

# HERE WE ARE NOW, ENTERTAIN US....

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## ABSTRACT

*Teachers are entertainers. They perform to a myriad of audiences on any given day, in part to students in a classroom, to parents or colleagues in the staffroom. These performances need to be carefully sculpted and managed to ensure that the audience engages with each presentation. This paper discusses the complex nature of the construction of the teaching persona through a triangulated approach that intersects media, sociology and education. Autoethnography and textual analysis is utilised to explore how teachers create and maintain a persona in contemporary society.*

## KEY WORDS

Persona; Teaching; Identity; Celebrity; Media; Education

### **Here we are now, entertain us.....**

With the lights out, it's less dangerous

Here we are now, entertain us

I feel stupid, and contagious

Here we are now, entertain us (Grohl, Cobain & Novoselic)

## INTRODUCTION

Nirvana's 90's anthem, '*Smells Like Teen Spirit*', hit the airwaves and began an era of grunge music that unified non-conforming and angsty individuals, who were looking for a voice to lead them through their despair (Ojii, 2020). Kurt Cobain, along with his bandmates, was the voice who was able to personify this agitation of 90's youth. This paper has nothing to do with Cobain, Nirvana or in fact music. The discussion for our purposes here though, is the interaction between teenagers, their teachers and the way in which persona impacts on how teachers associate with students and a broader school community. Speaking from personal experience, in the words of Cobain, "here we are now, entertain us", is a phrase that rings true for many teachers, as they face a crowd of 20 students staring at them in a tiny room. They become a spectacle forced to perform for each class, akin to a stage performer trying to amuse, charm and beguile their audience within each theatrical production, with the crowd expecting them to be 'entertained'.

In this paper, I will discuss the difficult navigation of a teaching persona, through anecdotal experience, using a dual methodological approach. I will utilise personal experience

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through autoethnography and textual analysis to link the personal experience with current academic literature. The examples provided in this paper are purely my observations and at no point have these observations been made with any identifiable information of those whom I have observed.

This paper intersects sociology, media, and education in a triangulated approach to understand the intricate manner by which teachers are required to navigate their personas. It is aimed at gaining an understanding of the complexities of creating and managing a persona as a teacher in the current social and educational climate. I discuss the creation and management of persona in different areas, such as on the school grounds and in the online environment. It is important to note here that this paper serves as an introduction to an area of study (the teaching persona) that is presently underdeveloped. This paper is a general discussion piece, that aims to raise awareness of the intricacies that are involved in creating a teaching persona.

Having worked as a secondary teacher for approximately ten years, I have found the construction and management of my own persona to be a complex terrain to navigate. The most curious aspect though, is the lack of discussion in this area both in teacher training, post degree and in the workplace. Persona seems to be a side note in discussions, which arguably is peculiar given that most of the time spent is in a classroom conducting a different performance almost every hour as you change from lesson to lesson. It is because of this lack of focus, that it is necessary to bring this issue to the fore in order to help pre-service and experienced teachers understand how their personas can be sculpted to better engage and potentially engage students and assist with their learning.

It is important to note that with the autoethnographic approach employed in this paper, I am solely referring to secondary teachers as this is my personal experience. I acknowledge that the creation of persona of primary teachers and secondary teachers may vary given the age disparity of the audience. This difference could serve as a springboard for a further (possible) research paper.

The discussion in this paper will align closely with the doctoral thesis that I recently completed, titled *The Identity Factory: Tennis Personas in Production*. This thesis focused on the production of female tennis players personas and investigated the constructive process that is complex and intertwined with external forces to create a public image in a heavily mediated sports environment, such as tennis (Szili, 2022). In this paper, parallels are drawn with the creation of a teaching persona and the persona of female tennis players, as was the topic of the doctoral thesis. This paper uses much of the research conducted in the doctoral thesis as a template for applying these ideas to the creation of persona amongst secondary school teachers. The paper draws on scholarly works from the field of persona and celebrity studies to further unpack the teacher persona more fully.

The literature and findings from my doctoral thesis, alongside the academic literature on teaching persona and my own personal experience through anecdotal observations, will be the approach used in investigating and discussing this topic. As previously mentioned, the paper will serve as a precursory discussion around the complex arrangement of creating a teaching persona with the intention of conducting a larger scale study in the future, to more fully understand how persona is created and enacted in a school setting.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Persona is often used in conjunction with 'self-presentation'. The term persona is derived from the ancient Greek word, meaning mask. According to Perlman (1968, p.4) the mask of a person is "readily detachable and put aside, but others become fused with his skin and bone". The

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teaching persona is a robust and ever-changing compromise between the self and the audience (Ashton, 2017). According to Hart (2016), a teaching persona is a version of yourself that is paramount in creating rapport with students.

