

## **True Bromance: The Authenticity behind the Stewart/McKellen Relationship**

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For public figures with high profile roles, media interest in professional pursuits is a regular occurrence. When media attention turns from the public role to the private lives of public figures, suggests Graeme Turner, is the moment when a public figure becomes a celebrity. It is the interest in the personal, private, and backstage areas of a public figure's construction endows them with the everyday currency of celebrity. Specially, Richard Dyer suggests, interest in the private lives of celebrities is grounded in the notion that in the private resides the authentic person behind the 'manufactured mask of fame'. The increasing popularity of social media, and celebrity figures' use of such intimate platforms of performance, gives rise to a system of representation P. David Marshall terms 'presentational culture'. Here celebrities gain direct access to their fans, bypassing the machinery of celebrity to shape their own performances.

A seemingly genuine persona is presented to public, yet it is one that nonetheless attracts questions of authenticity, especially when that presentation coincides with promotional activities for work affiliated with particular celebrities. This paper examines the authenticity of the bromance between Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart through the lens of their social media presence. It explores the narrative of friendship constructed by the actors, and evaluates how their history as friends, and recent promotional activity for the film *X-Men Days of Future Past* and plays *Waiting for Godot* and *No Man's Land*, influences the perceived authenticity of their bromance.

Keywords: bromance; authenticity; celebrity culture; social media

## **Introduction**

This paper explores the self-presentation of the bromance between Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart from the perspective of authenticity and promotion. It questions whether the two seemingly mutually exclusive concepts can co-exist through an examination of self-presentation of a celebrity friendship during a period of high promotional activity. Central to the discussion is whether the presence of promotional activities undermines

the sense of authenticity generated by celebrity interactions. While both are active on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, Twitter is the platform selected for exploration, as it is the one used most frequently by both. It is also selected for its ability to construct the impression of direct access to their private spheres. Tweets between, referring to, or about McKellen and Stewart were collated between the periods of January 2013 and May 2016 from both Twitter accounts. We conclude that while the platform, and their friendship, is used most frequently for the purposes of promotion, the genuineness of their bromance is the main driving force behind the promotional activity.

### **Literature review**

Describing the condition of public visibility in an age of Monarchy, Queen Elizabeth I is quoted as remarking “we princes, I tell you, are set on stage, in sight and view of all the world” (van Kriken 2012, p. 20), demonstrating her awareness that her legitimacy and authority is closely associated with self-presentation and public performance. While contemporary celebrity culture deals in a different currency of authority, in cultural – rather than political – power, the desire and need to cultivate a public performance is no less essential. Indeed, a defining characteristic of celebrity culture is a reliance on public viability to codify the presentation of well-known individuals in order to dramatise (Dyer 1986) notions of identity and enforce (or reinforce) cultural values (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler 2012). Public visibility becomes a means through which celebrity culture pervades and intersects with the everyday, blurring the boundaries between public and private spheres and calling into question the construction of celebrity identities. In particular celebrity figures occupy two coexisting, but divergent, concepts: the performance of public persona, and the desire to reveal the authentic. Echoing Elizabeth I, Leo Braudy (1986) suggests celebrities are set “on stage” (p. 546) within the mediated gaze of contemporary society. Their identities perceived as

constructed, performed and emergent from processes industrial manipulation and manufacture. Joshua Gamson (1994) describes these processes as “celebrity making [in which] public relations, photography, grooming and agenting” (p. 64) collaborate to produce the entity recognised by the public.

It is perhaps due in part to awareness of the performative and constructed nature of celebrity figures that curiosity of the private sphere inexorably accompanies interest in the public persona. Writes Richard deCordova (1990) the “private lives of the players were constituted as a site of knowledge and truth” (p. 98) where, it is imagined, the public persona is shed and the private (authentic) entity emerges. Indeed, from a sociological perspective, performativity is conceptually associated with identity in ‘normal’ circumstances. Erving Goffman offers a view of identity presentation in the everyday that perceives of interaction between the individual and others through a dramaturgical framework. The individual is an actor on stage, ‘giving’ and ‘giving off’ identity information that informs the other (their audience) of their ‘role’ and how they wish to be perceived (1959). Accompanying this front-stage space is the backstage, where the persona is shed and the ‘real’ individual is revealed (1959). The appeal of Goffman’s notion to considerations of celebrity persona is understandable, especially in light of the use of social networking sites by celebrities to interact with fans, media and other celebrities.

In particular, the immediacy of platforms such as Twitter encourages the perception of direct, unmediated access (Muntean & Petersen 2009). It is an avenue through which celebrities are seen to be more accessible due to the nature of use and association with personal digital devices. The platform is rarely further than an arm’s length away as it is associated with the mobile phones of the celebrity. The celebrity (not their management) is thus perceived to be the individual tweeting, which

contributes to the sense that tweets are genuine, authentic and beyond the reach of agents of control (Petersen 2009; Bennett 2014). The platform thus offers an alternative to previous models of stardom that emphasise ‘the idea of the star as an extraordinary and unattainable figure’ (Thomas 2014, p. 242). Yet, argues Marshall, the identity on display is not a deconstructed self, but a “private public self” (2010, p. 44) that consists of selected private moments. These private moments are equally performed, chosen for their ability to enhance the broader public persona of the celebrity figure, but accomplished with a degree of subtlety that is assisted by the platform. Through the use of Twitter and the immediacy afforded by its application within everyday contexts, the “practice of celebrity” (Marwick & boyd 2011, p. 141) becomes a performance of the private, as well as the public self. Celebrities able to master this practice are most successful when including aspects of the backstage – the illusion of glimpses into the everyday – in the “performed intimacy” (p. 140) of their online presence.

