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Interpersonal dynamics of fame: celebrity discourses in commercial music artist's romantic relationships

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ABSTRACT

Commercial music artists seek celebrity capital, which has central value in the music industry and broader society. Previous literature suggests that besides advantages, fame is connected to interpersonal issues in close relationships. The marginalised celebrity discourses emerging from well-known artists' close interpersonal relationships are examined to better understand the interpersonal dynamics of fame. Relational dialectics theory is applied to study celebrity discourses in the romantic relationships of 11 Finnish music artists. Contrapuntal analysis of the data indicates that fame emerges as competing celebrity discourses privileging separateness, closedness, asymmetry, publicity and inauthenticity. The discursive interplays illuminate the dominating celebrity persona, increased mistrust, social and emotional distance, and asymmetrical power dynamics in artists' romantic relationships. These meanings are linked to decreased self-disclosure and increased social distance, which are negatively connected to relationship formation and maintenance. The dominant perception of fame as harmful for relationships challenges the popular perceptions of fame as worth pursuing. Increased awareness of the interpersonal dynamics of fame can help individuals in managing the fame-related tensions in close interpersonal relationships, which are known as vital for well-being. The research adds to the understanding of the relational production of fame and introduces the interpersonal communication perspective on celebrity studies.

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Introduction

The idea of becoming famous is attractive to many. Fame is sought after as it tends to provide social and emotional gratification, enhanced social status and validation of self-worth (Fietkiewicz *et al.* 2018, Shabahang *et al.* 2022). Moreover, heightened public visibility, or celebrity capital, is transferrable into economic, cultural, social, normative and political capital (Driessens 2013, Marshall 2014). However, from the perspective of interpersonal communication, being well-known appears less lucrative. The existing literature suggests a connection between fame and challenges in forming and maintaining close interpersonal relationships (Giles 2000–95, Rojek 2001, p. 12). The fame-related

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interpersonal challenges are frequently disclosed by well-known music artists, for example, on social media (Aalto 2022), interviews (Hartikainen 2022), songs (Bieber and featuring benny blanco 2020) and documentaries (Gaga: Five Foot Two 2017). This study examines the interpersonal dynamics of fame to gain a deeper understanding of the reported challenges related to well-knownness in close interpersonal relationships.

Research on fame and interpersonal relationships has focused on psychology. For example, Mitchell and Cronson (1987) found that celebrity families tend to struggle with isolation from social networks and difficulties in the management of family boundaries and roles. Giles and Rockwell (2009) noticed fundamental changes in the person's relations to self, others and the world after becoming famous. The study suggests that along with advantages, such as wealth and access, fame is commonly followed by loss of privacy, concerns about family impact, character-splitting, social isolation, demanding expectations and mistrust due to the attempts by others to exploit the celebrity status. Giles and Rockwell (2009) noted that the continuous expectations to match the public image tend to promote feelings of lost authority of the self and subsiding of the real self. Similar notions were made by Maheshwari (2019, p. 311), who additionally recognised that the superseding public persona influences relationships with 'others, who appear to be forming private relations, but instead attach themselves to the public image and not the real individual'. Although the interpersonal impacts of fame are recognised, the previous studies remain limited as they fail to address the ontologically communicational nature of fame.

As the interpersonal challenges attached to fame exist in communication, communication must be correspondingly studied to understand the topic. This study approaches fame from the perspective of interpersonal communication studies, which focus on making sense of interactions between people (Manning 2020). According to social constructivism (Gergen 2015), fame is understood as a social construct produced in communicative meaning-making processes. A person becomes well-known, when others assign them with the attributes attached to fame (Deflem 2017, pp. 20–21). The discourses of well-knownness are produced in largely institutionalised social practices (Gamson 1994, pp. 55–79). The social construction of fame has been examined in the macro level of the phenomenon, for example in celebrity – fan relationships (e.g. Ferris and Harris 2011), yet, little is known about the formation of fame on the micro level, in the famous individual's interpersonal relationships, which according to the sociocultural and phenomenological perspectives on communication studies (Craig 1999, pp. 138–146), are inseparably connected to the broader phenomenon of fame. Relational dialectics theory (Baxter and Montgomery 1996) and contrapuntal discourse analysis (Baxter 2011) are used to identify and study celebrity discourses in close interpersonal relationships, which are situated at the core of the social phenomenon.

Applying the interpersonal communication perspective on celebrity studies enables valuable insight into the reported fame-related interpersonal challenges. Being able to form and maintain close relationships is vital as several studies indicate a strong link between close relationships and well-being (Aron *et al.* 2006, Grundström *et al.* 2021). In fact, social engagement and belonging are basic human needs (Baumeister and Leary 1995). Social isolation and loneliness, on the other hand, have been connected to mental health issues, substance use, morbidity and mortality (Hawkey and Cacioppo 2010, Negi *et al.* 2021). It is important to note

that it is the quality rather than quantity that defines the satisfiability of social relationships (Hawkley and Cacioppo 2010). Therefore, the fame-related expansion of social networks, may not be sufficient alone. Health promoting characteristics, such as social support, companionship and intimacy, are essentially found in close interpersonal relationships (Burleson 2003, Cohen 2004). The need for more resources to manage fame-related challenges has been proposed in previous studies (Giles and Rockwell 2009, p. 208, Maheshwari 2019, p. 314). Here, close relationships are presented as essential for being able to maintain well-being, while living in the centre of attention.

