CELEBRITY BROMANCES

CONSTRUCTING, INTERPRETING AND UTILISING PERSONAS

Celia Lam and Jackie Raphael

Routledge

Celebrity Bromances is a highly insightful exploration of the way male stars are coupled, homoeroticised and commodified in contemporary popular culture. Lam and Raphael provide us with a wonderful set of case studies, drawing upon the threads of star and persona studies to theorise what these relationships mean to gender and sexuality, branding and commercial power. In this timely book, we learn about the "bromance capital" between such leading figures as Matt Damon and Jimmy Kimmel, Hugh Jackman and Ryan Reynolds, Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart, and James McAvoy and Michael Fassbender. A fascinating, critically astute and pleasurable engagement with male-to-male stardom.

Sean Redmond, Professor of Screen and Design, Deakin University

Celebrity Bromances

This comprehensive work presents a thorough exploration of celebrity "bromances," interrogating how bromances are portrayed in media and consumed by audiences to examine themes of celebrity persona, performativity and authenticity.

The authors examine how the performance of intimate male friendships functions within broadly "Western" celebrity culture from three primary perspectives – construction of persona; interactions with audiences and fans; and commodification. Case studies from film and television are used to illustrate the argument that, regardless of their authenticity (real or staged), bromances are useful for engaging audiences and creating an extension of entertainment beyond the film the actors originally sought to promote.

This book will be of great interest to scholars and students of communications, advertising, marketing, Internet studies, media, journalism, cultural studies, and film and television.

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Contents

1 Introduction to celebrity bromances

Constructing, interpreting and utilising persona

Defining bromances

The image is a familiar one: Two celebrities embrace lovingly in the feature story of an entertainment news site, "couple name" emblazoned across the screen as a validation of their relationship. They are, it appears, the latest in a long run of celebrity pairings that have been given the stamp of approval by the popular press. They are the next bennifer or brangelina.[1] However, they are not a couple in the romantic sense of the word. They are bros; male friends whose closeness transcends ordinary friendship to enter the realm of the bromance. As our hypothetical cover story indicates, bromances attract intense media and fan attention, speculation and (re)imagination. Increasingly, the bromance has also come to the attention of scholars from a variety of fields with perspectives from gender studies, politics, media, advertising, marketing and Internet studies. This book explores bromances from a celebrity studies perspective. We aim to examine the significance of the bromance as a concept and practice in contemporary popular culture, and explore its use in celebrity culture.

The concept of the bromance almost requires no introduction in contemporary celebrity culture – which is admittedly a facetious way to open this introductory overview on the subject. By way of defence, consideration of the multiple uses of the term evidences the ubiquitous nature of the notion. From its origins as a descriptor of close friendships between famous male figures (DeAngelis, 2014) to its use in films on the same subject (Alberti, 2013), and appropriation by mainstream press to describe relationships between political leaders (BBC, 2018), the bromance has become shorthand for a particular form of male intimacy. Its predominance in popular culture and celebrity discourse is solidified through fictional texts that explore the subject matter, and use by celebrity figures to characterise and promote their relationships with each other off-screen. Within the more "serious" realms of geopolitical discourse, the term finds expression as a marker of positive (or perverse) international relations by virtue of the nature of the relationship between political leaders. In contrast to Barack Obama's playful and seemingly "healthy" bromance with Joe Biden (USA Today, 2017), Donald

Trump's various bromances with leaders such as Vladimir Putin (Forbes, 2018) and Kim Jong Un (BBC, 2018) are characterised as indicators of Trump's unpredictability. Thus, while the term is explored within the context of celebrity culture in this volume, its presence and influence beyond these confines cannot be discounted.

In Michael DeAngelis' oft-cited 2014 book, the bromance is defined as an "emotionally intense bond between presumably straight males who demonstrate an openness to intimacy that they neither regard, acknowledge, avow, nor express sexually" (p. 1). While DeAngelis firmly situates his exploration within fictional confines, the focus on relational connections between male figures against a backdrop of heteronormativity sees application of the concept in fields of scholarship such as gender studies in addition to literature and film studies. Gender studies scholars are primarily interested in how the term articulates degrees of male homosocial interaction within heteronormative frameworks, which nonetheless produce nuanced interpretations of heteronormativity (Robinson et al., 2018). For literature and film studies scholars, the bromance reflects and represents contemporary musings on masculinity and shifting attitudes towards homosexuality (Harbidge, 2012; DeAngelis, 2014). The concerns of these two fields of scholarship loosely shape the discussion of this volume, namely the interplay between applications and influences of bromances in real-world and fictional contexts. The following section explicates the key themes around which discussion in the aforementioned fields coalesces, and outlines the relevance of the themes to the analysis of the case studies examined in this volume.

Fictional bromances

The fictional bromances examined in DeAngelis' volume highlight increasing representation of male intimacy, which DeAngelis traces through the broader cultural context of American literature, popular culture and cultural discourse. Specifically, DeAngelis contrasts the growing acceptance of male intimacy within society with a denial of the "naturalized 'given'" (p. 2) of a homosexual relationship. Arguing that the bromance genre of film emerged as a manifestation of the tension between homosocial acceptance and homosexual disavowal, DeAngelis suggests fictional representations of bromances offer spaces to consider contemporary attitudes towards homosexuality. Bromance films become a "litmus test for discerning not only the extent to which homosexuality has been assimilated in contemporary culture . . . [but also the] . . . degree of comfort (or discomfort) that this culture actually experiences with such assimilated homosexuality" (2014, pp. 14–15). For DeAngelis, a reliance on homosexual tropes in the bromance genre is problematic as it ultimately undercuts any notion of acceptance of homosexuality through the deployment of homosexual tropes for humour. Played for humour, homosexual tropes are – if not ridiculed – deployed as a stop

measure to foreground and exaggerate intimacy, in the process downplaying any relational significance (p. 2).

DeAngelis argues that the use of homosexual tropes in bromance films ultimately reinforces heteronormativity through the presentation of homosocial interaction, but privileging heterosexual narrative conclusions. Nonetheless, changes in the cultural context enabled some degree of acceptance of non-normative gender relationships. DeAngelis, Ron Becker (2009), Cynthia Fuchs (1993) and others outline shifting attitudes towards masculinity (specifically hegemonic masculinity) that contributed to increasingly fluid representations of male homosocial relationships. DeAngelis and Fuchs point to the male buddy film as a space for the exploration of male identity, while Becker locates shifts in conceptualisations of masculinity to the American gay rights movements of the 1980s. Through the public expression of non-normative sexual orientation, Becker argues it is "at least possible to envision alternative ways to think about straight masculinity and organise (hetero) sexual identities, desires, and behaviors" (2009, p. 122). Thus, changes in expressions of masculinity resulted in greater acceptance of male homosocial friendships. John Alberti's examination of Judd Apatow's bromance films highlights how fictional texts present these alternatives to hegemonic gender behaviour by revealing "other types of relationships" that he locates within shifting cultural discourses on masculinity (2013, p. 160).

Influenced by a loosening of definitions of masculinity, bromance films such as *Superbad* (2007) construct narrative contexts in which the central question of "what it means to be a man" is examined by adolescent characters embarking on adulthood. The pre-adult stage provides a space to explore the fluidity of masculine behaviour, as well as same-sex friendships that ultimately dissolve, or are diluted, when heterosexual love interests are introduced. This reinforces the heteronormativity of bromance relationships by shaping them as passing phases in individual development (Boyle & Berridge, 2014). Films examining adult male intimacy similarly provide heteronormative narrative contexts in which male homosocial relationships are negotiated alongside male/female relationships (*I Love You Man*, 2009), or through the establishment of the heterosexual credentials of the main characters despite the absence of heterosexual love interests (*Step Brothers*, 2008; *Hangover* series, 2009–2013). Thus, as DeAngelis and others argue, while performance of masculinity is explored with some degree of flexibility, representations of homosocial friendships nevertheless contain the "homophobic caveat that these relationships remain non-sexual" (Rennet, 2015, p. 571).

In her 2020 entry in the *International Encyclopedia of Gender, Media, and Communication* on the topic, Hannah Hamad likewise notes the bromance to be non-sexual in nature, highlighting the how the term helped to normalise male intimacy in "21st-century anglophone media cultures" (p. 1). The normalisation of male homosocial intimacy and the ubiquity of bromance as a term might suggest that all male friendships are considered under a bromance banner. However, it should be noted that the bromance occurs

under what Alberti describes (in films) as "confused homosocial/homoerotic relationships between putatively straight male characters" (2013, p. 159). Intimacy within homosocial bonds is thus the key characteristic of the relationships under discussion, which characterises the discourse of bromance adopted by the key case studies in this volume.

This discourse of bromance encapsulates the homosocial/homoerotic ambiguity of male intimacies which are often expressed through the tropes of mediated male homosociality seen in the slate of bromance films in the late 2000s and early 2010s, including a tendency to present intimacy but disavow homoeroticism. In the popular vernacular of Anglophone (mostly US) culture, it is captured in the phrase "I love you man." The discourse of bromance is also utilised to facilitate on-and-off screen continuity. Hamad highlights how, in the promotional run for the bromance film *The Nice Guys* (Black, 2016) starring Ryan Gosling and Russell Crowe as private detectives, the narrativised bromance spanned both fictional and real-world settings. She observes:

> The bromance discourse that anchors the narrative of the latter also extended beyond the cinematic text and was harnessed in the film's marketing campaign, which made a point of depicting Gosling and Crowe in tactile contact with one another (e.g., leaning on one another, one being carried in a piggy-back, etc.).
>
> (p. 3)

This volume focuses on the extension of the narrative from fictional to marketing strategies, with an emphasis on how these extended bromance narratives operate and create new forms of capital. Despite Hamad's suggestion that the currency of the bromance peaked in the early 2010s (2020, p. 4), we suggest that bromances are still valid sources of celebrity capital, particularly when considering the presentation of celebrity bromances in real-world settings. The ways in which the bromance is integrated into other forms of relational or dynamic-driven celebrity capital are explored through the various case studies in this volume.

Real-world bromances

Central to discussions of fictional homosocial friendships is the tension between the homosocial and homosexual, namely that homosocial intimacy remains non-sexual. However, off-screen examinations of the concepts reveal more nuanced considerations. Gender studies scholars have traced what are described as shifting cultural contexts in which restrictions on expressions of male intimacy gradually eased. In 1987, Connell proposed the notion that while a number of masculinities existed in any given context, they were nonetheless dominated by hegemonic masculinities that emphasised specific qualities. Eric Anderson summarises these qualities as "emotional stoicism,

willingness to accept and inflict violence on other men, and participation in masculinized endeavours like sport, the military and other fraternal organizations" (2018, p. 243). An inability to adhere to hegemonic requirements results in "subordination by those who did" (p. 243). While the 1980s saw the characterisation of hegemonic masculinity in alignment with traditional notions of male gender roles, the 1990s witnessed increasing displays of institutional homophobia (Anderson, 2018). Scholars explored the role of homophobia in adolescent school ground hierarchies (Nayak & Kehily, 1996) and within the wider community (Bank & Hansford, 2000; Anderson, 2009). Anderson (later with McCormack) highlights the societal effect of homophobia on what he describes as homohysteria; "heterosexual men's fear of being socially perceived as gay" (Anderson, 2018). In order to avoid a perception of homosexuality, behaviour socially coded as heterosexual is expressed. Such conceptualisations reflect the rigidity of gender and sexual boundaries that scholars have described as characteristic of the 1980s and 1990s (2018).

By the turn of the century, research in Western cultural contexts demonstrates a decline in cultural homophobia (McCormack, 2011; Magrath, 2017) and increasing multiplicity in the behavioural possibilities for heterosexual men, as well as expressions of masculinity. Attributed to a decline in homohysteria, Anderson proposed inclusive masculinity theory in 2009, as a means to theorise post-millennial expressions of masculinity and male homosocial relationships. The theory proposes a correlation between a decline in homohysteria and an increase in diverse expressions of masculinity and intimacy (2009). Subsequent studies have supported the theory where interaction between secondary (McCormack, 2012) and tertiary (Anderson & McCormack, 2015; Magrath & Scoats, 2017) school male students is found to be increasingly intimate without the "homophobic policing" (Magrath & Scoats, 2017) of the 1980s and 1990s.

While the term was not applied in Anderson's initial theorisation, his description of the development of male homosocial relationships as "a "love affair" between two friends, but omitting sexual attraction and desire" (Magrath & Scoats, 2017, p. 3) aligns with what is elsewhere termed the bromance. Inclusive masculinity thus theorises cultural contexts in which fluid expressions of masculinity and male homosocial intimacy become – if not normalised – socially acceptable.

Applying inclusive masculinity to real-world explorations (in a university setting), Stefan Robinson et al. (2018) outline how bromances are conceptualised by young men. Their examination reveals a high level of acceptance of physical intimacy involving "kissing, cuddling, and nudity"; a heightened level of emotional intimacy which distinguishes the bromance from "friendships and romances"; and expression through "poly-amorous (albeit non-sexual) affection" (2018, p. 7). The participants view the bromance as a form of a highly intimate homosocial relationship, which coexists with a heterosexual orientation, and with heterosexual relationships formed after

graduation. Participants viewed emotional disclosure and physical intimacy with bromantic partners as regular and normalised interactions within the social setting of university. All participants identified as heterosexual in orientation yet did not view highly intimate homosocial behaviour in abnormal ways. This suggests that masculine expression is not defined by rigid definitions of heterosexual or homosexual behaviour. Rather, the expression of homosocial intimacy through the use of what is socially coded as homosexual tropes does not preclude heterosexual orientation. Indeed, sexual orientation does not seem to be a defining factor in the range of behaviour displayed, suggesting a more flexible approach to patterns of behaviour conventionally associated with heterosexual and homosexual orientations.

While fictional bromances engage in explorations of homosocial intimacy, it does so through the deployment of homosexual tropes as a means to foreground and diffuse suggestions of homosexual overtones. Explorations of real-world bromances, on the other hand, emphasise a cultural context in which inclusive masculinity enables homosexually coded behaviour to manifest within intense homosocial interactions. It should be noted however that in both contexts, interactions are non-sexual and as such do not challenge heterosexuality. In most cases, the heterosexual orientation of individuals concludes (in both fictional and real-world contexts) in the heteronormative outcome of marriage.

The fluidity of expressions of masculinity outlined by Anderson in inclusive masculinity theory is influenced by shifts in societal attitudes which are, by his own admission, culturally specific. Situated within what may be loosely defined as "Western" contexts (although more specifically American and British), Anderson's account of the increase and decline of "cultural homophobia" (2014) is specific to socio-political events in Britain and America, as well as constructions of hegemonic masculinity in those societies. It follows that for contexts in which shifts have not occurred, or in which hegemonic masculinity is differently constituted, real-world bromances may operate within vastly different discursive environments, if at all. With that caveat, it should be noted that the case studies at the centre of this volume derive from a predominately American cultural context as the relationships discussed evolved from Hollywood productions and are embellished in British and American popular press. The individuals involved hail from British, American and Australian backgrounds and while each locale possesses unique cultural characteristics – particularly in expressions of masculinity – the cultural contexts do share some commonalities.

The examination of bromances in this volume focuses specifically on the application of bromance discourse in real-world celebrity interactions. Located in the space between the narrativised (on-screen) bromance and the real-world (off-screen) sites of promotion and interaction, we consider how bromances are conceived and adopted within the highly mediated and performative contexts of celebrity culture. An examination of bromances in this context enables us to question the role, uses and construction of bromances

in contemporary celebrity and popular culture. With a focus on the dynamics between individuals in a bromance pairing, the celebrity bromance also becomes a site to investigate the commodification of celebrity interactions. Implicated in these questions are concepts that remain central to celebrity scholarship – persona, authenticity and commodification.

Celebrity culture

A defining characteristic of celebrity culture is a reliance on public visibility to validate (Braudy, 1986) and dramatise (Dyer, 1979) questions of identity, facilitate the dissemination of codified images of symbolic individuals (Dyer, 1986) and reinforce the boundaries of the "mediated centre" (Couldry, 2009, p. 438). Perceived thus, public visibility is constituted as a conduit through which celebrity is rendered ubiquitous, constructed as a form of dialogue that influences all aspects of everyday existence and through which audiences and fans shape their relationship with media and popular culture. It is this pervasiveness that enables celebrity culture to adopt multiple roles in contemporary society. Indeed, as a cultural phenomenon, celebrity has been studied for its ability to be pedagogical (Marshall, 2010), ideological (Dyer, 1979, 1986; Turner, 2004) and discursive (Gorin & Dubied, 2011).

Enacted as it is at the boundary between public and private domains, celebrity culture becomes a means through which to examine the interplay between public discourse – often embodied by public persona – and private spheres in which the consumption, reception and production practices of private individuals reveal wider patterns of what Nick Couldry terms "media flows" (2008, p. 48). Within such flows are located the processes of cultural valuation and ideological dissemination to be adopted, subverted or occasionally ignored by private individuals. Hence, celebrity culture is often considered in hegemonic terms and critiqued for its role in (re)asserting the status quo. Further examination of the cultural function of celebrity culture is beyond the scope of this volume, which will instead focus on the role and function of celebrity figures.

In his seminal text, *Heavenly Bodies* (1986), film scholar Richard Dyer characterises stars as texts, comprised of a multiplicity of images, representations and narratives, which are capable of being read. Stars, Dyer argues, reflect values that are current within a society – values which are enforced (or reinforced) through their public personas (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2012). They are personas writ large in the public that represent concerns attendant on notions of identity and personhood (Dyer, 1986). Increasingly, these personas offer glimpses of the private – or the "private public" (Marshall, 2010) – through celebrity use of social media platforms that not only reinforce neoliberal notions of extraordinary ordinariness (van Krieken, 2012) but also access to the intimate spaces of the private that are at once seemingly authentic and performed. As individual entities, celebrities become the site of two concurrent and paradoxical concepts – the performativity

of identity and the search for authenticity. Celebrities are set "on stage" (Braudy, 1986, p. 546) in the mediated public, placed firmly in a context that is performative and constructive in nature. Media scholar Joshua Gamson attributes the rise of visual representation and the "dissemination of the face" as the foundation for the "publicizing of people" (1994, p. 21) and describes a celebrities' rise to fame as a process of "celebrity making" (p. 64). For Gamson, industrial and cultural enterprises such as "public relations, photography, grooming and agenting" (p. 64) contribute to the formation of an entity that is visually fashioned and, by extension, behaviourally pre-fabricated. Indeed, marketing strategies for early Hollywood films sought to frame actors as "picture personalities" (deCordova, 1990, p. 50) reflective of on-screen persona rather than off-screen identities. When interest in the actors' private lives became dominant, publicists employed strategies to facilitate the "merging of on-screen and off-screen identities" (Turner, 2004, p. 13) in which celebrity identities were modified to align with the attributes of current films (Gamson, 1994, pp. 26–27).

From its inception and by virtue of its debt to public visibility, performance and prescribed presentation were inextricably linked with celebrity identities. However, the aforementioned interest in celebrities' private lives suggests a desire for truth within the celebrity image in which the performance is discarded and the seemingly authentic can be found. The "private lives of the players were constituted as a site of knowledge and truth" (deCordova, 1990, p. 98), in which the authentic could be uncovered and the real person revealed. Given the established performativity of celebrity persona in the public arena, considerations of celebrities' private lives were conceptually aligned with the authentic. Yet, confluence between what is privately known and what is publicly displayed become central to valuations of a celebrities' genuineness – accrued celebrity capital also reliant on the "truthfulness" of a celebrity figure.

Persona, authenticity and commodification feature heavily in the discussions of celebrity bromances in the following chapters as we consider how the construction and performance of individual celebrity persona are influenced by the need to accommodate additional (often multiple) relational dynamics and amass capital. The ways in which celebrity bromances are represented in the media, are presented and performed by the celebrity figures, and are received and propagated by audience and fans are informative of how bromance discourses are adopted to formulate celebrity "couples" which are deployed to both capitalise upon and intensify the currency of celebrity figures. This volume explores how celebrity "couples" are constructed in the contemporary context of mediated persona curation. It examines how celebrity figures engage with the performative aspects of expressions of (relational) intimacy, and the need to establish a sense of authenticity in the relationship. As such, three key themes form the basis of our theoretical approach – persona, authenticity and commodification.

Persona

The image of a celebrity figure is theorised as a site of discursive potential (Dyer, 1986), comprised of a variety of representations spanning sites and mediums. While a celebrity may come to public attention first through their works, their public image is reinforced and embellished through interviews, media reporting and more recently their own social media posts. More contemporary processes of celebrification, defined by Olivier Driessens as "the transformation from ordinary person to celebrity" (2012, p. 642), occur through online platforms which enable individuals to garner attention and amass capital. Regardless of the origins of celebrity, scholarly consensus is that the images associated with celebrities are products of the "celebrity industry" (2012, p. 642), which are manufactured and maintained by sub-industries such as agents and publicists (Gamson, 1994), and contain value (Marshall, 1997). The value of a celebrity lies not only in the attention they garner and their ability to help sell commodities. Celebrities also embody cultural values which, as previously outlined, are considered to reflect or reinforce values important to the cultural context in which they operate. It is for this reason that star images were shaped to emphasise hegemonic notions of femininity, masculinity and individuality during Hollywood's Studio era (Dyer, 1979),[2] or modified to match the attributes of the most recent films in which they featured (Gamson, 1994, pp. 26–27). It is for the same reason that celebrity figures are aligned with brands wishing to capitalise on cultural values deemed appealing to target markets (McCracken, 1989). Capital is located in a celebrity figures' ability to embody market appropriate values and to attract attention to a brand or media product.

The types of images discussed thus far have predominately been public images – those seen on-screen, at public events and in media reporting. They operate within what P. David Marshall terms a "representational culture" (2010, p. 38) insofar as they are a product of traditional media systems (television; film; the press) and dependent on the same system to gain and maintain currency. While the constructed public image of a celebrity is represented by these media systems, Marshall argues that the uptake of online modes of self-presentation exemplifies a "*presentational culture*" that enables celebrities to "in a very real sense, re-present and re-construct themselves" (p. 68, emphasis in original). The burgeoning social media platforms of the early 2010s constitute a system external to the traditional media system in which celebrity self-presentation seems to originate from the celebrity figure themselves, rather than through the filter of a representational system.

Notwithstanding the later development of agencies to manage celebrity social media accounts, the identity that is presented in presentational media seems to be more direct and under the control of the celebrity figure. Yet, full disclosure of an unmanufactured self is not guaranteed. Marshall theorises three levels of self that are presented – the public self, "the official version

that in celebrity parlance would be the industrial model of the individual . . . [sites that] work to maintain the public persona" (2010, p. 44); the public private self that involves "some sort of further exposure of the individual's life" (p. 44); and the transgressive intimate self which is motivated by emotions but "is also the kind of information/image that passes virally throughout the Internet because of its visceral quality of being closer to the core of the being" (p. 45). Uncharacteristic or unplanned expressions of sentiments online are perceived to be revealing of an individual's genuine self, and can further reinforce a celebrity persona or provide "accelerate pathway[s] to notoriety and attention" (p. 45).

In a presentational culture, celebrities are presented with more opportunities and platforms through which to present versions of their persona. These platforms operate by specific modes of expression that are often unique to each site and thus constitute diverse "rules" through which a celebrity persona can be assessed as genuine or manufactured. Personas, celebrity or otherwise are by definition performative, as they are the product of curation and rely on consistency (across platforms and over time) and appropriateness (to social roles) for credibility (Marshall et al., 2019, p. 3). Fan use of social media platforms to collate images of celebrity figures constitutes an additional, often alternative, persona that circulates in online media ecologies alongside "officially" curated persona (Harris, in press). Thus, the potential meaning attributed to individual celebrity figures multiplies depending on the source of curation, each producing a persona that is inherently consistent (to celebrity self-presentation or fan interpretation) but which might conflict with other variants.

Writing on online fan curation of narratives about Bill Murray and Keanu Reeves, Rachael Harris argues that shifts in celebrity persona are influenced as much by life changes and media representation as it is by online fan activity. Further, she notes that fan activity can create divergent celebrity persona, while at the same time helping to validate shifts in a celebrities' presentation of identity. Internet memes featuring Keanu Reeves engage with discourses of "sadness" through the 2010 sad Keanu meme, but in fact offer him as a source of philosophical reflection on melancholia and positivity. Harris tracks how these online personas intersect with an aging Reeves, forming a new "archetypal persona [that] has adapted from the youthful goofball into the mature, wise teacher" (in press). Whether curated by celebrity figures or by other online users, the online persona is integral to the overall identity presentation of well-known figures.

Thus, celebrity bromances are presented in a highly mediated context in which a number of celebrity figures could be curating multiple personas. More precisely, celebrity personas could be located in a number of different places, some of which (if fan curated) are not entirely within their own control. A bromance pairing combines individual celebrity personas with their attendant levels of curation (some highly managed by publicists; others self-managed), increasing the levels of both presentation and representation

implicated within the persona and complicating how the personas are interpreted. Finally, these personas are publicly enacted and utilised mostly for promotional purposes, bringing to the fore question of authenticity.

Authenticity

The term authenticity is defined in its original Latin and Greek context as "original, primary, at first hand" (Oxford Dictionaries online), denoting genuineness and factual representation in more contemporary iterations. A superficial correlation of the terminology to celebrity identity is paradoxical in the performative context of celebrity culture. However, it is the audience's awareness of such performativity that sparks queries into the entity behind the performance. What celebrities are really like, what they actually do, how they truly interact with other celebrities become questions that come to the fore in a highly mediatised environment. Additionally, in a contemporary media culture that actively reveals celebrities' stumbling forays into the limelight, celebrities are rendered as extraordinarily ordinary, grounded in the everyday, yet possessive of the tropes of celebrity that lend them the aura of stardom. As a consequence of intensive media interest in the everydayness of celebrity figures, audiences developed "celebrity literacy" (van Krieken, 2012, p. 141), the ability to discern the truthfulness of identity presentation. In this context, authenticity (or perceived authenticity) becomes an influencing factor in the believability of celebrity persona, and by extension celebrity interactions, particularly with other celebrities.

Theorisation of authenticity within celebrity studies owes a large debt to sociologist Erving Goffman's dramaturgical analogy of identity management. Goffman (1959) proposes a framework for conceptualising the presentation of self by distinguishing between "front" and "back" stage spaces – the "front" stage the site of public presentation before interactants; the "back" stage the private space of the self. The types of identity information presented in these spaces differ due to the nature of the social interactions involved, with more consideration given to the identity projected in the "front" stage space, depending on the type of audience (social interactants) present. Goffman articulates two types of identity information – given and given-off – that reflect conscious and subconscious ways to present information about the self (1959). In contrast, the backstage self does not deliberate over the nature of identity information to present, as there is no audience to whom to communicate details about the self. Implicit in this characterisation is the notion that the backstage self is devoid of construction and is therefore a truer version of the self than the frontstage self.

This perceived separation between the performed frontstage and "real" backstage underpins conceptualisations of the manufactured public image of a celebrity figure (Dyer, 1979; Holmes & Redmond, 2006), and the self which exists "behind the manufactured mask of fame" (Holmes & Redmond, 2006, p. 4). It is within the private self behind the mask that the

authentic individual is perceived to be located. This translates into tabloid media interest in the activities of celebrity figures in backstage (behind the scenes) and private spaces (caught without make-up or running errands). Scholars argue that while these exposés appear to highlight the ordinary side of celebrities, they ultimately reinforce their extraordinariness through a demonstration of a model of ordinariness that is far removed from the lived experiences of most (van Krieken, 2012). Nevertheless, a conceptual association exists between the "backstage," the private and by extension the "real."

From a dramaturgical perspective, the backstage is the space where the individual becomes stripped of the accoutrement of performance; the conscious and subconscious methods of identity presentation that, like costume and dialogue, inform the audience of the nature of their identity. It is where the individual is closest to their core being – if one such being exists – where, without the need to shape the self for social interactions and in the absence of audiences for whom to perform, the self is at its most genuine (for lack of performative layers). The search for authenticity thus rests on the existence of the celebrity in the real world, establishing a connection between that which is projected in media representations and that which is of the world. Richard Dyer articulates this as an "existential bond" (1991, p. 140) between the image of the celebrity and her or his referent; the physical being of the celebrity and that which exists in order for the image to be captured (p. 140).[3] Like the frontstage and backstage self, the referent is imagined to be devoid of the processes of production that create the image – the version of the self which is most likely to be found in private spaces.

The desire to locate the individual behind the "mask of fame" (Holmes & Redmond, 2006, p. 4) demonstrates an awareness of the performative aspects of celebrity images, as well as a need to legitimate the public persona through alignment with a private self (Dyer, 1991). It is for this reason that examinations of authenticity in celebrity studies often focus on how the notion reveals the mechanisms of celebrity production (Gamson, 1994), helps to legitimate and de-legitimate the public persona of celebrity figures (Sobande, 2019; Hermes & Stoete, 2019; Kjær, 2019) and is utilised to both support and confront a celebrity figure's alignment with social discourses (Sobande, 2019). In particular, authenticity is used to evaluate a celebrity's ability to speak in support of a cause, often utilising known elements of their public and private personas (their ethnicity, socio-economic background and personal experiences) in order to legitimate their stance and bestow authority on their statements (Williams, 2020). This emphasis on personal experiences implies a departure from a simple public–private divide based on notions of performance and non-performance. Instead, the nature of the individual is central to questions of legitimacy. In other words, who the celebrity *is* becomes the core question to determining their authenticity.

The emphasis on the individual is grounded in philosophical shifts that occurred during early modernity. Accompanying the waning authority of institutions such as religion and social hierarchy was the rise of individualism

and the centring of the individual as the site of truth (Potter, 2010; Fillitz & Saris, 2013). The discourse of "the individual" gave rise to the notion that the individual was the place where reality could be located (Potter, 2010). Philosopher Lionel Trilling suggests that the "inner selves" of individuals are ultimately truthful locations, where convergence between the "real" inner self and outer expression is seen to be a sign of the sincere and authentic (Trilling, 1971). Anthropologists Thomas Fillitz and A Jamie Saris (2013) likewise note:

> The concept of the autonomous individual in European early modernity gave rise to the personal search for the proper external expression of inner states: direct correspondences were valued as sincere, pure, real, natural and their opposites were, of course, maligned.
>
> (p. 8)

Authenticity and sincerity are therefore located in a confluence between internal and external states, with the internal state deemed the most genuine. As Dyer suggests, the "basic paradigm is just this – that what is behind or below the surface is, unquestionably and virtually by definition, the truth" (1991, p. 140). Like the inner self of the modern individual, the reality and therefore authenticity of the celebrity is perceived to be "behind" the external image, beneath the public persona and beyond the curated online persona.

The credibility of a celebrity identity, and by extension what they represent and the brands they are associated with, depends on some degree of belief that they – the self – are in some way genuine and authentic. Authenticity here is not conceptualised in the presentation of a celebrity figure within a private space (which, as has been established, is also subject to performance), but that the inner self informs outer expression. Paradoxically, this means that credibility needs to be performed in order to be recognised, and that the modes of presentation are easily discredited. As Dyer (1991) notes:

> [if] the movie pinup is perceived to be distorted (deauthenticated) by the manipulation of the filmmaking or photographic process (glamour lighting, clever editing and so on), then we can always go and get photos of her doing the chores at home. . . . And if we think these activities are a put-up job, then we might get a candid camera shot of her without make-up. . . . And so on in an infinite regress by means of which one more authentic image displaces another.
>
> (p. 140)

As each seemingly authentic image is displaced (and thus deauthenticated) by another image, the authentic becomes ever more elusive and ambiguous. As these indicators of authenticity are based on external expressions, through which the inner self of an individual is assessed, they are inherently unstable. Dyer notes that such authenticating processes are "a rhetoric of authenticity,"

which he characterises as "markers of sincerity and authenticity" which are effective "so long as it is not perceived as a rhetoric" (p. 141). Although the authenticity of a celebrity identity is conceptualised in non-performative spaces and aligned with their "true" inner selves, it is nonetheless evaluated on the basis of external expressions – markers of authenticity that need to be "performed" in order to be recognised. Dyer's markers of sincerity and authenticity centre on the authenticating processes surrounding individual celebrity identities and will be further discussed later in the volume.

The concept of the bromance intersects with the performativity of celebrity culture and the audiences' search for the authentic. Celebrity figures trade on the construction of widely accepted public (and public private) persona; interactions between celebrity bromances are complicated by the need to accommodate two public personas within the performance of a combined bromance persona. That is to say, the creation of celebrity bromances requires the amalgamation of two separate celebrity persona into that of a couple, replete with combined bromance names. This effectively creates a new celebrity persona, which is deployed in media representations for varying purposes. The representational value of the bromance persona shifts depending on the context of its presentation (played up in front of cameras, or subtly suggested through social media attention such as likes). The celebrity bromance persona thus needs to accommodate not only the combination of two celebrity personas but also the propensity of each celebrity figure to engage in the behavioural patterns associated with a bromance, and to do so believably.