In contemporary society we are progressively becoming more engaged in a public self (Marshall *et al.*, 2020). According to Marshall *et al.*, (2020, p. 1), the production of the self “has expanded in some interesting and intriguing ways for us and this production of a public self is actually connected to our techniques of presentation when we walk outside, but is put into different registers and modes” (Marshall *et al.*, 2020, p. 1). This idea is especially true for teachers who are required to change their presentation multiple times during a day, whether this be from changing classrooms each period or going from a classroom to a staff-room; the performance changes with each move.

The study of persona relates to the impact that intricate external systems (such as the media and otherwise) have on the construction of identity with a purposeful intent (Marshall, 2013). According to Marshall (2013, pp. 370-371) “persona allows us to explore the masks of identity as they are both constructed by our elaborate media and communication systems and enacted by individuals with a degree of intention and agency”. For Carl Jung (1992, p. 158), persona is a “mask of the collective psyche” and is “a compromise between individual and society as to what a man should appear to be”. Teachers working in various institutions are required to, in part, play a role in a particular narrative associated with the school in which they work. This results in a compromise between their own sense of self and the institution.

There is not a great deal of academic literature to draw from when investigating the intricacies that are involved in the creation of a teaching persona. There has, however been one study that links very closely to this paper. Janine S. Davis wrote an article titled “Five Secondary Teachers: Creating and Presenting a Teaching Persona in 2011”. Davis (2011, pp. 1-13) interviewed five secondary teachers and analysed the way in which they developed and presented their personas. Davis (2011, pp. 1-13) used Goffman (1959) as a way in which to analyse this data and found that these secondary teachers drew upon three realms: psychological, physical and social when constructing a persona. This paper will take a slightly different angle and look at the impact of teaching persona in a broader context that extends beyond just the classroom.

What Davis (2011, pp.1-13) discovers in her study, is outlined here through anecdotal examples that I have observed throughout my time in the teaching profession. Interestingly, Davis (2011, pp.1-13) discovered that the teachers she observed used costume (dress), teacher models (how they were taught) and social settings (the expected role of teachers and students) were amongst the ways that teachers in this study created and managed persona. These are elements that this paper also discusses, with a greater focus on performativity and through a more holistic lens.

While creating a useable teaching persona is important in the classroom, a teacher must navigate more than one area within a school and alter persona swiftly as they move about the physical space. That is, a teacher will go from classroom to staffroom to parent meeting to meeting with colleagues or their superiors which involves quick mask changes that are heavily dependent on context. Performativity is the term we can use to help us understand these swift contextual changes.

Erving Goffman analyses the notion of performativity in his work in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Goffman claims that a performance is based on context, that is, “a ‘performance’ may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (Goffman, 1959, p. 26). Goffman

also discusses the regions that these performances take place in and distinguishes these by referring to them as ‘front stage’, meaning in the public view; and ‘back stage’ that relates to the place away from the audience. The front stage is where the ‘actors’ adorn their ‘masks’ and perform for the audience, whereas the backstage is where they can unmask themselves and relax. However, if an intruder enters the backstage the actor is required to perform again. So, if we use Goffman’s theory in terms of teaching, the ‘front stage’ is the classroom and the ‘back stage’ may be the staff area where students and parents aren’t able to access. Interestingly, on the rare occasion where a student / parent may infiltrate the ‘back stage’ area, there is a quite obvious shift in terms of persona and the interaction between the interloper and teacher in this area – They could have had their ‘back stage’ mask on and then within seconds readorn their ‘front stage’ mask for this interaction, despite being physically present in the ‘back stage’ area (i.e. staff room).

Performativity is a concept that is well espoused in the teaching profession. As Davis (2012, pp.1) states “much occurs within the social interactions between teachers and students, including the formation of relationships, the subtle expressions of role expectations, the enactment and adjustment of social roles and ultimately the development of an identity”. Davis (2012, pp.1-11) continues by stating that there is a shift in performance when one is in the classroom versus with family, which resonates with Goffman’s sentiments about shifting persona based on context.

