

PRIVATE SELF IN CELEBRIFICATION: DISCURSIVE PATTERNS OF SELF- SUBJUGATION, SELF-DEMOTION AND SELF-SEGMENTATION

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ABSTRACT

In celebrification—the production of a celebrity identity—the public persona occupies a central position, but little is known about how the private self is sustained. This study examines how music artists negotiate their private selves interpersonally during celebrification through meaning-making processes, drawing on relational dialectics theory. Interviews were conducted with 17 Finnish music artists, and contrapuntal discourse analysis was employed to identify and interpret the discursive patterns and meanings that emerged in these negotiations. The findings reveal three patterns: self-subjugation, which suppresses the private self in favour of the public persona and external expectations; self-demotion, which downplays the public persona and fosters egalitarian interaction and personal disclosure; and self-segmentation, which compartmentalises private and public selves across relational contexts. Self-subjugation represents a shift towards a monologic self and associated interpersonal challenges, whereas self-demotion and self-segmentation reflect a dialogic self that creates space for the private self. Together, these patterns underscore the centrality of interpersonal communication in self-negotiation, where the private self is sustained through individual agency, contextual boundaries, relational symmetry and regulated self-disclosure. This study advances understanding of the communicative patterns that underpin the relational and personal wellbeing of artists and other celebrity practitioners in domains reliant on public persona construction. The findings contribute to persona studies by illuminating the conceptual interdependence of private and public selves. Practical implications include strategies for sustaining the private self in increasingly public social environments.

KEY WORDS

Public Persona; Private Self; Interpersonal Communication; Dialogic Self; Relational Dialectics; Celebrification

INTRODUCTION

I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. ... Absolute death (non-being) is the state of being unheard, unrecognized, [and] unremembered. (Bakhtin 1984, p. 287)

Celebrification, defined as the production and reproduction of celebrity (Rojek 2001; see also Driessens 2013a; Gamson 1994), is a communicative practice centred on the construction and maintenance of a public persona (Jerslev & Mortensen 2016; Marwick & Boyd 2011). Although it enables the accumulation of celebrity capital and confers associated privileges (Driessens 2013b), it may also entail significant personal costs. Scholars have long identified a connection between heightened public attention and the expansion of the public persona at the expense of other dimensions of the self (Adler & Adler 1989; Rockwell & Giles 2009; Maheshwari 2019).

Maintaining a private self is crucial for personal and relational wellbeing: it allows individuals to form personal relationships (see Altman & Taylor 1973; Petronio 2002), negotiate relational identities outside public scrutiny and societal roles (see Goffman 1959), and sustain a sense of self-continuity (Modell 1993). Self-continuity, meaning the underlying connection between past, present and future selves (Sedikides, Hong & Wildschut 2023), is necessary for having a coherent sense of oneself and for navigating social life effectively (Swann & Buhrmester 2012). Self-continuity has been associated with various psychological benefits such as enhanced self-esteem (Zou et al. 2018) and meaning in life (van Tilburg et al. 2019), but disruptions to it have been linked to emotional distress, depression and even suicidality (Donahue et al. 1993; Sokol & Eisenheim 2016).

A sense of coherence may erode when the self splits into private and public selves, especially when an individual perceives contradiction or distance between these identities (Maheshwari 2019). The self may become more dispersed and fragmented when relational influences on it expand beyond the individual's immediate social circle (see also Gergen 1991). Feelings of depersonalisation and disconnection from the private self often occur when identity is increasingly determined by the image created through public self-portrayal, the media, audiences and the broader public (Maheshwari 2019). Stronger orientation of social interactions towards the public persona and the imperative to maintain it may result in the "colonization of the veridical self by the public face" (Rojek 2001, p. 11), whereby the public persona becomes the primary representation of the individual, and the private self is eventually treated as secondary, deviant or even inauthentic (Archer & Robb 2023). This may foster a form of non-being, where the private self risks becoming "unheard, unrecognized, [and] unremembered" (Bakhtin 1984, p. 287).

This tension was vividly illustrated by Finnish music artist Cheek (real name: Jare Tiihonen), who framed his retirement in 2018 as the symbolic "killing" of his artist persona to reclaim his private self (Saari 2025). He reflected: "Koska Cheek oli niin paljon, oli lähellä, ettei Jarea ollut enää ollenkaan [Because Cheek was so much, it was close to there being no Jare left at all]" (Saari 2025, p.181, translation by the first author). Similar tensions between the private and public selves are widely recognised in studies as sources of mental distress among celebrities (Rojek 2001; Franssen 2022).

The significance of the private self and its vulnerability during celebrification necessitates examining how the private self is sustained during such processes. Yet research on this topic remains limited, despite growing scholarly interest in the public persona and its functions (e.g. Marshall, Moore & Barbour 2020; Pauló 2025). Moreover, existing studies have

addressed the issue primarily in psychology (Adler & Adler 1989; Maheshwari 2019; Rockwell & Giles 2009) and philosophy (Archer & Robb 2023) but not in interpersonal communication, even though the private self is an interpersonal construct formed, negotiated and expressed in and through communication (Baxter 2011; Zhang & Stephen 2025).