Indeed, for Internet scholars, the presentation of all – not only celebrity – online identities, is highly performative due to the networked nature of construction and expression (Turkle 1995). Within the networked context of identity presentation on social media, individuals are more likely to engage in extroverted displays that highlight and reinforce aspects of identity deemed appropriate and attractive to their circle of peers (Cavanagh 2007). The authenticity of such online performances is thus questioned as factors influencing identity construction are made visible. As previously mentioned, authenticity is central to discussions of celebrity culture, where the private is shaped as a space for the authentic. Celebrity use of Twitter to reveal the private has been characterised as an extension of celebrity performance (Marwick & boyd 2011). Yet, this performance is enacted via a medium that possess what Anne Petersen terms an ‘aura of ‘realness’’ (cited in Click, Lee & Holladay 2013, p. 366). Twitter thus enables

celebrities to seem more ‘accessible, approachable, and likable, and juxtaposes’ celebrities’ ‘ordinary personalities’ (Click et al. 2013, p, 366) with their ‘extraordinary talent, beauty, or skill’ (Petersen cited in Click et al. 2013, p. 366). Simultaneously, the reciprocity afforded by the platform at once ‘creates a new expectation of intimacy’ (Marwick & boyd 2011, p. 156) while deepening the relationship between fan and celebrity. Fans thus become testament to the authenticity of the celebrities’ online presence, locating it in their ability to discern the celebrity’s ‘voice’. Writing of Lady Gaga fans, Click et al highlight the importance of tone and expression in addition to private information:

Little Monsters value what they perceive to be Lady Gaga’s authentic voice in social media and believe that she uses it as a platform to speak directly to them. This perception is enhanced by the symbiotic affiliation between the perceived authenticity of Gaga’s tweets and the proprietary information she shares, including mundane details about her daily life and private disclosures reserved for her most loyal followers (2013, p. 374).

The frequency of interaction, reciprocal communication, and the use of a perceived ‘real’ voice contribute to a sense of authenticity for celebrities’ online presence. The interaction enables the celebrity to shape the fan’s identity (in the case of Gaga, through her use of the moniker ‘Little Monsters’ as a form of address), while at the same time reinforcing their authenticity. Thus while the presentation of the private can indeed be an extension of the performativity of celebrity persona (Marwick & boyd 2011), the interaction afforded by the medium fosters a sense of familiarity that can enhance credibility (Ledbetter & Redd 2016).

It is for this reason that Bethany Usher argues it is the repetition of audience inclusion in the performance of celebrity persona on Twitter, rather than the illusion of

glimpses into the everyday, that contributes to a sense of authenticity. Usher draws upon Goffman to explain the power of repetition in fostering familiarity and eventually acceptance:

For Goffman, repeated engagement with a performance – such as these Twitter interview moments – makes it less cynical as it moves through a ‘cycle of disbelief to belief’ (1956, p. 12). Thus, while these interactions may aim to influence consumer behaviour and despite audiences understanding that they are highly constructed, they may nevertheless be accepted as authentic (2014, p. 320).

As such, Usher questions the centrality of ‘the illusion of unstructured glimpses’ (p. 320) into the private lives of celebrities in conceptualisations of authenticity on Twitter. Indeed, authenticity in PR and Marketing does not rely on the ‘actual’ individual but the consistency of performance.

Authenticity is crucial in consumer culture, as it impacts on consumer interpretations of a brand and purchasing decisions. This authenticity is built through the consistency of a brand, whether it be a person or company. The way in which the brand is portrayed and its public appearance is thus significant. As Gilmore and Pine (2007) discuss, the notion of internal and external consistency is important to consider. They refer to external consistency as being the outside perception of a brand and give Apple, as an example of a company that has attained the perception of being what they call ‘real-real’. Whether it is a company or a person being sold to the public, there must be consistency in what is being offered. Gilmore and Pine (2007) list examples for consideration such as a name that matches the identity; aligning market values with your audience; matching what you say with what you offer; and physical representation. While they write in relation to a traditional business, popular culture is also a business.

The celebrity is the brand and the products being sold are their films, music, fashion and so on. Their choice in the work they create should reflect consistency, and in a social media driven world, what they represent online and offline must also align.

An alignment also occurs between the online, offline, and on-off-screen personas of celebrity figures. In this context, the private become closely associated with the off-screen persona. In addition to other off-screen activity, the private becomes part of the extra-textual tapestry of contemporary celebrity figures. This contemporary star text, Elizabeth Ellcessor suggests, differs from those in the 'broadcast model' as they are manifest through a combination of on-screen and off-screen material in which 'audiences, industries, and projects are unified through the creation of active, social, online star texts' (2012, p. 46). The ambivalence of celebrity authenticity thus becomes further complicated by a combination of on-screen and off-screen texts, wherein celebrities' private, public (or 'private public') and on-screen personas complement, and occasionally contradict, each other.

Indeed, fan works directly engage in the 'in-between' space of on/off-screen and public/private in order to excavate resistive, often queer, readings of celebrity texts. An exploration of the subversive meanings engendered by fan works, the motivation for such works, and the effect of such works on the fan-celebrity interaction are beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is pertinent to highlight the impact of fan-celebrity interactions on the shaping of the celebrity text. While fan construction of celebrity figures may not influence the performance of celebrity persona, it does contribute to the way celebrities are perceived in the zeitgeist of broader media and popular culture.

Early scholarship of fan works identified the potential for fan fiction to extend, enhance and subvert (Jenkins 1992) official narratives. Camille Bacon Smith's 1992 exploration of fans of science fiction series *Star Trek* (1963-1966) highlights the



motivation (including therapeutic and pleasurable potential) of fan fiction authors in the construction of non-canonical character pairings. In particular, Bacon Smith illuminates how the homoerotic Kirk/Spock character pairing challenges the heteronormativity of the original text. Subsequent scholarship exploring these subversive texts have variously explored fan activity and behaviour in response to (perceived) external reactions to fan fiction (Larsen & Zubernis 2012); utilisation of celebrity figures within (both homoerotic and heteronormative) fan fiction (Lam 2014, 2017; Piper 2015); celebrity appropriation of non-canonical character readings (Smith 2017); and the impact of fan-celebrity interaction on extra-narrative perception of character/actor dyads (Johnson 2008).