Another area that is touched on in this paper is the notion of celebrity and its links to teachers. In terms of simple definitions, celebrity derives from the Latin word *celebrem*, which essentially means ‘fame’. It also has connotations with the French word *célèbre*, which means ‘well known in public’ (Marshall, 2014; Rojek, 2001). The term celebrity has replaced the notion of renown. Those with renown would have been individuals who were involved in occupations such as a cleric, scholar, or senior mercenary. People with renown gained public notoriety through their accomplishments rather than any mediated acclaim (Inglis, 2010, pp. 4-5). In contemporary society, there has been a shift from renown (through authentic or legitimate means) to media constructed esteem (Cashmore, 2006). Within this paper it is argued that teachers are in fact a version of celebrity that lies somewhere between renown and celebrity within the schools in which they work.

According to Alice Marwick and danah boyd (2011, pp. 139-158), celebrity is an “organic and ever-changing performative practice rather than a set of intrinsic personal characteristics or external labels” (p.140). Additionally, it involves “ongoing maintenance of a fan base, performed intimacy, authenticity and access, and construction of a consumable persona” (p.140). While I am not suggesting that teachers are the commercial celebrities that we would ordinarily associate the term with, I am however suggesting that teachers, in part, mimic some of the connections we can make when looking at celebrity; that is, teachers are ‘well known’ in these semi-public spaces, such as schools, and will often feature in school publications (both in print, online and in marketing campaigns), and can therefore be viewed as a form of ‘micro-celebrity’.

Marwick and boyd (2010, p.121) state that the term “micro-celebrity implies that all individuals have an audience that they can strategically maintain through ongoing communication and interaction”. So, for teachers, this means that their interaction with their audiences (namely their students) and their continued communication in classes, can create an aura of celebrity that will develop with the construction of their own persona.

According to Marshall (2014), celebrities today are ‘extra-textual’ beings. This means the mediated existence of a celebrity transverses beyond what they are famous for. Due to the emergence of new technologies, celebrities are now able to share more information (often that of a private nature) than they previously have and to a wider audience. Marshall (2010, pp.35-

48) states that “celebrities perform in their primary art form-as actors, musicians, singers, athletes – as well as the extra-textual dimensions of interviews, advertisements/commercial endorsements, award nights and premieres”. The same can be linked to teachers, who, for many, are now prevalent on sites like LinkedIn and social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram that blur the line between the private and public sharing of information. Marshall (2010, pp.35-48) says that social media sites (used by both celebrities and teachers) endorse “a construction of character for a kind of ritual of the performance of the self”.

It is important to discuss the construction of an online persona when discussing any form of persona in a contemporary society. An online persona is the online production of persona and the interaction between the person and the online space. According to Moore *et al.* (2017, p. 2), “publicness is the first dimension of contemporary online personas”. The authors continue by saying that “...an online persona is comprised of a particularly wide-ranging spectrum of ‘publicness’ and at each point along its traversal exists the very real potential to go from a small public of close and intimate friends to a massive and global public audience, enabled by the act of sharing” (Moore *et al.*, 2017, p.3). Most teachers will need to navigate their online personas to suit a ‘smaller public’, however, there is a risk of their public self, extending out to employers, colleagues and even students if not carefully managed and considered. This area is one where very little research has been conducted in terms of how one creates and manages a public persona. Much of the literature in this area is focused on engaging students in an online atmosphere. For example, Parini (2005) states that an online teaching persona is a mask that a teacher speaks through in their classroom and Carroll (2002) claims that persona is a professional self that comes across when you teach students.

For teachers, the development of a teaching persona is an important aspect of their practice. According to Pérez Cavana (2020, pp.22-23), “many teachers would agree that teaching involves a sort of *mise en scène*: teachers have to project their voice, as actors do; they have to keep the interest of the pupils, tell a story, maybe change their face to appear stricter and so on”. According to Parini (2005, pp.58), “most of the successful teachers I know have been deeply aware that their self-presentation involves, or has involved at some point, the donning of a mask”. Parini (2005) also states that starting teachers must also be aware of the complexity of creating a persona and states that, “a beginning teacher will have to try on countless masks before finding one that fits, that seems appropriate, that works to organize and embody a teaching voice” (Parini, 2005, p. 59).

## Method

As previously stated, this paper serves as an entrée for a greater study that will look at the persona of teachers, the way that a teacher’s persona is constructed and the impact that teacher’s persona can have on student learning and outcomes. As such, this paper is a discussion on observations made throughout my time as a secondary school teacher in Victoria, Australia, to generate discussion surrounding this topic.