To address this gap, this study sought to identify the communicative practices and patterns that either support, constrict or allow the co-existence of the private self with a public persona. This study contributes to celebrity and persona studies by theorising the private self in relation to the public persona and by identifying the communicative practices through which the private self is negotiated during celebrification. Practical implications include strategies for supporting the private self in increasingly public social environments, which may be helpful for artists and other celebrity practitioners who must navigate transforming self-definitions and ways of relating throughout celebrification (see Maheshwari 2019). The findings may also hold significance for the broader population, as the negotiations of private and public selves concern all who engage in public life, such as individuals maintaining online personas on social media (Marshall 2020). In a world more public than ever, understanding how the private self is maintained is both timely and necessary.

Dialogic Self

The self can be understood as a set of identities that define and constitute who a person is (Oyserman, Elmore & Smith 2012). From a social constructionist perspective (Gergen 1999), the self becomes intelligible by learning the language and shared meaning-systems enabling individuals to make sense of it (Baxter 2011; Mead 1934). In interpersonal communication studies, this perspective is commonly grounded in symbolic interactionism (see Zhang & Stephen 2025), which posits that individuals understand themselves by interpreting how they are perceived by significant others and within the broader cultural context (e.g. James 1890; Mead 1934), and that the self is constructed through a process in which the inner subjective self (I) responds to and internalises aspects of the socially constructed self (me) (Mead 1934). However, Baxter (2011, pp. 101–103) and Taylor (1991) argue that this theory leaves unresolved the origin of the “I,” which appears to exist outside social interaction. Instead of adopting this view, we approach the self from a dialogic perspective, in which the formation and maintenance of the self are understood as inherently relational (Baxter 2011).

The dialogic perspective draws on Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981, 1984) concept of dialogism and the multivocality of social life (Baxter 2011). In contrast to symbolic interactionism, dialogism assumes that language and meaning-systems are not unified or monologic but inherently contradictory, composed of multiple competing voices or perspectives (Baxter 2011, pp. 101–103). From this standpoint, the self is not conceived as a preformed and separate entity that interacts with the external social self but as constituted in ongoing conversations between the self and others (Baxter 2011; Taylor 1991). As Taylor (1991) argues, “Human beings are constituted in conversation; and hence what gets internalized in the mature subject is not the reaction of the other, but the whole conversation, with the interanimation of its voices” (p. 314). Accordingly, the dialogic self comprises multiple voices, each representing different possibilities for being. The self emerges from the interplay of at least two distinct voices – the self and other(s) – reflecting the simultaneous need to connect with and separate from others (Baxter 2011). Consequently, the self encompasses multiple identities shaped in different relational contexts.

Adopting a dialogic perspective is suitable for the present study, as it foregrounds the multiplicity and fluidity of the self – diverging from the frequent contrasting of the public persona with a presumed “true” self in prior research (e.g. Rockwell & Giles 2009). In persona

studies, the public persona is understood not as true or false but as a “construction comprised from an interpretation of one’s identity and how that identity is made into a public entity” (Marshall, Moore & Barbour 2015, p. 292). The dialogic self view moves beyond the problematic true–false dichotomy (see also Strohming, Knobe & Newman 2017) by conceptualising private and public selves as distinct yet equally valid relational identities constituted and continuously negotiated across varying interpersonal interactions (Baxter & Montgomery 1996, pp. 142–145, 159). These identities are defined as discursive productions constructed in the moment through discursive competition (Baxter 2011), with discourses referring to systems of meaning cohering around particular identities. The private self is thus understood as a relational identity constructed and maintained in the “backstage” of social life (Goffman 1959), particularly in close interpersonal relationships where jointly managed privacy boundaries enable private self-negotiation (see Petronio 2002) and shared relational histories support self-continuity (Sedikides et al. 2016).

Conceptualising private and public selves as distinct yet interrelated aspects of the dialogic self enables us to investigate how these identities compete with and against each other in the construction of the self during celebrification.

Public Self and Private Self

The notion that celebrity culture and identity are characterised by a divide between private and public selves is well established in celebrity studies (e.g. Rojek 2001). From a dialogic perspective, however, private and public selves are not treated as separate but as interpenetrating discourses that emerge through their interplay in interpersonal interactions and broader sociocultural discourses (see Baxter 2011). Examining the private self provides insight into the public persona, as each is discursively formed in relation to the other. In this sense, the private self is always embedded within the public persona and vice versa.

The public persona can be defined as the movement of the self into the public sphere and the intermediate domain between the individual and collective (Marshall, Moore & Barbour 2020). This process is characterised by performative acts, collective engagement, mediatisation and strategic value production (Marshall, Moore & Barbour 2020). For example, for music celebrities, persona construction covers various media platforms and incorporates communication of shared meanings (e.g. emotions, authenticity and genre affiliation) that foster audience connection. The value of the persona is epitomised in celebrity status, which accumulates from countless evaluations within public discourse (Stewart & Giles 2020). Through these social processes, the media, audiences and other actors become involved in the celebrity’s identity construction (Maheshwari 2019).