In their 2012 exploration of *Supernatural* (2005 - ) fandom, Larsen and Zubernis outline the internal boundaries imposed by fan communities to monitor and 'police' (p. 164) certain fan fiction works, and the degree of exposure such works receive. They describe a practice of internalised protectionism, motivated in part by what they describe as a complex sense of 'fan shame' (2012, p. 58), in which certain fan practices are deemed to require protection by restricting its exposure to within the fan community. In particular, the creation of slash (non-canonical, often homoerotic) character pairings are not considered appropriate for discussion outside fandom. Recounting a Q/A session at a *Supernatural* celebrity event, Larsen and Zubernis describe the shock and horror when a fan asked actor Richard Speight Jnr for his opinion on Wincest (slash fiction featuring male characters, brothers Sam and Dean Winchester). 'There was a split second pause, during which audience members stared in horror at seatmates or at the fan, and then the room as a whole booed her loudly' (p. 145). The act of policing seeks to control the perception of fandom and fan works through tight protection of what is released to those outside fandoms. At the same time,

it engages in a negotiation between celebrity self-presentation and fan appropriation of the extra-textual materials associated with a celebrity. While fans may display concern that celebrities reject their appropriations, as is evidenced by the desire to limit their knowledge of slash fiction, the celebrity figures themselves display a high degree of fluidity. Speaking more generally about balancing different persona, actor Padalecki indicates an ability to divorce his private persona from his public celebrity persona, and that of his on-screen character:

[T]here are so many sides of a person, and especially the sides of an actor. There is the side of Jared that I know...and the side that people at work know. There are so many different sides and aspects and I think that fans are fans of the Jared...in the Sam costume, the Jared that is playing Sam' (2012, p.186).

Similarly, Real Person Slash (RPS) featuring the series writer Eric Kripke is considered by Kripke as fictional construction, for which his name, biographical details and role on the *Supernatural* creative team are but materials for further manipulation (p. 215). The actions of the fictional Kripke, are thus not perceived by the 'real' Kripke to infringe upon his persona. Kripke thus recognises the appropriation of their image under conditions which render them as 'celebrities-as-characters' (Lam 2017, in print). For fan fiction authors, a fictional boundary is maintained as the celebrity figure is conceptualised as raw materials for creative re-production. Thus, 'imagining the celebrity figure as a character enables the fan to use quasi real-world scenarios to explore culture, society and reflect on fan culture' (2017, in print).

The celebrity body offers fan fiction authors a space between reality and fiction, and character and actor upon which works are built. Melanie Piper's (2015) exploration of slash fan fiction featuring the actors Jessie Eisenberg and Andrew Garfield from *The Social Network* (2010), considers the degree to which actor physicality is adopted to

enhance the accuracy of the fictional work, and construct a common frame of (visual) reference. Piper concludes however, that a clear demarcation exists between the representation of the celebrity figure and their function within the fictional text. Rather than rewriting or the celebrity's public persona, the 'appropriation is used to recontextualize the public image, but not to the extent that it is expected to be believed as a representation of reality' (2015, 6.3). Thus fans use the in-between-ness of fictional interpretation to explore the boundaries of narrative texts, and the limits of actor/character entities. In their speculative works, fans reveal the ambiguities of persona construction and perception, such that actor identities are capable of accommodating multiple instances of conflation with characters.

Indeed, celebrities occasionally directly engage in speculation of their characters, conflating their off-screen interactions and statement with on-screen subtext and fan works that extend sub-textual readings. Jocelyn Smith nominates a number of celebrities who engage with their past roles in order to sustain celebrity currency. 'Bob Saget, Dave Coulier and John Stamos have all capitalised on winking at the sappy sincerity of their roles on the 1980s and '90s television series *Full House* (1987–1995)' (Smith 2017, p. 73). Additionally, celebrities such as Tom Felton encourage speculative homoerotic readings of the characters Draco Malfoy and Harry Potter by 'playing with fans' queer readings...and making jokes about his continuing intimate relationships with the male cast members' (73). In so doing, Felton actively conflates the on-screen, fan fiction, and off-screen representations of his character and celebrity persona. For Smith, this activity 'exudes [celebrity] self-awareness' (73), and is beneficial for prolonging public longevity.

Yet celebrity engagement with speculative or subversive readings of their characters may also entail a greater political intention. Derek Johnson's 2008

examination of Ian McKellen's negotiation of the actor/character dynamics his recent characters Magneto and Gandalf, reveals the extent to which celebrity identity can influence, or is limited by, character identity. In the case of Magneto, the character's pre-existing 'presence', back story and construction as villainous prevented a queering from the actor in support of McKellen's queer politics (Johnson 2008). The villainous construction of Magneto complicated any queer readings of the text, and character, as an advocate for homosexual rights. Thus the actor was unable to fully change reception of the character, with fans questioning the ability for the character to offer a platform for allegories of gay advocacy (2008). Johnson outlines fan-celebrity interaction, in which McKellen's acknowledgement of the villainy of Magneto presented obstacles for more straight forward alignment with the actor's politics. Johnson cites a fan thus, ' "[the] way the film portrays activism is deeply troubling for me. Should we sit by and let our human rights and relationships be ignored and vilified?" (E-Post: X-Men, 2000f)' (2008, p. 266). Because Magneto's construction within 'the film and in franchise iterations [was] outside the actor's purview' (266), McKellen was unable to subsume the character within the confines of his own personal politics.

The current paper does not engage with fan-celebrity interactions, nor does it explore the queer readings of the relationships between characters. Rather it focuses on how celebrities perform 'real life' relationships. Nonetheless, McKellen's interaction with his fans on the implications of queering Magneto reveals a desire to actively shape the reception of his performance, discourse and understanding of the character. Beyond 'excud[ing celebrity] 'self-awareness' (Smith 2017, p. 73), this engagement with fan discourse and broader media representation of Magneto, is suggestive of a level of reciprocity between fan perception and celebrity construction of persona. Regardless of intended audience or success of subversion, fan works contribute to the zeitgeist

surrounding the celebrity, and can influence how celebrities narrate their celebrity text. For Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart, online self-presentation evoked a broader narrative of bromance playing out in media and popular culture.