Resources to manage fame are especially needed in the music industry, which depends on the celebrity capital of artists (Marshall 2013, Deflem 2017). Artist's fame is used to promote commodities, such as recordings, and in direct sales of celebrity capital in brand partnerships (see Meier 2017). Artists build well-knownness by constructing a celebrity persona in discursive processes of celebrification, where a private individual becomes a celebrity (Driessens 2013, Jerslev and Mortensen 2016). Celebrity persona is a manufactured and strategically maintained public identity, which is embedded in the wider cultural discourses (Marshall *et al.* 2015). Celebrity practices include 'maintenance of a fan basis, performed intimacy, authenticity and access, and construction of a consumable persona' (Marwick and Boyd 2011, p. 140). The celebrification practices seem accumulated in the artist brand, which commercial artists from all career stages must maintain – not only in work occasions – but in their every interaction (see Donham *et al.* 2022, pp. 306–307). The data for this study is collected by interviewing commercial music artists, who tend to struggle with challenges in close relationships and are more likely to suffer from mental health issues (Gross and Musgrave 2020, MITC 2021). One objective is to shed light on the possible link between fame and artists' health issues (see also Elo 2022). The study is relevant as celebrity capital is increasingly important in the music industry (Shah 2020, Zarczynski 2021), yet, understanding of its interpersonal impacts remain scarce.

This qualitative study aims to generate novel information of the interpersonal dynamics of fame. Increased understanding of fame can support artists, other public figures and their close ones in forming and maintaining close relationships, which are vital for well-being. Moreover, the study adds to the knowledge of the relational production of fame and introduces the interpersonal communication perspective on celebrity studies. Next, the cultural discourses of fame are discussed to understand the meaning-systems attached to music celebrities.

Celebrity discourses

Fame is often understood as the long-standing, pre-historic of celebrity (Van Krieken 2018), which on the other hand, reflects the modern phenomenon emerging from the mass media, consumer capitalism and popular culture (Gamson 1994, Marshall 2014). Furthermore, fame is typically regarded positively as achievement-based, praiseworthy and long-lasting (Braudy 1997 [1986]), while celebrity is given negative connotations of being merely media-generated, superficial and fleeting (Boorstin 1962, Rojek 2001). However, at the most elemental degree, both fame and celebrity refer to the well-known individual. Well-knownness is

defined as being known by an extensive group of people, who frequently encounter the discourses associated with the famous individual (Lilti 2017, p. 6). In this paper, celebrity discourses refer to all meaning-systems illuminating individual's well-knownness.

Studying celebrity requires understanding of fame in connection to historical and societal contexts (Van Krieken 2018). Western literature on fame implies that the early celebrity discourses illustrated superiority, power, mythology and immortality. In the Ancient Greece and Rome, people in high positions emulated spiritual figures and war heroes to become similarly glorified and worshipped (Braudy 1997 [1986]). The God-like status was lucrative as it provided political and social power, and symbolic immortality, when the discourses related to the individual continued to circuit after death (Giles 2000, pp. 49–53). Constructing a larger-than-life persona was only possible for the elite, who had access to wide visibility (Gamson 1994). All of the early celebrity discourses seem to illustrate social distance, for example, between the elite and lower classes. Rojek (2001, p. 12) has proposed that social distance is the prerequisite for becoming famous. Separation from others appears as the inner logic of fame as demonstrated simply by McDonald (1995 cited Holmes and Redmond 2006, p. 14): 'if everyone were famous then no one would be famous'.

The development of mass communication technologies and, entertainment and public relations industries influenced the modern celebrity in the 20th century. Record labels and other institutions attained positions as the gatekeepers of fame, thereby, largely institutionalising the construction of celebrity (Gamson 1994, pp. 55–79). Celebrities were established as powerful mediums connecting ideologies and commodities with citizens and consumers (Marshall 2014). Kurzman *et al.* (2007, pp. 354–355) explained the modern celebrity as a high-status group constituting of 'interpersonal privilege (how we act when we meet celebrities), normative privilege (how many of us want to imitate celebrities), economic privilege (how celebrity is lucrative), and legal privilege (how celebrities claim special rights)'. This elite group of celebrities came to represent people's goals and dreams (Sternheimer 2011), success, and possession of extraordinary qualities, such as charisma (Dyer 1998 [1979]). New technologies, such as the television, fostered closer audience relationships with the previously unachievable celebrities (Giles 2000, pp. 23–24). According to Payne (2010, pp. 195–203) these parasocial relationships were founded on fantasies and illusions of forming an intimate relationship with the celebrity, especially, with female celebrities (see Kavka 2020).

In the turn of the 21st century, the rise of the ordinary individual as the new mass-mediated celebrity (Turner 2004), and the at least theoretical democratisation of fame was reinforced by the emergence of the internet and social media, enhancing the agency of celebrities and audiences in the construction of fame (Giles 2018). The new fame apparatus is emphasised by the ascent of the presentational media and presentation of the self over the traditional representational media and cultural intermediaries (Marshall 2020). Moreover, social media has dismantled the distance between celebrities and audiences and highlighted the significance of authenticity (Jerslev and Mortensen 2018). Intimacy and authenticity are communicated in the publicly private persona, which has become a normalised way of being in the world (Marshall 2016). Although celebrity discourses are constantly transforming, it seems that the conceptions of value, power and status remain central for fame (Marshall 2020, Stewart and Giles 2020) as the

prevalence of the contemporary celebrity appears ubiquitous and intensified (Hamad 2018).