Whereas the public self is characterised by fluctuating public discourse, collectivity and the inclusion of multiple voices, the private self denotes a more stable and exclusive identity co-constructed within a small circle of significant others. Despite its conceptual centrality, the private self has received limited attention in celebrity and persona studies and is often treated merely as the opposite of the public self. In other disciplines, the private self has traditionally been situated within the individual as a phenomenological experience and core of personal existence (Tedeschi 1986; James 1890). One of the most notable contributions is that of Modell (1993), who conceptualised the private self as both self-generative and dependent on others’ appraisals. However, this perspective – grounded in psychoanalysis and biology – does not fully account for the role of interpersonal communication, through which the private self is constituted.

Rather than treating the private self as a biologically rooted memory system (see Modell 1993), we conceptualise it as a discursive formation constructed and maintained in interpersonal interaction (see Baxter 2011). Accordingly, the private self is understood as a relational identity located in interpersonal discourses. Drawing on the existing literature, we argue that the private self is characterised by self-continuity, jointly managed privacy boundaries and self-disclosure. Self-continuity is sustained in close interpersonal relationships, where shared relational histories allow for recalling and reinforcing existing relational selves (Chen, Boucher & Molly 2006; Sedikides et al. 2016). Communication privacy management theory (Petronio 2002) is helpful in understanding how the private self is further distinguished from the public self by privacy boundaries. According to this theory, privacy entails a sense of ownership and control over personal information, which is typically shared with significant others expected to manage privacy boundaries appropriately. Finally, reciprocal self-disclosure affords social validation and self-clarification through open exchange of thoughts and feelings (Petronio 2002, pp. 66–71), thereby enabling meaningful self-negotiation through dialogic action (Taylor 1991; see Katriel & Philipsen 1981).

Importantly, self-disclosure is also central to the construction of the public persona (Marwick & Boyd 2011). However, celebrities' disclosure of their "public private self" (Marshall 2010) – referring to the strategic display of private aspects of the self in public contexts – is performative and aimed at fostering the illusion of intimacy with audiences (Marwick & Boyd 2011). Although parasocial relationships (Horton & Wohl 1956) may involve mutual self-disclosure (see Rotola-Pukkila & Isotalus 2021), this self-disclosure remains tied to the public persona rather than the private individual. In the contemporary celebrity system characterised by these interpersonal forms of communication (Marshall 2020), the boundaries between private and public selves have grown increasingly blurred. To examine how interpersonal negotiations of the private self unfold during celebrification, we employ relational dialectics theory as our theoretical framework.

Relational Dialectics Theory and Research Aims

Relational dialectics theory (RDT, Baxter 2011) is a social constructionist and dialogic theory rooted in Bakhtin's (1981, 1984) concept of dialogism. Its core premise is that meaning emerges in the interplay of competing discourses, where some views are reinforced and others resisted or marginalised (Baxter 2011). In this study, we applied RDT to celebrification, which privileges the public persona while marginalising other identities (see e.g. Maheshwari 2019).

RDT has been widely applied in studies on interpersonal communication (see Suter et al. 2024) and selfhood (e.g. Raval 2013; Tyler & Abetz 2019). Baxter (2011, p. 153) observes that communicative enactments marked by challenge or change are especially fruitful sites for RDT, as they animate multiple discourses. Celebrification exemplifies such enactments, being transformative and often destabilising relational dynamics (see Maheshwari 2019; Rockwell & Giles 2009). Given RDT's premise that meanings are made in discursive struggle (Baxter, Scharp & Thomas 2021), our first research question is:

RQ1: What competing discourses do celebrified artists voice in their talk about negotiating the private self?

Discourses are voiced in utterances, the analytic units of RDT (Scharp & Thomas 2021). Each utterance is intertextually linked within an utterance chain, which Baxter (2011) describes through four links: proximal and distal already-spoken and not-yet-spoken. Proximal links captured utterances within specific relationships, where the private self was negotiated, and

distal links reflected broader cultural discourses. We primarily analysed proximal links but also attended to their interplay with distal discourses.

Power is central to RDT (Baxter, Scharp & Thomas 2021). Centripetal discourses reflect dominant ideologies, while centrifugal discourses represent marginalised perspectives (Baxter 2011). Previous studies suggest that, in celebrity production, the public persona is typically privileged, positioning the private self as deviant (e.g. Adler & Adler 1989; Archer & Robb 2023). By analysing how competing discourses interact and position in relation to each other, it is possible to interpret the prominent meanings that shape private self-negotiations. Our second research question is:

RQ2: What meanings emerge from discursive interplay in artists' negotiations of the private self?