Conceptually, the notion of bromances intersects with the performativity of celebrity identities. The term, a conflation of brother ‘bro’ and romance, emerged in the 1990s to describe the intimacy of male friendships within American skater culture (DeAngelis 2014). Theoretically, its application to studies of representation in literature and films positions it as a model through which to explore male intimacy and homosocial bonding. It is thus, closely associated with shifting notions of masculinity (Chen 2012) and social attitudes towards expressions of intimacy, as well as the increasing visibility of homosexual representation in popular culture (DeAngelis 2014). A genre of films exploring contemporary notion of masculinity in Western culture have been associated with the term. Films such as *Superbad* (2007), *I Love you Man* (2009) and *The Night Before* (2015) are all categorised under the ‘bromance’ label, and feature narratives that explore questions of ‘what it means to be a man’. By extension, methods of expressions of closeness are also explored as notions of masculinity and masculine behaviour become increasingly fluid (Thurnell-Read 2012). Within the narratives of the bromance genre, openness to intimacy is often offset by the foregrounding of intimacy, ridicule or toying with the visual tropes of homosexuality, and the presence of female characters as the personification of an overarching heteronormative narrative framework (Alberti 2013, DeAngelis 2014).

Considered as a form of discourse, the bromance manifests as a set of aesthetics that enable the exploration and expression of male intimacy. As Ron Becker writes: “it is a way of talking and thinking about male friendships that helps produce specific ways of feeling and experiencing homosocial intimacy and masculinity” (2014, p. 235). Thus,

exploration of real-world bromances is revealing of contemporary attitudes towards male homosocial intimacy, and expression thereof. This paper adopts Becker's discursive view of bromances to explore the self-representation of a celebrity bromance through the Twitter presentation of the "public private self" (Marshall 2010, p. 44) of actors Stewart and McKellen.

## **Case Study**

### ***History of Bromance***

Sir Ian McKellen and Sir Patrick Stewart are both renowned British actors who have become known for their close friendship. McKellen was born May 25, 1939 in England and graduated from Cambridge in 1961 (*Sir Ian McKellen* 2015). Since then has grown to be one of the most respected actors in the industry. He is known for his work with the Royal Shakespeare Company and in particular for his iconic roles as Magneto in the *X-Men* franchise and Gandalf in *The Lord of the Rings* films. McKellen is homosexual and is recognised as a gay rights activist. He also "became a Commander of the British Empire (CBE) in 1979 and was knighted in 1991. He was named to the Order of the Companions of Honour (CH) in 2007" (*Sir Ian McKellen* 2015). These publicly known elements of his life build his persona as a caring and respected man. Playing such pivotal roles has also solidified him as being remembered for many years to come.

Similarly, Stewart has played iconic characters such as Professor X in *X-Men* and Captain Jean-Luc Picard in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. Stewart was born July 13, 1940 in England and by the age of twelve had already begun acting in theatre (*Sir Ian McKellen* 2015). Fifty-seven years later, Stewart was knighted in recognition of his work (*Star Trek star Patrick Stewart knighted at Palace* 2010). Having this title has enhanced his brand as a well-respected actor. In recent years his brand is also closely

associated with McKellen's. McKellen and Stewart have performed together in theatre productions such as *No Man's Land* and *Waiting for Godot*. However, their best-known joint performance is the *X-Men* films, where their bromance grew.

In a 2014 interview with Aaron Sagers for the Huffington Post, McKellen and Stewart were asked; "People seem to love your friendship and seeing you work together again, but isn't this a relatively new thing?" (Sagers 2014). McKellen explained:

Our careers have not really crossed. Our careers have run in parallel. We've played the same parts... We're not that old friends, actually. We've known of each other and bumped into each other ... I didn't sort of see him for 17 years. So our coming together is a relatively recent thing. But we fell into each other's arms because of our similarities in our career, and because of our age and because we like the same sort of things (Sagers 2014).

Stewart added that they became close friends while filming the first *X-Men* film, but they had known one another for many years. Stewart elaborated:

I saw him and I was amazed, overwhelmed by the quality of his work. I started our relationship as a fan. He wouldn't know who I was back then. Then we came into the RSC (Royal Shakespeare Company) together. We didn't know one another well but we were both pursuing the same sort of career, but Bryan Singer cast us in the first *X-Men* movie and we had adjoining luxury trailers. Of course, it was movie making so we spent more time sitting in our trailers than on the set. We got to know one another and that's when the bond began, which was cemented by 22 weeks of touring in England and being in the West End doing *Waiting for Godot*. And sharing a dressing room for 22 weeks! (Sagers 2014).

As Stewart mentioned, the two actually met in the 1970s at the Royal Shakespeare Company (*Two Sirs: Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart* 2013) and since *X-Men*, their friendship has gained a lot of media attention and fan interest. Their friendship was solidified and made authentic by McKellen officiating Stewart's wedding in 2013. The wedding was quite secretive, however Ian McKellen did state, "I'm going to marry

Patrick” in an interview with Jonathan Ross. The way of announcing it also adds to their bromance (*Sir Patrick Stewart marries, Sir Ian McKellen officiates* 2013). Being a strong user of social media, Stewart announced that he had married Sunny Ozell by posting a picture of themselves in a ball pit and captioning it with “Yes, married” (*Sir Patrick Stewart marries, Sir Ian McKellen officiates* 2013). Similarly, McKellen “posted a photograph to Facebook, in which he was holding a ‘Doctor of Divinity’ certificate and a black t-shirt emblazoned with the word ‘Minister’. ‘I played my part,’ he wrote, while linking to Sir Patrick's Twitter announcement” (*Sir Patrick Stewart marries, Sir Ian McKellen officiates* 2013). In another interview, Ozell spoke about McKellen getting “choked up” to which Stewart added that everyone had (Proud 2013). This reference to the amount of emotion further reinforces their bromance. It suggests that McKellen’s speech was sincere and passionate.

