. His presence is very calculated to promote his concerts and his music, and ensures that there is at least a connection to his followers no matter where they search on-line (Dogg 2009a, 2009b). Artists such as Lily Allen have made sure that their Tweets are re-tweeted to appear on their more official Facebook sites, and thereby enliven the connection between Allen and her fans with the regular-

ity of posts, even engaging in debates with fans as to the morality of downloading music (Allen 2009).² Demi Moore and Ashton Kutcher are famous for their use of images through Twitpics that are emerging from their private lives in order to construct and control a complete persona, thereby bypassing the traditional media. Kutcher's posting of a picture of the backside of Demi in her underwear is particularly noteworthy as an example of celebrity actively playing between different intercommunicative registers in his public distribution of what could only be thought of as a private moment (Kells 2009, Kutcher 2009).

The parasocial self

The intercommunicative dimension of on-line social networking identifies the new need for celebrities to stay connected in some way to this shifted relationship to an audience and a public. It demands an engagement that was, in the past, at least partially handled by the ancillary press of the celebrity industry, but now implicates the celebrity themselves in the interpersonal flow of communication. None the less, celebrities are at the forefront along with their fans in terms of an etiquette of engagement. The parasocial self is a pragmatic understanding that it is impossible to communicate individually with thousands and millions; and yet in this shifted on-line culture some effort has to be made. Thus celebrities are not fully fledged friends with all the people that may follow them but superficially, at least, they are. All social network users have to determine privacy settings, openness to follow others as much as they are followed, and a kind of moral code about presenting as themselves or allowing others to present on their behalf.

The level of engagement with friends as fans is often related to the relative power of the celebrity's position in representational culture. Thus Oprah Winfrey, who has one of the most successful talk-shows both nationally and internationally, was very concerned with expanding her reach into the Twitterverse and raced to achieve followers in the first half of 2009 (Winfrey 2009). She has minimal reply to the massive number of followers she has garnered and follows very few. Similarly, Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore, the celebrity royalty of Twitter, only follow 261 and 113, respectively (Kutcher 2009, Moore 2009). They do, however, make an effort to reply to fans' messages. They also promote others and maintain the exchange of information that has made Twitter so attractive. For example, Ashton Kutcher posted this rather 'normal' tweet which resembles countless users of Twitter in its relaying of a link that indicates interest:

AK very cool project by David Lynch <http://bit.ly/fj2YP> 11:14 AM Aug 21st from Tweet-Deck. (Kutcher 2009)

Others, such as Kathy Griffin, construct their comic persona in interpersonal language, but never reply or re-tweet: in a sense, she is maintaining a broadcast model of communication through conversational messages. She has 209,671 followers and follows no one. Her posts maintain the jocular and the informative:

If u watch the 'My Life on the D List' finale tonight on Bravo, I'll blow you. It's that simple. Oh, and I think I'm pregnant.8:52 AM Aug 10th from web Dear Seacrest, EMMY voting ends tomorrow. I voted for u. Did u vote for me??? Love, Kathy Griffin-Johnston2:30 PM Aug 27th from web. (Griffin 2009)

In this new parasocial connection between an audience of users and the celebrity, there are difficult boundaries to traverse. For some stars it is very obvious that a publicist has

written the posts. What is emerging is a first-person and third-person relationship to posts. Thus, Mariah Carey assiduously structures her personal posts in the first person and when they are not, her posts are listed in the third person. Here are two Tweets which identify the duality of conversational discourse of star and persona:

I believe I had the worst toothache today and I'm not in ny so its a definite situation! Anyway, thanks to all my friends for the support!!!

Let's take MC straight to the top! Cast your vote for OBSESSED on VH1's Top 20 Video countdown @ <http://tinyurl.com/32ssp2> (MC.com/gina). (Carey 2009)

Rob Thomas, of Matchbox 20, splits his 'identity' between publicist posts on Facebook and personal posts on Twitter (Thomas 2009a, 2009b). Britney Spears' on-line Twitter persona resembles that of Mariah Carey, where the first- and third-person address is employed (Spears 2009b). Where trouble emerges is when people pretend that they are writing their posts as the on-line persona becomes routinised into publicity structures. One of the dimensions of on-line personae is that the depictions are believed to be closer to the real than other representations. Thus, a giant sense of betrayal occurred when it was revealed that someone was impersonating the Dalai Lama (Campbell 2009), or that Hugh Jackman was not in fact managing and posting on his Twitter account (Petersen 2009). In the era of social media and presenting and producing the self, the search for the true and the real continues in a manner similar to the way celebrity gossip was a channel in the twentieth century to the more authentic star (Dyer 1979). Fans continue to try to strip away the veneers of performance and publicity to find these true versions of celebrities, and the on-line world constructs the parasocial interpersonal pathways for an apparent intensified connection. The reading of the 'true' public self through the celebrity is now linked to an audience/user pedagogic function of constructing and producing the self, as well as the continuing celebrity effect of producing emulative desire in an audience.

The private self for public presentation

There are new categories needed to describe the different ways in which the self is presented in on-line culture and, by implication, to a wider public. Social networking can reveal the private self, but in its design it has the potential of complete revelation to a wider public world. Interwoven into this mixture of private self and public world is the interpersonal register of on-line communication. What is emerging are three ways of looking at on-line production of the public version of the private self.