In the music industry, some discourses are more central to celebrity compared to other social fields. In the economic structures of the music industry, the meaning of fame is predominantly understood in the framework of generating profit. Commercially viable knowness requires audience relationships (Deflem 2017), which traditionally, were mediated, for example by record labels, whereas, today artists build intimate audience relationships directly on social media (Baym 2018). Besides intimacy, Marshall (2014, pp. 150–164) adds differentiation and authenticity as central discourses to the music celebrity. Artists must differentiate themselves from others in order to provide identifiable assets for identity formation. Performance of the real self, emotional sincerity and consistency in the construction of the celebrity persona express authenticity, which is vital as audiences tend to create relationships with artists representing them credibly and reliably. Next, the celebrity discourses are examined in the theoretical framework of relational dialectics.

Relational dialectics

This research employs relational dialectics theory (RDT), which explains the relational formation of identities and relationships in communication and language. The theory was created by Leslie Baxter and Montgomery (1996) and adjusted and expanded by Baxter (2011). RDT is based on Mikhail Bakhtin's writings on dialogism, which recognise social life as constituting of multiple coexisting and often opposing voices (Baxter and Norwood 2011). The main premise of this social constructivist theory is that meaning-making emerges in the interplay of competing discourses, in which different possibilities for meanings are connotatively located in (Baxter *et al.* 2021). RDT is fitting for the current study as celebrity is a discourse of contradictions (Turner *et al.* 2000), including but not limited to several discursive interplays, for example, between publicity and privacy. Previous studies (e.g. Tyler and Abetz 2018) have proven the suitability of RDT in examining the influence of certain discourses in close interpersonal relationships.

RDT emphasises the holistic nature of interpersonal meaning-making processes (Baxter and Montgomery 1996). The sociocultural theory considers communication to 'explain how social order (a macro level phenomenon) is created, realised, sustained, and transformed in micro level interaction processes' (Craig 1999, p. 144). RDT-based research examines communication in utterances, or turns-at-talk, which are intertextually positioned in utterance chains constituting of prior and anticipated utterances (Baxter 2011). Distal links of the utterance chain connect utterances into the broader social structures, while proximal links connect utterances into the interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions. This study focuses on the distal already-spoken and not-yet-spoken links of the utterance chain. Artists' perceptions of fame in close relationships are treated as responses to the cultural celebrity discourses in the music industry and the broader society. Sociocultural approach is suitable for studying fame, which is inseparably connected to the famous individual's interpersonal relationships.

RDT is an interpretative theory, which aims to provide alternative understandings of constantly changing communicative phenomena (Baxter and Montgomery 1996). Baxter (2011) explains the continuous change with centripetal and

centrifugal struggles, which are inherent in all social life. Centripetal discourses illuminate normal, dominant and taken-for-granted meaning-systems, which are positioned in the imagined social centre. Centrifugal discourses move away from the centre as less powerful, marginalised and muted. RDT is also a critical theory as it considers unequal power relations as central to meaning-making processes (Baxter *et al.* 2021, p. 11). Investigating artists' perceptions of fame may challenge the popular celebrity discourses centred on celebrity capital and power. Giving a voice to the well-known individuals is desperately needed for a dialogical understanding of fame, especially, in the music industry, where artists often experience being muted (Gross and Musgrave 2017, p. 9).

Studying meaning-making requires a clear definition of the semantic object of the study (Baxter *et al.* 2021, p. 16). In addition to the definition of the cultural celebrity discourses, it is necessary to define the context in which the discourses are interpreted in. The study is conducted in Finland and celebrity discourses are analysed in the Finnish culture and music industry. Close interpersonal relationships may provide too expansive context for the study as different relationship types may influence the meaning-making processes. Therefore, this study is limited to romantic relationships, which are reportedly the most important source of support for artists working in the music industry (Gross and Musgrave 2017, p. 22). Romantic relationships are close interpersonal relationships that are based on mutual romantic love and typically consisting of intimacy, social support and commitment (Sternberg 1986, Moss and Schwebel 1993). Romantic relationships offer a rich contextual framework for the study as romantic partners tend to have especially strong impact on well-being (Kansky 2018). Secondly, celebrities' romantic relationships arouse particular curiosity from the public (Cobb and Ewen 2015). Romantic relationships may, therefore, have greater significance in the relational production of fame compared to other close relationships. Thirdly, romantic relationships have been considered to have a negative impact on audience relationships as having partners may shatter the illusion of availability (Payne 2010, pp. 195–203). Similar perceptions seem to emerge in the music industry. For instance, South Korean entertainment companies have been accused of including 'no dating clauses' in artist contracts (Griffiths 2018). Based on these notions, romantic relationships provide an interesting context for the study.

This study aims to generate novel information of fame in close interpersonal relationships. RDT (Baxter *et al.* 2021) is utilised to make sense of the interpersonal dynamics of fame by studying the meanings given to fame in commercial music artists' romantic relationships. As meanings are connotatively located in discourses, we must first investigate, (1) what celebrity discourses, if any, emerge in artist's romantic relationships. Secondly, as meaning-making emerges in the interplay of competing discourses the second question is, (2) what competing celebrity discourses, if any, manifest in artist's romantic relationships. The identification of the potential fame-related discursive struggles enables the analysis of, (3) what meanings emerge in the competing celebrity discourses in artist's romantic relationships. These three questions lead to the final question concerning the overall aim of the study; (4) how the emerging meanings animate fame in close interpersonal relationships.