Gender studies scholars highlight the interplay between behavioural exhibition and emotional intimacy that enables the bromances to be conceptualised as a type of relationship situated between friendship and romantic partnership. Regardless of the emotional motivation for the behaviour, the types of intimate physicality and verbal affection are external expressions. These expressions are performative insofar as they give form to the emotional connections between the bromance partners. In the real-world setting, they are used to demonstrate the emotional intimacy between heterosexual males in homosocial settings. For celebrity bromances, homosocial intimacy is expected for individuals who have shared (presumably) less emotional intimacy. The celebrity bromance is thus both a performative and highly public one. It is one in which the credibility of celebrity partnerships is evaluated by media savvy audiences (Gamson, 1994),[4] and further questioned when the bromance is visible only during the promotion of affiliated works. This volume seeks to explore markers of sincerity and authenticity within the presentation of these joint persona. Dyer's markers of sincerity and authenticity form a theoretical framework for this exploration and will be revisited in Chapter 2.

Commodification

It is widely recognised that celebrity figures are part of a market economy. Writing in reference to film stars in the 1980s, Dyer highlights how the "star's

presence in a film is a promise of a certain kind of thing that you would see" (2004 [1986], p. 5), which ensures the profitability of the film. Stars contribute to the production of a film, but are themselves also products of the same system; "they are both labour and the thing that labour produces" (p. 5). Writing of celebrity,[5] Driessens notes that commodification is part of the process of celebrification. When an ordinary person becomes a celebrity, it is not just about attention received but the ability to capitalise and commodify themselves and that attention. As scholars such as Driessens and Marshall point out, the celebrity figure is both a product, "manufactured by the celebrity industry" (Driessens, 2012, p. 643), and a mechanism to sell products. Marshall (2014 [1997]) notes:

> [T]he celebrity as public individual who participates openly as a marketable commodity serves as a powerful type of legitimation of the political economic model of exchange and value – the basis of capitalism – and extends that model to include the individual.
>
> (p. xlviii)

Celebrity figures become part of the currency in a commodity culture, amassing capital that can be traded for profit to the benefit of the celebrity or affiliated products. Building on the premise of the centrality of celebrities-as-commodities in a market economy, the case studies in this volume explore the commodification of celebrity bromance pairs. Commodification is explored in two ways: (1) through intersections with authenticity and sincerity and (2) through considerations of the nature of commodification.

The contemporary celebrity bromance is often the product of marketing strategies aimed at extending bromance discourses from on-screen dynamics between characters to off-screen dynamics between cast. While this replicates earlier Hollywood practice of adjusting star persona to match current works (Gamson, 1994), it also demonstrates deliberate attempts to construct persona specifically for the purposes of promotion. In essence, the joint bromance persona is either created in order to promote works or promotional campaigns capitalise on pre-existing dynamics. Judging the authenticity of a celebrity pairing takes place against the background of highly commoditised (even contrived) contexts, and could be seen as a futile exercise. However, the case studies in this volume demonstrate that authenticity in celebrity dynamics is not only definable, but also central to the success of the bromance as an instrument of promotion.

The volume further considers how the joint persona becomes commoditised, departing from explorations of the celebrity figure as an entity of inherent value, as has been discussed by previous scholars (Marshall, 1997; Driessens, 2012). Instead, the commodification of the bromance as a notion and attendant affective (or discursive) associations are explored. Value is located not on the bodies (or symbol) of celebrity figures, rather it is situated in the capital that is amassed through the presentation of a bromance; specifically,

the presentation of intimacy that is characteristic of bromance pairings and the formation of a celebrity "couple." This "bromance capital" becomes more than a simple extension of celebrities' own value and cultural capital. As a result of the cultural significance of the bromance (and its value in promoting work), it accrues its own type of capital. The bromance is not only used as a tool to draw attention to individual celebrity figures. It also becomes a cultural "product" which gains value as a consequence of the affective attachments it provokes. Audiences enjoy the "authenticity puzzle" (Enli, 2015) of the mediated relationship, as well as the performance of the bromance, forming affective connections to the bromance pair as a result of this display.

Investigating bromances

The case studies in this volume enable us to explore the construction, roles and uses of celebrity bromances in contemporary popular and celebrity culture. It takes as case studies a number of relationships within Hollywood celebrity culture. The various methods through which these relationships are presented and reported in popular press, or reappropriated by fan cultures, are explored to highlight how the medium of reporting affects the construction of joint bromance persona, as well as the way bromance persona intersects with and extends celebrity persona. Extending Dyer's markers of authenticity and sincerity, we identify markers of authenticity unique to the celebrity bromance, and consider the centrality of authenticity in the presentation of celebrity bromances against the backdrop of a commodity culture. The bromance is further conceptualised as a commodity in its own right through an explication of the "bromance capital" and its contribution to individual celebrity capital. Through the discussion of female celebrities' interactions with male cast (and female-centred cast), we argue for the need for more inclusive terminology to characterise celebrity dynamics that transcend gender binaries. At the same time, we argue that the currency associated with joint celebrity persona extends to cast dynamics that are commodified to gain media attention, online hits and sell affiliated products.

Chapter 2 opens the discussion by tracing the history of bromances in popular culture, with a focus on on-screen and off-screen representations of bromances. Dyer's markers of sincerity and authenticity are applied to the dyad of bromance pairs and extended to account for the unique contexts influencing the formation of celebrity bromances. These contexts include on and off screen relationships, and the various "origins" of the bromance. The markers of bromance authenticity are applied in the analysis of case studies in two of the following chapters.

Chapter 3 examines the ways in which celebrity bromances are created by focusing on three dimensions – the celebrity figure, media and fans. The chapter considers how bromance persona intersects with the curation of individual celebrity personas and reflects upon the potential agency afforded to celebrity figures who actively engage in celebrity bromances. The way

in which media and fan groups contribute to the various meanings associated with celebrity bromances is discussed, as is the impact of narrativised bromances that flow between on and off screen spaces. The markers of authenticity are applied as the primary theoretical lens through which the authenticity of the bromances is considered.

The first section examines how celebrity figures construct and peform bromance personas. Focusing on bromances such as Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart, James McAvoy and Michael Fassbender, it explores how celebrity self-presentation on social media and in-person media appearances contributes to the bromance persona. It integrates a theoretical discussion about the nature of mediated persona curation in contemporary culture, with close readings of current bromances to explore how "real-world" bromances emerge. Situated between the representational system of celebrity culture and the potentially autonomous platforms of presentational culture, the bromance affords celebrity figures agency in the curation of ongoing persona, while simultaneously operating as a discursive framework through which individual identity is negotiated. Within this context, the combination of two distinct celebrity personas (with their attendant polysemy natures) into one conjoined persona is revealing of the ways in which celebrity figures negotiate and/or embody the concept of a bromance.

The next section identifies how bromances are shaped by media, analysing the role journalists and talk show hosts play in promoting the bromance. Through textual and semiotic analysis of print, online and televisual texts, the intricate performative and representational relationships between reporter/presenter and celebrity are explored. This section argues that journalists and presenters can transform the context of an interview through their own observations, using specific terms – in this case, romanticised words – to sensationalise an interview. This, in turn, can impact on how audiences view a celebrity's identity and help promote their image and film. Case studies include McAvoy and Fassbender, Matt Damon and Chris Hemsworth, the *Marvel* and *X-Men* cast.

Finally, the role of fan groups in the construction and perpetuation of celebrity bromances is explored. Through textual analysis of fan-created artwork, fiction, compilation videos and social media sites such as Facebook and Tumblr, this section identifies the myriad ways fan activities acknowledge, embellish or prolong celebrity bromances. It argues that the contemporary celebrity bromance requires a highly motivated and engaged audience and/or fan base in order to flourish. Specifically, audiences are required to be active readers willing to flesh out the dynamics of combined celebrity persona that are often only hinted at in interviews and press depictions. In doing so, audiences actively construct the celebrity text through the creation of memes, joint names and fan art/fiction. However, the longevity of these celebrity texts is reliant on continued audience and/or fan investment. Read alongside the individual celebrity figures, fan reactions to both off-screen and on

and off screen bromances are considered for their ability to influence on-screen character dynamics. Case studies in this section include Hemsworth and Tom Hiddleston, Jensen Ackles and Jared Padalecki.

Chapter 4 examines the ways in which bromances are "utilised" in the contemporary media environment. It explores how advertisers and popular press contribute to the perpetuation of bromances when creating marketing campaigns, as well as considering how the bromance has become a cultural commodity in its own right.

The first section considers the bromance as a form of cultural commodity, arguing that – in its "real-world" format – the bromance contributes to the characterisation of the celebrity figure as a commodity. In so doing, it reinforces the presentation of the formal/informal celebrity (the celebrity seen during interviews and publicity events) as an act of entertainment in and of itself. With the uploading of press junket interviews to online platforms, a staple of the contemporary media environment – during which the presentation of bromances is often more prevalent – the bromance gains currency as a potential means to attract attention and increase celebrity (cultural) value. While celebrity bromance pairings are used to promote products, they also have a value in and of themselves as cultural products. The performance of some bromances is not always linked to products or film work, and sometimes seem to be perpetuated simply because they want to keep the bromance alive. This is in contrast to bromances (such as the McAvoy/Fassbender persona) which are only activated when promoting a film. Case studies include Damon/Jimmy Kimmel and Jackman/Ryan Reynolds.

In the next section, we propose a new term, "bromance capital," to articulate the specific qualities of celebrity bromances that are valued within an attention economy (Marshall, 2021). We argue that the bromance itself constitutes a form of capital, derived from the cultural currency of the bromance discourse (Hamad, 2020). Celebrity figures who engage with, or enact, bromances access the cultural relevance of the bromance discourse, thereby lending to the celebrities some of the capital associated with the bromance. At the same time, the ambiguity of the bromance – whether it is genuine or fully performed – creates a desire to solve what media scholar Enli Gunn terms the "authenticity puzzle" of mediated presentations. Bromance capital conceptualises the bromance as currency, achieved through the commodification of interactions (or relationships) between individuals, and the affective responses it provokes. The bromance itself becomes the valued commodity, regardless of the individuals (celebrity or otherwise) involved. It is not only used as a tool to draw attention to individual celebrity figures, but it is a construct that bears markers of performance that are appealing as a cultural product.

The final section examines the ways in which promotional strategies and advertising techniques prolong the lifespan of celebrity bromances. It argues that, to a certain degree, the public persona of a combined celebrity image is no longer under the control of the celebrity figure, but becomes

a part of a broader process of fictionalisation that ultimately serves the promotion of franchised films. It considers the authenticity of bromances against a background of promotion and argues that perceived authenticity is vital to the success of bromances as a promotional tool. This chapter also explores the use of bromances to promote charities, through a close reading of the bromance between Jackman, Reynolds and Jake Gyllenhaal.

Finally, in Chapter 5, the limitation of the term is considered in more detail, as we expand from bromance capital to comradery capital. This chapter discusses how women are disregarded in the term "bromance," while their role is just as significant in promoting films. Bromance capital is also expanded to consider larger cast dynamics that are mixed in gender to reflect on the commodification of interactions between celebrities more generally. We discuss the implications for marketing, fan–celebrity interactions and digital curation of celebrity identity through the exploration of a number of mixed gender and cast dynamics. Case studies include the *Ocean's 11* (Milestone, 1960), *Ocean's Eleven* (Soderbergh, 2001) and *Ocean's 8* (Ross, 2018) cast, female pairings Tina Fey and Amy Pohler, and Oprah Winfrey and Gayle King, and three mixed gender pairings: Chris Hemsworth and Tessa Thompson, Kate Winslet and Leonardo DiCaprio, and Keanu Reeves and Sandra Bullock.

The conclusion to the volume summarises the key issues and proposes concepts for further research and publications. This would go beyond American and British film and television products to consider how notions of masculinity, homosocial intimacy and celebrity/fame are manifest in global cinema outside of Hollywood. It will also consider how bromances may manifest in contexts outside of entertainment industries, including in the arenas of politics and activism. Finally, further work on buddy banter and female-based friendships being used as a genre and a promotional tool will be suggested.

Notes

1 Portmanteaus given to Hollywood couples Ben Affleck and Jennifer Lopez (2002–2004; 2021) and Brad Pitt and Angelia Jolie (2005–2016).
2 Richard Dyer's seminal text *Stars* deconstructs the star image, highlighting the significance of stars from historical and cultural perspectives. Of particular interest were stars such as Marilyn Monroe and John Wayne, and the significance of their images to cultural discourses on gender and sexuality.
3 The validity of establishing objective reality through indexical connections is often challenged, especially by documentary scholars who note the highly subjective conditions of image capture. Choices related to camera angles, framing, filmmaker intervention onsite and during editing all imbue the final product with representations that may communicate a sense of reality. However, this reality is mediated and constructed through the codes and conventions of genres such as documentary that present specific versions of reality. Nonetheless, the notion of a connection to a 'real' person outside the image is still appealing. For more on mediated reality, see (Chapman, 2009; Nichols, 1991).

4 In *Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America* (1994), Joshua Gamson proposed a typology of audience types, ranging from "traditional" who demonstrated low levels of awareness of media strategies and took media representations at face value, through to highly aware "game-players" who view deciphering the media representations of celebrities as a game.

5 Debates regarding distinctions between star and celebrity are still ongoing; however, a general consensus applies to fields of operation. Stars emerge from film, music and sporting arenas, while celebrity refers to mediated fame (see also Giles, 2000; Driessen, 2012).

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2 Bromance history, identifying traits and the markers of authenticity

History of celebrity

Bromances

Bromances have a long history and have conceptually adapted to social changes, including how they are utilised in the media for promotional purposes. Bromances can highly impact the brand of individuals, pairs and groups. Across film and television, bromances are formed both on-screen and off-screen, but also overlap into other areas of celebrity, including sports and music. We focus predominantly on Hollywood bromances, although it is a global phenomenon and can be applied to many cultures. While the term bromance is relatively modern, the concept has existed for many decades. It is this history that has helped it to gain significance today.

Pre-bromance: packs and buddy films

Although not called bromances, male bonds between celebrities have existed since the beginning of Hollywood. Before the term "bromance" was coined, the media would still generate hype around close male friendships and their banter. However, it increased overtime with actors having more media appearances and an opportunity to repeatedly work together.

   While some bromances are constructed between two people, others are between three or more. In the 1950s and 1960s, there was a bromance between Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis, as well as the formation of the Rat Pack, which also included Dean Martin, along with Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr, Peter Lawford and Joey Bishop. The Rat Pack bromance went on for many years and helped form much of the comedy behind their interviews and live performances. This will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5.

   In the 1980s, the term Brat Pack was created to describe the close bond between Emilio Estevez, Rob Lowe, Judd Nelson and other stars of that time who appeared in films together. This can also be considered an early foundation of the bromance culture, which fans and the media enjoyed consuming.

While women were associated with both the Rat Pack and Brat Pack, it was predominantly focused on the male bonds, especially in regard to the Rat Pack, whose brand was focused on the drinking, smoking, gambling and inappropriate humour. The role of women will be discussed further in later chapters, as we move beyond bromances. In the 1960s, Paul Newman and Robert Redford began their bromance with *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (Hill, 1969). This friendship was later used to promote *The Sting* (Roy & George, 1973) when the actors once again shared the big screen. They publicly spoke of their bond with the media, adding to the narrative of their friendship. The classification of their first film as the ultimate buddy film reinforced this image, confirming their on-screen friendship flowed off-screen as well.

The significance of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), as well as films *Easy Rider* (Hopper, 1969) and *Midnight Cowboy* (Schlesinger, 1969), has been highlighted by Michael DeAngelis (2014):

> Certainly the films offer deviations from the classical Hollywood model, focusing upon homosocial rather than heterosexual bonding in narratives in which protagonists reject the prescribed life paths of heteronormativity by remaining rootless, socially and culturally marginalized, and often engaged in criminal behaviour.
>
> (p. 6)

DeAngelis also refers to the influence of the American Dream and the political climate of that period. He argues that the buddy film genre from the 1970s has historical significance in the origins of celebrity bromances, suggesting this of buddy films:

> Whether or not one accepts their designations as male love stories, it is indisputable that the narratives comprise character studies that focus almost exclusively upon the relationships between the central male protagonists, whereas female characters figure into the stories only tangentially, as needed to relieve the men's sexual tensions.
>
> (p. 7)

As acknowledged by DeAngelis, homophobia was dominant at this time. This was a period when celebrities such as Rock Hudson had to act both on-screen and off-screen as heterosexual. However, buddy films had strong themes of hyper-masculinity and strength. In the case of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), the characters are rugged cowboys with weapons going on a journey and rebelling against the law. This helps to reinforce the perceived ideology of a heterosexual relationship, making it acceptable to audiences at that time. DeAngelis (p. 10) also explores on-screen representations of homosexuality, which gained prevalence in the 1980s. However, during the height of the AIDS scare, this pushed back much of the progress made. Contemporary society is far more accepting of homosexual relationships, yet

there seems to be an increasing fascination in bromances. It is a relationship that can be marketed to the LGBQTIA+ community and heterosexuals of either gender, which makes it a strong promotional tool. As DeAngelis notes:

> The buddy film and the bromance are certainly similar in that both feature a homosocially grounded "male love story," but in bromance this designation of "love story" is always bracketed by scare quotes, signaling a romance that is never actually or intentionally romantic but that gains cultural currency by adopting the pretext.
>
> (p. 11)

Some films explore both a heterosexual love story and a bromance, such as *Hanover Street* (Hyams, 1979) starring Harrison Ford, Christopher Plummer and Lesley-Anne Down. This film is about Down's character choosing to have an affair with Ford's character, but through circumstances, her husband, played by Plummer, ends up on a journey with Ford's character. It is an ultimate love triangle between the three characters, with Ford's character bonding with Plummer's character. Thus, bromances have been a significant part of Hollywood history both on-screen and off-screen.

Birth of bromance: on-screen relationships

The term bromance can be traced to American skateboarding subculture in the 1990s to describe intense relationships between men. However, the term did not gain prominence in the popular press until the 2005 release of Judd Apatow's film *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (DeAngelis, 2014). The use of the term has grown exponentially in the past decades and is used excessively in media reporting. In *Reading the Bromance*, DeAngelis and other authors contribute a great deal to the understanding of bromances on-screen. Jenna Weinman (2014) describes the sexual undertones of the 1964 film, *Send Me No Flowers*, labelling it an early example of a bromantic film, before the term was in use. Weinman explains that many of the bromantic films of this period were set in the context of men trying to escape marriage or enjoy their last moments of bachelor life. The latter is also reflected in the contemporary film *The Hangover* (Phillips, 2009).

What was originally defined as buddy films, which was inclusive of women like in *Thelma and Louise* (Scott, 1991), is now referred to as a bromantic film or brom-com as they take it a step further by increasing the sexual undertones between male characters. As Hilary Radner (2014) explaines:

> The contemporary bromance makes explicit something that was always implicit in the buddy film, most notably the intensity of the masculine bond, something that was left unsaid at the time but now can be discussed overtly.
>
> (pp. 52–53)

Radner goes on to give a case study on the film *Grumpy Old Men* (Petrie, 1993), defining it as an example of a bromantic film, defined as such after release.

David Greven also contributed to De Angelis' book with a chapter analysing the film *Scream* (Craven, 1996) and its role in bromance history. Greven (2014) notes; "Scream redeploys the long-standing American tradition of a homoerotic bond between a pair of young male killers" (p. 87). He compares the film to others of its genre and examines the characters, costumes and tropes included in the film. He also draws comparisons between *Scream* (1996) and films such as *Pineapple Express* (Green, 2008) and *Superbad* (Mottola, 2007), suggesting that on-screen violence often plays a role when expressing male intimacy (Greven, 2014, p. 105). This element is not replicated in the off-screen bromances.

Nick Davis (2014) considers how bromances appeal across diverse national audiences, which is crucial with Hollywood films that expect a global audience. This is also the case in off-screen bromances being expressed in global interviews. Davis (2014) argues:

> Miramax Films had turned Gus Van Sant's modestly budgeted therapy drama *Good Will Hunting* into its most lucrative crossover hit to date, largely by hawking the lifelong friendship between stars and cowriters Matt Damon and Ben Affleck as vigorously as they advertised the film's plot and characters.
>
> (p. 114)

Davis goes on to compare this strategy to a Mexican film; ultimately, drawing comparisons between the on-screen and off-screen relationships and how they affect the promotion of a film within different cultures.

Similar to Davis, Meheli Sen (2014) has explored bromances in Hindi commercial cinema, exploring its transition from the 1970s to a contemporary culture. Ultimately, on-screen bromances are not a Western world–based tool, nor is it completely modern as a technique. As Ron Becker (2014) suggests:

> As homosexuality became less socially stigmatized and expressions of homophobia less culturally acceptable (at least in certain circles), discourses surrounding masculinity and male bonding have shifted. In the 1990s, such changes fuelled the spate of mistaken sexual identity plots that became a common feature of many primetime sitcoms.
>
> (p. 236)

Ken Feil (2014) also raises an interesting point of the popular phrase "metrosexual," which also plays a pivotal role in leading to the popularity of the term bromance. "The concept of the "metrosexual" arose in the mid-1990s,

identified by British journalist Mark Simpson" (p. 172). Feil (2014) went on to explain:

> Discussions about "bromance" that erupted in 2009, when both *I Love You, Man* and the MTV reality show *Bromance* premiered, the term signifies as a "simultaneous admission and denial" of the queerness underpinning intense male bonding in the metrosexual era.
>
> (p. 173)

Both the terms "bromance" and "metrosexual" appear to be a reflection of the change in society from the mid-1990s to today, and its perception of masculinity. However, one does not need to be well groomed to partake in a bromance. Metrosexuality became a more widely used term earlier on and helped to transition people's mindsets from assuming homosexuality based on certain traits. In fact, on-screen bromances are often perceived as more comical when the characters are physically more rugged. An example of this is *Pineapple Express* (Green, 2008). Feil provides examples of *Dude, Where's My Car* (Leiner, 2000) and *I Now Pronounce You Chuck and Larry* (Dugan, 2007). The latter, he explains, play off the macho image of firemen.

Similarly, Peter Forster (2014) drew comparisons across this film and *I Love You, Man* (Hamburg, 2009). Forster stated, "Uncertainty is the enemy of the bromantic comedy" (2014, p. 200) and analyses this in context of the film *Humpday* (Shelton, 2009). Ultimately, bromances must sit in a comfortable position between sexual undertones and a heterosexual male bond. Forster also raises the issue of the role of women in a bromantic comedy. He refers to "the threat of women's agency and their power to control – "change ('pussy-whip') – their men" (2014, p. 207). This is often the representation, if the women are included at all in the narrative. In an off-screen setting, this differs, but they are typically secondary to the male bond. For example, Ryan Reynolds and Hugh Jackman frequently mention their wives as a part of their bromance, but they are not the focus. This case study will be explored in depth throughout the book.

Ron Becker (2014) provides a great list of on-screen bromances in television, specifically including characters in *Scrubs* (Lawrence, 2001–2010), *House* (Shore, 2004–2012), *How I Met Your Mother* (Bays & Thomas, 2005–2014) and *Entourage* (Ellin, 2004–2011). Murray Pomerance (2014, p. 271) gives a detailed analysis of the bromance in *House*; "Bromantic male-male affiliations can only work if they are ultimately resolved through some definitive commitment to heteronormativity" (p. 234). Within television, there is room to flirt with this notion. Similarly, Dominic Lennard (2014) examined the bromance in *The Wire* (Simon, 2002–2008) and the shift in television quality with the rise of popularity in HBO. However, bromances existed in television long before this. As Hanna Hamad (2018) notes, bromances have been expressed in television long before the term was used so generously, providing the example of *Friends* (Crane & Kauffman,

1994–2004) characters Chandler Bing (Matthew Perry) and Joey Tribbiani (Matt LeBlanc). Similarly, before *Friends*, it was seen in *Full House* (Franklin, 1987–1995) with Jesse (John Stamos), Joey (Dave Coullier) and Danny (Bob Saget) and in *Beverly Hills*, *90210* (Star, 1990–2000) with Dylan (Luke Perry) and Brandon (Jason Priestly). In each of these television series, the male bonds are able to be developed much more thoroughly than in a film and many cross over into on and off screen bromances. There is ample opportunity for the characters to form their masculinity on-screen so that it becomes non-threatening when they express their bromance. These characters are often shown hugging or expressing their love for one another, some in a more sexual form than others. With long-spanning television shows, they often return to the bromance throughout the series rather than it being the sole focus of the show, like it may be for a film. Hamad's (2020) example of the *Wedding Crashers* (Dobkin, 2005) is an instance where the film is based purely on their bromance. This is also an example of on-screen and off-screen bromance.

Fictional bromances evolved from shifting attitudes towards masculinity and male intimacy in American literary and popular culture (DeAngelis, 2014, pp. 4–6). As a film genre and discourse, it offers a way through which male intimacy can be explored and expressed in a "safe" heteronormative context, while simultaneously highlighting the role of female characters in attenuating the closeness of male homosocial bonding and reasserting the heteronormative norm (Alberti, 2013, p. 165). However, real-life bromances have received less attention, apart from evidence of the concept in wider popular culture (DeAngelis, 2014, p. 2). The way in which characters express their bromances on-screen differs to that off-screen. They are limited by a script, genre and chemistry of actors. Authenticity is less significant in an on-screen relationship than that of an off-screen bromance.

Real-life bromances: media and promotion

Over the years, bromances have been increasingly utilised to create film and television hype, even before the term itself became commonly used. An example of this is Hugh Jackman and John Travolta promoting *Swordfish* (Sena, 2001) on *Rove Live* in Australia (Rove, 2016). In this appearance they sang a duet from the film *Grease* (Kleiser, 1978), suggesting the two had bonded while filming. This created word-of-mouth and also enhanced the brands of the actors, making them seem likeable and relatable to fans. If the interview had occurred in today's converged media environment, such a video would have gone viral online immediately and provoked fan interaction. In fact, 15 years after it aired, it was shared online receiving almost 10,000 views. Evidence of how videos like this go viral in today's social media culture is the 2014 interview uploaded by *Beyond the Trailer* in which Jackman danced with his *X-Men* co-stars to the song *Blurred Lines* by Robin Thicke and Pharell Williams, reaching 372,241 views as of September 13, 2021.

Ultimately, a fun atmosphere in an interview makes for an enjoyable viewer experience (Lam & Raphael, 2018). Fans relish seeing performers enjoy one another's company, as they want the dynamics within the film itself to have some authenticity. They want to believe that the chemistry is real, even if the plot and characters are not.

An example of this is the George Clooney, Brad Pitt and Matt Damon bromance, which was generated from the 2001 film *Ocean's Eleven* (Soderbergh, 2001). A series of junket interviews set the tone for their bromance, as they engaged in strong banter between them. This clearly was established to reflect the tone of the Rat Pack, who were in the original *Ocean's 11* film. Their banter carried on through an ongoing prank war between the actors, which is still regularly mentioned in interviews. Even the reluctant head of the Brat Pack, Emilio Esteves explained his hatred for the title and compared himself to the *Ocean's Eleven* cast. Speaking to Hadley Freeman in an interview with *The Guardian*, Esteves notes:

> It's annoying because Brad Pitt, George Clooney and Matt Damon have worked together more than any of us have. We just made two movies and somehow it morphed into something else.
>
> (2020)

Thus, their friendship is extremely well known among those in the industry, as well as in the media and across fans.

However, in 2014, when Clooney got married without Pitt at his wedding, fans and entertainment reporters became concerned that their bromance was *over* and questioned its authenticity (Jordan, 2015). Both actors have since claimed to still be friends and the media have tried to reinforce that their "bromance" is still prevalent (Vulpo, 2014; Keegan, 2014). After winning a SAG award in 2020, Pitt was asked by an *Entrainment Weekly* (2020) reporter if Clooney would contact him since they were "friends in the past." Pitt laughed at this, stating; "Friends in the past? We're still friends. We've been friends for a while . . . he'll probably send flowers" (Entertainment Weekly, 2020). However, this situation raises an interesting point of how involved the media is in developing and celebrating bromances. While Clooney getting married after so many years of being the top bachelor in Hollywood was a big news item, to some the bromance seemed more significant than the romance.

The media is so fixated on bromances that even the BBC acknowledged the term and offered the breakdown of how bromances are expressed using "the four c's" (BBC, 2021). They refer to them as comedy (comedic duos that share the same humour), compassion (sharing pains), camaraderie (family-like closeness) and consistency (long-lasting) (BBC, 2021). They also acknowledge physical affection as a part of the bromance. While we agree with these aspects of what a "bromance consists of" and how they are expressed, they do not analyse the authenticity and origins, or the impact it

has on media, fandom, celebrity culture and advertising. These four c's also exclude other key aspects of a bromantic relationship. Thus, we propose that a real-life bromance is identified by the following types of dynamics performed:

(1) *Frat-boy:* This fraternal bond is expressed in a juvenile and hypermasculine tone. In the UK, this would be described as laddish. It often revolves around pranks and competitions. Examples of this is James McAvoy and Michael Fassbender (juvenile), George Clooney and Brad Pitt (pranking), and Mark Wahlberg and Mario Lopez (hypermasculine).
(2) *Fake-feud:* This is a planned performative approach where a narrative is built to pretend that people are fighting in a humorous way, when they are actually friends in real life. Examples of this are Hugh Jackman and Ryan Reynolds, and Matt Damon and Jimmy Kimmel.
(3) *Familiar:* This is a more subtle and less performative approach. This is evident when people are comfortable with one another and show knowledge of one another's personal lives, while also expressing a loving intimacy. They acknowledge spending private time together. Examples of this are Hugh Jackman and Russell Crowe, and Leonardo DiCaprio and Tobey Maguire.
(4) *Flirty:* This is often expressed in a slightly homoerotic way. It can be verbal or physical. Examples of this would be Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart, and James Franco and Seth Rogen.
(5) *Funny:* Having a natural banter between people shows their chemistry. Examples of this is Anthony Mackie and Sebastian Stan, and Mark Ruffalo and Robert Downey Jr.
(6) *Familial:* In some instances, the bond goes beyond a close friendship between two men to express a sibling or family-like relationship among a pair or group. They often interact with one another's siblings or family members. Examples of this is Chris Hemsworth and Tom Hiddleston, Will Smith and Alfonso Ribeiro, and Paul Walker and Vin Diesel.

These subtypes can often overlap or shift over time. While a fake-feud could be performed temporarily, they may then become flirty in another setting. Or what may begin as a frat-boy relationship could mature over time to become more familial. A bromance is never stagnant but is always expressed through at least one of these traits.

Looking at the history of bromances, it is evident that it predates Web 2.0. However, with mass media convergence and the need for two-way communication through blogs, vlogs and social networking sites, bromances can now thrive online. They have an extended life beyond one interview and can allow for fans to interact with the footage. Bromances now go outside interviews and are used through Twitter and Instagram interaction between celebrities. However, the way in which a bromance is used can affect its

authenticity. Thus, it is important to identify the origins of a bromantic relationship to understand their promotional purpose. This chapter will explore the way in which markers of authenticity transform how we perceive real-life bromances.

Markers of authenticity

Richard Dyer's markers of authenticity are situated in a conceptualisation of authenticity that lies between the star-as-image and the star-as-person. Specifically, Dyer argues that the indexical link between the image of the star and person captured to produce it is potent due to the fact that stars exist as a consequence of representation in the media. Dyer (1991) notes:

> In part, the star phenomenon is defined by an in-built means of authentication. Stars appear before us in media texts – films, advertisements, gossip columns, television interviews and so on – but unlike other forms of representation stars do not only exist in media texts. To say that stars exist outside of the media texts in real life would be misleading, but stars are carried in the person of people who do go on living away from their appearances in the media, and the point is that we know this.
>
> (p. 139)

While there is an awareness that both representations of a star, or celebrity, in an image can be manipulated, as can the presentation of the person who exists outside of the image, the search for the "real" continues. In particular, the focus on that which is beneath a manufactured image is what ultimately authenticates the image, regardless of whether it is actually "real" or not. In effect, working both "real" and "representation" into a self-supporting tapestry of the star's identity, serving to "reinforce the authenticity of the star image as a whole" (p. 140). At other times, the star's on-screen and off-screen images are matched:

> Many star images were authenticated by showing that the star really was like he or she was on the screen. In other cases, the off-screen reputation is either suppressed (as in the endless word of mouth about which indelibly heterosexual love gods and goddesses were in reality gay) or just does not get widely incorporated into the image's popular currency (e.g. every interview and biography assures us that James Cagney was of a gentle and kindly disposition, but it seems to have had no impact on his image).
>
> (pp. 140–141)

Authenticity is thus paradoxically performed. It is a rhetoric, which Dyer argues, is effective so long as it is not "perceived as a rhetoric" (p. 141). In media texts, this rhetoric is communicated through markers to "indicate

lack of control, lack of premeditation and privacy" (p. 141). In contrast to the planned, organised and public aspects of the self, presented through what Dyer terms "the surface" (p. 141), authenticity is located in the moments that reveal the inner self.

