

TEENAGERS, FANDOM, AND IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses collective and individual identity construction processes in adolescent fan communities mediated by multimodal discourse. The theoretical framework relies on Jenkins, Itō, and Boyd (2015), Holland and Lave (2009), and Marshall, Moore, and Barbour (2015). Our approach is rooted in participant observation and supported by ethnographic work with teenage girls who belong to music communities built around One Direction, Justin Bieber, and Magcon. Firstly, we will show how participating in communities of practice such as through undertaking tasks which give meaning to group activities contributes to the construction of a social and cultural identity supported by the interpretation, production, and dissemination of texts. Secondly, we will examine how subjective and personal identities related to feelings, emotions, and situations are supported by the fan community, which is organised around the celebrity's public persona.

KEY WORDS

Fans; Community; Adolescence; Subjectivity; Intimacy; Identity; Individual

INTRODUCTION

This paper analyses identity construction processes in adolescent music fan communities mediated by multimodal discourse. Relationships between young people allow for communication about interpretations of the world, values, and knowledge, which contribute to establishing group and individual identities. The concept of persona (Marshall & Barbour 2015; Marshall, Moore & Barbour 2015) allows for an understanding of the production, dissemination, and exchange of public and personal identity. Here we incorporate persona studies with other theoretical frameworks (Jenkins, Itō & Boyd 2015; Holland & Lave 2009) to expand notions of the construction of fan identity. This process is organised around the public persona of celebrities, focusing on how these people present and represent themselves (Barbour 2014) in public spaces.

We consider fans to be people who have a positive emotional relationship with something or someone famous, such as a celebrity. Fans may express admiration by recognising the celebrity's style or creativity within the framework of popular culture. Fans are often involved in specific communities which give rise to certain practices and social roles (Duffett 2013). In addition to this, and above all, fans are interpreters of texts, with these texts underpinning the construction of their identities (Jenkins 2013).

It is clear that fans' everyday practices, particularly their relationships with texts, contribute to defining their identities, which can be understood as a performance of a persona. This is the way a personal reaction is transformed into a social response. Fans construct their identity and subjectivity as a person who feels like a fan in a contradictory context. They receive

both support from the community and criticism from certain groups, while also often being stereotyped, and produce their fan identities in adverse conditions (Jenkins 2014).

Furthermore, specific community practices support the personal and collective identity construction process, which is organised around celebrities. Marshall and Barbour (2015, p. 9) define celebrities as “public presentations of the self and they inhabit the active negotiation of the individual defined and reconfigured as social phenomenon”. Our aim in this paper is to examine how teens interact with the celebrity’s persona to build their own individual and collective identity as fans. We focus on the celebrity’s persona, which is presented via multimodal text and rebuilt by adolescent girls. This multimodal celebrity persona affects the configuration of the teen fans’ own identities.

THEORETICAL FRAMING

Considering the fans’ identity construction process in light of a number of theoretical approaches to persona and identity performance allows us to understand how the fans interact with the celebrity persona. Reflecting on data and theoretical interpretation allows us to look more closely at the fans’ identity construction processes.

Firstly, as we have already highlighted, the fans’ contact with the celebrity’s persona contributes to the construction of their individual and collective identities (Holland & Lave 2009). This interaction takes place online most of the time. There, the celebrity’s self is presented on a public stage and closely linked to social networks. Celebrities organise what they want fans to perceive. They build a public personality, which we understand as a persona, a public self that is extended among fans. This public persona is supported by emotion and sentiment, and takes both individual and collective forms (Marshall 2014a). We are also interested in how the texts provided by celebrities or other members of the fan community are reconstructed. In the context of this public dimension of the celebrity’s identity, the concept of registers of performance (Barbour 2014) is of particular interest. Registers of performance are related to the impression that a performance seeks to, or manages to, produce in the audience. These registers refer to three areas: public, private, and intimate. The performance acquires different features in relation to each of these areas.