Methodology

This study utilises a qualitative approach, which allows detailed examination of meaning-making processes in close interpersonal relationships (Manning and Kunkel 2014, pp. 435–437). Interviews with 11 Finnish artists were conducted to gather data about fame-related negotiations in romantic relationships. Sociocultural and phenomenological perspectives allow the examination of communication in connection to individuals, close interpersonal communication and the surrounding social structures (Craig 1999, pp. 138–146). The data was analysed interpretively according to the contrapuntal analysis (Baxter 2011).

Participants

We used purposive sampling method in selecting the research participants. Purposive sampling is based on the researchers' judgements on selecting respondents that generate useful information (Kelly 2010, pp. 307–326). The primary criterion for the participants was experience of working as an artist in the music industry and having some level of well-knownness. Eligible participants were contacted via email and social media. Acknowledging that recruiting celebrities as research participants may be challenging (Driessens 2015), we were pleased to notice that the research created a lot of interest and the artists were eager to participate. 11 Finnish music artists were interviewed in total. Participants included ten artists signed to a record label and one independent artist. The experience of working as a music artist ranged from two to 18 years. The participants' age varied from 21 to 40 (avg. 33), with nine self-identifying as males and two as females. The sample included three singles, six artists who were in relationships and two artists who were married. The participants were not asked about their sexuality or the types of their romantic relationships. The majority of the artists represented the genres of pop and hip hop, which at the time of the interviews corresponded with the most popular music genres in Finland (Teosto 2018).

It is necessary to discuss the well-knownness of the participants as the quantity of fame appears connected to the fame-related tensions (Maheshwari 2019, p. 314). According to Ramirez *et al.* (2018), celebrity studies have no consensus method for quantifying fame, yet, different approaches exist. For example, well-knownness can be measured with the number of results generated in internet search engines. However, this approach may ignore those, who have gained recognition before the internet era. In a previous study, Giles and Rockwell (2009, p. 181) interviewed celebrities 'who were identifiable in the public eye and, who had been written about in the public press'. While the first criterion can be approved by interpretation, the second criterion appears outdated, especially in the music industry, where artists get discovered in digital platforms, such as TikTok (Polaris Nordic 2022). Moreover, fame can be measured with, for example, music streaming numbers. However, Yucesoy and Barabási (2016) suggest there is no direct correlation between fame and individual's achievements. To provide some understanding of the participants' fame, their well-knownness is described in different ways. The participants included platinum selling and awarded artists, artists with exposure on national TV and artists with

shows in the biggest music festivals in Finland. Some artists have millions of views on YouTube, while others are actively played on the radio. Regarding the volume of fame, the sampling was comprehensive; a few regarded their knowness as relatively small, some were well-known within a certain genre and some attained national celebrity status in Finland.

Data collection

The research data was gathered using semi-structured interviews, which allow the collection of detailed information of the experiences of the interviewees (Manning and Kunkel 2014, pp. 53–54). The interview topics were predetermined; however, the respondents were able to provide detailed descriptions on the topics that were relevant to them. The participants were first asked demographic and warm-up questions, which were followed by questions based on the theme of the study: romantic relationships and work as a commercial music artist. The participants were individually interviewed between 2018 and 2019 in locations chosen by the artists. Average interview length was 45 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, which resulted in 102 pages of data with 12-point type and 1,5 line spacing without including filler words or repetition of the same words.

The study was conducted according to the ethical principles of research compiled by the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK 2019). Any leakage of the data is considered especially sensitive due to the public status of the participants and, therefore, special attention has been paid to the processes of anonymisation in all stages of the research. The interviews were conducted in Finnish and the data was processed and analysed in its native form. For this paper, all citations were translated to English word by word unless the meaning of the utterance changed in the process. If that was the case, the citation was translated so that the original meaning retained.

Contrapuntal analysis

Contrapuntal analysis (Baxter 2011) is a type of discourse analysis created for studying competing discourses in RDT-based research. Contrapuntal analysis begins with a thematic analysis, which has been successfully employed to identify discourses from the data in previous studies (e.g. Tyler and Abetz 2018). This study followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, which includes six steps; becoming familiar with the data, identifying codes, organising them into themes, labelling and reviewing the themes and finally identifying exemplars illuminating the essence of each theme. Utterances related to fame were coded according to the themes or discourses they illustrated. Each discourse was named until the point of saturation, when no new coding categories emerged from the data (Corbin and Strauss 2008, p. 149). Coded utterances were then placed under suitable themes representing celebrity discourses in artists' romantic relationships.

The next stages of contrapuntal analysis include recognising and studying the possible interplay between the discourses (Baxter 2011). Discursive competition was detected from the coded utterances and then examined to understand, how they produce meaning (Baxter and Norwood 2011). The complete transcriptions were

returned to multiple times to gain more context for interpretations. Discursive competition was identified, for example, by distinguishing discursive markers. Negating markers express the rejection of a discourse, countering markers illuminate the acceptance of other discourses, while countering them with an alternative discourse, and entertaining markers illustrate the existence of several possible discourses (Baxter *et al.* 2021, p. 14). Competing celebrity discourses were also identified by interpreting them within the Finnish society and communication culture, in which the researchers are natives. The first author has experience working in the music industry, which was also helpful in interpreting the emerging meanings in the specific context.