If mapped to a celebrity figure, these markers are visible in behavioural traits like gestures and speech patterns, improvisation and unplanned actions, which reveal the "real" individual behind a public persona. Dyer's deconstruction of Judy Garland's performance in the 1954 film *A Star Is Born* (Cukor) highlights how the narrative authenticates both Garland-as-star and Garland-as-character in a "reality" associated with the actor. Movements, gestures and apparently unplanned moments (being caught on camera) imply lack of control and lack of premeditation, which "can be taken to 'betray' neurosis" (pp. 142–143), by then associated with Garland off-screen. The on-screen representation of the character is authenticated and legitimised through its association with "an authenticated individual [who] is acting as the guarantor of the truth . . . of her stardom" (p. 143). This authenticating process draws heavily on knowledge of the private lives of celebrities, accounting for its inclusion as a marker of authenticity. It is also located in the notionally private moments of a celebrity caught before a performance, when they are not "on" (in front of a camera or on stage). In the liminal space between the on-stage and off-stage, the transition from "real" to performed selves is a glimpse of the authentic individual.

The authentication of celebrity pairings likewise considers that which is "behind or below the surface" (p. 140). However, unlike authenticating processes involving individual celebrity figures, the truth that is sought is not that of a single entity; rather, the truth of a relationship is what is pursued. Bromance pairs are joint persona, established through the combination of separate public persona each with their own cultural meanings. These joint personas are amplified by media representation (Lam & Raphael, 2016) and replicated or integrated into discourse within audience and fan communities (Jerslev, 2018; Lam & Raphael, 2018). Ultimately, many contemporary bromance pairs are commoditised, the dynamics between the celebrities involved presented in such a way as to retain attention. Seeking authenticity in this highly performative and commoditised context is perhaps futile, yet we argue that authenticity can be located and can account for the creation of a successful bromance partnership.

We extend Dyer's three markers to explore how the "truth" of a celebrity pairing could be conceptualised. First, lack of control and lack of premeditation are translated (in the context of a dyad) to unplanned physical interaction and banter. Verbal banter could be both planned and unplanned; however, affable dynamics between celebrity figures relies on what we term buddy banter (Raphael & Lam, 2016). This banter conveys a sense of closeness and an enjoyment of each other's company that we suggest are central to the presentation of engaging celebrity dynamics. The banter can be suggestive and flirtatious and is often used to generate a sense of levity and

suggest intimacy. Spontaneous interactions that seem unplanned (i.e. lacking in premeditation) and uninhibited (i.e. lacking in control) are thus markers that could authenticate dynamics between a bromance pair. Dyer's application of privacy is interpreted, in the context of a dynamic between celebrity figures, as off-screen contact and participation in private milestones (such as weddings and birthdays).

Next, we suggest extensions to Dyer's three markers in order to establish authenticity in bromance pairings – history and consistency. A narrative of past association (a history), together in both off-screen and on and off screen contexts, legitimates the dynamics through the intimation of a genuine rapport between the celebrities involved. We have elsewhere (Raphael & Lam, 2017) discussed the on and off screen flow of the bromance between Sirs Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart displayed during the 2014 promotional run for the film *X-Men: Days of Future Past* (Singer, 2014) and plays *Waiting for Godot/No Man's Land*. The sudden increase in highly visible displays of their bromance on social media was clearly serving promotional purposes. The pair did not hide the fact they were publicising their plays. However, a history of association which predated the 2014 plays fortified their bromance, folding the promotion of the plays into a longer bromance narrative which served to legitimise the relationship.

Associated with the formation of a history between the bromance pair is the consistency of the bromance dynamic. Unlike the narrative framework of fictional bromances, off-screen bromances are expressed and displayed through a multitude of media sources over (potentially) lengthy durations of time. This is especially the case for bromances associated with film franchises that span multiple years. The consistency of this ongoing presentation contributes to the creation of a sense of authenticity. It is also a means through which the genuineness of the relationship can be assessed.

Four markers of authenticity are proposed to articulate the authenticating processes of bromance pairs – history, privacy, spontaneity and consistency. The following discussion explores these markers and examines how they operate to both establish the existence of the pairing and ensure its sincerity.

History

The original formation of the bromance can impact on the reading of authenticity. The longer the history and depth of their past, the stronger the credibility behind it. Some prime examples of this are Matt Damon and Ben Affleck, James Franco and Seth Rogen, and Paul Newman and Robert Redford. They all share on-screen and off-screen bromances, while being supported by regularly working together. When actors work together repeatedly, it is suggested that they get along well. However, this can also be a contractual obligation. The strongest element of authenticity in filmography is when actors choose to work on various projects together.

Understanding the origins of a bromance can help to identify how credible their relationship is and whether it was created purely for the promotion of a film. We have identified five main starting points that reflect how bromances are formed:

(1) *Pre-success bromance:* Individuals known to each other before reaching celebrity status.
(2) *Industry bromance:* Individuals bonded through mutual celebrity friends or meeting at celebrity events.
(3) *Off-screen bromance:* Individuals become friends in real life through performing together even if they share minimal scenes or if their characters are enemies.
(4) *On-screen bromance:* Characters have a bromance, although the actors do not.
(5) *On and off screen bromance:* Reflects both the on-screen intimacy of characters and the off-screen closeness of actors in real-world contexts.

To explore these further, a variety of celebrity bromances have been examined.

Pre-success bromance

As people try to gain fame, they attend acting classes or attempt various auditions. Through this process, many individuals make friends that may or may not reach the same success as one another. When they are both successful later in life, this generates media interest and as a result is classified as a bromance. This particular category appears to be authentic when it is evident that they became friends before reaching celebrity status and they have maintained their friendship throughout the years. An example of this is Robin Williams and Christopher Reeve, who lived together while both studying at The Juilliard School (Clarke, 2014). After Reeve became paralysed, Williams provided financial support, reinforcing the credibility behind their closeness (Clarke, 2014). This was heavily publicised post Williams death, as it reflected well on his brand identity.

Another example of the *pre-success bromance* is the bond between Damon and Affleck, who were friends since they were children (Matt Damon Biography, 2015). Both actors rose to fame with the film they wrote and starred in together, *Good Will Hunting* (Van Sant, 1997). They have publicly maintained their friendship as they have individually continued to gain success in the industry. This friendship is so well known that it was referenced at the 2015 Academy Awards Ceremony (Oscars) in a humorous song by Neil Patrick Harris (Lee, 2015). It is also popularised in the media with reporters asking both actors about one another and sharing photos whenever they appear together. In fact, a 2015 interview in which Damon discussed his feelings about Affleck's relationship with Jennifer Lopez was widely disseminated

(Hines, 2015). Damon was then asked again in 2021 about the rumours of Affleck and Lopez reuniting to which Damon stated: "I love them both. I hope it's true. That would be awesome" (Shnurr, 2021). Thus, their joint persona is so strong that they are expected to know intimate details about one another's lives. Their friendship is treated in a similar way to power couples, where visuals of them together are worth money and their opinions on each other's lives are evidently newsworthy.

Comparably, Paul Rudd from *Clueless* (Heckerling, 1995) and *Ant-Man* (Reed, 2015) is more successful than Adam Scott from *Parks and Recreation* (Daniels & Schur, 2009–2015) and reached fame earlier; however, the two are renowned for their bromance that began before either of them was a celebrity. They have appeared on-screen together; however, their bromance is better known off-screen. In fact, Scott did a speech when Rudd received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, stating "Paul is like a brother to me" adding authenticity to this friendship (ScreenSlam, 2015).

A *pre-success bromance* that was specifically promoted for a film is Joe Manganiello from *True Blood* (Ball, 2008–2014) and Matt Bomer from *White Collar* (Eastin & Romero, 2009–2014), who studied in drama school together (Kimble, 2015). Since filming the *Magic Mike* movies (Soderbergh, 2012; Jacobs, 2015), the main cast of these films have also created a bromance. However, the Manganiello and Bomer relationship seems the most authentic out of all the cast friendships due to their history, and thus gains a lot of media attention. Yet, their bromance is not as authentic as Damon and Affleck or Rudd and Scott, as their friendship was not as consistent over the years.

Industry bromance

Some of the examples of *pre-success bromance* rely on the celebrities wanting to be actors and thus meeting at auditions or drama schools. Others occur if celebrities have become friends through mutual interests and are not dependent on existing fame. An *industry bromance* forms when they are already famous and meet at a red carpet event, an after-party or through mutual friends. They would not have performed together but meet through their celebrity status. Sometimes they are already fans of one another's work and other times they may be less aware of each other's fame.

A prime example of an *industry bromance* is Tom Cruise and David Beckham who became friends through social events (Lamb, 2012). Their friendship helped Beckham launch his revised brand identity in Hollywood, as he tried to "transform the status of American soccer" by playing for the LA Galaxy team (Kelly, 2012). The Beckham's friendship with Cruise's family gained a lot of media hype (Davison & Smith, 2015).

Further examples of industry bromances include the crossover between the cast of *The Vampire Diaries* (Plec & Williamson, 2009–2017), *Supernatural* (Kripke, 2005–2020) and *Arrow* (Berlanti et al., 2012–). They have

frequently used social media to express their bromance and they received a strong reaction from fans in doing so. While each series has a distinct narrative world and separate fan bases, similarities in genre and common ownership by The CW network means interaction between cast is encouraged. This not only functions as a strong promotional tool that encourages fans to cross between the series, but also enables actors to cross-promote charities. For example, Stephen Amell from *Arrow* posted a video online on March 13, 2015, showing himself talking with Jared Padalecki from *Supernatural* about their charities (Amell, 2015). Their video finds a balance of humour and seriousness to gain audience attention and deliver their message about their charity work. However, they also use this opportunity to mention when both of their new episodes will be airing. Ultimately, their industry bromance is far more obvious in their form of promotion; however, the authenticity comes from their seemingly natural banter. Amell even admitted to using his bromance with Padalecki at Supanova in Perth 2019:

> I don't know if we ever advertised anything together. We did a wine with him one time. But typically, everything is just for charity. I mean, there are people who like *Arrow* that have never heard of *Supernatural*. Plenty of people! (laughs). And you know there are people who like *Supernatural* that have never heard of *Arrow*. So, I think it cross-pollinates a little bit. I think it helps make people who aren't aware of each of our shows, aware of them. But if we can drive more people towards a charitable cause that's great. I try to be very selective with that sort of thing. If it seems like it doesn't make sense or it's a little gratuitous then I wouldn't.

Thus, Amell acknowledges the power of their bromance and the benefits it can provide not only for charities but also within the industry.

Another example of an industry bromance is Hugh Jackman and Russell Crowe, who eventually worked together in *Les Miserables* (Hooper, 2012), meaning they also have an off-screen bromance. Their friendship was discussed in the media, although their characters are adversaries. This is perceived as authentic based on their friendship existing before the film and continuing after. Both actors refer to one another in interviews and have appeared together online and at events.

Off-screen bromance

An *off-screen bromance* is defined by individuals who become friends in real life after making a film together, but may have shared minimal to no scenes. It is also inclusive of those who are enemies on-screen but have a bromance off-screen. Examples of this include Ben Stiller and Owen Wilson in *Zoolander* (Stiller, 2001), Norman Reedus and Jeffrey Dean Morgan in *The Walking Dead* (Darabont & Kang, 2010–) and Ryan Reynolds and Hugh Jackman across the *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (Hood, 2009) and *Deadpool* (Miller,

2016) films. The latter has resulted in various promotions, which will be explored in-depth in Chapter 4. Each of these pairings play characters that are on opposing sides, but off-screen have strong bromances expressed in traditional media and on social media.

Another example of this is Anthony Mackie and Sebastian Stan, whose on-screen characters do not get along for a large portion of the Avengers franchise (although the dynamic has shifted over time and has recently become more of an on and off screen bromance). When Mackie was asked about his bromance with Stan, he stated:

> When we were shooting *Winter Soldier*, he had this awful wig on and literally in the middle of scenes they would have to cut because the wig would like fall off or fall down. So, I would make fun of his wig and he would make fun of my calves because that's my bone of contention like growing my calves, you know. So, once I realized I can give him junk and he give me junk, and we were cool, it was great.
>
> (Thomas, 2020)

Thus, their bromance emerged out of a teasing humour while filming on set and carried through to off-screen. While much of their bromance appears to be linked to promotion of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), fans have shipped them as Stackie. Mackie explained in another interview that while they do not see each other all of the time because of their busy schedules, they keep in touch more than most (SiriusXM, 2021). He also expressed his "love" and "admiration" for Stan (SiriusXM, 2021).

Similarly, also in the MCU, Jake Gyllenhaal and Tom Holland play characters who oppose one another, yet off-screen they have claimed to have developed a bromance. Since filming *Spider-Man: Far from Home* (Watts, 2019), both actors have expressed their bromance through humour and flirtation. In fact, Gyllenhaal has jestingly stated, "I'm really sick of people calling it a bromance. It's a romance. It's a legitimate romance" (Rotten Tomatoes, 2019). Their bromance has gained a lot of media hype as they are frequently performing their bromance in interviews (Haylock, 2019; Locker, 2019). However, the obvious promotional aspect behind their bromance does create questions around authenticity.

On-screen bromance

An *on-screen bromance* is classified as those with a bromance in films who in real life either disliked each other or perhaps were just casual friends. An example of this is Steve McQueen and Yul Brynner who starred in *The Magnificent Seven* (Sturges, 1960) together but did not get along in real life (Eliot, 2011). Another example of an *on-screen bromance* is Kiefer Sutherland and Freddie Prinze, Jr., who co-starred in the television show *24* (Cochran & Surnow, 2001–2010), but years later Prinze declared that he did not get along with Sutherland (Rothman & Nathanson, 2014). Thus, in both these

instances, the bromance is confined to the narrative on-screen and the connection between their characters, but does not carry into real-world contexts.

On and off screen bromance

Chris Hemsworth and Tom Hiddleston are an example of an *off-screen bromance* that turned into an *on and off screen bromance* as the film franchise continued and their characters developed further. While they play brothers in *Thor* (Branagh, 2011) and *The Avengers* (Whedon, 2012) films, Hiddleston's character Loki begins as the enemy. Their characters have a brotherly bond on-screen, which develops throughout the films, turning Loki into a lovable villain who often sides with his brother, creating a great on-screen bromance. Off-screen they claim to be like brothers and have a strong banter between them adding credibility to this joint image (Sorren, 2015; Umit Altun, 2013). In fact, while doing press interviews at the premiere of *Thor* in 2011, Chris Hemsworth described Hiddleston as the fourth Hemsworth brother (Umit Altun, 2013). This public decree may be perceived as staged for the purposes of extending the on-screen dynamic and promoting the film; however, Hiddleston's off-the-cuff response that he had "hung out with his [Hemsworth's] brothers" and found it "fun to see where he fits into the dynamic" increases the perception that their claims to friendship are genuine.

Even more convincing, James Franco and Seth Rogen have a long running bromance and have highly capitalised on their friendship. They both began their careers with a television show titled *Freaks and Geeks* (Feig, 1999–2000), but have since collaborated on *Knocked Up* (2007), *Pineapple Express* (Green, 2008), *This Is the End* (Rogen & Evan, 2013), *The Interview* (Rogen & Evan, 2014) *The Night Before* (Levine, 2015) and *The Disaster Artist* (Franco, 2017). On top of these films, they have also done a series of humorous videos and photographs that have spread virally, including the parody of Kanye West's video clip for *Bound 2* (2013). In the majority of collaborations between these actors, they incorporate an element of their bromance on-screen, through declaring their love for one another or posing seductively. It should be noted however, that Rogen has stated in a recent interview with *Rolling Stone*, that he will not continue to work with Franco after the latter's sexual misconduct allegations (Shaffer, 2021). Bromances are therefore far from static.

Further examples of *on and off screen bromances* include Paul Walker and Vin Diesel, and Owen Wilson and Vince Vaughn. Walker and Diesel had completed five films together, as a part of the *Fast and Furious* (2001–) franchise before Walker passed away. Similarly, Wilson and Vaughn have four films together, including *Wedding Crashers* (Dobkin, 205) where they play best friends. They are renowned as a comedy duo. Longevity in shared careers is often an indicator of the authenticity behind a bromance. Another great example of this is Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles, who starred in the television show *Supernatural* from 2005 to 2020. The two play brothers on-screen and in real life bought houses next door to one another (Piester, 2019). Another long-spanning television example is the male leads of *Full House*,

who have shared a bromance since the 1980s and even reunited for *Fuller House* (Franklin, 2016–2020) in recent years. In between these projects, they also had various media appearances, refer to one another in their comedy shows and interviews, interact online and have even shared in an endorsement campaign for yogurt (NewsAlertCrew, 2014). Similarly, Will Smith and Alfonso Ribeiro played cousins on-screen that also shared an intimate bromantic friendship. Off-screen they have maintained their friendship since the 1990s and have even posted photos of themselves playing golf (Wakefield, 2018) and have danced together on *The Graham Norton Show* (BBC, 2013). When Ribeiro was on *Dancing with the Stars*, he even messaged Smith to ask permission to dance to Smith's song, thus expressing their ongoing bond (Webber & Meilan, 2014). Furthermore, the two actors have spoken in interviews about the influence they have had on one another and with Ribero stating they have "nothing but love" (Sway's Universe, 2020). Riberio also referred to his experience on the *Fresh Prince of Bel Air* as being with family (Sway's Universe, 2020), hence their familial dynamic. All of these on and off screen bromances go beyond the filming period and beyond on-set banter, creating a bond that generates enthusiasm by fans for future joint projects.

While Pitt and DiCaprio are perceived as having an on and off screen bromance since starring in *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (Tarantino, 2019), it is relatively new and does not share the same lengthy history as others listed here. Their bromance representation will be explored further in Chapter 3. Furthermore, Chapter 4 explores an on and off screen bromance between David Tennant and Michael Sheen, whose second appearance on-screen in *Staged* (Evans, 2020–2021) is closely connected to their first collaboration in *Good Omens* (Mackinnon, 2019) and subsequent off-screen bromance during press interviews. Their bromance does not share a lengthy history but has been utilised in a specific way.

Summary

Overall, the way a celebrity bromance is formed can impact the reading of the authenticity behind the relationship. Sometimes, there is an overlap across these areas, or they may change over time, thus the examples provided are not stagnant. For instance, Jon Bon Jovi and Richie Sambora shared a close bromance for three decades until Sambora left their band Bon Jovi. Thus, celebrity bromances like Hollywood relationships do not necessarily last forever.

For current bromances, the type formed may generate different audience reactions and thus have different applications if used for promotional purposes. For example, on-screen bromances can be particularly effective for film promotion, but are enhanced further when there is a perceived authenticity in their bromance also being off-screen. Thus, an *on and off screen bromance* has the potential to be highly credible and largely effective as a promotional tool. This is particularly the case when fans enjoy seeing actors reunite on-screen. In the example of Rogen and Franco, they have not only

been the leading stars of shared films, but Franco often does guest appearances in Rogen's movies.

On the other hand, an industry bromance can be particularly effective in the promotion of a celebrity's brand identity. In the example of Beckham and Cruise, it is evident that they both gained from their relationship. Cruise's career had taken a hit after some negative publicity and Beckham was trying to break into Hollywood. This unlikely pairing gained a lot of media attention, enhancing their identities.

The pre-success bromance is perhaps the most authentic, as it is the longest-lasting friendship that is not dependent on the promotion of a film or gaining red carpet attention. However, as established in the example of Manganiello and Bomer, it can help promote a film if the actors ever do unite on-screen together. The authenticity behind such friendships can vary depending on how close the celebrities are. Clearly, Williams and Reeve's bond was genuine. Ultimately, these origins allow for a deeper understanding of how they impact on individual and joint personas and how they can be used effectively in promotions. However, no matter how the bromances are formed, it is important that they build authenticity.

Privacy

The concept of privacy being a marker of authenticity is ironic in that anything that happens in the privacy of one's life should be unknown to the media and audiences. Thus, in this circumstance, it is the retelling of private details that is read as a marker of authenticity. For example, when Clooney and Pitt share stories of pranking each other or it is publicly shared that McKellen officiated Stewart's wedding, these become evidence of authenticity behind a friendship (Raphael & Lam, 2017). It suggests that their bromance goes beyond the films they promote and into their personal lives. Weddings, birthday celebrations or simply socialising off-screen are all strong signs of authenticity. Another prime example of this type of relationship is Ackles and Padalecki, who chose to be neighbours, while also working together for 15 years on the same television show. While there is no variety in their productions, this is a long period of time and is also supported by the choices made in their personal lives. These details reinforce that their bromance is not just on-screen or just for the media, but a truly authentic bond. How a private narrative is shared can impact on this marker of authenticity. Whether a paparazzi-based media outlet, like TMZ, captures people socialising or the celebrities choose to share a private moment on social media is indicative of the fact that there are various degrees of privacy.

Paparazzi

When the paparazzi capture celebrities, it is often perceived as unprepared and in an uncontrolled environment. However, it is also well known that

sometimes it is the celebrities themselves who have contacted the paparazzi to draw attention to themselves. Furthermore, it is always in a public setting, which is automatically a performed space for celebrities. The only truly authentic environment is their home. A non-posed image of Hemsworth and Damon on vacation together with their families has a sense of raw authenticity, compared to those that Hemsworth has photographed himself and posted online. Yet, both capture private moments that are not linked to filming. On the other hand, they are attached to Hemsworth's role as the ambassador for Tourism Australia. This promotional aspect decreases some of the authenticity. Perhaps a more authentic example is DiCaprio and Tobey Maguire, who are often captured at a basketball game together or going for a night out. This is a public setting, but they are captured sharing a private moment. The pair have been friends pre-success, meeting through the industry at an audition (Okano, 2019; Watson, 2020). Their bromance is authentic, as it has lasted more than three decades, they have worked together, and they are frequently captured socialising. While aspects of their social life are in a public space, it is not for promotional purposes and is often captured in situations that appear unprepared.

Social media

Social media is a cross between the private and public. A celebrity's persona can be controlled by themselves based on what they post and how often (Raphael, 2013). When celebrities share videos or photos in a home setting, it creates an intimate feeling for their audience. When celebrities comment on or like one another's posts, it creates a connection between those celebrities. However, when they are photographed together in a private space that cannot be accessed by paparazzi, traditional media or fans, it builds an authenticity behind their friendship. An example of this is Mark Wahlberg and Mario Lopez, who often share photographs of them working out together at the F45 gym, which Wahlberg is an investor in (Access, 2020). While this works as a promotion for Wahlberg's gym and healthy living brand, it is also an intimate insight into their personal time together and reflects a hypermasculine, frat-boy bromance. Moreover, they frequently interact online by commenting on each other's posts, reinforcing the narrative built. When Lopez interviewed Wahlberg, they referred to one another as "brother" and made references to one another's family TikTok videos, showing that they view one another's online content (ONWithMarioLopez, 2020). Furthermore, Wahlberg made a reference to having a crush on the women in Lopez's show when he was young, revealing a slight history in perhaps being a fan of one another (ONWithMarioLopez, 2020).

Mass media

In regard to traditional mass media outlets and junket interviews that are used during the promotion of films, these can also be an outlet for sharing a

private moment. Sometimes it is in the context of a news outlet announcing an interaction. For example, when Hemsworth and Damon arrived in Perth, Western Australia, and visited Rottnest Island, this was considered newsworthy and reported by all major outlets. Not much footage was available, as the visit was kept quite private. This made their trip even more authentic in its level of privacy. However, it was yet again attached to a tourism campaign.

On the other hand, many celebrities share private stories of interactions outside of filming together, as a way of demonstrating their closeness. An example of this is James McAvoy and Michael Fassbender, in promoting the X-Men films. They repeatedly told a story of racing buggies and shooting BB guns at one another, creating a playful persona for them both and reflecting an aspect of their bromance (Lam & Raphael, 2016). While there was no visual evidence, the verbal narrative was shared frequently. The lack of evidence is an example of how truly private moments are kept private.

Summary

Ultimately, the source that reveals these private moments impacts on how they are read by audiences. Once attached to a promotion, the sincerity behind its intent decreases. However, in order to be informed about a bromance, there must be some level of public performance. Some of the prime examples of intimacy are weddings, travelling together or socialising in a home setting. The varying levels of privacy can impact on the perceived authenticity; however, the more there is evidence to support it, the more the audiences conceive it in their minds. While it is extra private to simply share a verbal story than to show visuals, it could also be perceived as a publicity manoeuvre without the evidence. Timing of which private moments are shared also impact on the reading of authenticity. Once it is attached directly to the promotion of a film or show, it loses some value. An example of this is when Vin Diesel announced he named his child after his *Fast and Furious* co-star Paul Walker (Respers, 2015), during the promotion of his film that was not linked to Walker, *Blood Shot* (Wilson, 2020).

Spontaneity

Spontaneity is difficult to measure; however, the perception of it can help to create the feeling of authenticity. For example, when Jackman joined Fassbender and McAvoy in a junket interview and they began singing and dancing, it was perceived as unplanned (Lam & Raphael, 2018). However, when they re-enacted this performance on the Norton show, it appeared staged. Thus, spontaneity must be conveyed through a natural and slightly clumsy impulse. Even the unrehearsed banter between celebrities is evidence of a spontaneous chemistry between people. The lack of a controlled environment and premeditated plan creates the notion of spontaneity. It can be expressed as either a physical interaction or a verbal

banter in response to an unplanned question or situation. It can also be expressed virtually through online interactions.

Physical

In an interview setting such as *The Graham Norton Show*, which brings celebrities together on a couch or a red carpet event, we see celebrities interact with one another in a different type of setting than we are used to. Often, people are united in a way that the public has not seen in a long time, even though the celebrities themselves may be in frequent contact privately. For example, when McKellen and Stewart kissed at the premiere of *Mr Holmes* (Entertainment Tonight, 2015), this was an unexpected intimate moment. However, they were aware of all the cameras and it was most likely to help promote the film. Yet, Stewart's attendance alone is evidence of their closeness, as he was not attached to the film. Similarly, there are interviews when celebrities sit in close proximity or touch one another in a way that reflects a close bond. For instance, Fassbender and McAvoy have frequently caressed one another's faces in a humorous but intimate manner (Chlo K, 2014). These unexpected actions and random moments of touching show a level of familiarity that reinforces an authenticity behind their bromance.

Verbal

There are multiple situations where spontaneous verbal interactions occur that add to the authenticity of a bromance. For example, in interviews where the conversation seems to naturally flow to an unprepared question and banter pursues between those being interviewed. Another instance is when the interviewer does a quiz about how well the actors know one another and they either get the majority of the answers correct or share a private detail about the other person, suggesting an intimacy between them. As these are supposedly spontaneous responses, they are read as evidence of a close bond. McKellen and Stewart have certainly provided evidence for both of these situations (Raphael & Lam, 2017).

Virtual

While social media interaction is not entirely spontaneous, it gives the illusion of spontaneity through its non-professional setting. It takes place outside of the promotion of a film and the celebrities behave similar to fans – liking the same posts or commenting on the same content. Furthermore, when they record their own video content at home, this provides a setting for spontaneity where children and pets can enter the scene. Thus, when celebrities like, share or comment on each other's posts, it can be an insight into a natural friendship, like those among non-celebrities. When unattached to

a cross-promotion, it can be perceived as an authentic bromance. As celebrities are often not in the same city at the same time, working globally, they too keep in touch via social media. Once humour becomes a part of these interactions, it adds a level of credibility behind the relationship, as an extension of the in-person banter witnessed. Another example is when celebrities choose to post about another celebrity's birthday. For instance, Mark Ruffalo posted about Robert Downey Jr.'s birthday: "Sending you all the virtual hugs for your birthday, @RobertDowneyJr ❤ I love you to life, 3000. It's an honor knowing such a generous and complex man" (Ruffalo, 2020). This was accompanied with a photo of Ruffalo tightly hugging Downey. He uses a heart emoji and states that he loves him, while also paying him a compliment. Their bromance is reflected both on and off screen, spanning many years. In this instance, it was not directly attached to a promotion, but simply an expression of their bromance. While there may have been some premeditated process, it is considered spontaneous in that it is not in a professional media setting.

Summary

Staged bromance performances can still work quite well in engaging media and audiences; however, the more the spontaneity, the more authentic the perception. While physical, verbal and virtual interactions can certainly vary the way a message is conveyed, they all reflect an element of interaction that is outside of the typical mediated structure. Ultimately, choosing to celebrate a bromance publicly can help to promote shared work or individual work. However, even if it is not attached to a specific project, it also helps to enhance their individual and joint brand identity.

Consistency

Consistency in one's brand identity is crucial to developing authenticity in their individual persona, as well as joint image. This becomes even more significant when they share bromances with different people. While a romantic relationship is expected to be monogamous, a bromance has flexibility. Monogamy in bromances is not socially enforced, however having too many bromances can de-value one's authenticity. As such, celebrity figures must maintain a consistency in their overall brand. For instance, Hemsworth's identity is maintained whether he is expressing his bromance with Hiddleston or Damon. Similarly, Damon also has bromances with Affleck, Clooney and Jimmy Kimmel. Interestingly, Damon portrays these all in slightly different ways. However, his overall persona does not change and each of these bromances contribute to his humorous and nice-guy brand. His bromance with Affleck sometimes threatens to impact on this identity through Affleck's rebellious image. Clooney is evidence of his pranking nature and Kimmel has developed a fake-feud with him. However,

joining the Hemsworth family vacations is evidence of a close bond beyond just the two men, and yet is somewhat impacted by the fact that it links to Hemsworth's Tourism Australia endorsement.

Joint brand

When a celebrity bromance is formed, it works in a similar way to a romantic relationship, where the two personas become one. When Brad Pitt was with Jennifer Aniston, he was the handsome leading man. When he was with Angelina Jolie, he was the activist, adopter and slightly more rugged man. When linked with Clooney and Damon, he was the suave, humorous prankster. Similar to Grant McCracken's (1989) Meaning Transfer theory in relation to endorsements, there is a transfer of one brand to another when two celebrities combine in a shared identity. On the flipside, Jolie shifted from her gothic wild brand to A-list royalty. Aniston was seen as more than just her character on *Friends*, Rachel Green. Clooney's image was further enhanced as the charming cad that he was at the time, which transformed when meeting his now wife Amal. Furthermore, just as a romantic joint brand is often represented through the shipping of names such as Bennifer, bromantic pairings also have this such as Fassavoy. This is explored more in depth in Chapter 3.

Cross-bromances

Joining multiple brands at the same time makes things even more complex. Damon and Affleck have had a long-lasting bromance pre-success (although they pretend to have a fake-feud from time to time for promotional purposes such as the Omaze campaign). Damon and Kimmel had a history of dating the same girl, which turned into a fake-feud. The Hemsworth relationship emerged from their wives being friends; while his bromance with Clooney and to some extent Pitt began with the Ocean's franchise. All of these are ongoing, as he continues to work with Clooney on various projects, has sporadic appearances with Kimmel, travels with the Hemsworth's and maintains his bond with Affleck. Having too many bromances does put Damon at risk of being seen as insincere; however, the authenticity behind each of these relationships balances this out. They are long-lasting and consistent bromances that feed his existing brand. While Affleck's image has threatened his persona in the past, their bromance has never been questioned.

Summary

A consistent brand identity is crucial for a celebrity, as is consistency in the portrayal of a bromance – knowing that it has a long history and is beyond just one film promotion. If a celebrity tried to force a bromance for a promotional purpose and it was short-lived, this would lack authenticity and take

away credibility from their individual identity. Furthermore, ensuring their bromance with one actor does not impact on their overall identity is crucial. It should enhance both personas in order to be successful as a promotional tool and be perceived as authentic.

Conclusion

History, privacy, spontaneity and consistency all can be achieved in one bromance. Damon and Affleck are certainly a prime example of this. Understanding how real-world celebrity bromances are formed and critiquing the credibility behind them using the four markers of authenticity outlined helps us to evaluate the strength of a bromance for promotional use and better comprehend how they are also being used for entertainment value and brand enhancement. However, as soon as a bromance is used for a promotional purpose, it automatically loses some of its authentic worth. On the other hand, if this is done successfully and in an engaging way, it can also increase the awareness and enjoyment of a bromance, while also adding sincerity. A significant example of this is the fake-feud bromance between Jackman and Reynolds. This has generated a large amount of publicity for their charities, products and films. This will be explored more in depth in Chapter 4.

The way in which a bromance is identified varies on the basis of six main traits – frat-boy, fake-feud, familiar, flirty, funny and familial. While the dynamic often changes depending on the situation, they are always expressed in one of these forms. Overall, humour and closeness are the overarching significant aspects of a bromance. As outlined in the history marker of authenticity, there are five ways in which a bromance is formed – pre-success, industry, off-screen, on-screen, and on and off screen. The origins of each bromance also impact the way in which they express their bromance. The age in which they meet, how they have bonded and how often they work together all can help to form the narrative built and the way it is perceived by audiences and the media. Similarly, the fans and media also play a significant role in driving the publicity of the bromances.