In early RDT, responses to contradictions were called “praxis patterns” (Baxter & Montgomery 1996). Baxter (2011) redefined praxis as the “different ways in which discursive struggles, and meanings, are constituted” (p. 122), shifting the emphasis from individuals to discourses. Thus, our focus is not on how artists manage self-negotiation but on how their meanings are co-constructed in interaction. Because the dominance of the public persona often diminishes the private self (e.g. Maheshwari 2019), it is crucial to identify the praxis patterns that sustain the private self. Our third research question is:

RQ3: What praxis patterns support the celebrified artist's private self in interpersonal interactions?

These research questions are approached using qualitative methods, which are discussed next.

METHODOLOGY

We used interview data and contrapuntal analysis method to examine how negotiations of the private self unfold in interpersonal interactions during celebrification. Our aim was to understand these negotiations from the perspective of individuals at the centre of celebrity production. Accordingly, data were collected through interviews with commercial music artists who had first-hand experience balancing their private selves with their public personas.

Participants

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 Finnish popular music artists recruited via purposive sampling (Kelly 2010). The artists were contacted directly through social media, email and with the assistance of Music Managers Forum Finland. The participants identified as female (n = 6) and male (n = 11), aged 21–40 (M = 29), with professional experience ranging from 0.5 to 18 years (M = 8). The artists' genres included pop, rap and R&B, with visibility ranging from community-based to national fame. Ethical principles for research with human participants (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity 2019) were followed, with informed consent obtained. Special attention was given to anonymisation and secure data management due to the participants' public status.

Semi-structured Interviews

The first author conducted interviews face-to-face (n = 12) and via Zoom (n = 5). The semi-structured design provided both structure through a predetermined interview topic, and flexibility by remaining open to unexpected themes and patterns that might emerge during the interviews (Galletta & Cross 2013). Open-ended and theoretically grounded questions focused on specific forms of close interpersonal relationships, such as romantic relationships, and

general interactions, allowing the respondents to reflect on their private/public self-negotiations. Follow-up questions were based on either the respondents' answers or predetermined questions such as 'In what kinds of situations do you communicate as your private or public self?' and 'What kinds of contradictions or challenges have you experienced in those interactions?'. The interviews averaged 48 min. and produced 200 pages of transcribed text (12-point font), with filler words removed.

Contrapuntal Analysis

The data were analysed using contrapuntal analysis, a method tailored for RDT-based research that views language as an ideological practice which (re)constructs social realities through discursive interplay (Baxter 2011). In this study, the analysis method was employed to interpret how celebrated individuals' negotiations of their private selves are "created, reified, and transformed through processes of ongoing (counter)point-counterpoint negotiation, or dialogue" (Thomas 2017, p. 1).

Contrapuntal analysis comprises five stages (Baxter 2011; Scharp & Thomas 2021). First, the semantic object was identified as the negotiation of the private self during celebration. Second, interview transcripts were selected as the text for analysis. Third, relevant discourses were detected from the data. This began with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006), which involved repeated reading of the transcripts to gain familiarity, initial coding of expressions of negotiation (e.g. 'being recognised as the public persona instead of the private self' and 'being assigned social power associated with celebrity status'), collation of the codes into coherent themes, and refinement of themes into broader meaning-systems treated as discourses (e.g. the codes 'being recognized as the public persona' and 'being assigned social power associated with celebrity status' were coalesced into the discourse 'being positioned as the public persona'). Fourth, the manner in which discourses competed in the construction of meaning was examined. Discursive interplay was identified both inductively, by detecting value-laden expressions (e.g. "what I don't like at all" or "it's really hard") and lexical markers (e.g. "but", "however" and "actually"), and deductively, by situating utterances within broader cultural discourses. Interplay was analysed along a spectrum from monologue to dialogue (Scharp & Thomas 2021), which includes various types of discursive struggle (see Baxter 2011, for a detailed description). Dialogic contraction excluded alternative voices, while dialogic expansion opened space for multiple perspectives. Diachronic separation was noted when discourses shifted over time (spiralling inversion) or by topic (segmentation), and synchronic interplay captured co-occurring discourses, such as countering, where a dominant discourse replaced an acknowledged alternative (see Baxter 2011). Hybrid meaning-systems were also identified, reflecting both/and constructions of meaning. In some utterances, multiple forms of discursive interplay were detected simultaneously.

Finally, iterative analysis of the discourses and their interplay yielded three broader meaning-systems that illuminate interpersonal negotiations of the private self during celebration. The meaning-making processes and their interpretations are presented in the Findings section, with exemplars drawn from the data. All quotations were translated from Finnish to English, and the participants were anonymised by replacing their birth names with 'the person's name' and their artist names with 'the stage name'.

FINDINGS

In the context of celebration, artists' interpersonal negotiations of the private self manifested in four sets of competing discourses: (a) being positioned as the private self versus the public persona, (b) concealing versus disclosing the private self, (c) separateness versus

connectedness of the private and public selves and (d) equality versus inequality in relation to others. The interplay of these discourses produced three broader meaning-systems: self-subjugation, self-demotion and self-segmentation. Each meaning-system comprises sub-discourses that captured different nuances.