Secondly, we will interpret the practices of One Direction fans. These fans participate in collective enterprises within their fan community that give meaning to their activities. In our study, some of the adolescents are involved in more than one community. In all cases, the fans generate shared goals, which gradually give rise to a group identity. This is also related to the development of a civic imagination, which is linked to the origins of political consciousness (Jenkins, Itō & Boyd 2015). Interaction within the community is supported by the interpretation of multimodal texts (Jenkins 2013). Those texts are produced by the celebrity’s persona, and understood in relation to his/her public identity (Barbour, Marshall & Moore 2014). Screenshots are particularly useful to allow us to explore the presentation of these texts and the fans’ interpretive practices (Moore 2014).

Thirdly, based on the Justin Bieber fan community, we will explore how reconstructions of the celebrity and the celebrity’s music contribute to the identity construction process through personal and collective memories. We define these reconstructions in relation to meetings that occur on more than one occasion, creating the impression of a continuous presence (Goffman 1990). We will show how young girls become productive global and local actresses whose public and private feelings intersect, which contributes to generating their identities as individuals (Wargo 2015). The concept of micropublics (Marshall 2014a) is relevant to this analysis, as it helps us understand how the celebrity is configured through the community.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, we look at fans' practices, both in the physical world and on social networks, which we understand to be part of fan culture. We adopt an ethnographical approach. As participant researchers, we are present in two music fan communities—One Direction and Justin Bieber—which has allowed us to observe the evolution of the young fans' identities. In both communities, relationships between fans are mediated by the creation, distribution, and interpretation of multimodal texts (Kress 2003).

A presence in the field and daily contact with the participants are essential in ethnography (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007; Manning & Adams 2015). Participant observation involves, firstly, a commitment to the activities, and, secondly, data recording using specific instruments. The data collection strategies need to be planned, although the researcher must be flexible in terms of modifying or expanding them. We recorded the conversations in audio and, occasionally, in video. We always used a professional recorder, an iPhone, and an iPad. Under no circumstances did these instruments cause distractions or become a focal point themselves. Our data, from which we will extract a series of examples, comes from research undertaken in these contexts. Subsequently, we will provide more detailed descriptions relating to each of the two communities in which we participated.

The analysis reported here stems from data collected during fieldwork within these fan communities. Firstly, the researcher's summaries were compiled each day, and include descriptions and interpretations of what has happened in the field; secondly, the researchers collected audio, photographs, and videos related to multimodal fan discourse (Kress 2010); and thirdly, transcripts and audio recordings of discussions with fans were analysed. Data analysis interprets the fans' meaning-construction processes. To make this possible, the data and the meaning-construction process need to be examined in the social and cultural contexts in which our research takes place: the fan community.

BUILDING AN IDENTITY FROM A COMMUNITY CREATED AROUND THE CELEBRITY'S PERSONA

The case we address here is an ethnographic study carried out during the 2014–15 European academic year. After meeting the five participants—girls aged 13 and 14 years old—at workshops carried out in formal and informal education environments (see Lacasa, de-la-Fuente & Martín-Garrido 2016), we had repeated contact and held informal conversations and interviews through the study (Lacasa, Méndez & de-la-Fuente 2016). The girls were friends and followed different music groups of which they openly declared themselves to be fans. There are the two bands and one solo artist at the core to this study: firstly, One Direction, a pop band formed in 2010 comprising five London-based teen boys. One Direction have crowds of highly active followers who participate in numerous social networks. Secondly, the study participants were fans of Magcon, a music group formed of much less well-known teenagers aged between 16 and 20. Magcon are famous thanks to videos posted on the Internet (Twitter, Instagram and Vine) and the members have achieved fame both individually and as a group. Fan communities contribute significantly to the presence of these celebrities on social networks.

Approaching music fan communities

Here, we explore how the process of identity construction takes place in the framework of a community; how it is inseparable from the interaction of the self with others, including the celebrity's persona; and finally, how the fans—the text's interpreters—build their personal and public identities with, and through, the celebrity persona.

Teen fan communities organised around music celebrities are often considered an example of counterculture, opposed to adult values. People who follow and admire a celebrity may belong to these communities. While the Internet has transformed these communities, several aspects remain unchanged, such as musical fascination, romantic ideology, and an emphasis on the idol or idols (Duffett 2014).

The notion of a fan community can be extended and developed through various theoretical perspectives. Lave and Wenger (1991) focused on communities of practice, which are groups of people who share values, goals, and ways of acting. Within fan communities, these groups are organised around the celebrity or text. Sometimes, fans in the community are guided by other members who are more experienced in certain types of tasks. For example, members with the greatest number of followers can become models to imitate and retweet for the less-experienced. Usually, those who teach are distinguished with a certain social power. This power, which is not always explicit, contributes to configuring social relationships.