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3   Constructing bromances

From celebrity persona to bromance persona

In 2015, the cast of the superhero franchise *X-Men: Apocalypse* (2016) appeared at the San Diego Comic Con version of the *Conan O'Brien Show*. In what has become standard procedure for interviews promoting tent pole franchises, O'Brien quizzed those present on on-set pranks, BB-gun battles[1] and interactions between old and new cast members. Of particular interest, however, was the relationship between actors James McAvoy and Michael Fassbender, who by then were collaborating for the third time. To the delight of the studio audience, the two were presented with fan-created bromance names and were asked to select their preferred moniker. Although they did not conclusively agree on a name, "McBender" peaked their interest for its similarity to a burger from a fast food chain. The exercise was well received in the room, but also online with popular press picking up on the story in the following days (Lattanzio, 2015). It also succinctly highlights the central topics of discussion in this chapter – the amalgamation of celebrity identities into joint bromance persona; the role of the media in reinforcing the persona; and the role of fans in (occasionally) initiating the persona.

On the surface, the creation of a bromance name is as simple as finding a lyrical way to combine the surnames of celebrity figures. Yet, the implications of constructing such a designation lies beyond devising a convenient way to refer to two people. Rather, a new identity (a joint persona) is constructed, with a history and set of associated values that build on, but are unique from, the individual celebrity persona from which it is created. McAvoy and Fassbender's selection of a bromance name not only acknowledged fan and media perception of a close relationship, but also embraced the notion of their identities being bound together in a shared joint persona.[2]

Celebrity images are the product of the "representational culture" of traditional media (Marshall, 2010), in which the public image of a celebrity figure is constructed from an amalgamation of materials available about the celebrity (at work; in the press; in private). The public image is increasingly supported by, or run parallel to, the persona that is offered in the "presentation culture" of social media (Marshall, 2010). In these spaces, celebrity figures

seem to be in control of the type of self they present to the public, maintaining a higher degree of autonomy over the way their persona is presented, sometimes literally through selection of the images (and videos) that reflect who they are. Through the types of private glimpses offered for public consumption and their interactions with fans, the celebrity figure has the opportunity to control the dissemination of identity information that affects the perception of their public persona. Unlike the highly mediated public image found in representational culture, social media offers the celebrity the possibility to show a less mediated and direct view of the self, or the self they wish to display. This enhances the perception that the online persona of celebrity figures is in some way more authentic than those located in media representations. However, the sub-industries of image-making (Gamson, 1994) that produce a celebrities' public image have adjusted to social media spaces and also operate to curate persona on behalf of celebrity figures (Turner, 2019). Therefore, the point of discussion is not to locate a division between manufactured public selves and unpretentious online persona. Rather, the celebrity persona is, in its contemporary format, a doubly mediated one found in both the public image of traditional media and online persona of social media. Even if celebrity figures do not use social media themselves, their presence in online spaces is ensured through references by media and fans. The image is thus both constructed and curated; mediated through screens of all sizes and embedded in both discourse and everyday social media use, especially for those who follow celebrities' social media accounts and receive notifications on their own personal devices. The celebrity persona is comprised of identity information scattered through different mediums and methods (consider the difference between watching a talk show interview, seeing a post on Instagram and joining a Facebook Live feed). However, despite the dispersed nature of presentation, what underpins the identity information is the entity of the celebrity themselves.

Central to the celebrity persona is the maintenance of a narrative about the individual (the accuracy of the narrative notwithstanding)[3] that encompasses their origins; rise to fame; areas of excellence; current and future plans. In essence, who the celebrity figure *is* and what it is they represent become apparent through the various images and impressions of them dispersed in the cultural landscape. It is for this reason that the cultural value of a celebrity is of interest to celebrity scholars. From Dyer's exploration of masculinity (1982) to Sarah Jackson's examination of race and politics in African American studies (2018), and Brockington and Henson's discussions of celebrity advocacy (2015), scholars recognise the celebrity as a site for exploring larger topics important to society. It is the persona of the celebrity that unifies their work, their actions (for instance, advocacy) and the identity information about them, bringing a sense of coherence and building a notion of who the celebrity is. Inevitably, the celebrity is aligned with values which they are seen to reflect. For instance, work related to environmental activism conducted by actor Leonardo DiCaprio since the 1990s resulted

in the creation of an eco-friendly image for the celebrity (Raphael, 2019). However, they are also utilised in different discursive contexts to fulfil the needs of different societal groups, as is evidenced by Annelot Prins' work on the appropriation of Taylor Swift's image as a Country and Western singer by far-right groups in the United States (2020).[4]

As an object of discourse, the celebrity persona is thus adopted by cultural and subcultural contexts, their public visibility making them an easy point of reference. For the most part, the appropriation of celebrity persona seems to have little impact on the celebrity figure themselves. Taylor Swift might be aware of how her image is utilised in far-right political discourse, but it does not infringe on her appeal to liberal and left-leaning audiences. Occasionally, however, the perception of a celebrity figure may have unintended consequences.

Derek Johnson's 2008 examination of fan reactions to British actor Sir Ian McKellen's queer activism highlights how the narrative of the celebrity persona is an open site of contestation. Johnson explores online interactions between McKellen and his fans, in which the actor's attempts to offer X-Men villain Magneto as an allegory for gay advocacy was complicated by readings of the character (Johnson, 2008). Johnson notes that fans found Magneto's back story and villainous characterisation as obstacles to a straightforward alignment with the actor's politics (2008). The on-screen character became a site of contested interpretation for both fan and celebrity, with fans resisting McKellen's attempts to fold readings of the character into other discourses beyond the films. Johnson reports less resistance when considering a queering of Gandalf, McKellen's heroic character in the *Lord of the Rings* (Jackson, 2001–2003) and *The Hobbit* franchises (Jackson, 2012–2014). Thus, while there are clear demarcations between celebrity persona and the on-screen characters they portray (fans do not think McKellen *is* Magneto), the discourses represented by characters may still affect perceptions of actors. McKellen's interactions with his fans suggests a desire to engage in the reception of his performance and to some degree filter understanding of his character through his own celebrity persona and identity as a gay man. This indicates that, even in the absence of marketing campaigns continuing the narrative of on-screen dynamics in off-screen settings (Hamad, 2020), reception of celebrity persona can be influenced by on-screen portrayals.

The off-screen presentation of bromance can also influence the interpretation of on-screen dynamics, particularly if the on-screen characters appear in ongoing film franchises. For instance, the on-screen dynamics between characters in *X-Men: First Class* (2011) was replicated in initial promotional runs by the two actors, McAvoy and Fassbender. In subsequent films, even though the characters slowly grew apart, the on-screen relationship was still interpreted by the media as being close, particularly during interviews promoting *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, *X-Men: Apocalypse* and *X-Men: Dark Phoenix* (Weintraub, 2014; Lattanzio, 2015; Weintraub, 2019). It was notable during the promotion of *Dark Phoenix* in 2019

that interviewers actively recalled the dynamics between the actors in 2011, seemingly keen to recreate their interactions and bromance. This aligned with an overall narrative theme that emphasises a close but complicated relationship between Charles and Erik. However, the intimacy initially demonstrated between the actors seemed to enhance the reading of the closeness between the characters (Lam & Raphael, 2018). Whether that filtered back on-screen is difficult to determine, yet it is not impossible to suggest that some of the homosocial intimacy between McAvoy and Fassbender influenced subsequent characterisations of the relationship between Charles and Erik (or at least interpretations thereof).

In a similar fashion, the bromance between Brian O'Conner (Paul Walker) and Dominic Toretto (Vin Diesel) from the *Fast and Furious* franchise is expressed intertextually in both on-screen and off-screen contexts. On-screen, the characters develop a relationship akin to brotherhood that is expressed as a bromance. Off-screen, a similar relationship is expected between the actors partly due to references in media interviews. Walker notes in 2011 that despite their opposing personalities (Walker a "trekker"; Diesel a "city guy"), their relationship is viewed by the public as "complimentary . . . [and] people have clicked with it" (Entertainment.ie, 2011). After Walker's death in 2013, Diesel makes direct reference to their on and off screen relationship in a social media post: "I will always love you Brian, as the brother you were . . . on and off screen" (Diesel, 2020). Additionally, links between the hypermasculine themes of the film and celebrities' personas contribute to a sense of on and off screen confluences. In particular their preference for cars, a major theme of the films and the cause of Walker's death, provides a main reference point that influences how the off-screen relationship is perceived.

However, this bromance differs from others which are presented as a straightforward dyad and reinforce the authenticity of on-screen and off-screen presentations through perceived alignment between the fictional character dynamics and "real" actor dynamics. The Walker–Diesel bromance is constructed, on-screen, as one of a series of character dynamics in a broadly familial framework, a common trend noted by scholars of action films (Gutiérrez, 2015). Instead of featuring the story of a relationship between two characters, action films present a wider, more diverse cast with whom to attract audience attention and feature in promotional campaigns. The relationship between Brian O'Conner and Dominic Toretto is thus only one of several character relationships that, collectively, are presented as a family. Off-screen, connection between different cast members is also evident, with a well-publicised friendship between Walker and fellow *Fast and Furious* cast-mate Tyrese Gibson; videos of Gibson sobbing uncontrollably at Walker's funeral posted to social media reinforcing their connection (Mulick & Macatee, 2013). The primacy of the relationship in the Brian–Dominic bromance is highlighted at the end of *Fast 7* (Wan, 2015), with a sentimental closing sequence paying homage to Walker (who died before the film was completed), and celebrating the relationship between the characters.

Both on-screen character and off-screen persona can operate as paratexts, shaping how celebrities and the characters they portray are received. Jonathan Gray (2010) defines paratexts as materials that "surround" a text, which while independent from the main text, nonetheless influence how it is read. Paratexts "manage them [and] . . . fill them with many of the meanings that we associate with them" (p. 6). While Gray focused mostly on industry and fan-generated texts existing in the cultural zeitgeist around media texts (like film franchises or television series), the concept can be applied to the celebrity persona insofar as it too is a text with multiple and often conflicting meanings and an ongoing narrative. McKellen's attempted queering of Magneto, regardless of its success with fans, indicates the malleability of the boundary between on and off screen persona wherein on-screen characters are incorporated into the narrative of the off-screen celebrity text.

Celebrity persona are created through an amalgamation of different materials about the celebrity. They are integrated into cultural discourses for their ability to convey (and embody) values and meanings. They are shaped by both off-screen and on-screen contexts – with reactions to on-screen portrayals flowing off-screen to affect perception or ongoing cultivation of off-screen persona. The narrative of a celebrity text is thus comprised of a series of accounts, representation and interpretations that ultimately give shape to the entity that is recognised as a coherent celebrity persona.

The emergence of a bromance persona is a complicated process as two existing celebrity persona, with their attendant individual meanings and mediums of expression, are combined into a singular persona. In essence, a new persona is formed; its creation utilising many of the same methods as celebrity personas. A narrative is established outlining the origins of the bromance and current and future details are communicated through information that is dispersed through different mediums and platforms. The nature of the bromance (whether it is frat-boy, fake-feud, familiar, flirty, funny or familial) is also established through repeated displays in different mediated contexts, helping to maintain a sense of who the bromance pair are. Differentiating the bromance persona from the celebrity persona is situated in the need to encapsulate a dynamic (a relationship between two people), rather than the expression of an individual entity. This results in the need for synthesis between two individuals; to align expression within the bromance to maintain a consistent nature and coherent narrative, thereby reinforcing the credibility of the relationship.

In a similar way to on-screen characters, the bromance persona exists in a paratextual relationship to the celebrity persona such that characterisations of bromance pairs can influence the way celebrity persona is interpreted. Grant McCracken's meaning transfer theory (1989) provides a means to conceptualise the interactions between celebrity and bromance persona. Focused on celebrity endorsement in the advertising industry, McCracken suggested that celebrity figures' endorsement of products functioned through the transfer of meanings associated with the celebrity to the products they

endorse and then onto the consumer (1989). Advertising campaigns capitalise upon and facilitate this meaning transfer through selection of celebrity figures whose meanings match the products marketed and the target audience. This is achieved through advertisements that emphasise and reinforce both the celebrity's meaning and those of the product. The Australian actor Chris Hemsworth became brand ambassador for the Swiss watch brand TAG Heuer in 2015 after appearing in the 2013 motorsport film *Rush* (Howard, 2013). The company was involved in the production of the film which featured Hemsworth as Formula 1 driver James Hunt, later recruiting Hemsworth as ambassador due to alignment with their brand profile and motto "Don't Crack Under Pressure" (watchonista, 2015). The alignment was due in no small part to Hemsworth's role in the film, but also to a celebrity image that emphasises a hardworking, professional and reliable persona exuding traits of hegemonic masculinity such as strength and control. Established in 1860, the brand's image undoubtedly predates Hemsworths'. Nonetheless, his association with the brand reinforces specific attributes of strength and control that are expressed through his embodiment of contemporary masculinity. These attributes are transferred to the brand to refresh the brand image for a contemporary audience. Similarly, Hemsworth is the Australian Tourism ambassador and creates promotional material for Tourism Australia. In this context, the meaning transfer process works by Hemsworth representing an Australian stereotype and inspiring international and domestic travellers to want to reflect similar values. In this instance, Hemsworth's hypermasculinity yet again comes into play through his rugged outdoor activities, but it is also supported by his family-oriented image, as the photos he posts online often show him travelling around the country with his wife and children. This helps not only to build his own persona, but also to advertise Australia as an ideal destination for family holidays.

McCracken's meaning transfer theory emphasises the relationship between a celebrity's image and new or pre-existing product or brand. Applied to the bromance, meaning transfer conceptualises the intersections between celebrity personas within the bromance. Meanings from one individual could potentially transfer to the other; consequently, celebrities need to manage both their own personas and the impact of their associations with other celebrities on their own image. By way of illustration, consider the Damon/Affleck pairing. American actors Matt Damon and Ben Affleck have an established pre-success bromance, with the narrative of their close friendship originating from their youth presented in the promotion of their debut film *Good Will Hunting* (1997). As their careers developed, their celebrity images slowly diverged, with Damon's box office successes and stable family life contributing to his image as a reliable "good guy" (Helmore, 2017). Meanwhile, Affleck's box office missteps and highly publicised relationship breakups in the early and mid-2000s construed him as a Hollywood bad boy. Damon and Affleck often mention their bromance during media appearances and as such awareness of their close association influences how the media interact with

them. For Damon in particular, media attention intensified during Affleck's multiple relationship troubles, with Damon questioned about accusations made against Affleck. While Damon's own persona was not unduly influenced by this association, the type of media attention directed towards Damon suggests they are connected. As they share a close friendship (or bromance), Damon could speak for Affleck; if not condoning his actions, then at least to explain them, potentially risking Damon's image as a good guy. Similarly, Damon is now also associated with Hemsworth, thus emphasising his family-oriented image as he travels Australia with both their families.

Depending on the origin and nature of the bromance persona, celebrities may be required to modify or accommodate their expressions of celebrity persona within the narrative of the bromance persona. The degree of autonomy a celebrity figure has over the bromance persona depends on its place of origin and on its continued presentation. For instance, if a bromance persona is the product of a marketing campaign, celebrities might be required to perform certain traits of bromance during promotional runs. At other times, celebrity figures might adopt bromance traits naturally as an expression of their dynamics. Where these traits are shown (and how they are shown) become central to discussing their authenticity. As explained in Chapter 2, there are six main expressions of a bromance – frat-boy, fake-feud, familiar, flirty, funny and familial. The way a bond is performed can impact not only the way it is read by audiences and the media, but also the way the joint-persona is presented. For example, the use of humour can increase their positive qualities, or reports of Mario Lopez and Mark Wahlberg bonding over their gym workouts emphasises their hypermasculine brands.

As the bromance persona relies on displays within highly performative contexts such as media appearances or strategic social media posts, the authenticity of the bromance is easily called into question. As we have highlighted in Chapter 2, the markers of authenticity constitute a rhetoric adopted in the bromance to suggest degrees of genuineness. The markers of history, privacy, spontaneity and consistency form both the context against which a bromance is constructed (e.g. history of origins; location in private spaces and interactions) and the conditions against which its genuineness is assessed (e.g. are expressions "performed" or spontaneous). As we shall further discuss, these markers manifest in different ways, depending on the site in which the bromance is created and expressed.

Role of celebrities in forming bromances

The celebrities themselves have always played a pivotal role in constructing a bromance identity. Bromances are sometimes expressed through their use of humour and the chemistry with their bromantic partner during interviews and media appearances. Celebrities also determine when to share private details or tell stories about their bond. However, in recent years, celebrities have gained even more control through their use of social media. In this space,

they not only develop their individual personas, but also interact with their bromantic partner to create consistency and sometimes spontaneity, depending on their responses to one another. If they share old photos, they can also meet the history marker of authenticity. If images are shared that capture their personal time, then this can also be an opportunity to provide insight into their private lives. For example, Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart used social media to express their bromance while promoting their theatre work together. These images showed intimate embraces, reflecting their closeness and reinforcing a consistent image of their bromance (Raphael & Lam, 2017).

A social media post with significant degrees of genuineness was produced by Hugh Jackman, when he shared a photo of himself with Russell Crowe and wrote "Russell Crowe makes a mean BBQ. Good times mate!" (Jackman, 2015). This was not attached to any specific promotion, which adds credibility behind their bond. The two have often spoken about their long-lasting friendship with the media and this insight into a private moment reinforces the authenticity behind their bromance. Jackman has taken the power in his own hands and captured a memory that the mass media and paparazzi could not possibly reach. He compliments Crowe's cooking, expressed his enjoyment of time spent and refers to him as his "mate." In doing so, Jackman is writing the narrative rather than the mass media. Crowe also posted the image and wrote: "Fun seeing you man." This reinforces the consistency in their narrative. Of course, even though they controlled the story, it did not stop the mass media from interpreting their posts (Kimble, 2015). This has happened on more than one occasion, with another photo of the pair in New York together and the media sharing a social media post to report on their "bromance" (Burke, 2015).

Role of media in constructing bromances

The media has always played a pivotal role in shaping celebrity identities and creating awareness around their work and relationships. Over time, they have developed a greater interest in the bonds between performers, in particular the bromances between actors. However, they do more than just report on it, they often aid in forming the narratives. The interviewers become a mediator for the performance of the bromance, adding to the markers of authenticity in various ways. The written articles are often in depth accounts, retelling the history of a bromance; talk shows create consistency; press junkets provide a space for spontaneity; and tabloids/paparazzi give insight into the private space. Often these markers of authenticity crossover between the different media outlets, but each of these shapes the joint bromance persona.

Articles

When media articles are written about bromances, they can vary in their length and style. For instance, a feature article often tells a detailed history

of how they became friends and break down intimate significant moments between the bromance pair, while also sharing other details about their careers. The feature articles give the writer more room to fictionalise and embellish the relationship, but they also need to balance it out with more significant content. On the other hand, magazine-style articles or BuzzFeed posts often celebrate the bromances with a singular goal and different readership in mind. However, it seems that in both instances, sensationalism is applied to varying degrees. For instance, *GQ*, *Details* and *Out*, all had feature articles that focused on Fassbender and McAvoy's bromance in 2013 and 2014 (Lam & Raphael, 2016). The writers used sensationalised phrases to emphasise a connection between the men, including "super friends," "the meaning of true bromance," "the connection crystalised" and "deep and abiding" (Lam & Raphael, 2016). These terms romanticised their connection and added to how the articles and men themselves were perceived. Had the writers not focused on the bromance, or had they described it simply as a close friendship, the tone conveyed would have differed greatly. In an article, the writer can carefully select their choice of language and can dictate the narrative told about the person being interviewed based on their own interpretations. This differs to other media outlets that rely on the celebrities to verbally and physically perform what they want to portray. Thus, in an article, authenticity is harder to discern, as the bromance is mediated through someone else's interpretation, who may have a biased opinion that could influence the portrayal of the situation. While they may be accompanied by photographs, these are often staged poses rather than images capturing an intimate moment.

Other content that are not feature articles, but simply an observation of recent interactions, also develop the narratives. For example, *InStyle* wrote an article in January 2020, titled "Every Time Brad Pitt and Leonardo DiCaprio Have Bro'd Out This Awards Season" by Tess Garcia. Garcia (2020) used phrases such as "intimate," "a match made in bromance heaven," "forged a bond that goes beyond a typical costar relationship," "taken their star-crossed bromance public" and "score one for the (platonic) love affair between two of Hollywood's most famous men." She also utilised quotes from Pitt to support her story:

> Pitt used his acceptance speech for Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role to thank his "partner in crime, DiCaprio" and went so far as to joke that he would have "shared the raft" in *Titanic* with his costar, whom he affectionately called LDC.

Garcia went on to analyse the use of the nickname, suggesting it showed a level of intimacy and insight into their private lives. Pitt was clearly aware of the media's interest in their bromance and pushed it further with comments such as "Lover. He calls me Lover," when asked about DiCaprio's nickname for him. Garcia added to this by not only quoting Pitt, but writing: "If calling

him Lover is what makes DiCaprio happy, it seems to be fine by Pitt. Score two for the bromance of the century." Garcia then explained their attendance at an afterparty: "they got cozy chatting it up with fellow A-list pal Al Pacino. (What do you call a throuple of bros?)", in an attempt to draw Pacino into the bromance. Elaborating on the relationship, Garcia wrote: "Pitt and DiCaprio hinted that their friendship went beyond a typical professional relationship from the very start of their press tour." She supported this with both actors saying they would work together again. Garcia finished her article with "the LDC-Lover rendezvous is bound to continue, full steam ahead." Ultimately, the entire article is sensationalised and romanticised for emphasis.

Similarly, *Vogue* also wrote about Pitt and DiCaprio. Elise Taylor (2020) quoted Pitt as saying: "Leo, I'll ride on your coattails any day, man. The view's fantastic." Taylor (2020) stated that "Pitt and DiCaprio's friendship has been arguably the most fun thing to watch" during the awards season. Taylor also used phrases such as "their camaraderie was noticeable" and "then came the news that Pitt and DiCaprio were real-life friends. Friends who reportedly *made pottery and ate sandwiches together*." While slightly more reserved in the language than *InStyle*, the writer has again added to the excitement around their bromance by announcing the pottery information as "news" that had arisen.

InStyle also uses a dramatised tone in other bromance-related articles. For example, when writing about DiCaprio's bromance with Toby Maguire and Orlando Bloom, Olivia Bahoa referred to them as a "Sexy Bro Squad" (Bahoa, 2017). Bahoa (2017) wrote: "Bro hangs are the new hottest thing in Hollywood in 2017" and draws a comparison to Taylor Swift's squad. Following this, Lara Walsh (2017) wrote for *InStyle*, a piece titled "Leonardo DiCaprio and Tobey Maguire Take Their Bromance to a Yacht in St. Tropez." Walsh (2017) wrote: "Leonardo DiCaprio took his epic bromance with Tobey Maguire overseas," and "the pair appeared to be in high spirits." These two *InStyle* articles were supported by paparazzi-captured photos that reinforced the authenticity behind the privacy. The medium of the paparazzi image, with its connotations of the unofficial and raw, operates in the conceptual space of the private, offering a glimpse behind the mask of fame as the images are neither authorised nor planned. Paparazzi images that show bromance pairs together in their "private" time, thus reinforce the public (read: planned) presentations seen in mainstream media reports. It is also evident from their long history, consistency and the spontaneous moments shared, that DiCaprio and Maguire in particular meet all four markers. Comparing this to DiCaprio's bromance with Pitt, which centred around their film and does not hold the same lifespan, the level of authenticity varies. As an on and off screen bromance that formed more recently during filming, DiCaprio and Pitt have a shorter history. However, they do exhibit characteristics of the spontaneity and privacy markers. Their humour and compliments to one another during the promotion of their film

created authenticity, which was supported by rumours of them doing pottery together and socialising outside of work. This bromance could potentially disappear overtime or strengthen, impacting on the reading of authenticity.

GQ also seemed focused on authenticity in their article about Channing Tatum and Jonah Hill:

> We can rest assured their bromance doesn't just exist on-screen. Because at the WSJ Magazine Innovator Awards in New York yesterday, Tatum and Hill sealed their friendship with a noogie and a cuddle when Tatum presented Hill with the Film Innovator of the Year award.
>
> (Campbell, 2018)

The actors will be appearing in their eighth film together with *23 Jump Street* planned for the near future; the first film was released in 2012. The writer of the article, Amy Campbell, also used language such as "got their bromance on," "dynamic movie duos" and "showing us what a bromance should look like in 2018." Furthermore, Campbell quoted Hill saying: "Thank you, Channing. I love you." The article was supported by an Instagram post from Hill, which showed him hugging Tatum and was captioned:

> My old friend @channingtatum flew in to give me this award. I don't get to see him nearly as much as I'd like to and that sucks. But the idea that he would take the time out to give me this and be there for me, made me feel a feeling of friendship and joy that reminds you how special life can be. It's not about anything besides the beautiful people you meet along the way. And one of the best there is, is @channingtatum. Love u buddy.
>
> (Campbell, 2018)

GQ approached this story quite differently to writers of *InStyle*, with slightly less exaggerated phrasing and less interpretive commentary, the article was still framed to focus on the bromance, as is evident from the headline: "Jonah Hill and Channing Tatum Just Got Their Bromance On." Ultimately, the media plays a pivotal role in building a bromantic narrative through their use of romanticised language. In articles, they often support these with affectionate quotes from the celebrities or photos of them sharing a private moment or showing intimacy through an embrace. The authenticity behind Hill and Tatum is evident through consistently working together and building a history over the past decade. While Hill acknowledges that they do not see each other regularly, his honesty also adds credibility and gives insight into their busy private lives.

Talk shows

While videos show physical and verbal evidence of bromantic interactions, they can also be edited in a particular way. For example, content could be

removed to focus exclusively on the bromance. Video titles and advertising clips can also be selected to push a particular narrative. Furthermore, in a talk show setting, the interviewer chooses the questions they wish to ask. In doing so, they have already prepared to tell a particular story about the person they are interviewing. However, this controlled setting also allows the celebrities to stage their response to pre-prepared questions. Talk shows help bromance pairs to show markers of authenticity by adding consistency to their ongoing narrative and in some cases represent the history of a bromance through the telling of stories.

For example, for two consecutive years, Ben Affleck was a guest on *Jimmy Kimmel Live* and in both interviews, Matt Damon was mentioned. Their brands are so strongly intertwined that their bromance has become their shared persona. In 2016, Affleck performed a skit of pretending to sneak Damon onto Kimmel's show (as an extension of Damon and Kimmel's fake-feud narrative, as explained in Chapter 2) (Jimmy Kimmel Live, 2016). Affleck declared that he is friends with both Kimmel and Damon and wanted to help them "bury the hatchet." After Damon was removed from the stage, Kimmel showed a picture of Damon and Affleck with their mothers at the Oscars when they were young. Affleck joked about his bad boy image versus Damon's good guy identity. By reminiscing about their journey together, the actors yet again reinforce that their bromance is real. They fortify their long history, while also proving it is current in their joint appearance that does not relate to a linked project. Similarly, a year later, Affleck was interviewed by Kimmel and was asked about his childhood birthday parties (Jimmy Kimmel Live, 2017a). Affleck dropped in Damon's name while speaking about his 12th birthday party and the conversation transitioned to their early careers of going for auditions together. Ultimately, by mentioning that Damon had attended his 12th birthday celebration, it again supports how close they always were, reinforcing their shared past and adding credibility to their bromance. Furthermore, their experience of entering the industry together also reaffirms their bromance. It is evident that like any other talk show, the questions and stories are pre-prepared leaving minimal space for spontaneity. However, the talk show setting allows for consistency to be built, as well as stressing the history shared.

In another instance, when Chris Hemsworth was interviewed by Jimmy Kimmel, Damon again appeared continuing the skit of the Damon-Kimmel fake-feud. Kimmel asked Hemsworth about his friendship with Damon to which Hemsworth responded sarcastically: "I saw a friend in need and so I decided to extend a handshake" (Jimmy Kimmel Live, 2017b). Kimmel then asked about them travelling together to which Hemsworth joked: "Well he turned up at my house in Australia, uninvited . . . but I'm an open person so." Kimmel queried if Damon stayed in Hemsworth's house, to which he said yes and explained that his kids stay there too. While all expressed through humour, they are yet again reaffirming that their bromance is real and developing a consistency around their travelling together.

Simultaneously, in both the Affleck and Hemsworth interviews, Damon has also continued his fake-feud bromance with Kimmel, maintaining a consistent tone of comedy.

These examples show the rehearsed approach to talk shows. However, perceived spontaneity can occur in this setting. For instance, when Jake Gyllenhaal was on *Late Night with Seth Myers* (2017) and called Ryan Reynolds to prove that they were actually friends. Gyllenhaal was promoting their film *Life* and Myers jokingly questioned the authenticity of their friendship. While this would have most likely been pre-prepared, Gyllenhaal offered to video call Reynolds, who did not answer. After calling a couple of times, they then continued with the interview. During the break, Gyllenhaal came back out to the audience, as Reynolds answered his call. He was pushing a pram and walking. The cameras captured this "off-screen" moment, which was perceived as unrehearsed and comedic. In doing so, it added authenticity through both spontaneity and consistency. Had Reynolds answered immediately and seemed more prepared for the appearance, it would have been read differently by audiences.

Junkets and red carpets

Comedy is crucial in any bromance, but it is particularly important in junket interviews if they want the video to gain traction online. Junkets are a series of consecutive interviews that take place in one location, allowing for film promotion to be widespread. In the current platform, these interviews are shared on YouTube by various media channels. In a junket setting, celebrities are somewhat prepared but there is a slightly more casual tone in these interviews. They take place back-to-back and the actors often become bored giving the same responses and begin to add some spontaneity. In doing so, they try to use more humour and sometimes actors jump into another person's interview. This is also done on red carpets. While people are aware of the media stunt, it still maintains a sense of authenticity. An example of this is when Hugh Jackman joined Michael Fassbender and James McAvoy in a junket interview and the three men began dancing to the song *Blurred Lines* (Lam & Raphael, 2018). However, as our research revealed, it was then again performed on *The Graham Norton Show*, taking away the spontaneous authenticity and instead creating a consistency in their narrative of on-set bonding (Lam & Raphael, 2018). While consistency and spontaneity both can exist, this must be created through different expressions of the bromance, not the retelling of the exact same narrative. It is also more difficult to have a spontaneous moment in a talk show setting compared to a junket structure. The reading of these situations differ, as talk shows are a more controlled environment.

Another example of a bromance being portrayed in a junket setting is between Gyllenhaal and Reynolds, while promoting their film *Life*. They consistently avoided answering many interview questions and would instead break into their own jokes and laughter. An example of this is the

Rotten Tomatoes (2017) interview where they broke into fits of laughter and wiped away tears from their eyes. As a result, they answered one question about socks. In many of the interviews, they acknowledge that the interviews are "useless." While this seems like a planned approach to creating entertaining videos, there is an element of spontaneity in each of these interviews as they are not prepared for the exact questions. They are frequently asked the basic questions about the filming experience, their characters, their co-stars and so forth. However, in junkets, the interviewers often include short games or quirky questions, as they have a short time to impress their viewers. With increased competition, the junket interviewers try to stand out by getting content that is unique. For example, in an interview with *Fox 5 Washington DC* (2017), the actors were gifted a piece of Deadpool merchandise each. Gyllenhaal jokingly threw it behind him, then hung it from his ear. Reynolds then also began to play with his. The interviewer mentioned nametags on their chairs, which then became props for further jokes. These spontaneous reactions to the moments show their closeness and in sync humour. In another interview, with *Screen Rant Plus* (2017), they composed themselves a little more and they were asked about working together. Reynolds expressed his admiration for Gyllenhaal's talents and called him a friend. They then both spoke about their laughter and fun on set while filming. This reinforced what was already being expressed in the interviews, that they had built a bromance together, which they seemed to happily exploit for promotional purposes. On the other hand, in an interview with Jimmy Fallon, Gyllenhaal told a similar story of laughing on set so much that they were wasting the studio's money. In telling this story in a talk show setting, it added consistency. However, he then mockingly used the phrase "bromance," showing his awareness of media and fan interest in their friendship (The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, 2017). Since then, Gyllenhaal has also developed a bromance with Tom Holland, which has gained a lot of attention too.

Similar to other media outlets, junkets are often a place for the interviewers to authenticate the friendship of the celebrities. They frequently play games that test how well actors know one another. An example of this is an interview with *BlackTree TV* (2014), where the interviewer played the "Bromance Game" with Jonah Hill and Channing Tatum, while they were promoting *22 Jump Street* (Lord, 2014). They were asked to answer questions on behalf of one another. In this interview, the actors proved that they knew each other quite well, but also surprised one another with jokes. There were clearly backstories to these comments, which again added authenticity to their relationship. Games such as this can reveal all four markers of authenticity by capturing a long history, revealing a consistency in a bromantic narrative built, providing insight into private lives through stories told and creating spontaneous moments of intimacy. In the Tatum and Hill interview, they knew each other's favourite drinks and favourite sports teams, which they shared with the viewers, giving insight into their personal lives and also providing evidence that they have spent enough time together to know these details. Spontaneity was

also evident when Hill said that Tatum would work on a farm if he was not an actor, which resulted in the two laughing, expressing their shared humour. This has also been curated by the questions asked by the interviewer, who showed their intent by repeatedly stating that the bromance is real.