One methodological approach used in this paper is autoethnography. According to Ellis *et al.* (2011), autoethnography is a research technique that encompasses personal background as a means to understanding cultural experience. This approach allows the researcher to study common values, beliefs, cultural practices and shared experiences as an insider in order to help those who are on the inside and outside of the experience (Ellis *et al.*, 2011). This methodological approach was also used in my doctoral thesis, having been a professional tennis player prior to becoming a secondary school teacher, and enables me to provide a dual perspective on how persona is created in an educational context.

As I am presently engaged as a teaching professional, I am able to offer a dual perspective on this topic, as both an insider (employee) and an outsider looking in and observing other teachers in the industry. As Syrjälä & Norrgrann (2018) state, during the practice of autoethnographic research, the self-narratives of researchers are able to provide insight into various experiences or ideas that may not usually be accessible or may be difficult to obtain. Without this dual perspective, this discussion would not have been possible (Szili, 2022).

Textual analysis is the second approach used in this paper. The observations made and the links to academic literature are discussed and examined using textual analysis as a methodological tool. McKee (2014, pp. 31-43), states that textual analysis seeks the evidence that people produce throughout the course of daily living about how they make sense of the world around them. When conducting a textual analysis, the author states that when we perform textual analysis on a text, we make an informed guess at some of the most likely interpretations of the text, in order to help us understand how people make sense of the world.

A significant part of this discussion focusses on the *meaning* made by humans and their interactions with one another. This *meaning making* is a way that people form and then sculpt a persona based on their own understanding of identity and social norms and expectations. According to Fairclough (2003, p. 10), “part of what is implied in approaching texts as elements of social events is that we are not only concerned with texts as such, but also with interactive processes of meaning-making”. Teachers employed in a school are faced with layers upon layers or symbols and signs that bear significance culturally and socially. Alongside this, teachers are required to form their own persona with these external pressures that they must consider in this process which is what this paper intends to highlight.

## PERSONA AND TEACHING

I can't actually recall any moment during my teacher training where the construction of persona was discussed either implicitly or explicitly. The only recollection I have that may have some semblance of a discussion on persona was a lecturer telling us to be firm and not smile for the first few interactions with our classes. To have no direct teaching on how to create, manoeuvre and manage a teaching persona in an occupation where you perform to multiple audiences daily, seems strange.

There appears to be a disjoint between the academic realm of teacher training and the practicalities of creating and maintaining a teaching persona. Teachers are often focussed on teaching content as opposed to their performance in front of their students and their interactions with other stakeholders in the school community. As Parini (2005) states, it is vitally important to make informed choices and think deliberately about one's teaching persona, including considered decisions about what clothes a teacher wears to school, which Parini (2005) calls “rhetorical choices”.

Goffman (1959) has been utilised as a framework for the discussion on teacher performance. Goffman (1959) separated the construction of persona into two parts. One being non-discursive action which relates to gestures or clothing. The second method is discursive action which is influenced by social norms. Goffman (1959) also argues, people perform depending on their social situation. So, for teachers, this means that there is pressure that forms from what the normative understanding of what a teacher appears to be and the social ideology of what a teacher represents that is difficult to refute when a teacher creates their persona. The thing that interests me here is what happens when a teacher does not fit into what is considered to be a standard representation of what a teacher ought to be, as deemed by society.

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Goffman (1959) in his theory of self-presentation also describes what he calls a 'front'. This 'front' is part of a performance which is usually general and fixed and defines the situation for those who are watching the performance take place. Essentially, this type of performance is the standardised understanding or expectations of the behaviour/performance in a consistent manner.

The 'front' that Goffman (1959) describes works when everyone involved in the performance meets its expectations. However, when a teacher doesn't fit with the societal norms of what a teacher 'should' be then there is potential for the audience (this could be anyone in the school community) to be confused about how they respond to the teacher. This potential confusion can be linked to Goffman's (1959) ideas surrounding group dynamics and performance. Goffman (1959) states that each individual must uphold their performance (by sticking to the appropriate behaviours as set out in social conventions) to ensure that audience opposition doesn't occur and as a result each performer will feel pressure to adhere to the expectations of the performance.

I remember working at a fairly conservative private school in Victoria, Australia. The school had employed a teacher who didn't seem to fit the outward appearance of what a teacher at this particular school would look like. This was curious for me to witness, as the teacher moved about the corridors and the murmurings you would hear about their appearance / demeanour. I even recall one person saying, in quite a miffed tone, that they were surprised that this teacher had secured a job in the school. Using Goffman's (1959) framework here to analyse this example, we can see that this particular teacher is not what the audience had expected. So, the performance of the team (team being the other employees at the school) is in a vulnerable position in terms of the audience uptake. Essentially, audiences (in our case, the school community) may easily reject this person based purely on what they deem to be an appropriate and socially acceptable persona of a teacher. Suffice to say that this teacher didn't spend a great deal of time at the school before they found a job elsewhere.