Another pivotal moment in their bromance history was when Stewart arrived at McKellen’s premier for *Mr Holmes* and they shared a kiss on the lips, creating media hype. Nardine Saad reported for the Los Angeles Times, “Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart just took their bromance to the next level: smooching on a red carpet” (Saad 2015). Saad (2015) goes on to refer to the moment as a “public display of affection”. Saad (2015) also alludes to Ozell as being a third wheel stating, “Hey, Ian was here first, sister”. Similarly, Nola Ojomu wrote for Daily Mail, “Ultimate bromance! Patrick Stewart plants a huge KISS on best friend Sir Ian McKellen's lips at Mr Holmes premiere (as his wife Sunny Ozell watches on in the background)” (Ojomu 2015). Entertainment Tonight reporter, Jackie Willis titled her article “Best Bromance Ever! Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen Kiss at 'Mr. Holmes' Premiere” (Willis 2015). Willis followed this with “Just when you thought Patrick Stewart and Sir Ian McKellen couldn't get any cuter, they kiss! The best friends locked lips at the London premiere of



McKellen's movie *Mr. Holmes* while Stewart's wife, Sunny Ozell, watched. She didn't seem to mind and neither did the actors' fans" (Willis 2015). All of the reporters use the term bromance and express a sense of excitement over their shared kiss. Willis is more forgiving of Ozell's position but does point it out. Willis also expresses the positive reaction of fans. Ultimately, the actors knew they were surrounded by the media and that their kiss would generate discussion. It is highly likely that it was a publicity stunt to evoke more conversation around *Mr Holmes*. Whether it was intended or not, their bromance certainly helps to create promotion.

Their bromance is particularly interesting in that they often declare a homosocial intimacy, which is complicated by Stewart being heterosexual and McKellen being homosexual. Not only did they kiss on the lips at the *Mr Holmes* premier, but they posted a video on social media of them kissing at a New Years Eve party. Furthermore, they are often photographed hugging, holding hands and have a strong banter between them in interviews. It is these characteristics of their relationship that creates the essence of their bromance. Being of an older generation and being comfortable with sexuality is also a fascinating part of their joint persona. Their differing sexual orientation does not seem to impact on the audience's reading of their bromance.

In an interview for *Channel 4 News* McKellen and Stewart were asked to "write a hashtag that best sums up your bromance?" Stewart wrote #Aren'tWeLucky and McKellen wrote #Eternal (Channel 4 News 2014). The actors seem to embrace the bromance title and feed the media and fan interest. This is also evident through their online interactions, which is reinforced by the media collating the information and reporting on it, and cyclically repeated by the actors retweeting such articles. For instance, McKellen retweeted an article by *Empire's* Ben Kirby, titled "Why Sir Ian McKellen and Sir Patrick Stewart Rule the Internet" (Kirby 2015). The article

summarised photographs and posts by the actors. An article by Ann-Marie Alcantara for Popsugar did the same and sensationalised their friendship further with the title “15 Pics That Prove Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen Are True Soul Mates” (Alcantara 2015). Ultimately, they have a strong friendship that is well reflected in social media and traditional media. However, their bromance is also represented on-screen through their characters in *X-Men*. Magneto and Professor X are often on opposing sides of a battle and yet frequently save one another and share moments of intimacy through a brotherly-bond. Thus, Stewart and McKellen have an on- and off-screen bromance. Their on-screen chemistry elevates the significance of their off-screen friendship. For X-Men fans, their off-screen bromance also adds authenticity to the performance of their characters. The actors often refer to their characters and their film when promoting other joint performances or sharing images of themselves online. This paper focuses on how their social media postings reflect their bromance and analyses how they utilise their bromance as a promotional tool.

## **Method and Results**

Tweets from the accounts of Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart were collected focusing on a three-year period from January 2013 to May 2016. All tweets between the two were collected, as were tweets in which the other was mentioned or tagged. Content analysis conducted on both image and textual tweets categorized the tweets into four groups; ‘Friendship focused’, ‘Promotion – official’, ‘Promotion – personal/friendship’, and ‘Supporting career and causes’. Tweets were categorised based on the nature of the image and the theme arising from the text. The timing of the tweets is also taken into consideration, particularly when considering categorization into either of the ‘Promotion’ categories. During the time period of interest, the film *X-Men Days of Future Past* (2014) was released, and the two led a double run of the plays *Waiting for*

*Godot* and *No Man's Land* (2013-2014), as well as a rerun of *No Man's Land* in 2016. Each author conducted categorization independently and compared results. Tweets on which there were discrepancies were discussed and re-categorised.

In total 143 tweets were collected, 70 from Stewart and 83 from McKellen. A summary of categories is listed in Table 1. The majority (44%) of the tweets were categorized as 'Promotion – personal/friendship', due in part to the volume of images tweeted by both Stewart and McKellen during the 2013/2014 run of *Waiting for Godot* and *No Man's Land*. The specific marketing strategy adopted for the plays also contributed to the number of tweets in this category. 31% (44) of tweets were categorised as 'Promotion – official'. These tweets featured official publicity stills and retweets from official sources for the various works associated with both actors. Promotional tweets about work not involving either actor, or which did not mention either actor, were excluded from analysis. 30 (21%) tweets featured their friendship, with tweets highlighting personal time spent together, celebration of milestones such as birthdays, or use of the word 'friend' allocated to the 'Friendship focused' category. Tweet allocated to the final 'Supporting career and causes' category reflected a desire to support the other person's career and causes. These causes and works were unrelated to the individual tweeting, thus bringing no promotion benefit to the tweeter. The career of the other was supported through the retweeting of reminders to watch television shows, films, or attendance at premier events. Retweets of announcements advocating for specific causes was also noted. 6 (4%) tweets were allocated into this category.

<b>Combined Tweets from Jan 2013 to May 2016</b>		
<i>Category</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>%</i>
Friendship/bromance focused	30	21%
Promotion - official	44	31%
Promotion - personal/friendship	63	44%
Supporting career and causes	6	4%
Total	143	100%

**Table 1.** Combined tweets (January 2013 to May 2016)

## **Discussion**

### ***Friendship/bromance Focused Tweets***

The friendship or bromance between Stewart and McKellen is displayed through the presentation of public and private personas that reinforce media perception of the pair as friends, while simultaneously contributing to the genuineness of their bond. Tweets in this category generally conform to three types; casual or private tweets, tweets displaying interaction, and tweets relating to their friendship as is reflected in the media.