In a red carpet setting, the McKellen and Stewart kiss is a prime example of a bromantic moment (Raphael & Lam, 2019). At the premiere of *Mr Holmes* in 2015, Stewart attended and the media reacted strongly to their shared kiss. ET reported on it:

> As bros do, they cuddled, they leaned in, they kissed. Patrick's wife was sandwiched in between the two with a smile, because she knows when to let bros be bros . . . the dudes have held hands and hugged before.
>
> (Entertainment Tonight, 2015)

Thus, the media responded by not only describing the red carpet interaction, but also adding their own insights, romanticising the moment through their use of language and supporting it with a background on the pair's relationship. ET mentioned that McKellen officiated Stewart's wedding and showed social media posts of the two holding hands and hugging in other contexts. Even news outlets such as the ABC reported on their kiss and provided a list of "5 Reasons They Have the Best Bromance" (Rothman, 2015). By sharing their kiss in such a public forum, there are very clear photos that capture the moment. McKellen's right hand rested on Stewart's shoulder and his left on his lower back as they locked lips (Freydkin, 2015). Stewart's hands were wrapped around McKellen's back. Stewart's wife was positioned between them and captured in the background with a large smile. Her presence reinforces the non-sexual relationship between the two, while the kiss itself emphasised their bromance. It supports their markers of authenticity – history, consistency and spontaneity, while also capturing an intimate moment that would normally be reserved for the private. In 2017, the pair shared another public kiss at the Empire Awards, reinforcing the authenticity in their narrative (Oppenheim, 2017). In this instance, Stewart was holding an award, while McKellen had one arm wrapped around Stewart's upper back. In 2020, they kissed again at another red carpet event for the *Star Trek: Picard's London* premiere (Simons, 2020). In this moment, they were photographed holding hands as they kissed, adding to the romantic connotations of this visual. By repeatedly showing affection in this way, they continue to gain media attention but also show a consistency in their intimacy, making it a more natural form of expressing their bromance. While others may jokingly express their bromance through a kiss, these men express it genuinely.

Tabloids and paparazzi

Although tabloids generally have a negative reputation and questionable credibility through their intrusive tactics and sensationalism, they can sometimes provide insight into the private lives of celebrities, which generates a

sense of authenticity. While it depends on their captioning and the narrative they try to spin, the genuine paparazzi imagery of celebrities interacting can tell their own story and are often sold to news outlets to support their reporting. Their sneaky photographs from afar or their shaking cameras being forced into the faces of celebrities add a sense of reality to the situation, as they appear unstaged (although it is known that many publicists tip-off paparazzi in order to gain attention for a celebrity they are representing). This lack of prepared footage creates an authentic experience for the viewer. Whether they are photos of Matt Damon and Chris Hemsworth travelling together or Leonardo DiCaprio going out with his entourage of Tobey Maguire and Kevin Connolly, these are all seen as authentic based on a known history and consistency. The tabloids like *TMZ* add to this credibility by capturing moments that are not performed. They do, however, often sensationalise these moments with their own interpretations and narrations.

For example, *TMZ* (2006) captured a photo of DiCaprio with a cap on and pulling his jacket up to cover his face. They wrote that he and Connolly were leaving an event "together." This phrasing places them as a pair and is consistent with other reporting of the actors. By capturing a moment of DiCaprio's private life, it reinforces that he chooses to socialise with Connolly and it is not for the purpose of cameras or promotion. This image also reinforces his party persona.

In another instance, *X17* filmed Damon entering an airport and was asked about whether Hemsworth had become more of a best friend to him than Ben Affleck, to which Damon laughed but did not answer (X17onlineVideo, 2019). Another person was heard asking to give a shout out to Jimmy Kimmel, to which he jokingly cursed Kimmel. Capturing Damon in a private moment of travelling with his family and doing autographs for fans reinforces his nice guy image. However, with the media trying to turn it into an interview about his bromances and time in Australia, it changes the way Damon responds to the situation. Regardless, it is evidence of privacy and spontaneity and confirms an element of authenticity in his overall brand. It shows a moment in his personal life and he is asked questions that he is not directly prepared for, reflecting a more authentic reaction. It also shows the interest people have in his relationships with Hemsworth, Kimmel and Affleck and how intrinsically tied his persona is with them.

Tabloids often provide stories without visual evidence, but such reporting can also build a bromance narrative, even if they are not completely true. For instance, *The Sun* published an article about Pitt and DiCaprio:

> A source close to the pair said: Brad's got his own sculpting studio at his house and Leo loves coming over to use it. They sometimes hang out with Brad's artist pals, but other times it's just the two of them. Leo brings sandwiches over from their favourite place, Fat Sal's, and they spend their boys' nights creating art until the early hours.
>
> (Boyles, 2019)

First, similar to *TMZ*, they refer to them as a "pair." Using such language instantly creates a relationship-like notion. Second, the "source" is unnamed, as most tabloid stories are, which reduces the credibility of the article. However, once such rumours began, other more reputable media reported similar information and developed the bromance narrative further. Ultimately, any insight into one's private life suggests some element of authenticity behind the relationship. However, it is not just the media that forms the bromance, but the consumers that create their own tales.

Role of fans in creating bromances

Fan studies

The participatory nature of fan culture is an oft-noted aspect in fan studies, particularly during the formative years of the field of study. Scholars such as Henry Jenkins and Camille Bacon-Smith focused on the production of texts within fan communities, which revealed alternative interpretations of established media texts. Both emphasised the practices of fan communities that reworked media texts in order to extend narratives, reimagine character dynamics or create new meanings, Jenkins referring to fan creations as products of a "remix culture" (Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 225). A remix culture draws from existing media texts, reappropriating visual and audiovisual materials in order to generate new texts imbued with meanings reflective of the concerns of individual fans or fandom with which they identify (Lessig, 2008). Materials circulating within the media ecology of both representational and presentational cultures (Marshall, 2010) become raw materials that are absorbed into fan cultures and integrated into fan discourses through reworked texts. These raw materials, naturally, include representations and presentations of celebrity figures, who are conceptualised as texts (à la Dyer) capable of further manipulation and reimagination. There are two eventualities for the celebrity persona, both of which are theorised differently. On the one hand, it is the potentiality for the celebrity persona to be reappropriated into ongoing fan works and discourses. On the other hand, it is reimagined through concurrent presentation in social media outlets.

The works of fan studies scholars working in the area of Real Person Slash (RPS) are useful to theorise the first possibility. Slash is a genre of fan fiction that features romantic pairings between characters, usually in contravention of canonical representations in the source text (Busse, 2006). Slash narratives explore subtextual possibilities not made explicit in the source text, or extend the narrative world by exploring alternative possibilities and romantic outcomes. A subgenre of slash is RPS which, unlike fan fiction created about characters, features narratives that pair celebrities-as-personas rather than characters portrayed (Lam, 2018). Though not representative of all RPS, many RPS narratives involve homoerotic pairings that detail the ways in which relationships are expressed in private and personal settings. RPS

has been examined from a number of perspectives that consider the discursive implications of feminist readings of slash (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Massey, 2019), the maintenance of fan hierarchies and hegemonies and policing of fan practices (Larsen & Zubernis, 2012). For the purposes of the present discussion, these discursive and structural questions will be set aside in favour of considerations of persona construction. Specifically, the types of persona evoked during the process of RPS creation will be explored through articulation of different levels of persona.

The first level is the celebrity-as-persona, which is comprised of the materials that form the public image of the celebrity figure. This persona is more commonly associated with the representational culture of traditional media, in which the celebrity figure is constructed through mediated representations. Critiques of celebrity culture in scholarship and by media savvy audience highlight the constructed nature of this public image, such that celebrities are appraised for their symbolic value (Dyer, 1986); their cultural value dissected and revealed. Conceptualising the celebrity figure in symbolic terms emphasises the performativity of the entity on display while grounding them in social contexts. Celebrity figures are seen on-screen, at publicity events, in local settings and in private spaces through a variety of different media. A tangible entity is formed through these views of the celebrity, one with clearly definable characteristics (they are nice or "bad"; cool or alternative) and who occupies both media and real-world spaces. At the same time, awareness of the symbolic nature of media representations of celebrity figures divorces the public image of the celebrity-as-persona from the individual subjectivity of the celebrity-as-*person*. In this respect, the celebrity-as-persona become a symbolic resource for fans to express their own values and notions of personhood through identification or rejection of celebrity figures and the values they are known to represent. Engagement with this level of persona involves, for the most part, collating, organising or reworking existing media artefacts in order to shape the celebrity figure in specific ways. Yet, the frame of reference remains at the level of the celebrity figure's public image. Characterisation of celebrity figures directly engages with the attributes and characteristics associated with the public image circulating through representational media and presentational social media outlets. However, conceptualisations of celebrities as characters extend the boundaries of personhood beyond a celebrity's public image into the imaginative space of speculation. This perspective on celebrity figures constitutes the second level of persona construction – the celebrity-as-character.

Henry Jenkins' definition of a participatory culture is one in which active media consumers (including fans) rework and reappropriate media content (2006b), in essence utilising mainstream media texts as raw materials, to create novel works invested with new meanings that reflect the concerns of the creator. Fan works appropriate the raw materials of mainstream media not for the purposes of replicating existing representations, but to extend texts in exercises of imaginative embellishment. Within a participatory culture,

materials that construct the celebrity-as-persona are potentially reworked in fictional contexts in which the physical properties of celebrity figures (their appearance, career histories, known attributes) become subsumed into other discursive contexts. The representation of celebrity figures in fan texts, particularly in RPS, may bear a physical resemblance to a celebrity but are divorced from the *actual* persona. Instead, they become a vessel for the fan author's own subjectivities or concerns (Busse, 2006). Speaking of RPS in *Supernatural* fan fiction, show creator Eric Kripke recognises his own appearance in RPS as a façade that "belongs to the writer [the fan author]" (Busse, 2006, p. 215). While borrowing the properties of the actual individual, the fan's interpretation of the individual and establishment within their own fictional settings (no matter how closely they resemble the real world) separates the real-world celebrity from the fictionalised account. The celebrity is rendered as a character within a narrative, albeit one inspired by a real-world counterpart whose physicality and personal/professional circumstances are adopted as springboards for further imagination.

Finally, the celebrity-as-person is rarely invoked in fan fiction or RPS, but provides the framework for much of the persona construction that takes place in both mainstream and fan texts. It accounts for the "real" person whose physical characteristics and narrative is incorporated into the public persona and expressed through both representational and presentational media. Fan fictions rework materials from celebrity persona to create fictionalised versions of celebrities-as-characters. While the fan is less likely to engage with the celebrity-as-person, encounters can occur in staged or unstaged (Ferris & Harris, 2011) settings in which the fan gains the opportunity to witness the celebrity in unmediated contexts. Ferris and Harris argue that these types of encounters are desired by fans for the close quarters access afforded, and the opportunity to achieve reciprocal interactions wherein the fan's actions have a direct effect on celebrity responses. Differences between the celebrities' public persona and the entity presented in these live settings also satisfy fan desires to enter the space "behind the manufactured mask of fame" (Holmes & Redmond, 2006, p. 4) in a search for the authentic individual.

Broadly speaking, two types of bromance persona are constructed through fan works – fictionalised embellishment located in RPS, and alternative persona curated on social media platforms. The degree to which the creation of bromance persona engages with the celebrity-as-persona and celebrity-as-character is largely dependent on the nature of the persona created, and the context of its intended reception.

Fan art and fan fiction

For the most part, the creation of fan art and fan fiction occurs within the spaces of creative embellishment outlined by Jenkins as a defining characteristic of fan appropriation of media texts (1992 [2013]). While Jenkins'

explorations focused mainly on extension, corrections or reinterpretation of narrative worlds and character dynamics, a similar conceptualisation of reappropriation and embellishment can be applied to works directed towards celebrity figures. Fan works extending narrative themes will draw, naturally, from the existing themes and descriptions in the source text. In fan works depicting celebrities as couples, materials in circulation about the celebrities in question become the source texts. Here, it is the celebrity-as-persona that provides the raw materials for further creation; the properties of the personas utilised to create a common point of reference to facilitate recognition of the fictionalised versions by fan readers (Piper, 2015). Adopting elements of the celebrity-as-persona also grounds the fictionalised version of the celebrity in an authenticity associated with the "real" individual behind the persona (the celebrity-as-person). Cloaking representation of fictionalised relationships with details of the celebrities' *actual* biography or physical attributes creates a foundation of actuality through which their rendering of celebrities-as-characters is legitimised and the relationships afforded plausibility.

A prime example of this is the bromance between James McAvoy and Michael Fassbender, which was shared with the actors on *The Graham Norton Show* (BBC, 2014). Norton and his team had evidently selected some of the most humorous and sexualised examples, which is their role in creating an entertaining show. However, it is the fans themselves who developed the Fassbender and McAvoy bromance in a hypersexual manner. The artwork shows them sharing physical intimacy, while the fan fiction expresses their strong connection. In many of these narratives, baking is involved and Fassbender is frequently depicted as being the more dominant of the two.

The fan art utilised on the *Graham Norton Show* depicted Fassbender and McAvoy in the costume and hairstyles of their characters from *X-Men: First Class*, the film which inspired the characterisation of the pair as bromance partners.[5] The stories were set in private spaces of general domesticity, with little suggestion of where the domestic setting is physically located; no identifiable landmarks indicate real-world places or spaces originating from the narrative world of the X-Men universe. The figures, setting and dynamics represented in the fan art thus draw from on-screen representation of the fictional characters (embodied by the actors Fassbender and McAvoy). It also builds upon the emotional connection between the characters established in the plot. These elements are reworked and recontextualised to locales of generic domesticity wherein further exploration of the emotional intimacy hinted at in the film is achieved. The final work is clearly a work of reimagination, in which identifying properties of the characters (and by extension the actors who portray them) are utilised to present fan interpretation of character dynamics. The degree to which the interactions between the actors during promotion of the film influenced these interpretations is hard to determine. Yet, regardless of whether the intimacy suggested is between Charles and Erik the characters, or the dyads of McAvoy-as-Charles and Fassbender-as-Erik, the highly constructed nature of the images foregrounds the fictional

qualities of the representation and firmly suggests that the celebrities are here rendered as characters.

Other examples of fan art depicts Thor (Chris Hemsworth) and Bruce Banner (Mark Ruffalo) kissing, uploaded to Tumblr by Umikochann's Secret Cave (2019). The same artist drew Thor flirting with Star Lord (Chris Pratt) (Umikochann's Secret Cave, 2018) and Thor kissing Steve Rogers (Chris Evans) (Umikochann's Secret Cave, 2019). While some of these depictions extend expressions of homosocial intimacy into homoerotic contexts, they nonetheless are grounded in a bromantic relationship. Fan art embellishes existing or imagined homoerotic subtext behind the bromances, bringing to the fore fan readings of the intimacy between character/actors. Not all of these readings are homoerotic however, with many images depicting Thor and Loki (Tom Hiddleston) in close embraces that mainly express a brotherly bond.

Fan fiction likewise reworks existing materials related to celebrity figures or the characters they portray in order to explore new dynamics (often homoerotic in nature). A search of the word "bromance" on www.facfiction. net returned a total 2,738 stories. Among these were narratives around the bromance of Frodo and Sam from *The Lord of the Rings* (VictoireAgathon, 2012), Danny and Putzie from *Grease* (Writing4Life2018, 2020) and a story about Spiderman and Deadpool in a physical relationship (Concretewolf, 2019). In some instances, the authors draw from different narratives such as combining four Disney Princes into one story (TVMovieBuff, 2017). The practice of creating new narratives (by combining existing media properties) or exploring and embellishing subtext is indicative of fan desire to engage with popular culture texts through reinterpretation (Jenkins, 2006a). As such, these works become integrated into the discursive practices of the individual fan creator or the fan community for which the text is created, helping to address issues of gender or sexuality or facilitating playful interactions with source material. Stories set within a pre-existing fictional world, or one of a fan's creation (by combining both fiction and non-fiction settings) are narratives that fictionalise the celebrity figures involved, removing them from the narrative trajectories of the source text and divorcing them from the celebrity-as-persona that is depicted in mainstream media. Unlike fan art, fan fiction benefits from the illustrative capacity of text to further explore backstories, motivations and emotional nuance.

Fictionalised versions of celebrity dynamics are therefore afforded greater scope to both explore and legitimate the relationships depicted. With the benefit of numerous installations and high word counts, fan authors propose interpretations of celebrity dynamics within their fictional creations through an examination of the emotional complexity of the celebrity-as-character and projected actions. In order to render the interpretation probable, some degree of confluence between the celebrity-as-character in the fan narrative and what is known of the celebrity-as-persona needs to be established, at least initially. Likewise, dynamics between celebrity figures are rendered

more plausible if bearing echoes of the types of bromance expressed in media or online. As previously mentioned, Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart have engaged in public displays of affection, famously sharing several kisses in 2017 and 2020 (Oppenheim, 2017; Simons, 2020). Fan art illustrating intimacy between the two thus reflects documented expressions of affection already circulating in the media. As the fictionalised account is based entirely on the imagination of the fan author, reference to the celebrity-as-persona helps to authenticate the celebrity-as-character. The longevity of fan fiction, which can span for many years and thousands of words, enables the fan-created bromance to gain a history of its own, authenticated through continued and consistent depictions of the relationship. While the bromance imagined by fans might deviate from that which is visible in media, it nonetheless contributes to an overriding bromance image associated with the celebrity figures.

Fan video compilations and image manipulation

Fan art and fan fiction are representations of celebrity dynamics that are rendered through original creative works and therefore rely on authenticating features to lend the imaginings credibility. Fan video complications and manipulated images, on the other hand, more directly rework media representations of celebrity figures. Thus, these works operate at the level of the celebrity-as-persona (albeit an embellished version of the persona), utilising media text as raw materials and not just a point of reference. The primary source of content are images and video of the celebrities in question and, regardless of whether the final composition or edited video "actually happened" or not, the depiction sets the dynamic presented within known contexts (e.g. of public appearances or interviews), using known images of the actual celebrity. This sets the narrative of the bromance firmly within the contemporary popular culture landscape, and not within the imagined space of a fan's creation. While some fan works in this category impose greater degrees of interpretation on the dynamic than others (reading more into a relationship than is present), they all operate in a conceptual space that addresses the celebrity-as-persona rather than fully fictionalised celebrity-as-character creations. Some works attempt to embellish details already inherent within a dynamic, or provide visual "evidence" to known (or rumoured) details about celebrity dynamics.

   For instance, since rumours of Pitt and DiCaprio doing pottery together emerged, so did photoshopped artwork celebrating their bromance in a *Ghost*-like arrangement. Similarly, visuals of Chris Hemsworth and Tom Hiddleston have been photoshopped to reflect their bond on-screen and off-screen. Additionally, video compilations focused on Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles often highlight bonds that appear to already exist. For instance in a video uploaded to YouTube by MysticSwan (2019) shows the men hugging, dancing, laughing and sharing intimate moments. Sim Smoldy (2019) uploaded a similar compilation, with focus on their lasting friendship. This

video includes various speeches that the actors have made about their bond and thus has a slightly more dramatic tone than others, which capture them joking around and laughing excessively. Another fan created a video titled "Compilation of Misha making Jensen laugh," as Ackles and Padalecki also share a bromance with Misha Collins who stars alongside them in *Supernatural* (Taemiins, 2017). This video is humorous and is complimented with an upbeat song. Thus, the fans as creators make choices to edit footage and background music according to their own tone and pace.

Many compilations are made up of junket interviews and red carpet events, trimmed to show the highlights of either humorous or intimate moments. Thus, interviews form a second life through these compilations and the selection of clips can help to transform the persona of a celebrity. For instance, DiCaprio is often perceived as being quite serious in interviews, but by gathering all the clips of him joking with his co-stars, fans are able to depict a more charming identity. They are also able to emphasise particular bromances.

For these fan works, the credibility of the suggested reading of the dynamic and bromance persona is located in the evidence of the media representation (and re-workings thereof). For video compilations in particular, although music and added text promote specific interpretations of the dynamics presented, they do so to emphasise (rather than create) relationships that already appear to naturally exist. The authenticity of bromances depicted in fan video compilations is more reliant on the expression and perceived authenticity of the celebrity figures in question, rather than the efforts of fans. Consistency is a central marker of authenticity in these fan creations, as compilation videos emphasise certain characteristics of celebrity figures that contribute to the ongoing bromance. Videos that highlight humorous moments between bromance pairs contribute to the characterisation of the pair as funny, regardless of whether they are actually comical or not.

Social media dedicated pages

The use of online spaces to curate and present persona is theorised by P. David Marshall as the presentational culture of social media (2010). In online spaces, the celebrity figures (or a representative) present version of their private selves deemed appropriate for public display, constituting a "public private" (2010, p. 44) self that is calibrated for online communication. Short amounts of text and expressions that privilege images and videos become the means through which celebrity figures curate their online public persona. At the same time, fan activities in online spaces likewise curate persona that reflect aspects of celebrity figures they deem to be most appropriate, representing the celebrities in a (mainly) positive light (Soukup, 2006). Like the fan video or photoshopped image, online fan activities may highlight existing dynamics within celebrity bromances, helping to reinforce the bromance persona that is expressed by the celebrities themselves.

For instance, a number of fan webpages are dedicated to Ackles, Padalecki and Collins that group them together as an expression of their fandom of the actors and their friendship. With sites such as "fanforum," there are threads expressing fandom towards particular on and off screen bromances. For example, there is one dedicated to the characters Brandon (played by Jason Priestley) and Dylan (played by Luke Perry) from *Beverly Hills, 90210* (HipHopKingMike, 2018).

There are multiple Instagram and Facebook accounts with "Fasavoy," "McFassy" and "McBender" used in the name to represent the bond between Michael Fassbender and James McAvoy. Similarly, "Padackles" is used to ship Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles and has resulted in various social media accounts. Others are more direct with "mattandben" (referring to Matt Damon and Ben Affleck). On these pages, images from past and present are shared with comments from fans about their love for the actors.

While the examples discussed generally align with the expression of bromance presented by the celebrities in question, the bromance persona can also be a contested site of production and reproduction. Setting aside the more imaginative embellishments of RPS, fan-created bromance personas carry the potential to affect celebrity executions of the same dynamics. Fan-created materials such as compilation videos and social media activity support and reinforce celebrity versions of bromances, yet can also offer alternative and opposing views of a bromance persona. If media reveal fan interpretations that are contradictory to celebrity presentation, it either creates a divide between fan and celebrity interpretation of the persona or causes the celebrity to (if only momentarily) change their presentation. A final observation can be made about the exchange between McAvoy and Fassbender at the *Conan O'Brien* interview outlined in the opening of this chapter. The actors had, for the most part, expressed their bromance persona as one akin to frat-boys (based on juvenile onset antics). Yet, fans created their own versions based on a mixture of their on-screen presentation (literally the costume and hair styles of their characters) and their celebrity persona (fan works sometimes referred to the actors rather than characters). These versions characterise them as a domestic couple and not frat-boy buddies. For a moment, when McAvoy placed his head on Fassbender's shoulder, the two celebrities modified their version of their bromance to match fan readings. This delighted fans, but also highlighted the relative lack of control celebrity figures have over expressions of bromance persona in a media landscape in which both media and fan representations share the same space as celebrity expression of persona.

A celebrity's individual or joint bromance persona cannot be formed from just one perspective. It is developed through the media, fan creations and reactions, as well as the celebrity's performances and level of which they share insight into their personal lives. Through the markers of authenticity, they are able to prove their bromance and change the perception of their joint brand. However, fan embellishment that hypersexualises their

relationship may express the relationship in ways beyond the control of the bromance pairs. Media interest in the original bromance and fan interpretations, while helping to prolong awareness of a bromance brand, can likewise shape the joint persona in ways unintended by celebrities. Celebrities can however, choose how to utilise their joint bromance brand. Whether it be for advertising products, charities or promoting their individual projects, the brand can carry value.

Fan dialogue

While many fans are creators, the majority are simply consumers. However, even in viewing, they can increase the popularity of a video and they can comment adding to the dialogue around a bromance. It is evident from online comments that fans often insert their views on authenticity, use shipping names and quote favourite moments from bromantic performances in interviews. Fans want to believe that celebrities get along and when it reaches the level of a bromance they want to observe and take part in the bonding.

Watching interviews where celebrities share intimate details about one another not only proves the authenticity in their bromance but also provides an insight for fans. These types of interviews are usually more revealing of the celebrity's interests and style of humour. They are, thus, often perceived as being more entertaining than the standard interviews. Fan comments on such videos frequently exclude much commentary on the films being promoted and focus more on the actors themselves (Lam & Raphael, 2018). They analyse their dynamic, physical interaction, verbal banter, eye contact, facial expressions and compliments to one another. These observations are often guided by the media also. The interviewer's comments and questions, the caption and the introduction to the interviews all can direct the conversation around a video. The media will often direct the narrative based on what will gain them viewership.

In a previous publication, *X-Men Bromance: Film, Audience and Promotion* (Lam & Raphael, 2018), we examined fan comments in response to a junket interview with McAvoy and Fassbender, which included a cameo by Hugh Jackman. We noted:

> [A]udience responses demonstrate an overwhelming appreciation of the behaviour and the ease of presence that the close bond between the actors elicited. Audiences also demonstrate great enjoyment in witnessing the bromance between the actors, indicating that the performance of such off-screen persona could be as significant to audiences as on-screen dynamics.
>
> (p. 371)

Some of the unpublished comments from our data collection further reinforce the way in which fans engaged with the content. One commented,

"I love how they can never stay serious lolol would love to hangout with this trio – michael, james, and hugh." This is a prime example of wanting to go beyond the boundaries of viewer into a parasocial relationship.

Another YouTube comment read:

> Nobody realized how James reacted to the "hint" of Grace? Grace: Your weapon – I mean, your power is pretty awesome as well. Michael: T-thank you . . . James: Careful now, careful now . . . safety on? (just smile) Grace: Don't shoot . . .! James was like "Hahaha, yeah, but don't you dare to touch my man, ok? ^^"

> (2018)

The majority of this comment was a transcript of the interview, however the last sentence inserts the fan's perspective. The fan has interpreted McAvoy's reaction the way in which they want to read it as an individual and sexualises the banter further by creating a false ownership of McAvoy over Fassbender. Suggesting that Fassbender is McAvoy's "man" creates a homosocial undertone. This comment also paints the interviewer as a threat, suggesting she was purposely flirting with Fassbender. Hence, when these bromantic moments are shared publicly, they are left up to interpretation and fan or media comments can dictate the narrative. While this fan comment did not reflect the majority of perspectives expressed, it does show how much variety there can be.

Furthermore, a particular viewer stated, "these interviews are normally boring but man after 3.30 is so funny." This acknowledges the heightened entertainment of a performed bromance over traditional junket interviews. Another comment shows that fans often perceive such interviews as being raw and "uncut": "BAHAHA . . . this interview was fricken fantastic! I literally LOLed . . . gawd I love the X-men cast members. This uncut interview was highly entertaining!" Thus, creating the perception of an "authentic" moment versus a staged and prepared interview generates a stronger response. Many other comments compared the men to "frat-boys" and "school boys." The majority commented on the humour in the interview. Hence, this video is evidence of how bromances can be used as a promotional tool and form of entertainment. They utilised many of the bromantic characteristics outlined in Chapter 2, which resulted in predominantly positive responses from viewers. With the markers of authenticity at play, the majority of viewers appeared to reaffirm a belief in their bromance. The spontaneous banter between celebrities were highlighted in comments, indicating the spontaneity marker to be the primary marker in operation in this form of presentation. In the example provided, there were some comments that inserted a sexual undertone between the actors, while others simply perceived it as fun and enjoyable. Thus, the reading of a bromance can differ based on the fan. However, the online environment allows for all perspectives to be shared and debated. The fans are not producing art or narratives, but

are contributing to the dialogue around the bromance. This increases online viewership and media interest.

Cultural significance of bromances

Bromances are part of the ongoing presentation of celebrity dynamics that become entertainment in its own right, speaking not only to the cultural significance of bromances, but also to the way that bromances have diversified forms of entertainment in contemporary media environments. Not only are films and television series considered to be products for consumption, promotional materials are also consumed as entertainment. The practice of uploading uncut videos of promotional interviews not only forms a subgenre of online videos but also presents opportunities (and challenges) for celebrity pairings to capture the attention of audiences through their interactions. Displaying humorous interactions is central to creating an engaging and entertaining video with the potential to go viral and capture more attention. This "entertainment factor" contributes to the cultural significance of the bromance through its ability to appeal to a wide variety of audiences, made possible by offering the types of access to celebrity figures that drive and sustain aspects of celebrity culture (paparazzi and tabloid sub-industries a case in point).

Additionally, the interactions themselves are culturally significant. Media interviews with bromance pairs are often conducted with both celebrities present. This creates the condition in which unguarded moments could potentially emerge during banter between the pair, or through provocation from the interviewer. In comparison to the more "formal" singular interview, the group/pair interview seeks to uncover as much about the dynamics between cast as it does details about the film or television show. As such, questions and activities are often deployed to reveal more about the dynamic, with an emphasis on capturing fun moments. These interviews provide further insight into the celebrity figures through glimpse of their "private" selves; those reserved for fellow cast onset or interactions away from the public eye. This feeds public and media interest in the way that celebrities interact, while satiating desires to discover more about the "real" individual behind the "manufactured mask of fame" (Holmes & Redmond, 2006, p. 4).

The interactions also publicise and, in some ways, celebrate different models of male homosocial intimacy. As outlined in Chapter 2, celebrity bromances are expressed through different modes, including frat-boy, fake-feud, familiar, flirty, funny and familial. These homosocial interactions intersect with expressions of masculinity that range from the hypermasculine and macho to the more reflective and sensitive, offering "real-world" celebrity bromances as a site for the exploration of questions of masculinity, fulfilling a similar function to the on-screen exploration of fictional bromances (Boyle & Berridge, 2014; DeAngelis, 2014). The celebrity bromance becomes a space where Becker's notion of a "bromance discourse" (2014, p. 235) can

be manifest, publicly reimagining the behaviours around the expression of male homosocial intimacy regardless of sexual orientation (albeit mostly expressed through heterosexual pairings).

Ultimately, the bromance is always suggestive due in part to the mediated nature of its presentation in celebrity culture; seen through interviews and curated online interactions. The performative nature of the bromance – by definition an external display of affection occasionally using the tropes of homoerotic intimacy – will influence the way it is interpreted, feeding the same "are they/aren't they" questions noted by DeAngelis in fictional texts (2014, p. 3), as well as questions of authenticity and genuineness in celebrity relationships. The continued currency of the bromance as a source of intrigue and entertainment is also reliant on the presentation of the bromance by the celebrities themselves, shaped by media discussions and fan creations. The markers of authenticity, a shared history, access to the private (either granted through celebrity use of social media or obtained by paparazzi), spontaneity in interactions and consistency in expression are central to legitimising the bromance and ensuring its continued presence and visibility.

As will be further explored in Chapter 4, visibility grants currency to bromances, as interactions between bromance pairs are incorporated into a commodified celebrity culture more generally. The bromance is thus both a commodity created within the celebrity industries and one which helps to sell other commodities (films, television shows and celebrities themselves). Viewed through the lens of processes of commodification, the genuineness of these interactions is further called into question, yet paradoxically relies on a sense of authenticity to succeed. If the interactions between a bromance pair do not *feel* authentic, no amount of on-screen off-screen parallels or off-screen banter will convince a viewer that a bromance actually (or plausibly) exists. At the very least, audiences are less likely to find the bromance enjoyable.

Notes

1 The cast of the rebooted X-Men franchise developed a reputation, through stories recounted during promotional interviews, of juvenile on-set activities, including BB-guns battles, hijacking golf buggies and punching games. Stories of these activities emerged in 2011 with the release of the first rebooted film *X-Men: First Class*, continuing through the 2014 sequel *X-Men: Days of Future Past* and 2016's *X-Men: Apocalypse*.
2 During the interview, the actors further reinforced their awareness of how their bromance persona was perceived by performing what audiences wanted – physical intimacy – with McAvoy resting his head on Fassbender's shoulder, a gesture that echoed fan art depicting their X-Men characters as lovers.
3 The efforts to create "backstories" for stars created during the Hollywood Studio era is a case in point.
4 Prins examines Taylor Swift memes circulated on American neo-nazi websites which characterised the star as a white-supremacist heroine. Prins argues that Swift's reticence to declare a political position, and some cues in her music,

provided the opportunity for her polysemic star text to be "hijack[ed] by audiences" (2020, p. 144).
5 McAvoy and Fassbender came to fame as a bromance pair during promotion of the 2011 film *X-Men: First Class*, with lively and humorous junket interviews demonstrating their closeness. The two also participated in a number of interviews where their affection for each other was openly discussed.