The analysis process is demonstrated with utterances related to being a well-known artist and being in a relationship. First, the utterance, 'Artist should be mysterious, but still somehow accessible', was coded as a discourse of mystique. Mystique was expressed in contrapuntal relation with accessibility, which was placed under the discourse of connectedness. The interplay between connectedness and separateness was identified by the countering discursive marker 'but'. The interplay was interpreted to illustrate the idea that mystique is contradicting with accessibility, implying that to be mysterious is to be inaccessible, therefore, artists must communicate separateness instead of connectedness. However, the following sentence from the participant excluded 'being in a relationship' from the construction of separateness: 'It's been preached for ages, that even if you're in a relationship, it's somehow not good to bring that up'. The discursive marker 'even if' indicates an interplay between openness – closedness and privacy – publicity, when negotiating the public disclosure of the relationship. Analysed together with the previous utterance, the interplay illustrates that 'being accessible' means appearing single in public, animating the idea that artists should convey intimate availability to their audiences. Together, the utterances depict that artists should be both accessible and inaccessible by appearing intimately available, but still unattainable at a distance, thus, maintaining mystery. The broader meaning-system emerging from the discursive interplay portrays romantic relationships as harmful for fame by suggesting that 'being in a relationship' contradicts with the discursive construction of music celebrity. However, the long-standing discourse, which has been 'preached for ages', was also questioned as manifested in the tone of the expressions. Next, the results from the analysis process are presented.

Findings

Celebrity discourses emerged prominently in the artists' descriptions of negotiating fame with partners and potential partners internally within the relationship and with others externally between the artist or the relationship, and the surrounding social networks. Contrapuntal analysis of the interviews resulted in the discovery of celebrity discourses, which were identified in competing sets illuminating the interplay between; *authenticity – inauthenticity* (being yourself vs. performing the celebrity persona), *connectedness – separateness* (being connected vs. separated from others), *symmetry – asymmetry* (being equal vs. unequal in relation to others), *old – new* (interactions before vs. after fame), *privacy – publicity* (discourses within the relationship vs. outside the relationship) and *openness – closedness* (disclosing vs. concealing personal information). These discursive

interplays illuminate fame as the *dominating celebrity persona*, *increased mistrust*, *social and emotional distance* and *asymmetrical power dynamics*. Investigation of these discourses revealed larger meaning-systems illustrating fame in romantic relationships. What stands out strikingly from the data is that the dominant celebrity discourse depicts *fame as harmful for relationships* (FHR). However, *fame as good for relationships* (FGR) was also acknowledged as a valid, yet marginalised discourse.

Reciprocally, the participants discussed romantic relationships in relation to their fame. These discourses surfaced mainly in descriptions related to the artist brand. The dominant discourse in this context regarded *romantic relationships as harmful for fame* (RHF). However, some interviewees stated that having a partner alleviated the challenges related to being well-known, which again animates the complexity of fame and interpersonal relationships. Some artists also demonstrated neutral perceptions in utterances illustrating fame as having no impact on romantic relationships and/or vice versa. Neutrality was expressed in descriptions from lesser known artists and in the form of countering discursive interplays, implying that even when stating neutrality, other discourses were not rejected as invalid. Next, celebrity discourses are presented with exemplars from the data. Citations are marked according to the order of the interviews, for example, the first interviewed artist is referred to as A1.

Discourse of fame as harmful for relationships (FHR)

All participants voiced the discourse of FHR, which emerged in utterances animating the overlapping discourses of the dominating celebrity persona, increased mistrust, social and emotional distance, and asymmetrical power dynamics. FHR emerged internally in the relationships and externally in relation to the social networks. The discourse was identified in both relationship formation and maintenance.

Dominating celebrity persona

The participants described the prevalence of the celebrity persona in interactions with others. Dominating celebrity persona was the most common discourse communicated by the participants and it emerged in utterances illustrating the privilege of inauthenticity over authenticity, separateness over connectedness, publicity over privacy and closedness over openness. The competition between authenticity and inauthenticity manifested in discussions regarding the artist brand, which was portrayed as different from the self, yet including elements from it. Artists connected the private self with discourses of authenticity and privacy, and the brand or the celebrity persona with discourses of publicity and inauthenticity. The separation between the two was described as confusing, as one participant said: 'I notice that my close ones have difficulties sometimes in understanding the difference between my work and my real persona'. (A7). Artists reported switching into the celebrity persona, when others acknowledge them for their public image. The celebrity persona appeared as dominant compared to the authentic self, which seems dismissed by others. This happens especially in new encounters and, when others engage in idolising behaviour, such as wanting to take photos together. Dominating celebrity persona was enacted in descriptions of decreased self-disclosure, which illuminates the privileged discourse of

closedness. One participant described decreasing self-disclosure, when the dominating celebrity persona emerged:

I've liked those encounters more, where the other one has had no clue of who I am. It has been somehow easier to be myself, but then, if someone approaches and is like 'hey that's you' there's immediately a wall you put up. (A5)

The participant voiced closedness and separateness in relation to the celebrity persona, which was perceived to obstruct the disclosure of the self. Openness and connectedness seem to emerge, when the artist can express their authentic self.

For artists in relationships, the dominating celebrity persona surfaced in descriptions of simultaneous, contradicting expectations from others. One participant shared thoughts on the challenges of 'being yourself' in the eyes of the partner and being the fabricated persona expected by others.