Emotion is also an important consideration when discussing the teaching persona. Emotions are judgements and feelings towards particular events (Linnenbrink *et al.*, 2016). According to Pi *et al.*, (2022) if teachers are positive then relationships are equally positive which in turn creates good outcomes for all stakeholders (e.g. student motivation and performance and teacher wellbeing). It is important for teachers to consider emotion in their performance. If a teacher elicits a more positive emotion during both 'front' and 'back stage' appearances (irrespective of how they are actually feeling), they may find that there is a greater response from their audience.

Teachers who are employed in schools that are part of a religious order have an added layer of complexity when it comes to the construction of their personas. That is, teachers employed in these schools must navigate their own professional persona alongside the school's faith-based ideology. For example, I know of a pre-service teacher who was placed in a Catholic school and uses gender neutral pronouns. However, this practice didn't align with the school's ethos and, as such, the teacher was asked to be labelled by his or her biological gendered pronoun. The teacher was then required to make a decision as to whether or not he or she needed to shift his or her persona to align with the school, challenge the school or to retreat. This example highlights the complex decision-making thought processes one needs to make, particularly when your persona does not marry with the expectations of society or the community with which you are involved.

The above examples highlight the pull of social norms and expectations and that if one's persona doesn't fully fit into the expectations, then this can cause upheaval for both the individual and those surrounding them. However, it is not suggested that a teacher needs to fit

the exact persona of what is socially expected. Having an awareness of what is deemed 'typical' can assist in how to navigate this space. Should this teacher have wanted to stay, they may have manipulated their 'work' self from their 'private self' to align more closely to the school. Or, they may reject this entirely to secure employment where their 'work self' aligns more closely to their 'private self'. There is no one right answer here, but it is understanding how these complex social systems operate in order to make more informed choices about how we construct persona and aligning our best selves in the places that we work.

The understanding of persona, more generally, is an important consideration in teaching and how understanding your own persona can help in your own teaching practice. Sharhon Williams Van Rooij wrote a paper in 2012 titled "Research-based Personas: Teaching Empathy in Professional Education". Williams Van Rooij (2012, pp.77-78) states that her research "offers a technique for facilitating the integration of empathy into the practicum component of education by teaching students to construct research-based personas of the intended audience, which draws on the philosophy of User-centred design". In this paper, Williams Van Rooij (2012) used graduate students enrolled in education degrees to investigate research-based persona as a means to create website design for clients.

Williams Van Rooij (2012) acquired client data through the facilitation of focus groups. The students were asked to highlight the types of characteristics that stood out about those who were in the client focus groups. Patterns were then analysed amongst the groups as a way to garner empathy and understanding of their clients. Williams Van Rooij (2012, p.83) states that "research-based personas are an excellent tool for helping students gain empathy with the individuals they eventually will be serving. The opportunity to "walk in the shoes" of the client, patient or product user helps student to acquire and retain a holistic view of their intended audience".

The study conducted by Williams Van Rooij (2012) could be useful when looking at the construction of a teaching persona. It may be useful for schools to conduct focus groups and interviews with school stakeholders (students, parents, school boards) as a way to determine what they want out of their teaching staff. The information garnered from these interactions can serve as a guide as to how teachers may wish to construct and manage their personas in a way that may be a more 'fit for purpose' model for the school. Teachers can then decide or determine if or how they wish to construct their persona in a more informed manner than they may have previously been able to produce. A more in-depth discussion around persona construction may also assist in a greater understanding of all parties (both wider school communities and teachers) into how to manage and potentially embrace those who don't fit neatly into a particular category.

## **THE NOTION OF CELEBRITY AND TEACHING**

Having observed teachers over the past ten years at various schools, I have noticed that there are some teachers who really embrace a celebrity status in a school community. As previously mentioned, the term celebrity derives from the Latin word *celebrem* which has an association with the word 'fame' and it also has ties to the Latin word *celere* which links to the English term *celerity*, meaning 'swift' (Szili, 2022).

For Turner (2014, p.3) "the contemporary celebrity will usually have emerged from the sports or entertainment industries, they will be highly visible through the media, and their private life will attract greater public interest than their professional life". Boorstin (2006, p. 79) has a slightly different take on celebrity and attests that "his qualities – or rather his lack of qualities – illustrate our peculiar problems. He is neither good nor bad, great nor petty. He is the



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human pseudo-event. He has been fabricated on purpose to satisfy our exaggerated expectations of human greatness.”