### ***Casual/Private tweets***

The public platform of social networking sites such as Twitter encourages celebrities to adopt a method of interaction that, in the words of Marshall, “implies some sort of further exposure of the individual’s life” (2010, p. 44). Simultaneously, the rules and infrastructure of the platform (restricted characters and interface with camera functions on smart phones) facilitates immediacy and use within private spaces. The decision to capture images directly, upload pre-existing or professional images, and electing to use text thus provides insight into the user’s intentions for the tweet. For instance, a

captured image is more likely to be perceived as spontaneous, intimate and direct than a professionally shot still, while the choice of accompanying text is revealing of the user's personality, mood and motivation.

The casual/private tweets between Stewart and McKellen express a desire to demonstrate a form of friendship that is equally strong within private moments as it is under the gaze of media attention. Tweeted images of the pair in casual or relaxed situations away from publicity events illustrate a degree of friendship that extends into the everyday. When celebrities elect to spend the 'down time' together, the implication is a higher degree of familiarity and comfort in the other's presence. An image tweeted by Stewart in 2013 shows McKellen posing with a tile commemorating Janice Joplin's 1963 arrest in Berkeley, California, accompanied with the text "It's true...the boys are in Berkeley. @IanMcKellen" (Stewart 2013). The absence of Stewart in the shot (tweeted from his account) suggests Stewart's presence behind the lens. This is reinforced through the use of 'boys' in the accompanying text, verifying Stewart's presence and constructing an image of closeness worthy of the inclusive term. In tagging McKellen, Stewart includes him in the moment, in so doing publicizing the private moment as both his and McKellen's followers will be alerted to the tweet. The use of terms such as 'boys', 'friend', or 'old friend' when captioning these images, offer a perspective on how they view their relationship, and reinforce the sense of an off-screen friendship.

Other tweets that document time spent together away from publicity events further reinforces a sense of friendship, including attendance at basketball games, and themed image tweets during the Super bowl – in which they posed with soccer balls under the caption "Football!" (Stewart, 2014). Although posed, the body language within these images are not reflective of the more formal stance associated with publicity stills. Their posture is relaxed and they often refer directly to camera with

quirky facial expressions that highlight the fun and playful aspects of their personalities. Occasionally they appear to be unaware of the camera's presence. In an image tweeted by Stewart in 2013, McKellen watches on while Stewart practices the use of a bow and arrow under the supervision of (it is presumed) Stewart's soon-to-be brother in law. The image is accompanied by the caption "Finally, lesson 1 in the use of my beautiful Xmas gift. Instructor: brother-in-law to be, Andy. Audience: Sir Ian" (Stewart, 2013). Both are focused on Andy as he gives instructions, while the image itself bears the hallmarks of a photo taken with a phone.

In addition to the context of the images and the appearance – including body language and attire – of the celebrities. It is the quality of the images that contributes to a sense of private, everyday normalcy. The photographs are occasionally imperfectly framed, grainy, lack depth of field or are shot with inconsistent or automatic exposure. These aesthetics represent the antithesis of the "formulaic approach of commercial cinema or television..." (Buckingham, Pini & Willett 2009, p. 67) that privilege structured camera work and technical accuracy as 'professional'. The 'amateur' is thus defined in opposition to this formula of taste and is associated with the 'home made' and the private (2009). The 'amateur' aesthetic thus reinforces the sensation of unmediated rawness and encourages a perception of the relationship displayed within as genuine. They become evidence to document off-screen closeness within the private context. That these images are published on a public platform reflects a performance of the "private public self" (Marshall 2010, p. 45), which the intimacy of the platform both allows and enhances.

While the function of the platform facilitates continued exhibition of the private, a performance of the 'private public self' and insight into the personal sphere is not always the motivation for publication. A series of tweets from both Stewart and

McKellen illustrate the duality of the display ‘private public self’. In 2015, Stewart tweeted an image of himself and McKellen at a New Years Eve party. They sit facing the camera, arm around the other’s shoulder and wearing matching party crowns. Stewart’s caption reads simply “HAPPY NEW YEAR!” (Stewart 2015). At the same time, McKellen tweeted the image with the caption “Happy New Year, everybody! And a grand new year it will be!” (McKellen 2015). To the casual observer this series of tweeted images offers a glimpse into the private sphere of the celebrities and suggests they are close enough to elect to spend New Years Eve together. McKellen later tweets a video that changes the context of the original tweets by drawing attention to their collaboration. Users only subscribed to Stewart’s account may perceive the image as a straightforward display of friendship rather than the promotional opportunity it was. This is particularly the case as McKellen mentioned, but did not tag, Stewart in his video tweet meaning it was absent from his feed.

### *Interactions*

Tagging, retweeting and replying are the most common form of interaction that occurs on Twitter. Such interaction is often enacted between media organizations, fans and celebrities, and between celebrities. However, regular and sustained interaction is suggestive of continued contact and a heightened degree of familiarity and friendship. Both Stewart and McKellen tweet the other during milestone events such as birthdays, and reply to tweets as this interchange on 26 February 2014 demonstrates:

McKellen: My first-ever basketball game. Thrilling. Madison Square Garden at capacity: 18,200...

Stewart: My first as well! MT “@IanMcKellen: My 1st ever basketball game. Thrilling. MadSqGarden at capacity ...

McKellen’s original tweet included a link to an Instagram image of the two on court

during half time, visual ‘evidence’ of their presence at the event and a record of their excitement. This is supported by their choice of text: ‘Thrilling’ for McKellen and the use of an exclamation point for emphasis by Stewart. Simultaneously, this public display of private interaction both on and offline illustrates their desire to spend time together at events that ‘normal’ friends naturally gravitate towards. Over time, repeated tweeting, retweeting and replies reinforces the image of the two as off-screen friends and buddies who have adopted the social networking platform as an extension of their normal communication patterns.

### *Friendship reflected in media*

The impression of Stewart and McKellen as close friends who share a bromance is not restricted to, nor indeed does it originate from, Twitter. Within the broader popular and tabloid press, the image of the pair as a bromance ‘couple’ is frequently adopted, particularly as a point of comparison to bromance of James McAvoy and Michael Fassbender (Pate 2014). Their friendship forms the basis of most background information on media reports of their collaborations, following closely behind their *X-Men* connection. In an article retweeted by McKellen, *Daily Mail* reporter Baz Bamigboye emphasised the self-reported nature of their relationship, describing how they “both talked of their great friendship, which developed during the course of filming the X-Men pictures” (2016). This perspective is enhanced through two pieces written for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, in both recount the other’s background and experiences that brought them together, McKellen writes of Stewart “...he’s been a big part of my life lately...the crucial difference is that Patrick is a Yorkshireman and I’m a Lancastrian - Wars of the Roses and all that” (Wheatley 2014).