We can take this analysis further still. Jenkins framed his own academic career through the fan community. His explanation of his evolution is based on that community, which is focused, in one way or another, on the idea of participation associated with civic engagement. He speaks of "civic imagination" and refers to the possible sources of political consciousness (Jenkins, Itō & Boyd 2015, p. 152). In this context, fan communities inspired Jenkins' proposal of the concept of participatory culture linked to digital society. Participatory culture is one with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement which provides strong support for creators through mentorships (Jenkins et al. 2009).



Figure 1. Fans around the celebrity: a text on social network

The fan phenomenon is old, but has been transformed by today's social networks, which are part of digital and participatory culture. As we shall see, texts are transmitted and transformed through social networks. From another, complementary, perspective, Marshall (2014a) approaches social interaction in digital networks by focusing on "micropublics", represented by individuals communicating online. These individuals may be friends, followers, or fans in the case of this work. They are considered to be personas presenting "the self on and through digitally networked spaces, where the self presented is an extension of an individual" (Barbour 2014, p. 3.).

For example, Figure 1 shows various elements that may be considered in a fan community today, as adolescents participate in digital society as micropublics. In the photograph, we can see the celebrity coming out of a car while his fans, young people, use the

cameras on their mobiles. In addition to this, two or three older people seem to protect Niall Horan, one of the musicians in One Direction.

Figure 1 suggests several ideas. Firstly, the people surrounding the celebrity represent the community that has emerged from a shared sense of admiration for the celebrity. Only some fans are present physically, but they represent many others who do not have the opportunity to be as close to the celebrity and instead learn about his activities through social networks (Lave & Wenger 1991). Secondly, the fans have mobile devices that allow them to record images of the moment and share them online so other fans can access them (Kress 2003; Moore 2014). Thirdly, some people seem to be protecting the celebrity's person; in this case, they are seeking to ensure his physical safety, but they could also represent producers protecting their business interests. In short, fans are placed in new contexts comprising new places and practices through which they can develop personal and collective identities.

Interacting with the celebrity's persona

The celebrity projects certain images, both offline, through direct or indirect contact with fans, and online, through the way they present themselves on social networks. Fans construct their identities by addressing the celebrity's persona. That construction is mixed with feelings of admiration and affection for the celebrity. We uphold that identity construction can be defined as a dynamic process, rooted in a person's history and providing the backdrop for their actions. It is also associated with motivation and emotion.



Figure 2. Fans and popular culture

An example of approaching the celebrity can be seen in the two images included in Figure 2, which have been shared by the celebrities to construct a public persona. Both were relevant for one of our teenage participants. The one on the left was stored in her iPhone, and the one on the right was retweeted. The images reveal that belonging to a fan community does not preclude a fan from admiring several other celebrities: in the case of this teenager, One Direction and Magcon. The images in Figure 2 show both the power of the celebrity and the community in the adolescent fan context. Both express her ideals and values.

These two images unify the community at the same time as they reinforce personal feelings, contributing to the fans' personal and collective identity construction. Both images appear on the official accounts of two celebrities and are valuable to the girl. The image on the left is related to @Harrystyles, a member of One Direction. In the picture, he's making a joke and sharing it with his audience because he knows it's relevant to their fans. The image on the right

is a photograph of one of the girl's favourite singers, Shaun Mendez. Here, the celebrity appears in the foreground in front of the fans at a concert in Spain. This location is visually represented by the flag that appears in the image. At that time, the celebrity's offline persona, during a concert in Madrid, is being presented through a tweet. The picture was also tweeted by one of the members of One Direction, and retweeted by the fans. It is another example of the interaction achieved through the presentation of the celebrity persona.

Interpreters and producers of texts

In order to understand fan communities and the interaction they have with the celebrity persona, we need to focus on the texts that circulate among the participants. In these texts, fans constantly rebuild their values, feelings, and knowledge. Jenkins (2013) considers fans to be interpreters of texts; they are people who are part of a culture, approaching certain values, ways of being, and feelings, all expressed through texts. Jenkins recognises the influence of two theorists in developing his own ideas. The first is Pierre Bourdieu (1984), who considers that these particular feelings are associated with social experiences. Feelings are reinforced by exchanges and meetings, mediated by texts, which represent an education in terms of becoming part of the fan community. The second is Michel de Certeau (1984), who shows how authors and readers are immersed in a confrontation over who owns the text itself and who has control of its meanings.