In terms of how we can understand celebrities, Marshall (2014) states that celebrities can be interpreted as a text or sign. This means that the celebrity turns into a representation that is formed by cultural meanings (Marshall, 2014). As previously mentioned, celebrities are now considered to be ‘extra-textual’ beings and as such have acquired renown beyond what they were initially famous for. This is an interesting point here and we can intersect this neatly with teachers. Often when you have a class, students will ask you about your life outside of school. I have had occasions where student will Google me and find that I was once a tennis player. I then become ‘extra-textual’ as I am now known as the ex-tennis player, in addition to their teacher. These types of conversations are not uncommon in a classroom, but it becomes tricky when you are selecting information to disclose (often teachers do this to build rapport) and information to keep private.

To further reiterate my sentiments from earlier on in this paper, I am by no means suggesting that teachers are the full-blown celebrities that we see in the media. Rather, they fall in between the realm of celebrity and renown. As previously stated, those who were considered to have renown gained public notoriety via their accomplishments and were more concerned with the action rather than the person themselves (Inglis, 2010, pp. 4-5). The ‘in-between’ setting we can place teachers could be as ‘micro-celebrities’ within their communities.

Micro-celebrity is a term coined by Theresa M Senft in 2004. Senft (2018, p. xiv) says that “I speak of micro-celebrity as a practice, rather than a person: it’s the presentation of one’s online self as a branded good, with the expectation others are doing the same”. According to Marwick (2017), micro-celebrities are known to a niche group of people who practice self-presentation strategies to create a public persona. Micro-celebrities present themselves as public personas and aim to create affective ties with audiences and will generally attempt to facilitate this through online channels, such as social media (Marwick, 2017). For Khamis *et al.* (2016, pp.191-208) “micro-celebrity is a mind-set and a set of practices that courts attention through insights into its practitioners’ private lives, and a sense of realness that renders their narratives, their branding, both accessible and intimate”.

The notion of micro-celebrities in teaching is an interesting one as teachers may not be fully aware that they could in fact possess this level of renown within the school community. I once worked with a colleague who I would argue possessed this micro-celebrity status in a school. I worked with this person for quite a few years and slowly their persona shifted. Initially this person looked the part of what a teacher would ordinarily be likened to but then slowly their appearance started to change. This teacher would wear more colourful and daring outfits which drew more attention from staff and students. There was then a shift in demeanour with a more confident strut around the staff area and in the classroom. I wondered what had happened here and I asked this person if their shift had been a conscious decision. This teacher responded by saying that indeed it was and that the change was intentional. The shift in this teacher’s persona, I argue, propelled them into a version of a micro-celebrity. This teacher was very well loved and respected by staff and students, more so since the change in their persona. Now while this teacher possibly unknowingly used the notion of celebrity or micro-celebrity in their change, in reality this is what occurred. As Davis (2011, p.3) states, “teachers and actors have similar jobs—they perform for audiences, and those audiences can interact with the actors and change the outcome of the performance based on their reactions”. Evidently, this teacher was in a performance and based the reactions of the audience as a measure of the success in their altered persona.

Micro-celebrities will present themselves as a personal brand (Marwick, 2017). In the above example the teacher here has essentially established their own personal brand through careful decision-making about the way in which they constructed their persona. Interestingly, this teacher also created social media sites that are focused on the area of their teaching specialty that those outside the school community are able to access. I know this, because students that this teacher taught, told me about them. The knowledge that these students had of this teacher outside their school community created an idea that this person is now well-known beyond the school, giving them additional renown or establishing themselves further as a micro-celebrity. Despite this, it is worthy to note that micro-celebrity is ordinarily attributed to online spaces; however, there is a steady stream of teachers entering and developing profiles online (Bibby, 2022). This means that they are potentially creating their own micro-celebrity identity, and hence the importance of teachers acknowledging this development.

## ONLINE PRESENCE IN THE TEACHING COMMUNITY

I have always thought of myself as being fairly tech-savvy and capable of holding my own in an online environment. However, as many of my teaching colleagues can attest, the emergence of COVID-19 and the lockdowns that followed, forced teachers into an unknown realm of possibility in the online sphere. Personally, I have subscribed to online social networking sites and other online forums for as long as I can recall; but with the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, I have now become more intertwined in the online space as has my teaching practice and I have no doubt that the same can be said for many teachers in the industry.