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4 "Utilising" bromances

Bromances as cultural commodities

At the beginning of 2019, actors Ryan Reynolds and Hugh Jackman appeared in a video titled *Truce*, which was uploaded to various social media and video hosting platforms, including YouTube. As the title suggests, the video announced a truce to a feud that had played out online since 2015. To demonstrate their sincerity, the actors commit to releasing advertisements supporting the brands for which the other is ambassador. The resulting effect is – mixed, for lack of a better word – with Reynolds taking the task seriously and Jackman seemingly reluctant to end the feud. The specific content of the video and nature of their feud will be further discussed later in this chapter. What the video and method of "atonement" highlights is the close connection between celebrity bromances and promotion.

As has been discussed in previous chapters, the bromance persona is an amalgamated identity constructed by combining individual celebrity persona. Although not applicable to all bromances, the bromance persona is often closely associated with on-screen dynamics featuring intimate (or potentially intimate) relationships between male characters. The on-screen dynamic is extended off-screen to form the basis of interaction between cast that aligns with the cinematic "bromance discourse" (Hamad, 2020, p. 3). For on and off screen bromances in particular, off-screen presentation of bromances correlate to dynamics established on-screen, effectively operating as a means to draw attention to, and promote, the on-screen work. Occasionally, as shall be discussed later in this chapter, the off-screen bromance can transcend the promotional run of on-screen work. This suggests that while the bromance is an instrument utilised to promote products, it possesses a more sustained value located in qualities intrinsic to the bromance as a concept. The nature of this value and the application of bromances as promotional strategies will be the focus of this chapter. To support the discussion, it is necessary to consider the context where bromances operate – a commodified celebrity culture.

Commodified celebrity culture

Conceptually, celebrity is characterised as a site where discourses of the individual are produced and notions of individuals and individuality are explored through efforts to deconstruct the public persona (Dyer, 1986; Marshall, 2014). Marshall argues that this focus on the public individual is a "peculiarly modern phenomenon," with the concept of celebrity deriving "its emergence from the twinned discourses of modernity: democracy and capitalism" (2014, p. 4). Notionally, celebrity possesses a democratic quality as it is a status achievable through merit or the acquisition of wealth. Likewise, celebrity is only possible as a consequence of the conditions of capitalism, which not only introduced a new economic system based on competition within a free market, but also ushered in a new social order that disrupted the traditions of pre-industrial society (Drake, 2018, p. 274). In the competitive market space of a capitalistic system, the attention afforded by those with high visibility is transformed into economic capital and is thus valued. Celebrity becomes a currency utilised by media industries to determine conditions of trade (whether a production is financed and the amount budgeted), strategies for promotion (audience demographics) and distribution (countries and territories of release). Yet, this value lacks material basis or historical foundations; the contemporary celebrity emerges from a commodified media system rather than determined by traditional markers of notoriety such as peerage. In a Baudrillardian sense, the contemporary celebrity is formed not from labour or talent, but from a series of representations or symbols that are part of the spectacle of any given cultural epoch. This confers on the celebrity a sense of empty, or false, value encapsulated in contemporary definitions of the term, as Marshall (2014) notes:

> [O]ne can see the transformation of its [celebrity] sense from an affinity with piety and religion to some modern sense of false value. The two faces of capitalism – that of defaced valued and prized commodity value – are contained within these transforming definitions. The term *celebrity* has come to embody the ambiguity of the public forms of subjectivity under capitalism.
>
> (p. 4)

Marxist theory emphasises the difference between "use" and "exchange" value, wherein the exchange value of a commodity is determined through its monetisation in a market. Commodification is therefore described as "endemic to the logic of capitalism" (Ralph, 2009, p. 78), and the celebrity figure as a product of capitalism. Marshall (2014 [1997]), Turner (2004) and Driessens (2013) outline a celebrity "as a commodity" (p. 547) that is produced by media industries and likewise contribute to the production of

commodities within the media industry. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, commodification is considered to be the principal process through which an individual is celebrified (Driessens, 2012). Garnering attention as a public individual is insufficient; turning that attention into capital is deemed to be the primary route of celebrity. The celebrity-commodity legitimates capitalistic models of exchange and value by demonstrating the cultural and commercial value of individuals. Celebrity figures become part of the currency in a commodity culture, amassing capital that can be traded for profit to the benefit of the celebrity or affiliated products. Celebrities are therefore seen as cultural commodities (Marshall, 2014; Driessens, 2012, 2013); products of culture that contain value which can be traded for economic capital. Building on the premise of the centrality of celebrities-as-commodities in a market economy, this chapter explores the commodification of bromance pairs. Commodification is explored in two ways: (1) through consideration of the contexts of commodification, and (2) the nature of commodification.

Context and nature of bromances as cultural commodities

Celebrity bromances are, naturally, situated within and products of celebrity culture, subject to the same processes of commodification as the celebrity-commodity. Yet, while they share many similarities with the celebrity-commodity, they are unique due to both the context in which they are constituted and the nature of commodification. As shall be discussed, the cultural and industrial context in which celebrity bromances exist shapes how they are brought to public view and are bestowed with value. At the same time, the fact that celebrity bromances are formed through joint persona and ongoing interactional dynamics determines the elements of the bromance that is commodified.

The context in which celebrity bromances are commodified share many of the attributes of celebrity-commodities as they arise from the same cultural and industrial settings. As such, discussions of how celebrity and media are organised provide useful insights. Although the manufacture of celebrity-commodities is considered to take place within one media ecology, Olivier Driessens posits a separation between media and what he terms "the celebrity industry" (2013, p. 546). The media might be otherwise defined as the institutional manifestation of Marshall's representational system (2010); the producers of news, television and film that constitute legacy media. Driessens' conceptualisation of celebrity industry distinguishes the creation of products (like films that are sold to audiences) from the creation of the celebrity. As such, celebrity industry involves what Gamson dubs the "highly developed and institutionally linked professions and sub-industries . . . [of] public relations, entertainment law, celebrity journalism and photography,

grooming and training, managing and agenting and novelty sales" (1994, p. 65). For Driessens (2013), these sub-industries are independent from the media as a consequence of differing objectives:

> The celebrity industry . . . is better seen as an "independent" industry (at least in political economic terms) from the media because the agents within it do not have as their primary target the attaining of high audience ratings or circulation figures and selling advertisements (in case of commercial media). Instead they are interested in selling the celebrity image and all its related commodities, which may indeed conflict with the media's interests or their agenda.
>
> (p. 546)

Driessen notes that the media and celebrity industries are undoubtedly interconnected. The media seek to engage with celebrity to increase audience ratings and income, playing a role in circulating images related to the public persona of the celebrity. However, he argues that the celebrity industry is specifically concerned with the cultivation of the celebrity-commodity.

In contrast, Philip Drake argues distinctions between media and celebrity industries are difficult to maintain due to the interconnected nature of the media ecology, the application of celebrity as a "currency [that is circulated] through media windows, and the importance of intellectual property rights (including the licensing of celebrity image and performances) to media business" (2018, p. 275). Suggesting a more integrated framework, Drake points to work from marketing scholars (Rein et al., 1997) who define the various sub-industries involved in obtaining celebrity visibility as "(1) the entertainment industry, (2) the communication industry, (3) the appearance industry, (4) the coaching industry, (5) the legal and business services industry, (6) the endorsements and licensing industry and (7) the publicity industry" (1997, p. 46, cited in Drake, 2018, p. 275). Drake notes that while Rein et al. do not account for the intersections between these industries, or the role of audiences in "conferring visibility and celebrity," they nonetheless provide a useful means to consider the various tasks involved in the production of the celebrity-commodity (p. 275).

The bromance is likewise produced within the sub-industries that support celebrity visibility. They originate – broadly speaking – in publicity (advertising agencies and publicists), representation (agents and promoters) and endorsement (clothing and other product brands) industries and are disseminated through the institutions of the communication industry such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television (Rein et al., 1997). In a contemporary context, social media would also be considered an institution of the communication industry. This linear account of the process indicates the types of agencies involved, and highlights potential areas of overlap. In reality however, the process is far from linear as bromances can equally originate in the communication industry through character dynamics

in films, be cultivated in the publicity industry by advertising agencies and further distributed in the communication industry during cast appearances to promote work. Other bromances might appear to emerge more organically as individuals (yet to achieve celebrity status) move through institutions of training situated in the coaching industry. These pre-success bromances are then potentially enhanced and embellished by publicists (from the publicity industry) and disseminated through the communication industry, forming the foundation for ongoing presentations of the bromance that are constituted in publicity, representation or endorsement industries. Thus, the formation of a bromance is situated in an interconnected network of sub-industries and subject to any number of variations that bring it to public attention.

Indeed, development in the industries themselves have an impact on how the bromance is created. Rein et al. wrote in 1997 and examined legacy media comprising newspapers, magazines, radio, television and film (p. 275). Subsequent development of digital media broadens the avenues of communication to include online video hosting platforms, streaming services and social media (Flew, 2014). Accompanying online platforms of media distribution are contemporary modes of viewing and audience engagement. Online video hosting platforms such as YouTube not only democratised and diversified the type of media content made publicly available (Burgess, 2013), they also changed expectations of the format of media content and methods of engagement (Hartley et al., 2013). Shorter videos featuring everyday experiences characterised content uploaded to YouTube in its formative years (Burgess, 2013). Although improvements to bandwidth and partnerships with production companies has resulted in increased video durations and production quality, the rawness associated with User Generated Content is still a feature of a YouTube experience. Users are accustomed to viewing short videos of varying production quality, but featuring content they deem appropriate (sufficiently funny, touching or interesting) to share in their online networks (Jenkins et al., 2013). Recognising the potential of online platforms to extend broadcasting models, media corporations establish digital outlets as repositories for content historically considered extraneous to edited packages. Thus raw, unedited interviews are commonly uploaded to a network's website and/or to YouTube as additional content designed to prolong viewership or appeal to niche audiences who may be reluctant to view an entire show. These strategies address viewership that is increasingly fragmented and personalised, and which takes place within networked online contexts where sharing media content contributes to the cultivation of identity and community (Jenkins et al., 2013).

In particular, celebrity interviews that adopt a raw, unmediated aesthetic are a dominant form of entertainment reporting; cast interviews in nondescript hotel rooms conducted during press junkets are typical of this format. The rawness of these interviews is located in unedited presentation, in real time, of the interaction between cast and interviewer with inclusion of references to the limitation of time for each interview. While some videos

feature intercutting between interview and cast, the relative lack of editing and polish (a limited use of graphics, cutaways or background music) suggests what is captured are interactions that are devoid of post-production editing (read: manipulation). These "unedited" videos become a form of entertainment that is characterised by, and appealing because of, its rawness. They are also sites where bromances can potentially emerge or be developed.

Audiences and fan consumption of media texts (including works and interviews promoting works) can contribute to the creation of bromances by highlighting interactions and dynamics between cast or cast/character dyads. In essence, audiences and fans constitute an "industry" neglected by Rein et al., and a site of construction more applicable to bromances than celebrity-commodities in the following ways.

First, audiences and fans who encounter media texts featuring bromance dynamics contribute to their propagation by creating and sharing material supporting bromance reading. Some celebrity dynamics may be encouraged as an extension of bromance discourses seeded on-screen, as in the example of Russell Crowe and Ryan Gosling cited by Hannah Hamad (2020). Fans and audiences responding to the bromance by creating texts embellish the offered reading of the bromance dynamic and further disseminate and share it via online networks. Others might be "discovered" off-screen by fans or audiences when a bromance dynamic is noted, as in the ambivalent origins of the bromance between James McAvoy and Michael Fassbender (Lam & Raphael, 2018). In this instance, it is the work of the fan or audience community that suggests the notion of a bromance between celebrities by highlighting the dynamic, either in remix videos utilising an original media text (film/television series) or by compiling examples of bromances displayed during press interviews (but which may not be designed by advertising agencies). These works effectively introduce the notion of a bromance pair into the cultural zeitgeist; a notion that is often adopted and circulated in media outlets.

Second, fan works in particular function to further characterise or shape existing bromances. As mentioned in Chapter 3, specific interpretation of bromances is expressed in works of fan art, fan fiction and fan videos. These fan works can be picked up by media outlets to further consolidate the idea of the bromance and in particular how the pairing is expressed (whether they are flirty, funny or familial). These characterisations potentially influence the expression of the bromance if they are presented to the bromance pair and subsequently carried forward in their ongoing presentation of the bromances. As the majority of fan works related to bromances that are presented to celebrity figures tends towards the homoerotic, the likelihood of direct adoption is relatively low. Nonetheless, examples of celebrity bromance pairs accepting fan-created bromance names[1] indicate the influence of fan groups as an "industry" shaping celebrity bromances.

Finally, fan labour adds value to both celebrity-commodities and the bromance as a commodity by drawing attention to bromances through online activities such as liking and sharing on social media. This attention can then

be leveraged into financial gains for associated works, attaching an economic value to the bromance. Thus, the fan/audience cluster constitutes one of the sites that produces the bromance; however, what is commodified is not inherently apparent, with the exception of a general sense of celebrity dynamics. This will be addressed in the following discussion, which focuses on the nature of commodification.

Writing of celebrity-commodities, Driessens (2012) notes the following qualities as potential objects of commodification: "celebrity's name, image, hair(style), clothing style, to name but a few, are also turned into commodities to be sold and consumed" (p. 652). Hence, the locus of commodification for a celebrity figure is the individual celebrity themselves. This is not surprising given the centrality of the individual and discourses of individuality in the notion of celebrity. However, the celebrity bromance is not only a joint public persona; in its inception and presentation, it is a set of interactions between celebrity figures that engage with discourses of bromance. The bromance as a commodity deals not with the personhood of celebrity figures, but with relationships. Hence, the objects of commodification do not possess material qualities, rather they are experiential and affective.

First, the bromance is the presentation of a relationship between two celebrity individuals. While the construction of the bromance is likely to be both a consequence of and engagement with the cultural significance of the bromance, its commodification is reliant on an underlying interest in celebrity relationships and a relational discourse (McAlister, 2021; Cobb & Ewen, 2021). Notwithstanding the premise of the bromance as a homosocial relationship that disavows a homoerotic "naturalised given" (DeAngelis, 2014, p. 1), the interactions presented in the bromance is one of intimacy tinged with a relational potential. This potential intersects with broader cultural discourses that encourage the formalisation of intimacy between individuals, albeit predominately between heterosexual couples. If the type of bromance presented is not based on relational potential, but is akin to juvenile frat-boy behaviour, the type of relationship changes to that of intense friendship. Yet, it is still the spark of interhuman dynamics – what in film parlance would be termed "chemistry" – that is emphasised and commoditised. Evidence of the relationship is dispersed through video or social media interactions, to establish the nature of the bromance and to add to its ongoing narrative. These instalments function primarily to promote associated works for which the bromance pair are appearing in public (or on social media), and can be considered the principal return reaped from the bromance. A secondary outcome is the generation of affective connections as fans and audiences invest in the relationship, ensuring the continued efficacy of the bromance as an instrument of promotion.

Second, the bromance capitalises on what Gunn Enli describes as the "authenticity puzzle" (2015) created by mediated representations of reality. Media producers and audience negotiate what Enli terms "authenticity contract[s]," wherein representations are deemed truthful until the contract is

broken. Like Gamson's "game player" audiences (1994, p. 146), media audiences navigate the media landscape solving authenticity puzzles, "separating the fake from the real," as part of "inherent practice[s] of media use" (Enli, 2015). The authenticity puzzle of the bromance is situated at the intersections between performance and sincerity. The extent to which the bromance pair *actually* get along and the genuineness of their interactions becomes a main point of attraction for those consuming the bromance. The desire to solve the puzzle is increased due to the performative nature of the bromance, presented through external expressions of affection (or playful animosity) in highly mediated and construed contexts. The markers of authenticity discussed in Chapter 2 (history, privacy, spontaneity and consistency) form a framework on the basis of which an "authentic" bromance is created and potentially evaluated. As will be explored further later in this chapter, ongoing uncertainty about the authenticity of a bromance can be leveraged into extended engagement with the bromance and, ultimately, the products that the bromance pair endorse.

Finally, the bromance engages with the participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006) of contemporary media environments and fan communities by creating speculative spaces. The bromance is presented in fragments, either through on-screen subtext or through off-screen interactions during interviews or online. These fragments contribute to an ongoing bromance narrative yet is rarely presented in full, providing space for fan embellishment and extension. Thus, the speculative potential of the bromance is a feature that invites further investment, offering the concept as a framework for fan activity. Conceptually, the bromance is valued as a site of creativity; practically, continued fan creation of celebrity bromances helps to prolong awareness of celebrity figures, thereby contributing to their overall value as celebrity-commodities.

Bromances are part of commodified celebrity culture, but possess unique features on account of their expression as relational dynamics. Through the commodification of celebrity relationships, questions surrounding the authenticity of the bromance and a creative space for fan embellishment, the bromance (not only the celebrities involved) becomes a commodity. Like the celebrity-commodity, the bromance is conceived and executed in a celebrity culture that operates according to the logics of an attention economy (Marwick, 2013). The value of the bromance is located in its ability to garner attention and leverage that attention into monetary return. In its capacity to capture attention, the bromance is similar to celebrity capital. However, we argue that the inherent value of the bromance bestows on the concept a particular type of capital – bromance capital.

Bromance capital

Capital are tangible and intangible resources that secure an individual's position within their respective social fields (see Bourdieu, 1986). In Bourdieu's model of field theory, these resources are expressed as economic capital

(funds or physical assets that can be converted into monetary funds), cultural capital (institutionalised or embodied indications of prestige such as academic qualifications or outstanding work), social capital (recognition within one's own social network) and symbolic capital (legitimatised public recognition in a social field). Scholars have noted a form of celebrity capital to operate within the realms of popular culture and society more broadly. Although specific definitions vary, the capital of celebrity is described in terms of attention. Robert van Krieken views celebrity as "primarily a matter of the accumulation and distribution of attention" (2012, p. 55) and the celebrity figure as the "embodiment of a more abstract kind of capital – attention" (p. 54). Hunter et al. (2009) offer a definition based on familiarity: "public awareness, their favorability, their personality, reputation, and the public's knowledge of past behaviors" (p. 140). Barrie Gunter (2014) associates capital with value and influence, noting celebrities to possess "economic, political, psychological and social capital" derived from "the development of the right kind of public profile" (p. 16). Olivier Driessens, following Cronin and Shaw (2002) and Heinich (2012) (see Driessens, 2013) associates celebrity capital with visibility. Applying Bourdieu's field theory to celebrity, Driessens articulates a capital based on media exposure that he differentiates from economic, cultural, social or symbolic capital: "celebrity capital finds its material basis in recurrent media representations or accumulated media visibility. In this sense, it is a specific kind of attention-generating capacity . . . that, importantly, cannot be reduced to symbolic capital" (p. 550). Unlike symbolic capital which operates within social fields, Driessens argues celebrity capital can move across fields due to its formation based on broad recognition, and as a consequence of the increasing celebritisation of societies which he conceptualises as the "cultural embedding of celebrity" into society (2013, p. 641). Thus, celebrity becomes a form of currency that expresses the degree of attention (bestowed by the media) an individual accumulates, and a form of capital that can be translated (or exchanged) into other forms of capital (Driessens, 2013, p. 555). However, celebrity capital is also fragile as it relies on the recognition gained from continued media visibility. As Driessens notes: "Notwithstanding its substantial character, celebrity has been identified as a largely unstable category (see also the necessity of *recurrent* media representations), as something that can change overnight" (p. 557). Visibility also operates as a double-edged sword; over-saturation in legacy or social media could result in loss of value. If celebrity capital is based on recognition derived from media visibility, bromance capital is based on relevance (or currency) derived from the cultural significance and malleability of the bromance as a concept.

The value and influence of celebrity capital draws from the power of media. Citing Nick Couldry's model of media meta-capital (2003a, 2012), Driessens highlights how celebrity capital transcends fields due to the "symbolic (or definitional) power [of media] exerting influence in other social fields" (2012, p. 553). The influence of media not only bestows value on

celebrity capital, it also influences how the capital of celebrity is transformed into other types of capital, where "media's influence can potentially materialize in celebrity capital and its value (or recognition) and exchange rate are influenced by media across social space" (p. 554). The power of representation in the media is also related to Couldry's "myth of the mediated centre" (2003b) where media are considered to operate at the centre of society, and gaining visibility in the media is a sign of privilege over those outside media.

In a related fashion, the value and influence of bromance capital draws from the power of the bromance discourse. As Hamad notes, the discourse of male homosocial intimacy and shifting models of masculinity implicated in on-screen bromances are often continued off-screen and leveraged for promotional purposes (2020). She highlights not only the capitalisation of on and off screen congruence, but also the importance associated with the bromance discourse which affords it cultural currency. As discussed in the Introduction to this volume, the bromance is not only a narrative device or genre of film, it is also considered a form of cultural discourse through which male intimacy is explored and expressed. As Ron Becker notes, "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). The prevalence of this discourse affords it recognition and, although not part of institutionalised power structure of a society, symbolic importance as it forms part of the language to articulate relationships between high-profile individuals – reference to bromances between (albeit male) political leaders a case in point. In this way, the bromance capital transcends the field of celebrity, much like Driessen's conceptualisation of celebrity capital transcends social fields. While it may be contingent upon the media visibility of celebrity capital, its influence is not related to visibility but in engagement with topical concepts. As such, bromance capital bestows cultural relevance and currency to those who engage (or enact) a bromance.[2]

An additional point of departure from celebrity capital is the centrality of relationships to the bromance capital. While the media visibility of celebrity capital could be applied to groups rather than a single individual, it nonetheless emphasises recognisability as the central conceit. The presentation of relationships in the bromance capital fosters the dual conditions of desire and investment.

The relationships presented in the bromance are manifest through highly public and externalised expressions of intimacy through the amalgamation of celebrity persona into the bromance persona. The bromance persona is thus inherently performative, creating an intriguing authenticity puzzle (Enli, 2015), which in turn generates desires to "solve" the puzzle (Gamson, 1994). This desire supports the currency of the bromance as audiences seek to determine the authenticity of the interactions presented. At the same time, affective investment is encouraged through the speculative space of the bromance that invite fan engagement. On the one hand, the creation of fan works enhances individual bromances, prolonging the visibility of bromance pairs.

On the other hand, fan engagement affirms the value of the bromance as a discursive construct in popular culture through its use in the exploration of notions of masculinity from hegemonic and subversive perspectives.

Consider, by way of illustration, the bromance between British actors David Tennant and Michael Sheen. Having first collaborated on the Amazon Prime/BBC adaptation of Neil Gaiman's *Good Omens* (Mackinnon, 2019), the pair typify an on and off screen bromance. They play theologically opposed entities (Tennant a demon and Sheen an angel) who form an unlikely friendship and work together to stop the Apocalypse. The two actors bonded during the promotional run for the series: Sheen recounting in an interview with *The Times* that the long hours meant "David and I really got to know each other" (Maxwell, 2020). This bond is central to their reunion in the two-season run of the comedy series *Staged* (Evans, 2020–21), in which the two play fictionalised versions of themselves during the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK. During the same interview, Tennant notes that their familiarity with each other fed the comedy: "I think it's allowed us to know each other enough to take the piss out of each other" (Maxwell, 2020). Filmed during lockdown[3] and presented as a series of video-conferencing sessions, the first season depicts a fictionalised Tennant and Sheen rehearsing Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. The second season tracks the relationship between the pair, now appearing as "real" versions of themselves, as they cope with the success of the first season and being excluded from an American remake of the show.

The dynamic between the two is first formed on-screen as an unlikely friendship in *Good Omens*, developed into a familial and funny bromance off-screen during press tours, and is extended through two different on-screen representations in *Staged* that capitalises on the previously established bromance. Bromance capital is deployed through highly reflexive portrayals of the relationship that emphasise its performativity, yet it is dependent on a perception of authenticity. In season one, Tennant and Sheen play versions of themselves and replicate known off-screen dynamics, creating a puzzle for media savvy game player audiences to unravel. Thus, the reflexivity of *Staged* trades on the performativity of the bromance. It capitalises on the inherent ambiguity of relationships possible only as a consequence of public visibility and confluence between on and off screen dynamics, to build its primary dramatic conceit. The consistency marker of authenticity becomes important to ensuring the continuing visibility of the bromance as it is presented through multiple mediums and in variously fictional and pseudo-fictional settings. The consistency of the bromance, in terms of confluence with both on-screen dynamics and ongoing off-screen interactions, becomes the foundation on which the fictionalisation stages its deconstruction (no pun intended).

The centring of the relationship in the narrative capitalises on broader bromance discourses that afford a means to explore and express male homosocial intimacy. The bromance capital in the Sheen/Tennant pairing is evident first in the emphasis on the (potential) intimacy of their *Good Omens*

characters, and reading of their dynamic as a couple. Their off-screen relationship draws heavily from the capital associated with the bromance as a concept; leveraging the presentation of a close male homosocial relationship to enact a "typical" bromance. It is again the bromance that provides the framework for the on-screen character dynamics in *Staged*, manifest as a narrative element intertextually linking media texts (*Good Omens* and *Staged*) with bromance persona. While the bromance is of central concern to the narrative in *Staged*, its use also demonstrates its conceptual value. *Staged* leverages the intertextual links between on and off screen expressions of the Sheen/Tennant bromance to capture the imagination of viewers, while at the same time providing further materials for continued (re)imagination of their relationship. It thus relies on the value of the bromance to imbue the narrative with conceptual relevance, reflecting its cultural significance. It also contributes to the continued relevance of the concept by maintaining its visibility in contemporary popular culture.

Bromance capital conceptualises the bromance as currency, achieved through the commodification of interactions (or relationships) between individuals, and the affective responses it provokes. The bromance itself becomes the valued commodity, regardless of the individuals (celebrity or otherwise) involved. It is not only used as a tool to draw attention to individual celebrity figures, but it is also a construct that bears markers of performance that are appealing as a cultural product. Yet, bromance capital is unstable, like celebrity capital, as it relies on the continued relevance or significance of the notion. The bromance is also, by definition, limited to discussions of relationships between male celebrities. We therefore argue, in the following chapter, for another form of capital to describe the currency associated with the presentation of cross-gender, female focused and group dynamics. In this way, we seek to avoid the gender limitations of the bromance.

Bromance in promotion and advertising

Introduction

As cultural commodities, bromances contain varying degrees of value, located in bromance capital. This value is evaluated by publicists, managers, studios and all other industry investors. However, they also need to be decided by advertisers and marketing strategists. If a bromantic pairing is being used to promote a movie, it is in the hands of the film industry; however, once they are removed from this context and used to advertise a charity or product, the roles shift. In the advertising industry, they will need to decide if it is worth investing in a bromance, as any endorsement would require paying both celebrities.

In the example of Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart using their bromance to promote their theatre shows, it had a direct impact on their success and income. However, in 2020 when Ben Affleck and Matt Damon offered an

Omaze lunch with the duo, it was about using their shared persona to generate hype and draw attention to support the Eastern Congo Initiative and Water.org (Omaze, 2021). In the promotion, the two men are shown holding comedic signs and are in close proximity to one another. It is accompanied with text that reads "Get to know the two A-list actors and best buds over lunch at one of their favorite spots" and "They grew up together. They won an Oscar together. And now their next big project will be getting to know YOU over lunch. How do you like them apples?" Thus, they are reinforcing their bromance in the description, which helped to generate media interest. A video was also released to promote the competition, where the actors jokingly critiqued one another and their films (CNN Entertainment, 2021). This fake-feud tone is consistent with previous Omaze competitions that the pair have promoted over the years (Lewis, 2016; Omaze, 2014). Another example of a bromance that has crossed over products, films and charities, while also creating a fake-feud is between Hugh Jackman, Ryan Reynolds and to some extent Jake Gyllenhaal, who plays a smaller role in their joint narrative. This will be explored in depth to demonstrate the extent to which bromance capital can be used for advertising purposes.

Jackman, Reynolds and Gyllenhaal bromance campaign

There are various layers to the bromance between Jackman, Reynolds and Gyllenhaal, which has a long history. Jackman and Reynolds first worked together in *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (Hood, 2009), while Jackman worked with Gyllenhaal in *Prisoners* (Villeneuve, 2013) and Reynolds became friends with Gyllenhaal during the making of *Life* (Espinosa, 2017). Through interviews and social media appearances, their friendships have become well-publicised bromances, resulting in powerful advertising campaigns and strong fan reactions. While all three actors use a mix of social media today, Instagram will be the central focus for this analysis, as the posts across the different platforms are similar. Jackman was the first of the three to join Instagram, in 2013. Reynolds joined in 2015 and Gyllenhaal joined in 2018. From 2013 to October 2020, the three had posted over 50 times in relation to one another and have commented and liked one another's posts frequently (these interactions are ongoing). Furthermore, they post comedic birthday messages to one another online. Some key examples will be explored.

Although Gyllenhaal was yet to join, Jackman posted his first Gyllenhaal-related post in 2013, to promote their film. In this post he referred to him as a "great actor" and "great mate" accompanied by a photo of the two of them together. Reynold's first post about Jackman was to promote Deadpool in 2015. While he made a joking reference to their film together, he referred to Jackman as a "legend." This is a kind comment, as it was before their fake-feud really began. Reynold's first post about Gyllenhaal was in regard to his play and helping to promote it, in 2017. The image was the promotional poster for the theatre production. Again, giving compliments. The same year

he posted a photo of two of them laughing at the *Life* premiere, along with a humorous caption. Thus, the bromances all began in a caring and comedic tone. However, this soon shifted to a more fake-feud style.

The fake-feud between Jackman and Reynolds is reflective of their on-screen dynamic. In *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (2009), the characters are against one another. In *Deadpool* (Miller, 2016), there are various comedic references to Jackman and his character Wolverine. Thus, their feud crosses between on and off screen, meaning their off-screen fake-feud concept was most likely generated from their on-screen relationship. As a part of this feud, they frequently joke in interviews and through social media posts about their Sexiest Man Alive titles (Booth, 2020). For example, in 2016, Jackman jestingly placed a cut-out of Reynolds' face in front of him and pretended to be Reynolds, stating that Jackman had been the Sexiest Man Alive before Reynolds and poking fun at Reynolds' star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame (Jackman, 2016). In doing so, Jackman was also helping to promote this achievement.

In a more authentic rare moment, Jackman posted a photo of himself, Reynolds and Pierce Brosnan in 2017 (Jackman, 2017). He used the hashtag #wolverinebonddeadpool, emphasising their three iconic roles. The photo shows the three men laughing together while waiting at an airport. This provides insight into a private moment, as there is no media or fans and no direct advertising, other than promoting their existing characters. This enhances the authenticity behind the bromance between Jackman and Reynolds.

In 2018, Jackman helped to promote the trailer for *Deadpool 2*. Jackman was dressed in a white robe, sitting on the end of a bed and as the camera panned across, Reynolds is shown laying on the bed and dressed as Deadpool (Jackman, 2018). They continue their comedic tone, with Jackman saying to ignore Reynolds. Similarly, Reynolds posted a video about Jackman on November 2, 2018, to help him promote his film *Frontrunner*. He captioned it: "3 Facts About Hugh Jackman" and goes on to challenge the truth behind Jackman in a sarcastic manner. In response to this, Jackman posted a politically toned video, which not only helped to promote his own film, but advertised Reynolds' *Once Upon a Deadpool*. Thus, both actors have used their joint bromantic persona and fake-feud to promote their individual films.

In December 2018, Gyllenhaal joined Instagram and Reynolds and Jackman helped to gain him some attention with a photograph of the three of them. Reynolds was standing in the middle with an overly festive Christmas sweater and a disappointed expression, while Jackman and Gyllenhaal are shown laughing on either side of him. Reynolds captioned it, "These fucking assholes said it was a sweater party." Gyllenhaal then reposted the image, which had been photoshopped to turn them into their famous characters – Wolverine, Deadpool and Mysterio. Spiderman is also placed in the bottom corner, outside the window. This turned the post into a promotion for the upcoming film *Spiderman: Far from Home* (Watts, 2019), introducing Gyllenhaal's marvel character. Since then, Reynolds has turned his Christmas sweater

into a charitable campaign for SickKids (Sick Kids, 2019). Jackman also helped to endorse the charity by posting a photo of himself in the sweater and hugging Reynolds (Jackman, 2019a). The two are shown smiling happily, reinforcing their bromance and taking a step back from the fake-feud for a moment. These posts generated media interest, thus adding to the promotion of the charity (McRady, 2019). Hence, an image that seemingly appeared like a spontaneous capture of their bromance resulted in multiple advertising campaigns for their films and charity, while also enhancing their humorous personas and pushing their bromance narrative. While the promotional aspect slightly decreases the authenticity in their bromance, it is still consistent with their use of comedy and their long history.