Rather than mapping onto distinct meaning-systems individually, the sets of competing discourses informed all three meaning-systems through patterned foregrounding of particular discourses. Self-subjugation was evident in utterances that reinforced the public persona, concealment of the private self, the connectedness of private and public selves, and inequality in relation to others. Self-demotion emerged when the public persona was marginalised and the private self, disclosure, separateness of private and public selves, and equality in relation to others were emphasised. Self-segmentation was detected in utterances that foregrounded the separateness of private and public selves and when the dominant discourse was determined by the privileged identity in a given relational context.

Self-subjugation represented dialogic contraction by suppressing the private self, whereas self-demotion and self-segmentation manifested as dialogically expansive patterns that supported the private self. All three meaning-systems were articulated by artists exposed to both high and moderate levels of public attention.

Self-subjugation

Self-subjugation refers to the suppression of the private self and the foregrounding of the public persona. It was identified in discursive practices that reinforced the public persona, concealed the private self, emphasised connectedness between the private and public selves, and positioned the artists unequally in relation to others. These utterances conveyed a loss of agency, as the participants described feeling compelled to conform to expectations attached to their persona. Their sense of obligation was evident in their frequent use of expressions such as “having to be the public persona” when discussing its presentation in non-professional contexts. Three sub-discourses captured this meaning-system: (a) being positioned as the public persona, (b) meeting external expectations and (c) experiencing social disorientation.

Self-subjugation as being positioned as the public persona. This sub-discourse illustrates how the public persona was foregrounded and attached to the private self, particularly in interactions with fans, acquaintances and even significant others. One artist shared how others resisted the boundary between the private and public selves:

Other people, even the closest to me, don't always distinguish that if I post something on Instagram, it's always my work self. ... It changes my image, how people see me, and it also changes how my friends and family members see me. ... It's really hard to get it to work the way I want it to, where everyone else also completely separates the artist and the personal me. (A7)

Here, discursive interplay manifested through countering and antagonistic struggle: the artist prioritised separation of private and public selves, while others foregrounded their connection. The value-laden expression “It's really hard” signals countering, where the private self and multiplicity of identities was acknowledged but replaced by the public persona and monologic view of the self. The same artist noted how the private self was constricted when interwoven with the persona:

I don't really get asked much how I'm doing anymore, and I've realised that people just kind of assume they know. More often, they come up and say things like, ... “Hey, things must be going great for you!” And I always think, How do

you know how I'm actually doing? But they're talking about the artist ...; and even if things aren't going well, I feel like I can't break that bubble. (A7)

This utterance animates self-subjugation through countering, as the private self was acknowledged but subordinated to the public persona. Restricted disclosure and guardedness also appeared in interactions with new acquaintances: "If someone approaches and is like, 'Hey, it's you!,' then there's immediately that wall that you put up" (A10). Another artist described relational asymmetry:

I have a few people who I really don't have anything to do with anymore, because their attitude towards me changed after I became famous. ... Now they're like: "... You must have such a finer life than the rest of us." You realise they're putting you on a pedestal. Then I'm like, "... we're not friends anymore ... You're giving me power that doesn't belong to me." (A1)

This exemplifies spiraling inversion, as social power associated with the persona was attached to the private self after fame, complicating relationship maintenance and self-negotiation.

Self-subjugation as having to meet external expectations. Self-subjugation was also voiced as obligation to conform. One respondent explained:

There might be a conversation going on with someone when I'm [the person's name], and I'm talking with my friend, and then someone shouts [the stage name], and suddenly, I have to act like a shop cashier and match ... their demands and ... the kind of image they've formed of that public persona. (A3)

The repeated phrase "have to" signals naturalisation, constructing obligation to conform as "the way things are" (Baxter 2011, pp. 171–172). Self-subjugation was depicted as unavoidable, highlighting the dominance of external expectations in structuring interaction. Another artist described lost spontaneity:

It's a little limiting and makes you think about what you should do, say or be, or whether you should be at all. ... everything had to be thought through, not in terms of what others think but in terms of what image you want to project. (A17)

Here, self-subjugation constrained self-expression and contributed to feelings of disorientation.

Self-subjugation as socially disorienting. The participants frequently reported confusion when the private self was overlooked in everyday interactions. One artist noted: "You never really know what expectations others already have of you, and then, you must prepare yourself differently" (A1).

Another described withdrawing from informal activities: "I quit all hobby groups too, because people recognised me there and I felt like everyone was watching me. Even there, I had to be good, even though I just came to do my hobby and be at peace" (A5). The lexical marker "even though" signals contradiction, while "I had to be good" illustrates prioritisation of the discourses associated with the public persona. Similarly, one respondent voiced frustration:

What I don't like at all is when someone in an everyday situation calls me [the stage name]. Then I'm like, "Now, I'm not, what?" ... I'm a little offended by that because suddenly, in that moment, I feel like I'm not being taken as me ... and that I'm being put on a pedestal or placed in a different role. (A3)

This reflects synchronic interplay in the forms of countering and antagonistic struggle: the artist prioritised the private self, while others simultaneously foregrounded the public persona.