From this perspective, Jenkins argues that behind fans' activities there are transgressive practices that go far beyond what is standard in middle-class communities. What is essential, perhaps, is that popular texts have the same value as canonical texts. Fans talk of artists where others see only commercial products. Fans see transcendent meanings where others see banalities. They see quality and innovation where others see only convention. To be a fan, Jenkins (2013) argues, is to assume a subordinate position within a cultural hierarchy. It is to accept an identity that is constantly criticised by institutions like schools and academia, which are considered as being representative of a particular culture. Jenkins understands fans as active, manipulative producers of meaning. They build their social identity by borrowing and transforming mass media images, which are sometimes hidden by the dominant media culture.

Jenkins (2013, p. xxix) defines fans as people who construct their identities in affinity spaces, mediated by texts. They are text nomads. Reading in fan communities is a social process, where individual interpretations merge through discussions with other readers, which expands the text beyond the initial consumer experience. They are also considered text pirates, as they physically reconstruct them. In any case, the meaning-construction process is dynamic. Fans choose texts because they seem more able than others to express specific feelings, not only feelings of fascination, but also of frustration. This antagonistic motivation is what causes them to engage with the text. Fans understand that although they transform the texts, they do not own them exclusively.

In understanding this transformation of texts, we must also look at how texts circulate throughout the community and contribute to enhanced emotional support among members. Figure 3 offers an example of this, demonstrating how this emotional support generates a collective identity around the celebrity's persona. The people who retweeted the image are an example of the micropublic that participate in social networks, reconstructing the text..



Figure 3. Texts circulate and are reconstructed

Software applications (apps) and mobile devices, which mediate relationships between fans, give rise to these new types of relationships in fan communities. Social networks create new ways of generating and distributing messages and connecting with like-minded others. In addition to this, these scenarios involve the use of specific discourses. Audio-visual codes have greater importance than writing or drawing, although the latter two have not disappeared. Communication scenarios and the discourses used have been transformed, as have the channels that make them possible. Figure 3 shows how content is transformed through the network. It combines two photographs, both of which were supplied by Jack Johnson, on the singer's official account. Both were then retweeted, as shown in the image of Google search results above. If we look closely, we can see that the same image is accompanied by different written messages.

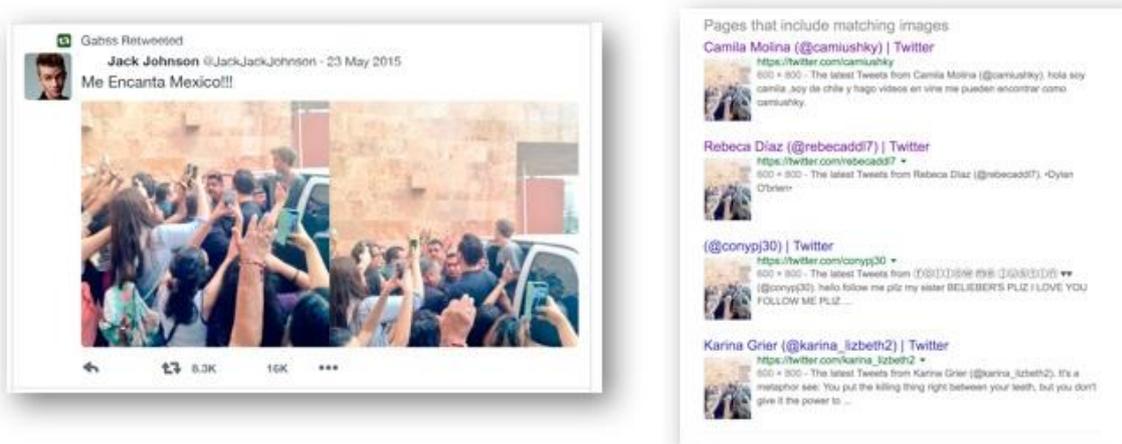


Figure 4. Sharing feelings and multimodal discourses

Social networks also facilitate the social expression of personal feelings. Figure 4 shows how social networks are used to express fans' shared feelings. The image on the left is a tweet comprising a selfie and text. It focuses on Nash, the celebrity to whom the fan dedicates her selfie, even though the celebrity always "ignores" her direct messages. The tweet on the right is a remix, including both an image and words. The text, which says "I miss the old #MAGCON. I love you so much", expresses regret as a feeling.