The challenge is that you have to be both yourself and sometimes the artist persona. [...] It's much more difficult to be that other persona, when my partner knows, what I truly am and when I pretend to be something else. (A6)

While voicing authenticity and inauthenticity, the artist portrayed having a partner as complicating the performance of the celebrity persona. Commenting on the same topic, another participant disclosed attempting to manage the contradiction by going alone to events, where the celebrity persona emerges. However, the same artist stated that these situations occur simply by leaving your home. The dominating celebrity persona appears as a persistent discourse that the artists ultimately have little agency over.

Dominating celebrity persona was also voiced in discussions concerning the influence of outside forces within the relationship. The participants reported contradicting perceptions about the artist within versus outside the relationship, thus, illuminating the competition between privacy – publicity and authenticity – inauthenticity. The discursive interplays were described as stronger, when the public discourses emerged as new after attaining fame, thus, also illuminating discourses of old versus new. The dominating celebrity persona emerged in descriptions, where the public discourses attached to the celebrity persona were given greater importance over the private discourses concerning the artist within the relationship. One participant discussed this as gossips about unfaithfulness influenced his relationship: 'She became embarrassed that those things were said about me, even though they were not true. [...] she experienced it as shameful that people think that I'm unfaithful and that she's still with me'. (A5) The excerpt demonstrates that the public discourses can influence the relationship whether they are considered true or not. The dominating celebrity persona and the public discourses attached to it were also expressed in utterances illuminating increased mistrust.

Increased mistrust

The participants communicated increased mistrust in descriptions privileging closedness over openness, publicity over privacy and inauthenticity over authenticity. As discussed above, the utterances depicting dominating celebrity persona and increased mistrust reflect the influence of external forces within the relationship. Several participants reported that stereotypes about music celebrities generated tensions within the

relationships. These public discourses depicted artists as individuals, who are adulated and actively approached by others and, thus, likely to have multiple partners and cheat on their partners. These presumptions illuminated as increased mistrust in artist's romantic relationships and, especially, in relation to the perceptions of the performing artist. When commenting on this, one participant said: 'If I go on gigs every weekend and have fans, and admiration and so on, it is a difficult situation for the partner'. (A8). The challenges related to increased mistrust were described as difficult for the partner, however, in relationship formation, increased mistrust appears to concern the artists themselves.

Multiple participants communicated fame as increased mistrust, when meeting new people. One participant demonstrated mistrust after attaining the celebrity status: 'You have to be really cautious about who you get to know, because the motives in the background may be something else, and clearly are, if new people suddenly appear in your life'. (A11) The utterance indicates that mistrust emerges, when ambiguity arises whether people approach due to the celebrity status or for wanting to genuinely know the artist. Realisation of exploiting others would result in decreasing self-disclosure and becoming increasingly precautious with new people. This emerged as privileging closedness, which was expressed, for example, as 'building a protective armour'. The participants demonstrated that, if the true motives were revealed, the relationships were typically ended. While depicted as harmful for relationship formation, some participants understood the people seeking surface relationships as a precondition for being an artist. The majority of the descriptions illuminated increased mistrust together with social and emotional distance.

Social and emotional distance

The participants voiced the discourses of separateness and disconnection from others. Social and emotional distance emerged in descriptions privileging separateness over connectedness and closedness over openness. These discourses emerged in descriptions of non-work-related occasions, where the recognition of the celebrity persona was typically perceived undesired, even when the attention was positive in nature. The special treatment was considered differentiating and isolating, as described by one participant:

You don't want that special attention and, still, at some point you will get it, and then you start thinking you don't want to go anywhere. I feel like I'm not part of the group like others or I'm isolated from it. (A7)

This view was echoed by other interviewees, who reported that the dominating celebrity persona hinders their ability to experience connection with others. Moreover, the special treatment may lead to avoiding social situations altogether, which further highlights social distance in the artist's social life.

The dominating celebrity persona and social distance were also illustrated in descriptions of, how artists and their partners engage in the surrounding social networks. Majority of the utterances depicting this illuminated social distance and separateness over connectedness. Social distance was enacted in descriptions of lack of privacy. The participants reported that being in the public typically led to others invading their private space. One participant communicated social distance in description of being recognised in the public together with his partner: 'She always noticed, when I started to close in a shell, and eventually she didn't really like to go out anywhere with me'. (H1). The artist

voiced closedness in connection to the dominating celebrity persona, when the recognition of his public image caused him to 'close in a shell'. Social distance was expressed as ultimately not being comfortable in the public together anymore.

The participants voiced emotional distance in utterances privileging closedness in relation to the celebrity status. The superior status was considered to complicate the artist's ability to show vulnerability. As one interviewee said: 'It's really difficult for you to be vulnerable or seek support from the other, because the presumption is that you are a star'. (A5). The utterance illustrates 'being a star' in contradiction with showing vulnerability and receiving social support, which highlights emotional distance in romantic relationships. Although emotional closeness appeared marginalised, some artists also communicated openness in their romantic relationships. As one interviewee said: 'If there's trust and you get to know someone well enough, then I'm pretty open'. (A11). The comment illustrates that openness is considered to develop as the relationship progresses. However, if the relationship was perceived as asymmetrical, this was not possible.

Asymmetrical power dynamics

The participants demonstrated unequal distribution of social power in their romantic relationships. Asymmetrical power dynamics were illuminated in descriptions highlighting asymmetry over symmetry, separateness over connectedness, publicity over privacy and closedness over openness. The asymmetrical power dynamics and emotional distance were enacted in descriptions of inability to show vulnerability and receive social support. To avoid asymmetry, some artists described seeking relationships with others, who understand fame, thus, reducing the emotional distance between the relationship parties. Although these relationships provide symmetry in the form of mutual understanding, symmetry was also portrayed as undesired. For example, some participants stated that their celebrity status caused jealousy in their partners, who were attempting to gain well-knownness.