Through countering, negotiation of the private self was constructed as self-subjugation, with the private self struggling to be recognised. However, when the private self was reinforced rather than marginalised, the same interplay produced the alternative discourse of self-demotion.

Self-demotion

Self-demotion illustrates the foregrounding of the private self by emphasising equality and commonality rather than distinction and superiority in relation to others. This pattern was identified when the private self, relational openness and symmetry, and the separateness of the private and public selves were prioritised in interaction. The respondents consistently described self-demotion in positive terms. Unlike self-promotion, which sustains the public persona by highlighting recognition, status and social power, self-demotion invokes the opposite approach. It involves averting celebrity status and reducing ascribed social power and interpersonal attention, focusing instead on relating to others on an equal, human level. Three sub-discourses animate self-demotion: (a) supporting the private self, (b) symmetrisation and (c) enabled by significant others.

Self-demotion as supporting the private self. Practices constituting self-demotion supported the private self by creating space for it beyond persona-related roles and expectations. One artist explained: “It’s nice to be a bit of a character in a situation like that [with fans], so that when you come home, you don’t have to be [the stage name], and you can be who you are” (A4). Expressions such as “having to be the artist” versus “getting to be the private self” recurred across the data, signalling contrasting attitudes towards these identities. Whereas self-subjugation and the public persona were described as compulsory and disorienting, self-demotion and the private self were associated with naturalness and ease. Equalising the relationship between self and others enabled more casual interactions and openness, reducing the need for self-subjugation. As one respondent explained:

If I’m talking to a follower who asks for a photo together, then the setup is automatically that this person admires me, and I have to be this mega-cool artist ... But if it’s a work acquaintance or a colleague, then I’ll adopt a friendly attitude, because the positioning is equal and no one is putting the other on a pedestal or glorifying the other. Then, I can speak in a much more relaxed way. (A5)

This utterance illustrates diachronic separation through segmentation, as the private and public selves were compartmentalised into distinct relational contexts. Here, self-demotion was interpreted as a more natural way of being, supported by value-laden lexical choices and naturalisation.

Self-demotion also intersected with distal discourses surrounding privacy. Some respondents described how cultural norms in Finland facilitated self-demotion. One artist noted, “I feel like in Finland, and in Helsinki, people know how to just let you be. Like, maybe they’ll whisper at another table and check me out a bit, but I feel like people generally behave well” (A4). Others described spending time abroad as enabling similar conditions: “I was in the States for a longer time to get away, and it was a really relieving experience because there, no one knew me, so I could just be a normal person” (A17). Overall, self-demotion was associated with a sense of normalcy and being treated as equal to others, reflecting a need for relational symmetry despite celebrity status.

Self-demotion as symmetrisation. Symmetrisation was identified in communicative practices that equalised the social playing field in interpersonal interactions. One respondent described her experience in a hobby group:

I took a really strict line: I don't talk to anyone about my work, and I'm not allowed to be called [the stage name] – I must be called [the person's name]. And now that I've been telling everyone that for a couple of years, ... I feel like I'm treated just like everyone else, ... but it took a lot of effort to get to that point. I don't have the energy to be there also promoting myself, ... telling them when I have gigs when they always ask. And I'm like, "Look it up on the internet; don't disturb my evening off," but you can't say things like that, as they'll get offended. But now, they've started to learn when I just kindly say that I have this rule. (A12)

This excerpt illustrates discursive interplay through spiralling inversion, as discourses surrounding the private self and equality gradually moved to the centre over time. Ultimately, self-demotion destabilised patterns of self-subjugation, affording the artist equal treatment.

Self-demotion as enabled by significant others. Finally, self-demotion was often facilitated by significant others, who provided space for the private self to be acknowledged. Although significant others sometimes conflated the private and public selves, they were also those with whom artists could be recognised as a person rather than as a public persona. One respondent described his relationship with his partner: "She is, in the end, always the person with whom I get to reset my mind and just be the everyday me" (A8). Another expressed gratitude for long-standing friendships: "I have long-term friends with whom I don't have any positioning [asymmetry] like that. Thank God, I have those long-term friends who have been my friends even before I became an artist" (A12). These descriptions indicated that self-demotion was most feasible within established close relationships, where relational symmetry was sustained over time.

Self-segmentation

Self-segmentation refers to compartmentalising the private self within specific social contexts while maintaining boundaries between the private and public selves. This pattern emerged primarily through discursive segmentation, which occurs when "one discourse aligns with a topic or activity domain and another discourse aligns with a mutually exclusive topic or activity domain" (Scharp & Thomas 2021, p. 198). Self-segmentation foregrounded the separateness of the private and public selves and was identified in utterances where the dominant discourse was determined by the identity privileged in a given relational context. Three sub-themes characterise self-segmentation: (a) segmentation as shielding and supporting the private self, (b) segmentation ambiguity and (c) segmentation as neutral.