The images and written text included in Figure 4 are an example of how the girls built their feelings around the celebrity's persona. We found two different approaches. The first

image, on the left, shows that the girl is looking for a personal online relationship: a direct message to her that never arrived. The second image expresses a feeling of nostalgia. It was built from photographs representing the members of Magcon at a given moment in the history of the band. However, some band members left and were replaced by other people while the group kept the same name. The teenager misses them; she preferred the old members.



Figure 5. National identity in the fan community

Other examples show how the One Direction fan community is also a platform to share values which sometimes extends to socially important topics. Figure 5 shows a sense of national identity. It features Spanish flags and other symbols that show how the adolescents recognise themselves not only as fans, but also as members of a specific national community. The images are also a remix of various different moments when the celebrity's persona appears alongside symbols of national identity. For example, the image on the left shows One Direction wearing the t-shirts of the Spanish national Soccer team as well as t-shirts of the two most famous teams in Spain, Barcelona and Real Madrid. These photographs are interspersed with those of their concerts. Moreover, in the image on the right, the musicians display the Spanish flag. This could be interpreted as a feedback process: first, how the musicians appear in front of their fans supporting their national identity and, second, how the fans assume the message and retweet it.

To summarise, these images show how people participating in fan communities have shared feelings and values, and participate in specific practices created around the celebrity's persona mediated by digital tools. These shared endeavours generate a collective consciousness and are a point of support for the construction of personal identities. Although the phenomenon is not new, what has changed are the practices used in the community to establish contact with the celebrity and between the fans themselves to share their hopes and desires. Social networks have opened multiple doors in terms of how to establish these relationships, achieve certain goals, and allow participants to offer each other emotional support (Marshall & Redmond 2016; Duffett 2014; Redmond 2014).

MUSIC AS A MILESTONE OF MEMORIES AND PERSONAL HISTORY

Cultural identity, which is generated from specific communities, is intertwined with the construction of personal subjectivity (Holland & Lave 2009). Although Holland and Lave analyse environmental activities, the concepts they use can be applied to the fan community, conceptualising "personal identities as psychological formations [...] as complexes of memories, sentiments, knowledge and ideas of environmental action that one can evoke via cultural

symbols of identity” (2009, p. 8). Therefore, personal identity is rooted not only in action, but also in the memories and the feelings associated with that action. Marshall and Redmond (2016, p. 9) note that

stars and celebrities can provide the interest “glue” that can bring people together in the first place; ongoing fandom can provide the social setting for a range of shared (subcultural) activities (...); and one's memories, spectacle events, and rituals can be marked by the inclusion or incorporation of celebrity texts and contexts. Celebrities are our common companions; they are a key “narrative” in the intimacies we make, and in the stories we tell and share.

Celebrity therefore serves as a “glue” at the collective level. It contributes to raising awareness about certain cultural practices which are present in personal narratives such as memories. We will look at the role of the celebrity’s persona in the construction of the fans’ personal histories. We will focus on what it means for the girls to be fans and the role of the celebrity’s persona in the construction of their personal and collective identities, based on the stories we were told by the teenagers. Our examples will come from a different fan community, organised around Justin Bieber.

One of the researchers established a deep, personal connection with a number of fans prior to a Justin Bieber concert held in Madrid on 23 November, 2016. The week before the concert took place, the researcher spent four hours a day with the girls on the street as a participant observer. This was the starting point for an ethnographic study (Lacasa, Méndez & de-la-Fuente 2016) which is currently underway. Studies by Denzin (2014) and Marshall, Moore, and Barbour (2015) consider people as if they are performers. In this case, both the researcher and the fans are considered as performers. A written summary of the researcher’s interpretations of what happened each day was added to the recordings. The fragment below includes the researcher’s reflections taken from the summary she wrote on the last day:

Fragment 1. The researcher’s summary

I must admit that being close to these girls for almost four hours a day for a whole week gave me a different view to the one I had held since I began interacting with One Direction fans. Justin’s fans were expecting to see him really soon, and emotions were running high. Something they had been waiting a long time for was about to happen. In some way, I almost became a Justin Bieber fan myself. For example, I had to use their terminology to refer to the singer, calling him simply Justin, enquiring about his personality, and above all about his music. That changed my perspective as a researcher. I couldn’t be at home analysing what academic texts say about fans, when a hugely relevant event for this fan community was happening practically on my doorstep.