The asymmetrical power dynamics were illuminated in descriptions of the superiority of the artist in relation to the less known partner. All participants, who voiced asymmetry, considered it as off-putting. Artists described not wanting to proceed relationships, in which asymmetry was communicated by glorification or adulation based on the celebrity status. In one description of a relationship, which was continued despite of the asymmetry, the participant described the perverted dynamics in the relationship: 'I could've insulted her or, I don't know what else I could've done, and still, she would've been like "you're so wonderful!" (A5). The comment indicates unevenly distributed social power, when social norms are considered to not concern the adulated artist. However, the participant said that eventually the relationship had to be ended, because of the asymmetrical dynamics.

In descriptions of interactions outside the relationship, asymmetry emerged in situations, where the artist attracted attention, while the partner was dismissed. Artists expressed concerns about its impact on their partners. One participant said: 'Often, it's really challenging for the partner, because where ever we go, the other is always the one people are interested in'. (A11) The utterance illustrates asymmetrical power dynamics by depicting the dominating celebrity persona as more interesting compared to the partner. Few artists described the saturation of the partner's self,

when they are continuously acknowledged as the ‘artist’s partner’ instead of an unique individual. Several artists expressed fame to spill over their partners, who then have to deal with fame as well.

In conclusion, the celebrity discourses in artists’ romantic relationships appear to privilege the discourses of separateness, closedness, asymmetry, publicity and inauthenticity, which illustrate fame as the dominating celebrity persona, increased mistrust, social and emotional distance, and asymmetrical power relations. These meaning-systems illustrated fame as harmful for relationships. Although the discourse of FHR emerged as dominant, the participants also communicated fame as good for relationships.

Discourse of fame as good for relationships (FGR)

The discourse of FGR illuminated the positive impacts of well-knownness in artists’ romantic relationships. FGR emerged in utterances privileging the discourses of connectedness over separateness and new over old, which illustrated the dominating celebrity persona. The dominating celebrity persona was described as beneficial, when it generated possibilities to meet new people. Increased interest from others was considered especially gratifying, if the artist had not received much interest prior to being well-known. One participant pondered on the newly found temptations after fame:

If your own history with the opposite sex has been such that you haven’t received particularly much attention [...] and then when you suddenly have it immensely, it messes up the head really well. Then, you start thinking that you have million opportunities and the temptation to check them is really huge. (A1)

The comment depicts the privilege of connectedness and new in opposition to separateness and old, which were described as increased interactions and interest after gaining recognition. Sudden attention can be exciting and overwhelming as described by the artist. However, the descriptions also imply that, eventually, fame-generated relationships were not wanted as they were perceived as superficial instead of meaningful and long-lasting.

In the context of relationship maintenance, FGR manifested in descriptions highlighting connectedness in relation to gained access to exclusive events and networks, and new financial opportunities, which fame enables for artists and their partners. For example, connectedness was communicated in a description of being able to introduce the partner to other renown people. Based on the descriptions, FGR emerged only in countering utterances, where fame was also depicted as harmful for relationships. One participant expressed that fame did not really impact their relationship other than providing advantages in relation to access. This was later on countered by the notion that the artist’s peers experience fame-related interpersonal struggles, thus, acknowledging the discourse of FHR as valid. Finally, some descriptions illuminated romantic relationships as harmful for artist’s fame.

Discourse of relationships as harmful for fame (RHF)

Many described romantic relationship in contrary relation to fame, therefore, portraying being in a relationship and being well-known as mutually exclusive. RHF emerged in discursive struggles of connectedness – separateness, openness – closedness and privacy – publicity. RHF was communicated in descriptions of experiencing difficulties in performing the celebrity persona, while being in a relationship, and in discussions regarding concealing the relationship to appear available for the audiences. The expectation of connectedness with the audiences was voiced in the following example:

As an artist you are, in a way, an object of fantasy, and me too I've been asked on dates. I think that at least with some big international stars, you don't necessarily want to tell publicly about your relationships, so that people can have that image, that certain possibility. (A9)

The expression 'at least with some big international stars' suggests that the discourse is not as prevailing in the social life of the respondent as it may be for artists with greater celebrity status. However, negotiation of the public disclosure of the romantic relationship in relation to the artist brand appeared as common in artists' romantic relationships.

While the RHF was dominant, some participants expressed positive implications of having a partner and, simultaneously, being a music celebrity. Two of the participants stated that having a partner was connected to their artist brands. In this context, being in a relationship appeared connected to the maintenance of the celebrity persona. Moreover, positive implications were described in relation to the partners alleviating the challenges posed by fame, as illustrated by one participant:

Partner is [...] what grounds you, an anchor, whatever term you want to use [...] They are always that someone [with whom] you get to reset your mind and just be you [...] with them, living in the public eye is more tolerable. (A1)

The comment demonstrates authentic and meaningful interaction allowed by the emergence of the authentic self with the partner. In a world of interactions dominated by the celebrity persona, the value of authentic interactions becomes emphasised.