As they adopt a playful attitude towards the presentation of their relationship, it is unsurprising that the media follow suit. In 2014 the Guardian US ran a competition



asking fans to alter the Kayne West/Kim Kardashian wedding edition of *Vogue* magazine. One entry submitted by fans, tweeted by Guardian US and retweeted by McKellen, featured their heads on Kayne and Kim's bodies. The celebrities are thus engaging with wider media perception of their friendship – and construction as a 'couple' – through the online platform while at the same time endorsing the sentiment by retweeting it, an unspoken expression of agreement within the rules of the platform.

Similarly, references by other celebrity figures to the two as a pair reinforce the media (and self-constructed) image of closeness as this retweet from Taylor Swift indicates: "Thanks for reciting my lyrics, @IanMcKellen and @SirPatStew! You've made my day. You two are ULTIMATE Squad Goals:" (McKellen 2015). The image accompanying the tweet is a collage of Stewart and McKellen in various locations around New York, as well as an official photograph of McKellen officiating at Stewart's wedding. Swift thus employs a widely accepted image of Stewart and McKellen as close friends and a bromance 'couple' as a means to justify her affection towards them and willingness to admit them to her inner circle or 'squad'. In the act of engagement, both McKellen and Stewart are acknowledging and reaffirming the perception of their relationship within broader media and celebrity culture, and by retweeting, perpetuating and sustaining that image.

### ***Supporting Careers and Causes Tweets***

A smaller portion of tweets does not focus on sustaining an image of friendship, nor are they associated with collaborative works. These tweets consist of retweets of articles, other celebrity tweets or tweets from the other party regarding work or causes in which the other does not feature. In the lead up to the 2015 broadcast of Stewart's television series *Blunt Talk*, McKellen retweeted Stewart's promotion tweets. Likewise, Stewart retweeted a vine video featuring McKellen and Derrick Jacobi celebrating the US

Supreme Court's ruling on gay-marriage in 2015, adding the text "A great day for love. #lovewins" (Stewart 2015).

These tweets are more altruistic in nature, as they do not serve a promotional purpose for the individual retweeting. McKellen is not involved in the series *Blunt Talk*, nor is marriage equality an issue commonly associated with Stewart. Thus, drawing attention to the work or causes brings little benefit to the individual. It is however, an illustration of how the pair use the platform as a means to support the other's work and interests. Through the act of retweeting, their own followers become aware of the work and causes of the other celebrity, in the process widening the field of distribution and starting (or continuing) a word-of-mouth campaign. It illustrates a desire to support the other's career and causes and, through this support, establishes a deeper connection between the two. They are friends who not only 'play' together, but 'stand up' for each other when more 'serious' matters arise. Their friendship thus appears more genuine as they take the time to promote the other's work and causes, not only taking to Twitter when they have collaborative projects to promote.

### ***Promotion – Personal/Friendship Tweets***

Many of McKellen and Stewart's tweets have a dual purpose of promoting their joint projects and enhancing their bromance identity. A key example of McKellen and Stewart using social media to promote their work and reinforce their friendship is the aforementioned New Years Eve postings. Like the photo, McKellen posted a video on Jan 1, 2016 of the actors celebrating New Years Eve, wearing party crowns and cuddling together. In the video they talk about their upcoming theatre show, but within the context of their partying environment. They wish viewers a happy new year and then end the video with a kiss. McKellen's tweet reads; "We are celebrating (can you tell?) the new year, that will bring Patrick Stewart and me back to London's West End"

(McKellen 2016). By sharing a kiss and celebrating the New Year together this enhances their bromance identity. However, the video is still a direct advertisement for their play.

Similarly, on 29 November 2013, Stewart tweeted “Thanksgiving! #gogodididonyc @TwoPlaysInRep” accompanied by an image of the two actors wearing their bowler hats and celebrating Thanksgiving (Stewart 2013). They are hugging and have large smiles on their faces, reflecting the notion of their close bond. This image is one of many that represented their time together in New York. They released a series of images through social media of them in bowler hats doing tourist activities in New York, which worked as promotion for their theatre show. The handle @TwoPlaysInRep was often used. However, their playfulness and the perception of them looking authentically happy together also reinforced their bromance. Another example of their New York travels include a post by Stewart on 3 October 2013 that read; “Coney Souvenir! #gogodididonyc @TwoPlaysInRep” (Stewart 2013). The accompanying image showed the two actors hugging and smiling in the bowler hats once more. However, this image was also photoshopped to look like it was on a pink wall with graffiti writing that stated “Homies Forever”, which reiterated that they are close friends.

As a part of their New York trip, McKellen and Stewart also used the opportunity to create a cross-promotion for their play and for a charity. On 4 April 2014, Stewart tweeted; “Sir Ian's and my auction of our signed #gogodididonyc tshirts closes today at 4pm PST. @CityHarvest is a GREAT cause. <http://bit.ly/1fXUWAK>” (Stewart 2014). This creates a positive reinforcement of their brands, representing them as kind-natured people, while also drawing attention to their show. There were several tweets about this. Another example, is Stewart’s tweet on the same day that stated “My

dear @EllenPage might I ask you to tweet about Sir Ian's and my @eBay auction? We're cute AND it's a great cause. <http://bit.ly/1fXUWAK> (Stewart 2014). Ellen Page's response reads; "@SirPatStew of course!! You guys are the cutest! Date already!!!" (Page 2014). Stewart guides the direction of this conversation by stating that he and McKellen are cute. Their bromance is then reinforced by Page's response. Thus, Stewart is utilising their shared brand to help promote the charity.