Self-segmentation as shielding and supporting the private self. When artists reported a sense of agency in self-negotiation, concealing the private self and separating it from the public persona were portrayed as protective mechanisms against the demands, public scrutiny and disadvantages associated with the public persona. Segmentation prevented persona-related discourses from being treated as reflections of the private self. This pattern emerged, for example, through visually distinct self-presentation: "It looks physically very different too, so that I get to go about my everyday life pretty peacefully" (A1). Another respondent described how the public persona shielded them from offensive comments:

If some man shouted something at me like 'fat' or whatever, I might be bothered by it, but the person on stage doesn't care. So, in a way, it protects me a little bit. These hits don't come to me but to this persona or this character who is performing for them, because I'm a character to them ... I'm not necessarily the human person they follow. I'm a celebrity. (A6)

The lexical marker “but” signals contradiction between being positioned as the private self and as the public persona. Through countering, the private self was acknowledged yet pushed to the margins, as the public persona assumed dominance. At the same time, the interplay reflects discursive segmentation, as the private self is concealed and separated from the public persona in the context of work.

Self-segmentation also supported the private self in close relationships, where distancing from the public persona allowed the artists to be seen beyond celebrity status. One respondent explained: “It’s much easier for me to just be myself and feel that I’m interesting as a person, the way I am, without that kind of external stuff” (A14). Self-segmentation created space for the private self without being saturated by persona-related discourses, thus overlapping with the pattern of self-demotion.

Self-segmentation as segmentation ambiguity. Segmentation ambiguity refers to challenges in maintaining boundaries between private and public selves. Highlighting the tension between connectedness and separateness, the respondents described ambiguity when both identities were simultaneously expected by others. For example, one artist recounted:

At the same time, I must be really proper and handle the situation, but at the same time, they [friend] want to be in their civilian role and talk to me about what’s going on with them. But then it feels like you can’t really be either. (A3)

This utterance reflects segmentation ambiguity and the disorientation that arose when conflicting discourses co-occurred through synchronic interplay. Segmentation ambiguity also appeared in difficulties separating discourses associated with the private self from those of the public persona. One respondent described her family’s struggle:

It was really difficult for them to see, like, the headlines, the photos, the articles; they never ever give an accurate portrayal of who you are. Even if it’s a positive article, it still feels weird. ... It was really hard for my family at first to understand, like, “Why did you say that?” ... or “That’s not who you really are.” (A12)

This reflects the intertextuality of distal and proximal discourses through the connectedness of private and public selves. The phrase “at first” signals spiralling inversion, indicating that connectedness initially dominated before separateness became more prominent over time. Segmentation ambiguity also intersected with self-subjugation, as the dominance of the public persona complicated separation. Another participant described similar ambiguity in intimate relationships: “I realised they weren’t really interested in who I am; they were interested in the guy on stage and in the music videos ... And yeah, that led to some disappointments too” (A10). Here, segmentation ambiguity and self-subjugation occurred, as the public persona was foregrounded in a relational context where the private self was generally preferred.

Self-segmentation as neutral. A few respondents described self-segmentation in neutral terms without evaluative language. For example, one noted that such practices were simply “pretty common things that just tend to happen” (A2). In this sense, self-segmentation emerged as a routine aspect of the artist profession and everyday interactions.

DISCUSSION

Negotiating between the private and public selves appears to be a prevalent and ongoing interpersonal practice during celebrification. In relation to the first and second research questions, our findings indicate that these negotiations are animated through the

communicative patterns of self-subjugation, self-segmentation and self-demotion. These meaning-systems were identified from discursive interplays between concealing versus disclosing the private self, being positioned as the private self versus public persona, separateness versus connectedness of the selves, and equality versus inequality in relation to others. The third research question sought to determine which praxis patterns supported the private self during celebrification. We found that self-subjugation narrows the possibilities for being to those permitted by the public persona, whereas self-demotion and self-segmentation enable the private self to be sustained as a part of a dialogic self.

Self-subjugation emerged in non-professional interpersonal interactions when the public persona was positioned as the expected and socially validated identity, aligning with prior research on the prominence of the public persona (e.g. Adler & Adler 1989; Maheshwari 2019). The suppression of the private self appears connected to the privileged positioning of the public persona and the accompanying obligation to maintain it, both of which limit individual agency and self-disclosure. Foregrounding the public persona may restrict relational openness, complicating the formation and maintenance of close relationships in which self-continuity is sustained (see Sedikides et al. 2016). Moreover, the amalgamation of private and public selves fosters misinterpretations of persona-related discourses as reflections of the private individual. This pattern generated social disorientation, manifesting as confusion, disconnection and unpredictability in interpersonal interactions. In close relationships, asymmetrical power dynamics and other persona-related discourses challenge relational norms and undermine meaningful interaction, thereby restricting opportunities for self-negotiation and the preservation of the private self. Overall, the findings indicate that in the context of celebrification, the private self is constricted through communicative practices that uphold relational asymmetry, limit individual agency and self-disclosure, and blur the boundaries between the private and public selves.