Discussion

The current research introduced interpersonal communication perspective on celebrity studies as a novel way to understand the ubiquitous phenomenon of fame. This study provides deeper understanding of the mechanisms behind the relational production of fame in close interpersonal relationships. The findings are valuable as little is known about, what fame essentially is in the epicentre of the social phenomenon. This study proposes that in close interpersonal relationships the privileged celebrity discourses of separateness, closedness, asymmetry, publicity and inauthenticity illustrate fame as the dominating celebrity persona, increased mistrust, social and emotional distance, and asymmetrical power dynamics. The overall aim was to answer, how the emerging meanings animate fame in close interpersonal relationships. This study suggests that fame is, predominantly, understood as harmful for close interpersonal relationships. Contrary to the dominant perceptions, in the context of close interpersonal relationships, fame appears as more harmful than beneficial. These findings challenge the value-focused discourses of fame as celebrity capital in the music industry and the popular discourse of

fame as worth pursuing within the broader society. Theoretical and practical implications of the study are discussed next.

One aim was to gain a better understanding of the suggested connection between fame and challenges in close interpersonal relationships (Giles 2000–95, Rojek 2001, p. 12). This study proposes that the dominating celebrity persona and increased mistrust, which were also recognised in previous studies (Giles and Rockwell 2009, Maheshwari 2019), are closely linked to decreased self-disclosure. Decreased self-disclosure appears as closeness to and with others, which occurs, when the public discourses connected to the celebrity persona are privileged and the private discourses connected to the authentic self become muted. Non-disclosure and closedness are amplified, when ambiguity of others' motives and negatively perceived public discourses cause increased mistrust. Self-disclosure is essential as exchanging intimate information about the authentic self enables formation of meaningful, close interpersonal relationships (Altman and Taylor 1973). Moreover, according to Baxter and Montgomery (1996, p. 142), individual's 'self develops and is sustained and experienced in communication with others'. It appears that fame can generate a loop, where the subsiding of the authentic self and increased mistrust contribute to decreased self-disclosure, which reciprocally, complicates the dialogical construction of the self.

The fame-related interpersonal challenges are also linked to social distance, which Rojek (2001, p. 12) has deemed as the prerequisite for becoming famous. Fame, which tends to promote social isolation (Giles and Rockwell 2009), can be linked to the discourses of social and emotional distance, and asymmetrical power dynamics in close interpersonal relationships. According to the relational dialectics theory, relationships are constructed out of the centripetal force of connecting with another and the simultaneous centrifugal force of separating from the other (Baxter and Montgomery 1996). The current research suggests that fame privileges the centrifugal forces of separateness and closedness over the centripetal forces of connectedness and openness. To secure the continuing of the relational interplay and, thus, the existence of the relationship, the centripetal forces of connectedness and closeness need to be fortified. This can be difficult, especially, in the music industry that seems to promote anti-sociality and social isolation (Gross and Musgrave 2020, pp. 87–114). Suggested solutions include increasing the awareness of the fame-related interpersonal challenges, which may promote emotional closeness through the experiences of being understood. Furthermore, awareness of the unwanted attention on the celebrity persona in non-work-related occasions might allow the authentic self to be acknowledged more, thus, enabling experiences of symmetry and closeness with others.

Practical implications include utilising the findings to support the well-being of individuals working in the music industry and other public domains, and their close ones. Better understanding of the interpersonal dynamics of fame may help managing the fame-related issues in close interpersonal relationships. Because the fame-related interpersonal challenges and the connection between close relationships and well-being (Grundström *et al.* 2021) are acknowledged, the next step would be incorporating this knowledge in the practices of the institutions that benefit in different ways from individuals' celebrity capital. As the current study was conducted in the music industry, we encourage especially music companies to learn about the interpersonal dynamics of fame and discuss them with the celebrated artists to

better prepare them for the possible interpersonal challenges related to fame. Within the broader society, a more comprehensive understanding of fame is beneficial as practicing celebrity appears increasingly common for ordinary people as well (Marshall 2016). As celebrity culture continues to transform, the interpersonal dynamics of fame may become more relevant in the social lives of individuals not working in public positions.

One limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size. Although the data was rich, larger sample might strengthen the reliability of the findings. Another limitation concerns the lack of descriptions from artists' partners, who should be heard as meaning-making is always dialogical instead of univocal (Baxter and Montgomery 1996). These limitations could be addressed by including the partners and other commercial music artists in the process of member checking, where the accuracy of the findings is tested within the target group of the research (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Another deficiency concerns the lack of diversity. For example, only two of the participants self-identified as females. Analysing women's perceptions would be beneficial as the social conditions of the female celebrity appear to be different from the male celebrity (see Kavka 2020). Greater diversity in the sample would make space for more diverse voices to be heard. In regard of the generalisability of the findings, questions remain whether the results are applicable to other cultures outside Finland and other types of close interpersonal relationships. Moreover, some of the findings may be specific for the music industry. The limitations leave room for further progress in determining the dimensions of interpersonal dynamics of fame.

Further research is required to develop the interpersonal communication perspective on celebrity studies. We present four recommendations for future studies. Firstly, other close interpersonal relationships should be studied to determine, how the celebrity discourses identified in the current study emerge, for example in friendships. Secondly, celebrity discourses should be studied in professional interpersonal relationships and in the context of the relational construction of self, which are central concepts in interpersonal communication. Thirdly, other social fields should be investigated to identify any field-specific implications of the interpersonal dynamics of fame, for example, in the politics, sports, audiovisual industries and social media. Finally, the interpersonal dynamics of fame should be studied in different cultural contexts as celebrity discourses and interpersonal relationships are always influenced by the surrounding culture and society.

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