The focus of this section will be on the construction of teachers' online personas and not dealing with online instruction. It is important to note that online instruction (i.e. conducting classes online) and online persona more generally (how a teacher presents themselves on social media / professional industry sites) are different. It is hoped that there will be further investigation into online lesson-delivery in a larger scale study. Here, it is argued that the way a teacher manages their persona online can significantly impact on the way in which the audience responds to a teacher and where they create and develop their status as a micro-celebrity.

To investigate this more comprehensively the five distinct academic personas as identified by Barbour and Marshall in their 2012 paper titled "The Academic Online: Constructing Persona through the World Wide Web" are used as a template for discussion. Barbour and Marshall (2012) explored online identities of academic university staff. *The authors* identified five distinct versions of the 'self' that academics employed online. These are:

- **The Formal Self – The Static Self:** Using online media platforms like a curriculum vitae or staff profile.
- **The Public Self – The Networked Self:** This is still part of the academic realm but is used as a means to share ideas and connect with other academics.
- **The Comprehensive Self:** A means to keep in touch with family and friends and keep socially involved with peers.
- **The Teaching Self:** A focus in teacher instructions and students (i.e. through institutional intranets etc).
- **The Uncontainable Self:** This is where others may take control of your own online persona through public commentary (Barbour and Marshall, 2012).

There are certainly instances where we can see that secondary school teachers will be able to see how they fit within the above template framework. Firstly, if we consider the 'Formal – Static Self' we can see a shift in the instance of professional profiles amongst teachers. LinkedIn "is the largest professional network on the internet" (LinkedIn, 2023). Interestingly, LinkedIn has been labelled as a 'safe space' for educators to use - given the professional nature of the site

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(Shulman, 2012). Here, teachers can create their own profiles and map a work history timeline along with providing general information relating to their teaching philosophy and best practice. I recently spoke to a colleague in Human Resources who stated that many teachers are being recruited from this site as it provides a good source of professional information relating to potential candidates.

In terms of the 'Public-Network Self', there are many places that teachers could potentially go in order to present themselves in this space. There are various online platforms that relate to subject-specific areas. For example, History teachers can connect to the History Teachers' Association of Victoria (HTAV) where there are opportunities to connect with other History Teachers in Victoria. This example demonstrates where teachers are more likely to present themselves with a more professional persona, given the nature of the online platform.

The majority (if not all) teachers I know have some form of social media account to maintain connections with friends and family. It is here that we find the teacher's 'Comprehensive Self'. Teachers will subscribe to various social media sites such as Instagram, Facebook, SnapChat et cetera to keep abreast with personal news. Interestingly, I recall that during teacher training, we were told by various lecturers to ensure that all settings on these sites are set to private so that no student can infiltrate your private space. It is still an important area to observe as many of my colleagues are linked to my social media accounts. I would now continue to assume that there would still be some level of self-regulation about what to post, given these sites aren't necessarily and completely private. Further, as Barbour and Marshall (2012) point out, some academics infuse part formal and part personal selves. I have noticed this with some of my colleagues who will blur the line between their posts relating to their profession and their personal dialogue. This fusion potentially can create confusion in how one's persona is constructed and really echoes a point made by Perlman (1968, p.4) who said, "a person makes himself known, felt, taken in by others, through his particular roles and their functions. Some of his personae – his masks – are readily detachable and put aside, but others become fused with his skin and bone".

The 'Teaching Self' is one that all teachers are readily utilising. Each school requires staff to post on their own intranet/online learning management system. While there is scope to discuss online teaching, I will leave that for a future paper as schools have now returned to face-to-face teaching, and, while I am not discounting the importance of this discussion, it will be reserved for a future study.

Most schools now provide continuous online reporting of students. That is, at the end of each assessment, the teachers will provide a mark and comment of the students work, as opposed to making general commentary at the end of a semester or year. It is through this online forum that persona and the way one constructs their persona is interesting. At a school where I was employed, we were told to write these continuous reports to the student and make them less formal than standard end-of-year reports, but formal enough so that parents could read them. On occasion, I was tasked with reading some of these reports and I always found it interesting to see how teachers presented their information and if, at all, their personalities were evident in their writing style. The parameters placed around teachers and this style of reporting does arguably impact on the persona of teaching staff.