Madrid, 23 November 2016

The text above shows how the researcher, who simultaneously undertakes her work as a participant observer and as a performer (Goffman 1990; Denzin 2014; Marshall, Moore & Barbour 2015), was introduced into the community and gradually became familiar with the fans, even adapting some dimensions of her own personal identity as a researcher (Lave 2011). Also, she explains that the circumstances under which the interview was carried out gave rise to certain aspects that were, perhaps, not present in her relationships with other fan communities. This could be interpreted as situated cognition (Lave 1997) and performance (Goffman 1990).

To gain a deeper insight into this researcher’s perspective, we analysed the two pictures in Figure 6, which summarise her presence in the community.



Figure 6. The researcher's perspective of the fan community

The photographs, taken by the researcher, show the fans' situation during the week prior to the concert, and the material elements that contributed to the organisation of their daily life. In the left image, the fans appear sitting on the street in small groups. At the time the photograph was taken it was almost dark. There are bags containing supplies to help them camp until the next day. The image on the right shows the mobile phone, essential in this situation, both for the fans and the researcher. It kept fans in touch with the community, as well as with their families. Moreover, it was a companion for the researcher to take notes and record the situation.

The researcher's reflections and the pictures above show how her participation in the fan community changed over time. She participated in fan culture through her presence and interactions with the fans in individual and small group interviews. The researcher is a performer reconstructing her public persona among the girls (Marshall & Barbour 2015). Her reflections, written and recorded, also reveal the role of material objects, and even a sense of the physical environment that was created over the days leading up to the concert. The researcher interviewed the girls informally and accessed their social media accounts on the same day that the interviews were carried out. From that moment onwards, weekly contact was established with the girls through Twitter and Instagram.

Identity and memory in the fan community

Goffman (1990) links the construction of identity to the concept of the person who is present in a community. The construction of the self also relies on actions and goals. These are demonstrated through activities that can be described as performances, forms of human conduct that provoke an emotional reaction in another person when an encounter takes place. In this sense, fans can be viewed as performers when other people recognise their identities. That is, the individual fan must act to project the image that he/she wants to convey as a public persona (Barbour 2014). Let's see an example of the fan's interview to see how this happens among Justin Bieber's fans:

Fragment 2. Being in touch with Beliebers

We knew Beliebers through Twitter. We participate in competitions and organise meetups for the concerts. Also, through there we met a lot of people, and we created a WhatsApp group to talk about Justin, his songs, the concerts, the awards... to catch up.

Juana, Madrid, 22 November 2016

Juana participated in the Beliebers fan community using Twitter. By presenting herself as a Belieber, she created a public persona sharing goals and values with other people with similar interests. In some ways, she was performing to be part of the community. Moreover, she was happy to have more personal relationships with some of these people using WhatsApp.

We will take Bakhtin's work as our starting point to go deeper into other examples and explore the identity construction process. The process through which the fans construct their personas is what Bakhtin (1981) would call a dialogue, both with themselves and with others. Dialogue is understood as the possibility of cohabitation and interference among different voices, as the interaction between points of view. Focusing on his concept of dialogue, Bakhtin reflects on how identity goes beyond the individual persona and is related to people's activities and goals in the context of personal and group scenarios (Morson & Emerson 1990, p. 216). This means that identity is not given to people, but rather it is created, which means it is dynamic. Following Bakhtin's understanding of identity, we see identity creation is not so much a question of building a sense of wholeness; rather, the consciousness requires goals and values. In addition, that consciousness can be expressed from an autobiographical standpoint; one divides oneself in two to be able to dialogue with oneself.