In February 2019, Reynolds and Jackman created a joint video titled *Truce* (Reynolds, 2019). They announced that they were ending their feud and were going to release advertisements in support of one another's products – Aviation American Gin and Laughing Man coffee. The video shows Reynolds' advert promoting the coffee, then cuts to the two men sitting beside one another and Jackman confessing he did not realise they were actually calling a truce. He asks to not play his advert, but Reynolds insists and it shows Jackman criticising Reynolds and his gin. This humorous joint advertisement continues the tone of their fake-feud.

Following this, Gyllenhaal was again included with all three actors taking part in a social media joke around "Best Friend's Day" in June 2019. Reynold's posted a photo of himself with Jackman and captioned it "Happy #BestFriendsDay to Jake Gyllenhaal (Not pictured)" (Reynolds, 2019). Jackman then posted a photo of Reynolds hugging him and captioned it "Stage 4 clinger. #bestfriendsday# HiJake" (Jackman, 2019b). This clearly continued Reynolds' joke. Gyllenhaal then posted a photo of himself drinking with Jackman and wrote "Happy #bestfriendsday to Ryan Reynolds (not pictured)" (Gyllenhaal, 2019). While these posts did not appear to directly be linked to a specific promotion, they did continue the bromance narrative, almost expressing it as a love triangle between the three actors and their battle to be at the top of the bromance. However, the images posted all linked to periods of time when they were together creating promotional materials, rather than authentic moments of friendship captured during private time. This removes an element of credibility.

In October 2019, it was evident that the bromance fake-feud between Jackman and Reynolds went beyond just social media and interviews, but into stage performance. Jackman referred to Reynolds in his stage show, stating in a challenging tone; "Let's see Ryan Reynolds do that" (Jackman, 2019c). This then crossed back into social media, when posted by Jackman and accompanied by a video with Reynolds singing happy birthday and being hurt by Jackman's words, followed by cursing. This helped to promote Jackman's *The Man. The Music. The Show*.

In February 2020, Jackman posted a video to celebrate one year since their "truce" (Jackman, 2020a). The video continued the comedic tone of their

fake-feud, while also promoting Reynolds' gin. Jackman is in the same setting as the original and is committed to sitting on the sofa for a 30-second advertisement to be filmed. He then turns the bottle of gin around, so there is not a clear view of the branding. He states, "The gin is ok."

In April 2020, they used their fake-feud to help raise money during the COVID crisis (Jackman, 2020b). They again pretended to have a truce, but jokingly bickered throughout the entire video. They explained that the feud began with their family names, long before they were born. They then went on to clarify that they were putting their feud on pause, to help promote the All in Challenge. However, in doing so, they both mentioned their products and Jackman is shown wearing a Laughing Man hat, working as a triple endorsement. Jackman explained, "We will stop our feud for one day and help sell a different kind of drink." Reynolds chimed in with "lemonade." The goal of the advertisement was to help fight hunger. As usual, there is cursing, eye-rolling and friction between the actors, as a part of their performance.

In September 2020, the pair joined forces for another Laughing Man promotional video (Jackman, 2020c). The video showed Jackman waking up grumpy until he has had his coffee. It is narrated by Reynolds who sarcastically describes Jackman's achievements, which are contrasted to what is shown on-screen. Unlike previous advertisements, he speaks kindly of the product.

In November 2020, the actors posted a video advertising Sam's Club and linking it to their individual charities – Laughing Man and Sick Kids (Jackman, 2020d). The video recaps some of their fake-feud and continues the usual tone. They ask viewers to shop at the store and choose sides between them. This is a way to engage fans in the fake-feud more directly, resulting in fundraising for their charities. This promotion was linked to the festive season and thus they talk about it being a time for forgiveness. The skit elaborates on the fact that they do not intend to forgive one another, hence reinforcing that the feud lives on.

In December 2020, Reynolds posted a video of his mother saying negative things about Chris Hemsworth. This was in promotion of the AGBO Superhero League, which raises money for charity by having Marvel stars compete in a fantasy football league (Bond, 2020). Even in this instance, Reynolds' video made a reference to Jackman. Hemsworth responded with his own humorous video critiquing Reynolds. These videos had a similar tone to Reynolds' other fake-feud content.

This humorous approach to advertising used across all the promotional elements between Jackman and Reynolds makes the ongoing campaign more enjoyable for viewers and focuses less on why the products are good or why they should purchase them. The endorsement approach in this instance is simply to be attached to Reynolds and Jackman. The brand recognition is strong and their own personas are synonymous with the brands of their products, allowing for the meaning transfer process to do the work (McCracken, 1989). In the case of the Laughing Man coffee, the campaign helps to draw attention

to its humanitarian brand, and is tightly attached to Jackman's kind, caring and humorous image. With his hypermasculine identity and the word "man" in the name of the brand, this would also target a male audience. However, with Jackman's female fanbase, it is also likely to draw in other buyers. The Aviation American Gin brand is tightly associated with Reynolds, who is a co-owner. As a Canadian, there is a slight brand mismatch. However, his suave, sexy and hypermasculine identity makes it appealing to male drinkers. Again, also appealing to his female fans based on his identity alone. Each brand has a black and white logotype and bold fonts, again reinforcing a masculine tone that reflects both men. Ultimately, with these products being drinks, they easily allow for humour to be used in the campaigns. They are relatively static products, unlike a fashion label, which would need more focus on new ranges. Thus, their cross-endorsements work well.

Conclusion

While there are many more posts to analyse, those explored provide ample evidence of their bromance approach. Overall, their promotional posts often overlap between advertising their films, charities and developing their bromance narrative, as well as their individual comedic personas. This makes their social media presence more entertaining, potentially resulting in a growth of followers, especially with the sharing of one another's fan bases. This expansion of viewership can increase their celebrity currency. Their advertising and marketing strategy is evident not only through their posts but also supported by the fact that all three actors (including Gyllenhaal) share the same Commercial Talent Agency, according to IMDb. While this removes some credibility behind their bromance, they have still met other markers of authenticity – history (spanning for over a decade) and consistency (humour and style). While many fans may perceive some of their posts as spontaneous, it is evident that most instances have a planned approach. Perhaps some of their retorts in commenting online or responding to interview questions are to some extent spontaneous; however, their approach to the bromance is clearly staged. Privacy appears slightly in moments such as the airport photo with Brosnan or when they comment on one another's wives; however, this is rare. Ultimately, their predominantly off-screen bromance is focused on their fake-feud, which creates entertainment making the advertising elements more subtle. Therefore, the humour and enjoyment behind their fake-feud bromance makes their bromance capital highly valued, with both fans and the media responding well to their posts.

Notes

1 See introduction to Chapter 3.
2 It should be noted that this type of capital differs from Bourdieu's notion of capital in its association with visibility rather than acclaim.

3 To prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), during the global pandemic that started in late 2019, governments implemented restricted movement orders that encouraged citizens to remain at home and limit social gatherings. These orders became commonly known as 'lockdown' in many jurisdictions.

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5 Beyond bromances

Comradery capital

Bromance to comradery capital

In Chapter 4, we outlined bromance capital as a form of currency achieved through the commodification of interactions between individuals. At the same time, we noted limitations to the concept. In this chapter, we expand beyond bromance capital to consider the significance of relational dynamics on the commoditisation of celebrity dynamics more generally. In this way, we seek to overcome the gendered limitations of the bromance, as well as suggest other means to theorise celebrity interactions.

As will be explored in this chapter, the commoditisation of celebrity interactions and dynamics are not limited to the male homosocial intimacy of bromances. Group dynamics, female friendships and mixed gender dynamics are models of interaction that are likewise presented in celebrity culture and utilised during promotion of media productions. In this way, this final chapter extends the discussion between celebrity figures beyond the bromance, which is limited to interactions between male celebrities, and beyond the bromance pair, which predominantly focuses on couples rather than groups.

The qualities of bromance capital outlined in Chapter 4 equally apply to interactions between female celebrities, cross-gender relationships and group dynamics. Specifically, it is the interactions between celebrity figures that are valued, not only for the attention they garner but also for the speculative "authenticity puzzle" (Enli, 2015, p. 2) they present to audiences and fans alike. Thus, like the commodification of dynamics between male celebrities in the bromance, the presentation (and performance) of interactions and relationships between different configurations of celebrity figures becomes the focus of the capital we term comradery capital.

Like bromance capital, comradery capital expresses the cultural and economic value associated with interactions between celebrity figures in contemporary celebrity culture. Developing further from the bromance capital, comradery capital broadens the types of celebrity interactions to consider how different manifestations can be encapsulated within a singular concept. Thus, comradery capital articulates the value associated with the presentation of celebrity interactions that are expressed as flirtatious couples, as

sibling-like intimacy or as a family bond. It includes the articulation of male homosocial relationships in the bromance, as well as the intimate and familial dynamics of female and mixed-gender pairings, and groups, which we term "buddy banter."

Through the proposal of new terminology to describe celebrity interactions, this chapter aims to address behaviour considered to be inappropriate humour. Some displays of bromance behaviour (especially frat-boy and flirty) derive from cultures of casual misogyny or homophobia. For instance, overly sexualised comments, depending on the target, can reinforce the discourses of objectification and entrenched power structures that normalise sexual harassment and abuse in the entertainment industries. Humorous use of homosexual tropes could, if used in a derogatory sense, reinforce homophobic discourses. In the context of social movements such as #metoo, which aims to draw attention to and address sexual victimisation, the term bromance needs to be expanded, due to its limitations.

The characterisation of interactions between female celebrities and groups of celebrities is not a new area of exploration. However, like discussions of male homosocial intimacy, the examination of female celebrities focuses mostly on on-screen representations. Exploration of female friendship films have been influenced by contextual ideological discussions of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s (to the present). On the one hand, scholars such as Tasker (1998) and Hollinger (1998) locate their analyses of female friendship films within feminist discourses that seek to identify avenues for female agency (Hollinger, 1998). On the other hand, postfeminist discourses influence the exploration of female friendships by more contemporary scholars such as Winch (2012) and Cobb and Negra (2017). For these scholars, on-screen representation fluctuates between the construction of a postfeminist environment and a postfeminist sensibility (Brunsdon, 2013, cited in Cobb & Negra, 2017, p. 763) through which is explored issues for contemporary women. Regardless of feminist or postfeminist perspectives, however, scholarship of female friendship films has highlighted a set of tropes that characterises the presentation of homosocial relations.

First, female friendship is often presented within group scenarios rather than between dyads. Hollinger (1998) notes that while dynamics between individual female friends were explored in early Hollywood films, by the late 1980s the tendency was to favour presentation of group dynamics (p. 238). Boyd and Berridge echo this sentiment in 2014, noting that, unlike contemporaneous bromance films, female friendship films focus on the ensemble, which they argue "dilute[s] the intensity of the [individual] bond" (p. 356). The resulting effect is the construction of interactions that narratively move female characters towards heterosexuality and romance. Here, groups of female friends encourage female characters to seek intimacy not in homosocial interactions but in heterosexual relationships that are reinforced by heteronormative outcomes of marriage and family.

In addition to reinforcing heteronormativity, Winch argues that groups of female friends also act to monitor the expression of "representable femininities" (2012, p. 69). In order to embody the postfeminist ideal of "having it all" (p. 72), female characters maintain ideal body types and the performance of selected traditional femininities (a "girly" appearance, marriage and motherhood) in addition to achieving financial and professional success. The role of the supportive female friend is to ensure that individuals do not deviate from this mode of representation and thus lose "representability" (Negra, 2008; Winch, 2012). Female friendships in films therefore enforce a degree of uniformity wherein female bonding reproduces specific, and essentialist, markers of femininity (slenderness, marriage and motherhood), which ultimately reinforce conservative values.

While supportive female friends monitor and shape the representability of the ideal postfeminist, the destructive female friend highlights another trope characteristic of female friendship films – conflict and competition. Conflict is undoubtedly necessary for narrative progression, and competition is not unique to female friendship films. Indeed, discussion of both bromance and female friendship films notes a tendency to replicate the relational trajectory of conventional romantic comedies. Friends meet, develop a misunderstanding and separate, only to be reconciled at the narrative's conclusion. However, as Winch notes, female friendship films problematically present conflict and in particular "competition and jealousy . . . [as] innate" female tendencies (2012, p. 77). This results in an unstable (sometimes pathological) relationship in which intimacy between female characters is discouraged, or at least questioned. When the conflict is intergenerational, female characters are seen as personifications of differences between second- and third-wave feminism often represented in "mother–daughter relationship . . . tropes" (Henry, 2004, p. 2).

Intergenerational conflict can be viewed as an expression of ideological struggles; however, a rationale for the emphasis on intragenerational conflict is less apparent. One possible explanation is found in a third characteristic of female friendship in films. Female homosocial interactions contain a combination of what Stacey (1988) outlines as identification and desire. Specifically, referencing the relationship between Roberta and Susan in *Desperately Seeking Susan* (Seidelman, 1995), Stacey articulates how for both female character and spectator, intimacy is driven by a desire for identification. On-screen, Roberta desires to be Susan. On-screen, the spectator identifies with Roberta through cinematic techniques such as editing and camera placement, thereby also desiring Susan. In this way, the interplay between desire and identification which operates in female homosocial relations is integrated into the narrative structure of the film. This interplay is lacking in male homosocial interactions, which employs homophobia to regulate male homosocial behaviour (Sedgwick, 1985, pp. 87–88, cited in Boyd & Berridge, 2014, p. 356). Bromance narratives which engage with male homo-sociality also adopt homophobia as part of the narrative structure

to disavow eroticism. It is for this reason that female homosocial intimacy, with its "potential erotic charge" (Boyd & Berridge, 2014, p. 356), is often diluted through conflict, presentation within group dynamics, or established in childhood.

While the aforementioned scholarship addresses on-screen representations of female friendship rather than off-screen interactions, similar concepts can be identified in "real-world" contexts. In particular, the popular press adopts the dichotomous position of supportive or destructive female relationship. The former characterises friendships between female celebrities as intimate homosociality while disavowing homoeroticism (as girlfriends); the latter characterises relationships between female celebrities through conflict and competition (as duels and catfights) (Howarth, 2018; Kindon, 2020).

The case studies in this chapter do not categorise interactions between female celebrities as "girlfriends" or "enemies." Rather, they highlight the ways that relational dynamics more generally are utilised in similar ways to bromances to garner attention. As will be elaborated later in the chapter, these dynamics share the characteristics of bromances outlined in Chapter 2 such as humour, verbal banter and physical intimacy, and creation of ongoing narratives. The application of these characteristics to female pairings indicates both the limitations of bromance as a term to describe homosocial relationships and the types of interactions that transcend gender definitions.

We argue that descriptions of homosocial interactions should not have gender restrictions due to the fact that similar behaviours are expressed in homosocial interactions that are commoditised. However, it should be acknowledged that *homosocial* intimacy is not the only form of celebrity dynamics that garner attention. Indeed, relationships between male and female celebrities gain much more attention than homosocial interactions, with a tendency to read mixed gender dynamics through a "relational discourse" (McAlister, 2021; Cobb & Ewen, 2021). Close mixed gender relationships are accompanied by open speculation over the possibility of reaching the "naturalised given" of heterosexual union (DeAngelis, 2014, p. 2). We adopt the term "buddy banter" (Raphael & Lam, 2016) to articulate interactions between genders, and a way to express the types of behaviours that indicate closeness. We have previously defined buddy banter thus:

> [A]s a general category to describe female, male and cross-gender friendship bonds . . . [it] emulate[s] the camaraderie of characters in "buddy cop" film and television narratives . . . [and] evoke[s] the notion of an enjoyment of company accompanying close friendships, and by extension, the contagious joy of witnessing such interactions.
>
> (p. 164)

As we explore in this chapter, the interactions encapsulated by buddy banter can vary from flirtatious closeness tinged with suggestions of romance to playful familial or sibling bonds, in a similar way to the types of bromance

dynamics outlined in Chapter 2. In presentations that mimic the familial intimacy of the bro (brother) in bromance, sibling bonds express intimacy that extends beyond friendship but is in some way insulated from the conclusion of a relationship as lovers.

Under the framework of buddy banter, the chapter also addresses group dynamics, which are often expressed as combinations of dyads or familial relations. Scholars have noted the influence of genre on expressions of group dynamics in on-screen contexts. Peter Turner (2019) cites Gutiérrez to note that action films tend to present the cast as "quasi-families," with a prevalence for sibling bonds. These familial bonds are often replicated in off-screen cast dynamics (2019), where a variety of dynamics are presented, spanning from cohort relationships (siblings) to hierarchal (parental) interactions. Included are individual pairings (often romantic in nature) within the overall group dynamics. These pairings are often influenced by on-screen dynamics, such that romance between characters are extended to romantic interpretations of friendships between cast. In previous examination of the cast of *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (Whedon, 2013–2020), we note that even when group interactions are emphasised, audience and fans seek out cast pairings inspired by on-screen character dynamics (Raphael & Lam, 2016).

The cast of *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* demonstrated a high degree of buddy banter during cast interviews, which was not confined to specific pairings or genders. However, audience comments indicated a desire to highlight closeness between cast of different genders as evidence of heterosexual romance (despite the fact that some of the cast already had partners). Physical proximity, banter and allusions to character dynamics were referenced in online comments that clearly shipped (construct romantic pairings) cast members. This highlights the ease with which on-screen dynamics flow off-screen, and the prevalence of heteronormative romantic as a filter to interpret celebrity interactions.

The group emphasises the homosocial bromance between Brett Dalton and Iain De Caestecker, with their co-star Chloe Bennet noting the "sexual tension" between the actors. At the same time however, other female cast note the attractiveness of both Dalton and De Caestecker, and audience comments highlight a desire to witness romantic outcomes between both actors and female cast playing their on-screen love interests. Thus, while the bromance exists within the group dynamic, it becomes a source of in-group banter; the homosocial intimacy between the male cast attenuated by audience readings of heterosexual cast/character pairing which render the display of the bromance within "safe" heteronormative confines.

Similar pairings are noted in some of the group dynamics mentioned in this chapter. As we will highlight, varying degrees of intimacy are displayed in these mixed-gender groups, some of which mimic romance or the ambivalent homoerotically charged homosociality of bromance. When the individuals implicated in the pairings/groupings are of mixed sexuality, expressions of intimacy hint towards additional relational possibilities. At the same time,

highly performative expression of intimacy in public settings may call into question the authenticity of the relationship presented. In these instances, the presence of other markers of authenticity (such as ongoing narratives) is used to suggest the genuineness of the interactions.

Peter Turner argues that in off-screen contexts, celebrities seek to situate themselves within "interstellar networks," tailoring their online presentations and interactions to highlight their belonging to groups of extraordinary individuals (2019). Belonging to recognised and highly visible cast thus affords individual celebrity figures a degree of capital that is gained from the collective group identity, and reinforced through the pleasures offered by witnessing their interactions. To some extent, the relational, collective personas of bromance and the authenticity puzzle offered by their performative presentation likewise account for the attraction and capital of celebrity groupings. We thus suggest that examination of commodified celebrity interactions needs to move, beyond the bromance, to address female homosocial, mixed-gender and group dynamics. The following section outlines how comradery capital operates within these three types of interactions.

Female friendships

There are many wonderful celebrity female friendships that should be celebrated such as Tina Fey and Amy Poehler, Jennifer Aniston and Courtney Cox, and Oprah Winfrey and Gayle King (Finn, 2018; Henderson, 2020). These women have been friends for many years and frequently have great on and off screen moments that fans enjoy. However, sometimes instead of being celebrated like Damon and Affleck, they run the risk of being accused of hiding their sexuality or the tabloids falsely reports them as having feuds. Winfrey and Gayle in particular have been frequently questioned about their sexuality (Wallace et al., 2010). Thus, women can be treated differently by the media than men.

It appears that the media focuses more on female feuds in celebrity culture. There is a long list of these, including Britney Spears and Christina Aguilera (Grossbart, 2018), Miley Cyrus and Nicki Minaj (Fleischer, 2015), Taylor Swift and Katy Perry (Lang, 2019), Lindsey Lohan and Amanda Bynes (Huffpost, 2012), Terri Hatcher and Marcia Cross (Hardy, 2013; and Faithful, 2021), Sarah Jessica Parker and Kim Cattrall (Feller & Walsh, 2021), and Mariah Carey and Jennifer Lopez (Estera, 2020). Obviously, the celebrities feed into this to gain media attention. Carey is a perfect example of this with her famous line, "I don't know her." It was initially in reference to Lopez, but she has since used it to talk about other female celebrities in a demeaning manner. However, the celebrities would not use this for attention if it did not seem to gain the interest of the media and audiences. On the other hand, the media often drives these feuds from the beginning by pitting the stars against one another. They also falsely report feuds. An example of this is Carey and Whitney Houston (OWN, 2018). The

media saw them as competitors with their strong voices and created rumours around them. However, they united for a duet, proving the media wrong by sharing the stage.

While there are cross-gender feuds such as Tom Hardy and Charlize Theron (Lewis, 2020), Seth Rogen and Katherine Heigl (THR Staff, 2016), Will Smith and Janet Hubert (Ng, 2020), Elton John and Madonna (Schillaci, 2012), and Eminem and Mariah Carey (Krol, 2021), there appears to be more drawn-out female feuds that gain extra media attention. While there are some male feuds such as Dwayne Johnson and Vin Diesel (Bryant, 2017), George Takei and William Shatner (Rothman, 2015), Joey Bishop and Frank Sinatra (Nolasco, 2021), and Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin (Pena, 2015), these usually centre around egos and hypermasculinity. Overall, the media reports on female feuds are depicted as more "catty" or petty. The females are often pitched as seeking revenge. Ultimately, there appears to be a larger reporting of female feuds than there are close celebrity female friendships. Similarly, there seems to be more bromances reported than male feuds.

However, as mentioned, the female bonds that have been publicised heavily are very strong. Focusing on Tina Fey and Amy Poehler, it is evident that they share a similar relationship to Damon and Affleck. They were friends before either of them had peaked in the success, but met through the comedy industry. While they are celebrated for their closeness, the media never knows how to address the pair. Although the men are known for their "bromance," the women have articles written about them with phrasing such as "best friendship," "relationship" and "like sisters." The actresses have worked together many times since 1993, with several films, comedy skits and co-hosting roles (Logan & Fox, 2021). In particular, when promoting *Sisters* (2015), the media focused on their closeness, frequently working together and their long history. These are all characteristics of bromances, as outlined in Chapter 2. Thus, such interactions are not gender restricted.

During an interview with *Unscripted*, Fey responded to a question by giving an example of Poehler from 1993, reinforcing the authenticity of their friendship (Moviefone, 2015). During an interview with Seth Meyers, he referred to them as "work wives," to which they agreed to the title (Late Night with Seth Meyers, 2015). They were then asked about having a shorthand communication between them, which Fey confirmed that they did and compared it to being almost like twins. These comments again show the media's interest in their bond but in referring to them as "wives" develops a higher level of intimacy, similar to that of a bromance. Using the term "wives," appears to be the media's attempt to express their closeness with a lack of phrase like bromance being used for women.

Also similar to a bromance is the way Fey and Poehler perform their friendship. The pair share crude humour, complement one another and speak with such flow that shows their chemistry. While in interviews, they mainly rely on their verbal comedy and facial expressions, there are many photos

of them online hugging one another and showing a physical intimacy. In expressing their friendship this way, they express a familial bond, while also being funny, thus crossing over between the categories outlined in Chapter 2.

In an *Extra* interview, they were asked if they ever fight like sisters (Extratv, 2015). While this is somewhat relevant to the film they were promoting, it is not a question normally posed to men. However, the sister-like bond fits the brotherly element of "bromance." They acknowledged that they are as close as sisters but without the fighting and explained it was because they had the opportunity to choose one another. By expressing it in this way, they are suggesting that their bond is even stronger than siblings.

Interestingly, their relationship has even crossed paths with the bromance of George Clooney and Matt Damon. In a junket interview for *The Monuments Men* (Clooney, 2014), Clooney was asked about getting back at Fey and Poehler for their jokes about him at the Golden Globes (SiriusXM, 2014). Clooney explained that he dragged Damon into his revenge plans by using him as a part of the prank. Damon was sitting next to him and described how Clooney had created stationery with his details and sent a letter to the comedians saying he was offended by their jokes. Fey and Poehler knew that Clooney was behind it and responded with their own fake apology letters and gifts. As the men told this story, they were both laughing in a juvenile manner. This crossing over of pairings reinforces how tightly they are connected to one another and how similar the friendships can be regardless of gender. In fact, Poehler said in an interview for *Marie Claire* that she and Fey had pranked each other a lot while filming *Baby Mama* (McCullers, 2008) (Logan & Fox, 2021). This also situates them under the frat-boy category of Chapter 2.

Furthermore, just like a bromance, Poehler and Fey have used their close bond to help promote their films and other media appearances. While much more needs to be explored on feminine intimacy in future research, this chapter touches on the existing relationships between women that show how females can have the same style of banter as men. There is a need for the media to shift away from rumours of sexuality and fighting. Women such as these should be celebrated in the same way. For a deeper understanding of how gender plays a role in these settings, a comparison of the three generations of Ocean's films will add to this analysis.

Group dynamics

The Rat Pack is one of the earlier examples of a group bromance and is also one of the best performed bromances. Their bromance transcended film and television, also being performed on stage during live singing performances and in interviews. In fact, their dynamic is so iconic that in filming the remake of *Ocean's Eleven* and the reboot of *Ocean's Eight*, the casts seemed to attempt to replicate this charismatic interaction. This will be examined throughout the three Ocean's casts.

Rat pack

Although the Rat Pack dynamic had already formed prior to the release of the original *Ocean's 11* film in 1960, their group identity was solidified by their on-screen representation. The five main cast members went on to make several other films together. They are also known for having performed in the nights during filming of *Ocean's 11* and for partying together. The authenticity behind their friendship is clear in the longevity, regularly working together in music and film, as well as forming a shared persona as the Rat Pack. Although they preferred to call themselves "The Clan" or "The Summit," the media popularised the term "Rat Pack" (Bertram, 2020). While other celebrities were also attached to the group, the core relied on Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr, with Peter Lawford and Joey Bishop being secondary. Women were also known to be attached to the group, including Angie Dickinson (also in *Ocean's 11*) and Shirley MacLaine; however, they were not the central focus of the media's branding. With highs and lows, their bromance lasted decades and they reunited just a few years before Sammy Davis Jr.'s death (Bertram, 2020).

It is important to note that Dean Martin also had a bromance with Jerry Lewis (Haronidu23, 2012). Martin had been working with Lewis for ten years – performing live and making a long list of films together. Their bromance ended, as they went their separate ways. Lewis stated in his book that the last ten months of their working relationship was difficult (Lewis & Kaplan, 2007). However, it is worth noting that Lewis's book was titled *Dean and Me: A Love Story*. Thus, even through his book title, he acknowledges that their working relationship and friendship had a romantic undertone. After they split from each other, Martin's image always remained attached to Lewis, but he also formed a new brand with Sinatra and the rest of the group. Sinatra and Martin filmed *Some Came Running* (Minnelli, 1958) together before doing *Ocean's 11*. This helped in his transition away from Lewis.

All of these bromances were complex; thus, this case study will focus on the Rat Pack identity around the time of the *Ocean's 11* filming and release. Their Rat Pack image developed over the years to be associated with alcohol, Hollywood parties, comedy and Las Vegas (Bertram, 2020). With the main focus on Martin, Sinatra and Lewis, the dynamic on stage was created to reflect a drunk-like behaviour and inappropriate humour around race and sexuality. (This was clearly a reflection of its time where this was acceptable behaviour. Although the details have changed in how these bromances are represented in today's society, they still revolve around a flirtation.) Their banter and charisma in all their performances had a consistent tone. They were very teasing and sarcastic, with a mix of slapstick humour in some of their performances. They would also make sexual references towards one another, adding to this notion of the bromance. It is this frat-boy style of banter that was also used in promoting the remake.

Clooney's clan

Similar to the original Ocean's dynamic, the focus is on the male cast members. While Julia Roberts is not just a part of the 2001 *Ocean's Eleven* cast, but is also friends with George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Don Cheadle and Matt Damon; she was not the focus of the media's attention, as they preferred to focus on the bromance between the male leads. This is similar to Dickinson being less of a focus in the original *Ocean's 11* dynamic. Also similar to the original, the promotion and the media have less interest in other cast members such as Scott Caan or Casey Affleck, with the majority of interviews focusing on the leading stars.

There is a particular media fixation on the pranks between the leading cast, the decision to work together again on other films, reuniting for the franchise and whether or not they attended one another's weddings. The banter Clooney, Pitt, Cheadle and Damon created is clearly an intentional attempt to replicate some of the Rat Pack dynamic using jock-like humour that is masculinised and flirty. While they did not sing together in the evenings, they have continued to work together and have various extreme pranks on one another that keep them linked outside of filming over two decades.

While most of the *Ocean's Eleven* cast had not worked together prior to the success of the film, many of them have continued to reunite since then. In between reprising their roles in the Ocean's franchise, many of the actors have paired up on other projects, including *Syriana* (Gaghan, 2005), *Burn after Reading* (Coen & Coen, 2008), *The Monuments Men* (Clooney, 2014) and *Money Monster* (Foster, 2016). The main cast claim to continue to be friends, with many of them attending Clooney's wedding in 2014. Brad Pitt could not attend due to a filming clash, which resulted in media hype and concern that Pitt and Clooney were no longer friends. Furthermore, when Clooney had his children, the other cast members were asked about what he would be like as a father and if they would be the godfather. Thus, the media's interest in the group continued long after the Ocean's films had finished.

It is however evident that although these actors are all friends, they have other friendships that supersede each other. For instance, Damon's friendship with Ben Affleck. Their individual careers are also less reliant on one another compared to the Rat Pack. However, their individual personas are enhanced by their bromance, in particular, the tone of banter they have set between one another. This humour builds their individual identities as being fun and comedic. Furthermore, Clooney and Pitt's A-List "cool" identities would have also reflected positively on the actors who were not yet as successful. This differed slightly in *Ocean's Eight*, which had a cast of highly successful women who had already established their careers and many had already received Oscar nominations/awards for previous work.

Sandy's sisters

It is acknowledged in interviews that Bullock is friends with Clooney, having performed together in *Gravity* (Cuaron, 2013), and spoke to him before doing *Ocean's Eight*. Bullock plays Clooney's character's sister. Paulson and Blanchett had worked together on *Carol* (Haynes, 2015), Paulson and Bullock had also starred in *Bird Box* (Bier, 2018), Anne Hathaway and Helena Bonham Carter had worked on various projects together, but the rest of the cast were relatively new to one another. The main cast also included Mindy Kaling, Awkwafina and Rhianna. Their apparent friendship was built on set, with a particular aura developed around Rhianna that all the other cast members spoke about in interviews.

Many of the interviews focused on Paulson, Blanchett and Bullock. When the three were together, it was evident that Paulson and Blanchett shared a particular bond and would run wild with their banter, while Bullock was forced to play the sterner role. However, in other instances, Bullock was able to shine with her usual sarcasm. Paulson and Blanchett's characters in *Carol* had a romantic past and off-screen Paulson identifies as being a part of the LGBTIQA+ community. Thus, similar to the Ian McKellen and Patrick Stewart relationship, they express a non-romantic love for one another. Many people believe that Blanchett and Bullock's characters perhaps have a romantic past in *Ocean's Eight*; however, this has yet to be explored on-screen.

Off-screen, it appears that Blanchett and Paulson are particularly close; however, the entire cast attempted to portray the image of being "besties." This is developed through banter, storytelling and giving one another compliments in interviews. Whether they work together again on the Ocean's franchise or other projects will be evidence of credibility. Ultimately, it appears that Blanchett and Paulson are authentically close friends, but perhaps the others are not as close. This is not to say they are enemies like the media often wants to believe when it comes to female cast members.

Comparison

While the Sinatra Ocean's group was the most authentic in their performance of buddy banter, the Clooney Ocean's group has proven to have built some strong connections too. The Bullock Ocean's group is still somewhat new, so it is difficult to judge, but certainly seems the least credible at this point. However, Blanchett and Paulson undoubtedly have a special bond that they are capitalising on. In order to demonstrate how the original Ocean's dynamic was replicated over the three variations, two interviews per group were selected for analysis.

When Joey Bishop hosted *The Tonight Show*, while filing in for Johnny Carson, Martin and Sinatra pretended to crash the show, as a way of promoting their own projects (Archy A, 2018). Within seconds Martin kissed Bishop on the cheek, Sinatra had a drink in his hand and various jokes of

alcoholism were sporadically spread throughout the episode, both Martin and Sinatra were smoking and they also constantly disrupted the progression of the show by interrupting Bishop with various banter. They cut away to a promotional clip for Martin's new show where Sinatra is shown kissing Martin on the cheek. Their frat-boy humour often had sexual undertones and revolved around poking fun at one another. They also portrayed a hypermasculine tone of the time, through the smoking and drinking. Thus, they applied many of the dynamics outlined in Chapter 2.