According to Pardosi (2017) a school is an institution that is managed by a variety of stakeholders. If we look at the teaching institutions, we can draw comparisons with Goffman's Total Institutions Theory. Goffman (2007, p. 6) explains:

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First, all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority. Second, each phase of the member's daily activity is carried on in the immediate company of a large batch of others, all of whom are treated alike and are required to do the same thing together. Third, all phases of the day's activities are tightly scheduled, with one activity leading at a prearranged time into the next, the whole sequence of activities being imposed from above by a system of explicit formal rulings and a body of officials. Finally, the various enforced activities are brought together into a single rational plan purportedly designed to fulfil the official aims of the institution. (Goffman, 2007, p. 6).

Teachers are having to teach, report and create content knowing that there is an overarching institution, that has its own agenda, thus making a true representation of their persona increasingly difficult to maintain.

Finally, the 'Uncontainable Self' is an area in which teachers may find themselves and, *moreso*, unbeknownst to them. With the advent of social media, more and more people are able to comment on teachers both professionally and personally. There is a website called [ratemyteachers.com](http://ratemyteachers.com) where students are able to provide commentary on the performance of their teachers and provide other comments, should they wish to. A forum like this clearly has the capacity to shift how a teacher creates their persona. A teacher may notice negative or hurtful commentary and take active steps to change, which could potentially result in an alteration to their persona. I know of one school where students (and I am sure that there are many more examples of these) posted negative commentary about their teachers and then personally attacked them about various aspects of their personas (i.e. the clothes that they wore or how they interacted with students). This potentially could have impacted on the staff involved as their personas were created for them by the students in these posts, potentially creating a feeling of helplessness or loss of agency in the creation of their identities.

As this paper serves as a precursory discussion on how a teacher creates, develops and manages a persona, the question-list below presents considerations that will be addressed in-depth in a future related study:

- How do teachers create, develop and manage their personas?
- How does the online space alter teaching personas?
- How does the teaching persona impact educational outcomes?
- What strategies can teachers employ to create a successful teaching persona?
- What are the institutional impacts on teaching personas?

## CONCLUSION

This paper served as a means to create awareness and generate discussion about the teaching persona, which is an underdeveloped area of investigation. The construction of a teaching persona is complex and requires careful navigation and an appreciation of the external forces that can impact upon this creation and management.

The understanding of how one constructs persona in teaching is not only important for the teacher and the school, but also helps teachers create rapport with their students (Hart, 2016). Emotion is also an important consideration when constructing a teaching persona and the impact emotion has on student learning. The creation of a teacher's persona requires careful consideration and flexibility to move between the different spaces in a school context (Davis, 2012, pp.1-11).

The teachings of Goffman (1959) on performativity allow us to more deeply explore the different performances that teachers are required to undertake in their workplace. Goffman's (1959) theory allows us to identify and further understand the tension that teachers may experience when they perform in various arenas and are required to understand the context of their performance and their audience, otherwise they may succumb to the rejection of their observers.

An understating of celebrities and how teachers can be linked to the notion of celebrity is useful in comprehending how the teaching persona is shaped. As Marshall (2014) states, celebrities are now viewed as 'extra-textual' beings, meaning that they are known beyond what they were initially famous for. While teachers don't exactly fit this idea, they could be considered 'extra-textual', with students in particular, often wanting to know more about their teacher than just learning about content in their subject areas.

A helpful way to view teachers is as forms of micro-celebrities: that is, they are known to a niche group of people who practice self-presentation strategies to create a public persona (Marwick, 2017). So, for teachers, they are well known in their own school communities. This means that they, in part, need to regulate their behaviour but can craft their own brand or identity in the process of persona creation, which could potentially result in better outcomes for them personally and professionally.

Teachers are utilising the online space more and more. Sites such as LinkedIn serve as a means for professionals to interact (LinkedIn, 2023). The 'five selves' that Barbour and Marshall (2012) discuss is a helpful template in order to further understand how the teaching persona can shift when placed online, and with this area becoming more and more predominant in contemporary society, encourages us to think more deeply about how teachers present themselves online.

As I have previously mentioned, this paper is really an entrée into a future study of how teachers create, manage and navigate their personas, and more broadly, how we can more closely explore and understand the notion of persona and how it relates to teachers. Much of the links that have been made in terms of teachers and their personas have been made through the study from my doctoral thesis; *The Identity Factory: Tennis Personas in Production*.

While Nirvana's *Smells Like Teen Spirit* didn't actually have anything to do with the creation of teachers' personas, the lyrics, "here we are now, entertain us", is quite apt when we consider the performances that teachers undertake daily in their workplaces, particularly when faced with a classroom full of teenagers. Persona, and how we present ourselves, becomes a focal point when we are 'entertaining' those around us in the school community.

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