Stewart and McKellen have also used their friendship to sell *X-Men*. On 21 July 2013, Stewart posted; "Last night, Sir Ian prepared for us a fortifying risotto in preparation for Comic Con. @IanMcKellen #SDCC2013" (Stewart 2013). The candid image that supported this tweet showed Ian dressed casually and stirring a pot of food. Stewart does not mention who else is at the dinner, which leaves the focus on the two of them. The intimate setting of a homely environment and the fact that McKellen is cooking for Stewart, adds to the notion of their bromance. However, Stewart's inclusion of the Comic Con hashtag transforms this into an advertisement for the event, which is held to promote *X-Men*.

### ***Official Promotion Tweets***

Both Stewart and McKellen often retweet movie posters and other promotional material. Sometimes these are given greater value when they reference one another directly in the posts. These are the tweets gathered for this study, as this action can help personalise the promotional message. An example of a tweet that just focused purely on promoting their joint projects is: "The X-Men factor is roaring into the West End September 8 <http://dailym.ai/1U5LMeB> via @NoMansLandPlay" (McKellen 2016). This was posted by McKellen on 11 March 2016. The accompanying image was a professional photograph of the two actors. This promotional post is particularly interesting for the reference to *X-Men*, although they are promoting their play. This may

be intended to draw in their *X-Men* fans to entice them to watch their show as well. They have discussed in various interviews that it is certainly a different target audience between the various performances they do.

Another example of an official promotion tweet, is by Stewart on 13 October 2013; “Tune in to CBS Sunday Morning to see Sir Ian and myself talk about our upcoming Broadway run...and to see some rehearsal footage!” (Stewart 2013). Stewart mentions his co-star, where they are appearing, and their upcoming performance. He tempts followers with reference to rehearsal footage, which suggests a backstage view of them working. This glimpse into the unseen part of their performance rewards fans for their loyalty and is a strong promotional tool in gaining people’s interest.

### ***Promotion and Authenticity***

Through the data collected it is evident that Stewart and McKellen use social media to enhance their bromance identity and promote their work. Often they do both simultaneously. They are recognised by traditional media for their efforts online. While they are of an older generation than most Twitter users, they embrace the media. They interact with fans and other celebrities, they post seemingly candid photos and they promote their work and charities. They both post frequently and reflect their brands well through their tone of voice and use of the space. With the paradigm shift brought on by social media in the past decade, it is becoming increasingly important for celebrities and film studios to utilise the environment for advertising. Of course, it must be done well to be successful. A sense of authenticity in the posts can enhance the way a message is read.

An emphasis on the private sphere, both in tweets focused on their friends, and tweets used to promote their work, resonates with Marwick and boyd’s claim of a “performed intimacy” (2011, p. 140) in the online space of social networking sites such

as Twitter. They argue that it is the inability for fans to decipher moments of authentic spontaneity and strategic performance that makes engagement on the platform pleasurable (2011). In the celebrity performance of the “private public self” (Marshall 2010, p. 45), fan expectation of ambiguity between genuine private moments and strategic displays becomes a part of the moment of fan-celebrity interaction. However, when promotional activities form the context of such presentation, interpretations may lean towards the cynical.

Authenticity and genuineness is, as established, difficult to discern as identity and especially celebrity identities are highly performative in nature. Yet, the perception of authenticity is a motivating factor in fan enjoyment of celebrity interactions (Authors 2016), and can be influenced by a number of factors. Within the range of tweets sampled, a majority displayed individuals who were relaxed, smiling or playing up to the camera in both official and unofficial contexts. The ease, with which they appear in the images and in particular the consistency of the apparent ease, is suggestive of ‘real’ comfort and familiarity. The sense that ‘they really do get on’ is enhanced with every subsequent post of similar images. Similarly, repetition and regularity in interactions is suggestive of increased levels of genuine affection between the pair, each post that continues a ‘conversation’ adding to the perception that their friendship is authentic.

While the presentation of their friendship on Twitter is more recent, 2010 and 2012 for McKellen and Stewart respectively, their acquaintance and eventual friendship dates back to the 1970s, as previously mentioned. This long history of association provides a context through which their Twitter activity is viewed. It may be unclear whether their image and textual posts are strategic or spontaneous, however the fact that there is interaction between the two after so many years is testament to an underlying connection that extends beyond the superficial performativity of self-presentation on

social media. The persistence of interaction and the desire to continue to collaborate renders the platform but the latest communication technology to service the cultivation of a long-lasting relationship. Similarly, their promotional activity, in which their friendship features prominently, becomes folded into a larger narrative of friendship. As the media pick up on these instances of (performed) intimacy, the narrative of Stewart-and-McKellen-as-friends (now a bromance couple), enhances the genuineness of their relationship. Their subsequent re-circulation of these media stories further reinforces this perception and heightens the degree of authenticity attributed to their bromance.

## **Conclusion**

The presentation of friendship and bromance on the Twitter accounts of Sir Ian McKellen and Sir Patrick Stewart are multifaceted, employed for different purposes and engage with varying degrees of authenticity. At face value, the promotional strategy adopted for the 2013-2014 run of *Waiting for Godot* and *No Man's Land* can be interpreted as pragmatic capitalisation on their combined bromance image. The genuineness of their friendship is thus called into question, as the public display of closeness can be cynically construed as the reflection of a performed identity designed to attract attention. However, within the context of their history of association predating both the *X-Men* films and the run of plays, this presentation is rendered as the latest installation in a long series of publically displayed friendship. Indeed, should their bromance not be grounded in authenticity, it would not serve the core message at the heart of the campaign: that of two companions undertaking two absurdist plays with joy and gusto. Had the pair not shared a pre-existing friendship (recognised by both media and fans) from which references could be drawn, their presence as friends within the images used for the #gogodididonyc campaign would not be convincing. Thus, it is the perceived authenticity of their prior bromance that lends the promotional activity

believability, and indeed it is upon a basis of intimacy that the approach to the campaign is constructed. Additionally, their desire to collaborate frequently (evidenced by their revival of Spooner and Hirst in the 2016 run of *No Man's Land*) and their respective presence during times of personal importance (McKellen officiating at Stewart's wedding), lends weight to the genuineness of their bromance and adds to the authenticity of their relationship.

This paper examined the self-presentation of McKellen and Stewart through one social media platform. Future research will explore their image within wider media reporting, as well as the reaction of fans to their online activity, including analysis of the 'performance' of their friendship in video recordings.

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