On one level, there is the *public self*. This is the official version that in celebrity parlance would be the industrial model of the individual. It would identify release dates of recordings and films, premieres and appearances, performance videoclips, the path to get tickets for specific appearances and events and biographical profiles of the most fawning nature. Official websites produce this effect, but because social networking defines the way users often find information there is a tendency to use Facebook as a quasi-official version of the public self. For high-profile celebrities, as discussed above, these kinds of sites are managed by their publicity assistants and work to maintain the public persona as a valued cultural commodity.

The second level of presentation is the *public private self*. It is in this version of the self that the celebrity engages, or at least appears to engage, in the world of social networking. It is a recognition of the new notion of a public that implies some sort of further exposure of the individual's life. Twitter has become the vehicle of choice in

maintaining a public private self for many celebrities. Its affordances limit the compulsion to respond and the possibility of short textual bursts that identify thought or location of a particular celebrity. Moreover, the currency of Twitter is that it is much more connected to mobile delivery and thus gives the sensation of immediacy. For some celebrities the self-negotiation of the public private self wrests control of the economy of their public persona in a way that resembles the 1950s breakdown of the film studio system, and the emergence of the star at the centre of film culture. The value of the public private self is still being determined, as individuals construct their versions of what parts of their lives they are willing to convey to an on-line public.

The third level is the *transgressive intimate self*. In answer to a question after his high-impact back-to-school speech in September 2009, President Barack Obama warned against putting something on Facebook that you might regret later, because ‘Whatever you do, it will be pulled up later in your life’ (cited Pace 2009). The transgressive intimate on-line version of the self is the one motivated by temporary emotion; but it is also the kind of information/image that passes virally throughout the internet because of its visceral quality of being closer to the core of the being. Elizabeth Taylor’s Twitter posts exposed her grief-stricken self in response to Michael Jackson’s death (Taylor 2009). What may have appeared appropriate for one’s closest friends is, in this case, shared with hundreds of thousands who pass it on virally to millions. The movement of the transgressive intimate self travels quickly back into the representative media culture as well as entertainment reports on celebrities. These transgressive moments are also clustered in on-line celebrity sites such as those of Perez Hilton, Harvey Levin and Jason Binn, who are regularly trawling Tweets and Facebook sites for moments of transgressive behaviour (Binn 2009, Hilton 2009, Levin 2009). Transgression remains a beacon in on-line or off-line form for fans and audiences to see a persona’s true nature exposed and the event/moment for intercommunicative sharing, comment and discussion. It is thus an accelerated pathway to notoriety and attention both in the wider world of on-line culture for all users and very visibly for celebrities whose behavioural transgressions expressed in interpersonal registers move swiftly into the powerful viral on-line juggernaut.

Conclusion: the increasing value to produce the self

Twelve years after the publication of *Celebrity and power* (Marshall 1997), it remains an intriguing question what makes celebrity culture prosper, proliferate and continue to have a kind of powerful influence. This article has tried to grapple and ultimately answer that perplexing question. On one hand, we are in the middle of a quite dramatic change in the organisation and legitimation of our culture in all its manifestations. Our celebrity system has been deeply embedded and wedded to what I have called a representational regime where culture and politics have relied upon a media filtering system to organise and hierarchise what is valuable, significant and important. It has produced a system of ‘representatives’, some of which are celebrities who embody our public discourse.

On-line culture has led to a partial – and by no means complete – dispersal of that representative system and we are living in cultures that are partly organised through the representational structures which remain dominant, but also partly organised through what I am calling a presentational culture and regime. Of course, all these grand claims are constituted differently in various parts of the world, but there is some similarity in Europe, North America and parts of Asia in this development. Celebrity culture is intriguingly poised between these two cultures – representational and presentational – because of its power to express cultural desire and will in significant ways.

What this article identifies is that celebrity culture has been a very elaborate discourse on the individual and throughout the twentieth century it has served a certain pedagogical function. Its capacity to train populations to consumer culture only partially captures the educative power of celebrity culture. More profoundly, celebrity culture articulates a way of thinking about individuality and producing the individual self through the public world.

The longer historical trajectory of celebrity discourse maps this increasing focus on the production of the self that has been partially designed to identify the power of individuals in the process of cultural production, as well as the ideological importance to identify individual power in an era of democratic capitalism.

The new dimension of this discourse on individuality provided by celebrity is its articulation with the demands and exigencies of on-line culture which operates as the expanding source of presentational culture. Past celebrity discourse, with its textual and more significantly extra-textual dimensions that revealed an interrelation between the public self and the private self, has served as the template for the production of the on-line self. Moreover, because of this expertise in producing the public self, observing the way celebrities are constructing their on-line identities isolates on the various facets of the new public self that is now a form of production engaged in by the vast users of the various and interconnected on-line social networks.

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Notes

1. Internet usage in Australia surpassed television viewing time in early 2008 (Nielsen 2008). Microsoft currently predicts that this change will also occur in Europe by June 2010 (Microsoft 2009), and it can be expected that this trend will spread throughout the world.
2. Lily Allen has now left Twitter, although her Twitter page is still available to view on-line. Her final post on 28 September 2009 reads 'I am a neo-luddite, goodbye' (Allen 2009).

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