In neither biography nor autobiography does I-for-myself determine the crucial moment of form. They cannot do so, because both genres tell a story of the self from the outside. In autobiography, the story is told by a sort of double, projected and assembled by the I-for-myself; in biography, real others tell the story. If one imagines an ideal biography of oneself, it would be told not by oneself, but by "that potential other" who is "with us when we look at ourselves in the mirror, when we dream of glory, when we lay down the external plans for our life" (Morson & Emerson 1990, p. 217).

One way of becoming aware of one's own identity is to convey it through an autobiography, which differs from a biography or a confession. It is a form of dialogue with "the other", which sometimes involves splitting "the I" in two. In our study, when the girls speak of themselves as fans, we believe that they are making a confession. In Bakhtin's words: "In confession, the self is unfinalizable; it does not even admit of another who could consummate it" (Morson & Emerson 1990, pp. 216-217). Autobiography, in contrast, is closer to finalisation; people are perhaps seeking an ideal "I", which does not appear to be a factor in the identity awareness shown by fans.

To demonstrate that this tends to be the case, we present the reflections of África, another girl who explains her evolution as a fan more explicitly.

Fragment 3. Being a fan as part of your identity

Before I used to be (...) a massive fan, it was quite extreme, like, I'd buy 40,000 photos, if a T-shirt came out I'd buy that too, I don't know, any trinkets there were, bracelets, badges, anything, I'd buy anything. But I have matured now, I mean, I'm interested because I like his music and stuff and the way he is as a person, but it's not as extreme as it used to be. And well, I still like him because he is Justin Bieber and he's part of me... I love him, he is a great artist and I love him.

África, Madrid, 23 November 2016

These ideas are useful to interpret the image that fans have of themselves and the image that they want to project onto others. This example is drawn from the interviews, as are all the examples provided over the following pages. For example, Rosa (Madrid, 22 November 2016) appreciates Justin Bieber's music. This is not because she's objectively interested in it, or

because she analyses it critically, but rather because it generates a specific emotion in her; it was part of her adolescence, and this is true of most of these fans. As Rosa mentioned, “‘You've never met him personally’, people always say that and you say, ‘I know, but his music has been with me when I didn’t know who to be with’, I mean (...) you create a bond without meaning to”. She recognises that this is often not what people mean when they talk about fans.

What África and Rosa convey in their interviews is a confession, according to the terms used by Bakhtin (Morson & Emerson 1990). They describe their relationships with Justin Bieber, mediated in both cases by his music. The artist’s persona becomes part of the adolescent identity, either because he contributes to marking the stages of the evolution of that identity, as in Rosa’s case, or because material objects linked to him contribute to configuring their identity, as in África’s case.

Seeking an example and a source of support

In this final part of the paper we will analyse how, among the Beliebers, the celebrity and his music represent a source of support to help the adolescents overcome difficulties at certain times in their lives. This is experienced more at the personal than at the group level. In this context, Hassan’s (2014) work is relevant. Hassan’s study explores the role of musical activity in the daily lives of a group of adults with learning difficulties. The difficult situations in which these people live force them to overcome conflicts like the ones that Justin Bieber’s fans occasionally mention. We will now look at how Justin Bieber’s fans also refer to the role of the music and the singer in helping them overcome their own difficulties. The girls are aware of this role and express it verbally. The two transcribed fragments below, coming from an interview, are good examples of this.

Fragment 4. Almost a friend

He makes me feel good, sometimes when I have felt really bad he's made me feel as good as a friend would have done. I don't know. And I've been listening to him for a really long time, I basically grew up with him, that is, whether you like it or not... I don't know. Before (now not so much) I was such a fan of Justin, a huge fan of Justin Bieber. He is pretty much my adolescence and my pre-teen years, so I don't know, he reminds me of a lot of things...

Luisa, Madrid, 21 November 2016

Music is a mediator between shared memories, actions, the act of overcoming difficulties, and a common sense of belonging to the group. It can therefore be a personal and social tool to help achieve multiple goals. Loving music is an integral part of communication and of the identity construction process for many people who have occasional difficulties. Hassan’s work (2014) shows the importance of seeking new research approaches to fan practices. Below is another example:

Fragment 5. It helps us to overcome problems

When you feel alone or you've been through a bad time, you think, if he's been able to overcome all he's been through, then why shouldn't I? It makes you feel stronger, you can listen to one of his songs and it cheers you up. You go: come on, I have to do this, I have to get there.