A central aim of this study was to identify discursive patterns that support the private self during celebrification. Among these, self-demotion emerged as the most salient. Self-demotion refers to interactions in which the public persona is pushed to the margins, thereby enabling relational symmetry. In doing so, self-demotion challenges the culturally prevalent discourse that positions celebrities as socially centred individuals and disrupts the intrinsic power differentials associated with celebrity (see Marwick & Boyd 2011). Our findings demonstrate that self-demotion underscores a form of resistance to celebrity power in interpersonal contexts, while not negating the existence or value of the public persona. Rather, it limits its relevance in contexts such as close relationships, where relational norms call for symmetry. Self-demotion fosters personal disclosure, egalitarian interaction and equality through symmetrisation. Such relational reconfiguration reflects a transition towards a more equal distribution of interpersonal attention and social power, thereby challenging taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in celebrity interactions. Although relational symmetry is co-constructed with others and may therefore require time and consistency, it can be initiated by celebrities expressing a desire for equal treatment or by fans respecting celebrities' private space in unexpected encounters.

Self-demotion appears most salient in interactions with significant others, where reciprocal self-disclosure and shared relational histories enable negotiation of the private self. Because existing relationships carry precedent meanings of the private self, they allow for its continuity when interpersonal (proximal) links between past and present selves are recalled (see Chen, Boucher & Molly 2006). Therefore, maintaining existing relationships with those who knew the individual prior to celebrification may help sustain the private self. Importantly, celebrity practitioners must establish clear boundaries between private and public selves, as the

private self can only be sustained when recognised as distinct from the public persona. The normalisation of disclosing personal information for public consumption (see Klostermann et al. 2023) underscores the importance of regulating self-disclosure and clarifying which aspects of the self remain private. Broader cultural discourses also shape how self-demotion unfolds. For instance, in Finnish communication culture, where personal privacy is commonly valued (see Wilkins & Isotalus 2009), opportunities for self-demotion may be more accessible. Future research across cultural contexts and celebrity domains could provide deeper insights into how cultural (distal) discourses shape private self-negotiations.

In addition to self-demotion, our findings point to self-segmentation as another pattern through which the private self is sustained. Self-segmentation enables the maintenance of both private and public selves through their separation and compartmentalisation across relational contexts. The participants consistently described the public persona as an identity confined to work occasions, whereas its presence in non-professional interactions was perceived as disorienting. Self-segmentation may help safeguard the private self by distancing it from the public persona and its associated discourses, which largely remain beyond individual control. Maintaining clear boundaries between private and public selves can mitigate some challenges associated with celebrity status. Strategies such as creating a visually distinct persona or adopting a stage name may reinforce these boundaries for music celebrities. When the private self is acknowledged as distinct from the public persona, it may ultimately gain stronger footing as a socially valid identity. Future research could examine whether self-segmentation consistently supports the sustenance of the private self in the context of celebrity production.

Collectively, the discursive patterns of self-subjugation, self-demotion and self-segmentation underscore the central role of interpersonal communication in private/public self-negotiation. This study demonstrates how private and public selves compete in interpersonal meaning-making processes, where the multiplicity of the dialogic self is either contracted or expanded through communication. Expansive patterns of self-demotion and self-segmentation are associated with a dialogically rich self and enhanced relational and personal wellbeing through recognition of the private self. By contrast, the contractive pattern of self-subjugation reflects a more monological view of the self through the suppression of the private self. Moving towards a dialogically rich self that sustains the private self, self-demotion and self-segmentation appear beneficial, as they enable the maintenance of individual agency, contextual boundaries, regulated self-disclosure and relational symmetry. Building on these findings, future studies could investigate how feelings and emotions are communicated, regulated and reconstructed in negotiations of the private and public selves. Such inquiry would further develop our understanding of the discursive constitution of the self during celebrification and in social life more broadly, where private and public interactions are increasingly intertwined.

The limitations of this study primarily concern the small sample size, emphasising the need for further research with larger and more diverse populations. Recruitment of celebrities remains a methodological challenge, given that the pool of suitable participants is inevitably restricted and often difficult to access. Future studies could also benefit from incorporating the perspectives of all relational parties, including significant others, to explore how they perceive these negotiations and the strains of publicity. The cultural context of Finland was not examined in depth, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. However, given that previous studies have examined the sociocultural dimensions of celebrity and public persona more extensively, our focus on interpersonal interactions is justified. Despite these limitations, this study offers valuable insights into how interpersonal communication underpins negotiations of private and public selves and the challenges they entail. Practical implications for sustaining the private self can inform the development of protocols to support the wellbeing of celebrity

practitioners across various fields. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of the private self, which is essential for both personal and relational wellbeing yet vulnerable in increasingly public environments.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is part of the first author's doctoral studies, which have been supported by the Finnish Cultural Foundation under Grant 00240586. We thank Evelyn Diaz Añago from Scribendi for English language editing.

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