María José, Madrid, 21 November, 2016

In this case it is the singer, who has had difficulties in the past, who provides a role model for overcoming struggles. This feeling is almost interlinked with the experience of listening to his music. Justin Bieber presents his difficulties through the lyrics of his songs and thereby becomes an example for his fans. It is important to note that fans are different from casual spectators.

Fans make a significant emotional investment in cultural objects, in this case the musical text itself, which involves a subjective reconstruction.

CONCLUSION

This study analyses the construction of collective and personal identities in fan communities organised around the celebrity's persona. We adopted an ethnographic approach based on a process of interaction between the data and certain proposed theoretical models. Our goal was to advance the design of a model that contributes to understanding teen practices in fan communities.

This model comes from reflecting on the data that came from our presence as participating observers. The model is also inspired by several authors: Marshall, who looks at the celebrity; Jenkins, who explores the fan community through the texts circulating in it; and Duffett, who focuses on the emotional dimension of fan activities. It should be noted that we wanted to look for what complements these models. Each one is rooted in different theoretical traditions and brings its own gaze, converging at some points and differing at others. In short, we have explored the celebrity persona and the fan communities that are organised around it, considering the elements that contribute to the construction of the fans' collective and individual identity.

The fan community is organised around the celebrity, who projects a public persona which gains meaning in a social world (Marshall 2014b). The celebrity contributes to building collective representations that arise when fans share values and goals, agglutinated to some extent around it. They identify as part of a group that shares goals, values, and feelings, organised and articulated around the celebrity (Duffett 2014; Marshall & Redmond 2016).

For a collective identity to be created, the fans must look to interact not only among themselves, but also with the celebrity persona, who in turn maintains that contact, contributing to the generation of this collective identity. The cultural industries support the process (Marshall 2014a), for example, by spreading their messages through social networks. They transmit multiple facets of the celebrity such as his/her daily life, family, or affective relationships, etc. They also present the celebrity's public persona, built collectively, for example, images of the concerts where all the attendees respond to the celebrity, supporting their own individual identity.

In this context, multimodal texts are particularly relevant. They act as mediators in the contacts for building a collective identity. This is all bound together through the production of collective texts, not just one but many texts shared on social networks. In this sense, fans are considered as nomads and pirates of texts (Jenkins 2013). The fans are an interpretative community immersed in certain traditions. Today the community extends over the Internet and texts are rebuilt. Remaking and publishing them indicates a form of social commitment. Individual interpretation or authorship is less relevant than the recognition of a collective production (Jenkins, Itō & Boyd 2015).

However, the fact that fans show a sense of belonging to the community does not mean that they forget the role that the celebrity has played in their personal and individual lives. When we invited the girls to think about what that celebrity meant to them, they told us that it was linked to the memories of a certain moment in their lives. They approached the celebrity from the music, since they had built their own identity as individuals around it (Duffett 2014). Our interpretations and findings are in alignment with the findings and theories of other researchers (Morson & Emerson 1990; Goffman 1990; Marshall & Redmond 2016). We looked

at the role of memories in the construction of the self, from the perspective of a subjective identity in which both personal and collective dimensions are present. For fans, the celebrity was more than a musician because the music becomes a vehicle for intimacy around which the adolescent identity is organised as a way of living in and understanding the world. Emotions were intense, and, in most cases, were linked to the music, although there is also an attraction to the celebrities themselves.

Furthermore, at an individual level, celebrities can become a model and even a form of support for the teens' feelings. Music not only evokes common values, but also similar experiences. Both the celebrity and the fans need to overcome difficulties in their own personal lives. Being part of a community of fans creates situations that allow individuals to overcome personal problems (Hassan 2014). Other fans, and even the difficulties that the celebrity has experienced, become an anchor for help to surmount personal problems.

In short, we believe that the data explored in this paper and the interpretations coming from different theoretical models open new doors to examine the relationships between the celebrity persona and those who recognise themselves as their fans. Especially relevant are the practices of teenagers, particularly adolescent girls, who spend a great deal of their free time participating in communities and collective endeavours, looking for what they may not find in other aspects of their everyday lives.

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