While this interview is missing Sammy Davis Jr., it shows the style of humour that the Rat Pack shared. In a performance of Davis, Martin, Sinatra and Carson, Sinatra is shown grabbing Davis' buttocks repeatedly (Musical World, 2017). Sinatra then started grabbing at his face and telling Davis to loosen up to which he jokingly responded: "You may be my leader, but I'm going to punch you right in your mouth." This statement is a direct reference to the hierarchy of their friendship and the balance is restored through two of them laughing. This hierarchy is also reflected in their on-screen representation in the *Ocean's 11* film, as Sinatra played the leader of the group. As the performance went on, Martin pretended to fall to the floor and Sinatra and Davis ran over to help him up. Davis continued to hold him as they sang with his hand slipping down to Martin's buttocks repeatedly. Martin continued to move it away and then decided to place it firmly on his buttocks. In creating these staged routines that appeared spontaneous, they developed their tone of bromance. It was consistent across all their performances, but in a time before the Internet and handheld recording devices, these moments were perceived as rare interactions.

Similarly, the *Ocean's Eleven* remake was released in 2001 and *Ocean's Twelve* came out in 2004, prior to YouTube and the popularity of other social media. Thus, their performed bromance inspired by the Rat Pack was a little more seamless compared to others today. In an interview with *ScreenSlam*, Pitt, Cheadle and Clooney were promoting *Ocean's Twelve* (2004), and they avoided answering many questions by creating their own banter (ScreenSlam, 2013). This included, jokes about the director not doing much and Pitt sleeping. At one point, Pitt sarcastically stated that Cheadle is "very dedicated to his art" when talking about his British accent in the film. Pitt went on to joke about Oscar buzz around the film. Clooney then stated that something was racist to which Cheadle agreed; when the interviewer tried to clarify what was racist, Cheadle said he just agrees with anything Clooney says. This creates a similar replication to when Davis referred to Sinatra as the leader. This leaves Pitt in the handsome, half-listening role of Martin. While he does not act drunk, he does act disorientated and less involved in a humorous way. For example, when he repeated what the other actors said, and they went on to make jokes about being redundant. When asked about their friendship, Pitt sarcastically explained that it is purely acting. They then joked about using green screens to work around restraining orders. They also made an inappropriate joke about groping in reference to Catherine Zeta-Jones. Although Damon was

not in the interview, the three actors began joking about him having a huge ego after the success of *The Bourne Supremacy* (Greengrass, 2004). They claimed that he would take their lines and threaten people with his new fighting skills, which they each acted out. Pitt also played up his performance of being "ditzy" in this interview by asking Cheadle questions such as if Amsterdam is in Europe. The jokes went on to drug references and talking about coffee houses. The interviewer continued to query their friendship by asking if Clooney invited them to his house in Lake Como because they were filming in the area. They joked that they were not invited but did go to his house regardless. This led to jokes about budget constraints and Pitt saying it was uncomfortable staying there. The interview ended with them joking about another sequel. Unlike the Rat Pack, these actors did not break into laughter as much. They were able to maintain their sarcastic, straight face approach for the majority of this interview. While they varied their approach slightly across different interviews, their style of humour was consistent. Although they replicated a Rat Pack approach, this can be viewed as authentic, as this humour is a style they each use individually in other interviews too. Pitt had perhaps performed the most in this particular interview.

As Pitt and Clooney were the biggest stars of the Ocean's franchise, the media seemed most interested in them. In a junket interview with *MSN*, the two actors are asked about what happened on the set of *Ocean's Twelve* (thomasflowery, 2009). They begin their banter about truth, lies and a goat. When asked about returning for the sequel, Pitt led the joke about it being a contractual issue and Clooney confirmed this. Clooney then drew Damon into the interview, as they often do when one of them is missing. Clooney said that Damon was trying to campaign for the Sexiest Man Alive title, which both Clooney and Pitt had been awarded before. This is a running joke between the men. The interviewer then reads out a question from a fan asking Pitt what it was like to work with Clooney. Thus, the sarcasm continued as Pitt explained how difficult it was to work with him. Clooney was then asked about his most enjoyable film making experience, as he pondered the question, Pitt jumped in to suggest *Three Kings* (Russel, 1999). Clooney agreed and then sarcastically said *Ocean's Twelve* was enjoyable despite having to work with Pitt. By Pitt answering the question on his behalf, he showed an insight into Clooney and suggested that they had discussed the topic before. This adds authenticity to their bromance. Clooney stated, "I never saw him not drunk." This is another hint at the Rat Pack style bromance. Clooney added sarcastically; "Matt seems like a nice enough guy, we didn't really talk." Pitt then broke into laughter. The interview ended with the two actors sharing their minimal knowledge of the Italian language and laughing together, again reinforcing their chemistry and the joy they share together.

A great representation of the banter between cast members is the interview that Paulson and Blanchett did on *Today* (2018). While Bollock is missing from this interview, it captures the main pair well. The interview began with

the interviewer laughing, as she was clearly distracted by the women joking around before they began filming. The interviewer questioned them about their friendship and the pair explained that they have known each other a long time, having filmed *Carol* together. They began making jokes about their awards and pretended to not get along for a moment. They continuously spoke over one another with a loud energy. Paulson repeatedly pointed out that the interviewer is not getting direct answers. Blanchett later stated that the interviewer's mascara was running and they made a joke about supporting her by all holding hands. As they continued, the interviewer invited her co-worker to join them and they squeezed in together on the chair. They referred to Blanchett and Paulson as being "besties" and then Blanchett sat on Paulson's lap. The banter continued and they joked about including the hosts in the next film. Paulson then pulled Blanchett's hair and she pretended to elbow her back. This childlike behaviour, is very reflective of the Rat Pack. As the hosts were wrapping up the interview, they stated: "They're in love. They love each other." In stating this, the interviewers were reinforcing the narrative of their close bond and adding a romantic undertone.

In a junket interview that included Blanchett, Paulson and Bullock, the three made jokes about toilets, vaginas and having sex with one another for money (Lemon, 2018). This crude humour is consistent yet again with the Rat Pack style. There is a sexual tension created between Blanchett and Bullock in particular. Again, the women spoke over one another and avoided answering many of the questions; however, in this particular interview, Blanchett did try to make a more specific point about gender. Bullock also pointed to the other two and referred to them as "friends." Moreover, Bullock flirted with Blanchett by making a reference to dirty thoughts and rubbing her finger down Blanchett's arm. Blanchett continued the joke. As the interview progressed, Paulson and Bullock made fun of Blanchett's hand gestures when speaking about a bike and masculine energy. Blanchett then made her own joke and pretended to grope both women's chests. Thus, the women appear to be very comfortable with one another. They also seem to be making a point that just because they are women, it does not mean they cannot have crude banter.

Analysing these interviews, it is evident how each group attempts to do interviews without answering questions directly, but purely creating banter and answering sarcastically. They also break into laughter from one another's jokes and share private moments. While these interviews do not include all the people involved in the dynamics, they still work as evidence of the media approach the performers have taken. They each represent a frat-boy dynamic with emphasis on flirtation and humour, meeting many of the bromance qualities. The markers of authenticity vary in each relationship, but overall there is a consistency in the performances and for the majority of the strongest bonds, there is a history and sense of spontaneity in their banter. A marker that is perhaps less evident in many of these performances is privacy. However, this still exists in some of the relationships. For example, there is

evidence of Damon attending Clooney's wedding. Julia Roberts had also attended Clooney's wedding and their bond appears to be highly authentic. In other *Ocean's Eleven* interviews, Roberts was included in the banter, and there are often media comments on her close friendship with Clooney in particular. However, there is no terminology used broadly to capture this bond. This is another example of buddy banter.

Cross-gender

In *Marvel Media Convergence: Cult Following and Buddy Banter* (Raphael & Lam, 2016), we introduced the term "buddy banter" as an inclusive phrase to describe friendships across all genders. While there are often group dynamics such as the cast of *The Avengers*, which celebrate their close friendships, there are certain male and female bonds that are particularly close and reflect a more similar connection to Damon and Affleck or Fey and Poehler. The examples chosen for analysis are Chris Hemsworth and Tessa Thompson, Kate Winslet and Leonardo DiCaprio, and Sandra Bullock and Keanu Reeves. These pairs represent three different generations, but are all still largely popular in the media. Through these examples, it is evident that bromance-like tropes exist outside of the male parameters and the same techniques can be used for promotional purposes. While they are of the opposite sex and thus romantic rumours spread more so, their friendships are still celebrated.

Reeves and Bullock

Beginning with Reeves and Bullock, the pair became friends after filming *Speed* (de Bont, 1994). Instantly, audiences wanted a real-life romance between them, however, as the decades went on they never dated but confirmed repeatedly that they have remained friends. They reunited in 2006 for *The Lake House* (Agresti), where they utilised the media and fan obsession with their relationship to promote the film (Raphael & Lam, in press a). As we elsewhere discuss, Reeves and Bullock have a very flirty approach to their communication in interviews, which fuels many of these rumours (in press a). However, as mentioned, Bullock also flirted with Cate Blanchett in an interview, thus it is simply her style of humour. While both Reeves and Bullock have confessed to having crushes on one another in the past (in press a), they have reinforced the fact that they are just friends.

In an interview for *The Lake House*, Reeves and Bullock were told that they only had six scenes together in the film, to which Reeves responded that the scenes were "sixy" (playing on the word sexy) (sandykeanufan, 2006). Bullock burst into laughter and it became an ongoing joke for the remainder of the interview. When asked about attending Bullock's wedding, Reeves said he was late. Bullock joked that he was not a part of the wedding party but would have liked to see him as a flower girl. The two began acting out throwing flower petals. Bullock referred to Reeves as a "sixy flower girl." Reeves

was then asked about starting a family and Bullock sarcastically asked him if he knows how it is done. When Reeves got lost for words while joking about the process, stating, "Well you hope that they are really," Bullock then finished his sentence with "sixy" and they both laughed. This is just one example of their fluidity in humour. The interviewer then asked Reeves "why he loves her so much," pointing to Bullock. Reeves stated that she is "a fantastic person." Bullock then joked that he should look at her while giving her compliments and the two broke into laughter. The interviewer was keen to reinforce the authenticity behind their bond and asked if their friendship was real. Bullock responded:

> I really like him. I don't know where he is 24/7. Sometimes, I don't know where he is for a half a year. But I always want to know where he is and I want to know how he's doing. And our paths always cross and we always somehow see each other. And when we get together, people think we're very sixy together.

The two broke into laughter again. While expressing their closeness and being truthful of distance, they reinforce the credibility behind their bond. They acknowledge people's interest in their pairing, but at the same time speak openly about her wedding. Thus, like a bromance the romantic relationship is essentially impossible, but their intimate friendship is evident and well performed for publicity.

DiCaprio and Winslet

Similar to Reeves and Bullock, DiCaprio and Winslet became friends after starring in a film together. *Titanic* (Cameron) was released in 1997 and since then people have wanted the actors to become a couple in real life. Also similar to the previous example, they reunited for a film titled *Revolutionary Road* (Mendes) in 2008. This again flared up people's obsessions with the pair. In between these films, the stars also shared various intimate moments at red carpet events, which has continued to give viewers something to talk about with their special bond.

While promoting *Revolutionary Road*, Winslet and DiCaprio did an interview on *Today*, where they gave each other many compliments and DiCaprio reached over to tap Winslet a couple of times (Kate_X_Leo, 2011). They spoke about their history and made jokes together. The interview began by showing a clip from *Titanic* and the interviewer mentioned that the pair looked at each other off-screen. DiCaprio stated, "It's almost surreal to watch actually. We see clips of it all the time obviously, but to be together and look at it." As DiCaprio spoke, he reached over to touch Winslet, adding a level of familiarity to the moment. They were then asked to look at each other and express what has changed about one another over the years. With the interviewer requesting that they look at each other, he was clearly trying

to generate a feeling of intimacy. Winslet stated that they had a lot more wrinkles and called DiCaprio "darling." Winslet then joked; "he's a man now. He's a man." DiCaprio responded with a lumberjack action to show off his hypermasculinity in a humorous way. Winslet then added, "you're just less puny." DiCaprio agreed. DiCaprio then described Winslet as, "Still as beautiful and radiant as the day I met her." Winslet threw her head back in laughter and joked that people would refer to the interview as the time she was mean and he was kind. When asked about their working methods, DiCaprio continued to compliment her by calling her "professional" and then stated: "that's why I keep saying she's the best." He then tapped her on the leg in a friendly manner. Winslet expressed that she also thought he was the best. As Winslet went on to speak about her body image issues, she mentioned that DiCaprio had been supportive of her while filming *Titanic* and had told her "you've really got to let the whole fat girl thing go." This again shows their closeness that they speak about personal feelings and reiterates their history. The interviewer ended with his own reflection: "From my perspective, it's nice to interview people who have a real relationship as opposed to a publicity tour relationship." In making this claim, he reinforces for the viewers the authenticity behind their bond. He chose to use the word "relationship" rather than "friendship," adding a level of affection. However, this is similar to a bromance being beyond just a friendship.

A pivotal moment in the Winslet and DiCaprio narrative is when Winslet won Best Actress in a Motion Picture Drama at the 2009 Golden Globes for *Revolutionary Road*. In her speech, she thanked DiCaprio profusely and expressed her love for him: "Leo, I'm so happy I can stand here and tell you how much I love you and how much I've loved you for 13 years. . . . I love you with all my heart, I really do" (AwardsShowNetwork, 2009). In response, DiCaprio blew her a kiss. By comparison, she then thanked her husband for directing the film and said that working with him has made her love him more. This gained a lot of media and fan attention, as she seemed to express greater love for DiCaprio than her husband. In fact, the media is so obsessed with this bond that there is an article by *Vanity Fair* summarising nearly two decades of "awards-season friendship" between the two (Robinson, 2016). Some of the main highlights included them posing together in a couple-like manner with a close embrace and kissing one another on the cheek. In one instance, during a 2005 SAG Red Carpet interview, DiCaprio kissed Winslet on the cheek and said: "I love you, sweetheart." At the 2009 Golden Globes Red Carpet, Winslet called him "babe." Thus, they use cute romantic names for one another, again adding fuel to the media and fan interest. Similarly, Reeves and Bullock have used nicknames for one another, usually applied between a romantic pairing.

In both of these pairs, the actors had maintained media interest through interviews confirming their closeness and in media appearances such as awards ceremonies. While Reeves attended Bullock's wedding, DiCaprio attended Winslet's wedding. These facts again reinforce the authenticity

behind their friendships. However, even though both women are married to other men, the fantasy created by fans and the media continues.

Hemsworth and Thompson

However, a less romantic pairing is the bond between Hemsworth and Thompson. The pair have acted in *The Avengers* and *Thor* films together, as well as *Men In Black: International* (Gray, 2019). They have repeatedly expressed an interest in continuing to team up on projects. Furthermore, their on-screen dynamics often have a somewhat flirty relationship but never progress into a romance, which is somewhat reflective of their off-screen dynamic. While they are often playful in interviews, they generally portray a more sibling-like bond. Perhaps, it is because Hemsworth is often sharing narratives and imagery of his happy home life to wife Elsa Pataky. They have been married since 2010 and have three children. As he was already married before working with Thompson, no rumours or shipping occurred. Similarly, the media seems more interested in Thompson's bisexuality and her rumoured relationship with Janelle Monae (Weinberg, 2018; Moniuszko, 2018). As a result, the reading of the Hemsworth and Thompson relationship differs to other cross-gendered bonds.

In an interview with *PopBuzz* for *Men In Black: International* (2019), Hemsworth and Thompson shared a lot of jokes and had flowing chemistry as always (PopBuzz, 2019). While Hemsworth maintained his usual sarcastic, straight-face approach, Thompson added a slight flirtation. In particular, when they spoke about Hemsworth being on *Dancing with the Stars* in Australia, Thompson stated, "I like the way your hips move." The two also joked about remaking *The Bodyguard* (Jackson, 1992) but reversing the roles so Thompson would carry Hemsworth. In making this joke, it removed the romantic notions of them starring in such a film together.

In another interview for the same film, the pair were gifted slime aliens (heatworld, 2019). Hemsworth and Thompson made their little aliens kiss. As the interview continued, Thompson had her alien kiss Hemsworth on the cheek. This playful nature can be read in a more childlike manner. The *Heat* interviewer then asked about them getting along after working together so much. Thompson stated: "we know when the other is in a bad mood . . . he gets hangry." The two began sharing details of their time on set, showing how well they knew one another and laughing at each other's quirks. They were then asked to do one another's accents and again it showed a chemistry between them through references to time spent together and by sharing in their banter. Thus, the same bromantic tropes were evident.

In an interview with *Build*, the pair were asked about all their cut scenes of kissing from across their films (BUILD Series, 2019). They explained each one and at one point Thompson joked that Hemsworth suggested the on-screen kiss just because he wanted to kiss her. Hemsworth then responded, "My wife's not here is she?" as he looked off-stage. In this brief moment, it

becomes flirty, however their descriptions of these awkward kisses remove any notion of romance. Furthermore, Hemsworth mentioning his wife in that moment reinforces a reminder to viewers of his commitment.

Comparison

With the first two pairs, they had not been married during their first filming experiences. However, all three pairs do repeatedly work together and express their closeness. They use their bonds to promote their films and in some instances utilise the media's interest to promote films not attached to the other person. A prime example of this is when Bullock announced that she had had a crush on Reeves while being interviewed by *Ellen* for *Bird Box*. Reeves then expressed his crush on her while promoting *John Wick: Chapter 3* (Stahelski, 2019) on *Ellen* (Raphael & Lam, in press a). These expressions of romance are where it differs to a bromantic relationship where there is never an actual chance of a real relationship. However, once it transfers across to true friendship, it utilises similar markers of authenticity and expression of bonding. Furthermore, all three pairs are able to use their special bonds to promote their work and enhance their individual identities through association. In each of these pairings, they apply the markers of authenticity – history, privacy, spontaneity and consistency. With the first two having longer history, the latter have worked together more regularly. They all share private details about their lives and express a spontaneity in their humorous banter. The consistency in their friendship narratives also reinforces the credibility behind their bonds. The main "bromance" dynamics applied are funny, flirty and familial. These vary depending on the circumstances and the questions posed in interviews. However, it is evident that the same bromance qualities can be applied in buddy banter pairings and groups.

Cross-gender groups

In comic book adaptations, the films often have a male-centric cast with only one dominant woman included in the leading roles. This is evident in *Justice League* (Snyder, 2017), which starred Henry Cavill, Ben Affleck, Jason Momoa, Ezra Miller and Gal Gadot as the leading superheroes. Gadot is the only woman in many of the group interviews. Similarly, the original cast of *The Avengers* (2012) included Robert Downey Jr., Chris Evans, Mark Ruffalo, Chris Hemsworth, Jeremy Renner and Scarlett Johansson. *X-Men: First Class* (2011) promotion revolved mainly around James McAvoy and Michael Fassbender, with some inclusion of Jennifer Lawrence. However, in each of these examples, the women either tone down the crude humour or join it. In *Marvel Media Convergence: Cult Following and Buddy Banter*, we explored the dynamics of *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, which had a balanced ratio of three leading men and three leading women. In this instance, the fans seemed to want to create pairings between males and females, while

there was also a bromance evident between two of the actors (Raphael & Lam, 2016). Johansson, Gadot and Lawrence have never been pushed into a romantic pairing with their co-stars extensively. Instead, they share friendships similar to that of the bromances. Referring back to the *Ocean's Eleven* (2001) cast that included Julia Roberts, she also joined in the "buddy banter" when included in the interviews. However, the media often focused on the men. Likewise, in the promotion of *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (Tarantino, 2019), Margot Robbie was included in the interviews; however, the media's emphasis was predominantly on the bromance between Brad Pitt and Leonardo DiCaprio, even though Robbie and DiCaprio were starring in their second film together. Overall, these examples are evidence of a broader issue in Hollywood where there is not enough female roles. In all-star cast films, they often have a predominantly male cast unless it is a romantic movie such as *Love Actually* (Curtis, 2003). In *The Avenger's* cast, much of the focus is on the bromance between Mark Ruffalo and Robert Downey Jr., Hemsworth and Tom Hiddleston, Anthony Mackie and Sebastian Stan, and Jake Gyllenhaal and Tom Holland (FilmArtsy, 2020). While some attention is given to Scarlett Johansson and Chris Evan's long-lasting friendship, it does not gain the same amount of hype.

Returning to the example of *Ocean's Eleven* (2001), Roberts has close bonds with her co-stars, in particular George Clooney and Brad Pitt. While they are not given an opportunity to express their friendships as much in the group dynamic, the details of their friendships have appeared in other interviews. Roberts and Pitt starred in *The Mexican* (Verbinski, 2001) preceding *Ocean's Eleven* and during a junket interview with *ET* explained that they had been friends for 17–18 years prior, through mutual friends (juliabiggestfan, 2007). They joked about their hair and eyebrows from back when they were struggling actors, showing an authenticity in their friendship. They shared banter and laughed together. Furthermore, they were asked about their on-screen chemistry and they explained that it was instant because of their history: Pitt using the word "automatic" and Roberts referring to their "familiarity." In an Access Hollywood interview, the caption read "close relationship," while they were described as having a brother and sister like bond (andziafun, 2009). Thus, in this instance they did not try to push a romantic pairing. At the time, Pitt was married to Jennifer Aniston and were considered many people's favourite Hollywood couple. With the media focusing on their friendship, a question that recurred during the press junket was why they waited so long to work together. During this particular interview, Roberts has her arm laying on the seat behind Pitt's back and they are sitting in close proximity, reinforcing their comfort with one another.

Over the years, they have continued to work together in various ways, including Pitt producing a film that starred Roberts titled *The Normal Heart* (Murphy, 2014). *ExtraTv* captured a red carpet moment between the two where Roberts spoke into Pitt's ear while hugging: "I have officially now worked with you in every way, more than anybody" (Extratv, 2014). Pitt

responded in surprise, "Is that right? Did I beat George?" This authentic moment shared between the friends expresses not only their long-lasting working history but also their close bond through their physical intimacy. It also reflects their mutual friendship with Clooney by bringing him into the conversation.

In an interview with *Vanity Fair*, Clooney and Roberts explained how they first met at a hotel, which Roberts acknowledged was a "provocative sounding answer" (Vanity Fair, 2014). Roberts went on to explain that they had been "long reported best friends and had never met before" but they had organised to meet, as Clooney wanted her in *Ocean's Eleven*. They go on to explain how Clooney had pranked her with a 20-dollar bill as her payment after hearing that she made "20 a picture." The two laughed together as they shared the details of their friendship. This story is consistent with Clooney's pranking-humour and depicts the fun nature of their bond. Realising it had been 14 years of friendship, they were both surprised, joking sarcastically that it felt longer. Similar to the Pitt interview, they have great banter where they tease one another and make each other laugh. This is very similar to that of a bromance. When asked about what they need on set, Roberts stated: "a sense of comradery . . . you and I, that's how we function, knowing this is a team and a family." The term "family" is often used to describe casts, including *The Avengers* and *Fast and Furious* franchises.

In particular, *The Fast and the Furious* (2001) cast has shifted its focus from the central bromance between Vin Diesel and Paul Walker to be inclusive of the growing cast members (Raphael & Lam, in press b). This has become increasingly pushed since Walker's death in 2013 (Raphael, 2018). While much of the promotion for the *Fast and Furious* franchise has focused on Diesel and Walker's bromance, there are also close friendships across other cast members – in particular, Tyrese Gibson and Walker (Raphael & Lam, in press b), and Diesel and Michelle Rodriguez. In a cast interview with *Today*, Rodriguez stated: "Me and Vin have such a long-standing 13-year friendship . . . on and off-screen" (vindiesel.com, 2013). Thus, while celebrities may have particular friendships, the media and fans dictate which friendships gain the most publicity. This is often guided by on-screen dynamics.

Ultimately, these bonds can occur in groups or pairs, regardless of gender. While the media is still excited by these friendships, they are fixated on the buzzword of "bromance" and lack a language to describe these intimate relationships. As Roberts stated, "comradery" and "family" are two key aspects of these dynamics. They share similar traits to bromances, but these can vary depending on the style of the individuals. They usually still include humour, sexual references and are dependent on the markers of authenticity to reinforce them to fans and the media. Building these bonds and utilising them in promotions shows the value of comradery capital, which is generated from buddy banter.

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6 Conclusions and reflections on celebrity bromances

At the beginning of the writing process, we noted the relevance of the bromance to contemporary celebrity culture, and the multifaceted ways in which the topic could be addressed. The study of celebrity bromances could replicate existing approaches to celebrity figures – a focus on reading the bromance as a text and consideration of discursive implications. However, examination of bromances as a promotional tool is less prevalent offering further entry points to the concept. To aid the investigation, we focus on three key notions – authenticity, persona and commodification.

Questions of authenticity are related to the presentation and reception of the bromance. The celebrity bromance is manifest through external, public displays of affection and intimacy, often in conjunction with the promotion of products (media or otherwise). Yet, its success is dependent on the believability of the relationship that is presented. As such, notions of performativity and authenticity are implicated in the celebrity bromance. The concept is not novel in studies of celebrity figures and celebrity culture. It was of primary thread of investigation for Richard Dyer in his 1991 contribution to Christine Gledhill's edited volume *Stardom: Industry of Desire* (1991), and a central theme for special issue of the field's key journal *Celebrity Studies* in 2020. It is adopted in this volume not only as a means to conceptually interrogate the celebrity bromance, but also as a way to evaluate its presentation.

The concept of persona is central to discussions surrounding the formation of celebrities. Dyer's initial argument for the symbolic nature of stars was founded on the notion of a public image, formed by studios in a process of star-making and aligned with cultural values (1979). The public image is thus conceptually separated from the private, giving rise to speculation in the individual behind image. The notion of the public image is occasionally used interchangeably with the celebrity persona, a similar concept of the aspects of a celebrity figure that is known to the public. There is, however, a subtle difference expressed through the medium and nature of the celebrity persona. P. David Marshall argues that celebrity use of social media gives rise to the public/private persona, that which is curated and enacted in mostly online contexts in which the celebrity figure provides a semblance of access to their private spheres (2010). The celebrity persona is thus expressed both

by the celebrity themselves (or agents managing their online profiles) and through characterisations of the celebrity in legacy media. The singular celebrity persona is expanded in this volume to consider the implications of joint persona – the bromance persona.

Finally, the commodification of celebrity culture is central to the discussions in the volume as we seek to conceptualise the significance and value of the bromance. Political economy approaches to the analysis of celebrity culture (Williamson, 2016; Farrell, 2021), and Olivier Driessen's reflections on processes of commodification served as important points of reference (2012).

Having established key conceptual reference points, our approach to the topic is to interrogate bromances from the perspective of its formation, relevance and utility. Chapter 2 presents the outcome of our endeavours to categorise different types of bromances, based on the behaviours exhibited in different dynamics – frat-boy, fake-feud, familiar, flirty, funny and familial. Here, we also propose a means to evaluate the bromance based on Dyer's notion of markers of authenticity. We suggest similar markers exist for bromance pairs which indicate the genuineness of the dynamic presented, and through which perceived authenticity can be established, expressed as history, privacy, spontaneity and consistency. Whether a bromance is perceived as genuine despite its performative expression and formation within contexts of promotion (usually as part of a publicity campaign for a film) often relies on the perceived authenticity of the interactions.

Chapter 3 considers how bromances are created by focusing on the contribution of celebrities, media and fans in the formation of the bromance persona. It argues this joint persona is distinct from the celebrity persona. The chapter outlines how the bromance persona is constructed, which is expressed either as an extension of the celebrity persona or as a new entity with its own history and ongoing narrative. While bromance persona can be enacted by celebrity figures during online and offline interactions, media and fans both play a role in shaping and propagating the bromance persona. Media reports contribute to the formation bromance persona by emphasis on the nature of the bromance (whether it is frat-boy, flirty or familial), sometimes literally writing them into existence by characterising celebrity interactions in the language of bromance discourse. This type of media attention ensures a degree of public awareness about bromance pairings – continued reporting maintaining public visibility. Fan works highlight how the bromance is offered as a conceptual platform through which fan and audience engagement with celebrity culture and media industries is made visible, given some agency and potentially actual contribution to celebrity culture. The chapter thus establishes the mechanism through which celebrity bromances are formulated, adopting the markers of authenticity to interrogate the genuineness of the presentations.

The final two chapters offer a reflection on the utility of bromances. From a political economy perspective, the value of the bromance as capital in a commoditised celebrity culture is explored. The commodification of celebrity

figures is an oft-explored topic; however, this chapter marks its contribution to the discussion through a specific and detailed deconstruction of the aspects of the bromance dynamic that is commodified – presentation of relational dynamics, construction of the authenticity puzzle, position as a site of affective investment and creativity. These aspects operate within contemporary reception and media contexts that emphasise active and participatory audiences, and texts that respond to shifting cultural discourses (in this case relating to expressions of male homosocial intimacy). Bromance capital is thus a powerful resource to capture public awareness within the contemporary attention economy. Finally, Chapter 5 highlights the limitations of the term "bromance" while reinforcing the notion that dynamics between celebrity figures is valuable in the contemporary attention economy. Moving beyond bromance and bromance capital, we build on the notion of "buddy banter" to characterise non-gender-specific interactions. The term comradery capital is proposed as a way to theorise mixed gender, female and group dynamics.

In summary, this book defines the various characteristics of a real-life bromance, the markers of authenticity utilised to interpret and evaluate the bromance (including categorisation based on bromance origins). It examines how bromance personas are developed as joint identities by celebrities, media and fans. Further, how this joint identity is commoditised through the specific qualities of the bromance capital. Finally, the aspects of celebrity interactions that are used as commodities are expanded beyond the male homosocial interactions of bromances into cross-gender interactions, which we term comradery capital. Thus, the characteristics and markers of authenticity can be applied to any comradery capital situation to understand how it is commodified.

Bromance and celebrity culture

This volume opened with claims to the ubiquity of the bromance as a discourse, genre of film and shorthand for a particular type of male homosocial intimacy. Facetiously, it claimed that such a notion required no introduction. In many ways, this claim still holds true. For in the particular cultural epoch in which this volume is produced, at the beginning of the third decade of the twenty-first century, the bromance has become embedded into celebrity and popular culture of American, British and occasionally Australian cultural contexts. The notion manifests in other cultural contexts as well, although perhaps not expressed as a "bromance"[1] and as such, this volume focuses predominately on examples from American and British celebrity cultures, with a focus on Hollywood actors. The integration of bromances, celebrity and popular culture in these contexts is made possible by the specific qualities of media and entertainment industries that have reached a degree of maturity by the early 2020s.

First, a convergent media landscape provides the necessary conditions to not only foster the spreading of media across platforms, but also establish the desirability of spreadability in the contemporary attention economy.

Corporate synergies facilitate the diversification of media content under shared intellectual property agreements, and the dissemination of content across media platforms. The use of social media platforms by media companies and increasing collaboration between social media and media platforms create conditions in which content related to media products (and the celebrities attached to them) proliferate in both legacy and digital media.

Second, a vibrant online media ecology has developed that intersects with the online cultures of social media influencers, fandoms and audience groups. These online cultures emphasise a culture of persona curation (creation and maintenance) and presence of niche interest groups that facilitate the formation and preservation of popular culture notions – like the celebrity bromance – in popular consciousness. To a great extent, it is the adoption of a celebrity bromance pairing by these online cultures that enables their prolonged survival. Even if media industries invest in propagating the existence of a bromance, its longevity and viability is not guaranteed if it is not embraced by online cultures.

Finally, a consequence of vibrant online cultures is the increased visibility of audience and fan activities that create, embrace, or sustain a bromance pairing. A common feature of talk show interviews with celebrities is the presentation of fan works about the celebrity and their various pairings. This practice indicates the degree of scrutiny mainstream media afford fandoms and their outputs, and their potential transgression of boundaries of fandom in their desire to publicise fan works.[2] It also affirms the fact that bromances are recognised by fan groups, and in some way provides evidence (to the celebrity and/or marketing agencies) that the bromance continues to garner interest. In so doing, both the works and media attention of fan output help to prolong the awareness of a bromance. Mainstream media discussion of fan interpretations in some way also officiates fan readings, particularly if a celebrity pairing seems to agree with it. James McAvoy and Michael Fassbender's "selection" of a bromance name at the 2016 San Diego Comic Con affirms the fact that a bromance exists, and that they agree to the fan-created moniker, even if rejecting other fan representations of the relationship.[3]

The bromance is thus part of contemporary celebrity and popular culture discourses and practices. Its integration into the mechanisms through which celebrity value operates is suggestive of a media environment where the curation of celebrity persona is no longer sufficient. Rather than only focusing on works or craft (professional abilities), attention is garnered through exploration of celebrity dynamics and interactions. These extraneous elements draw upon a central facet of celebrity culture – interest in that which lies behind the persona and a desire to discover more of the "real" individual. In addition to this tabloid interest in celebrities' private lives is the presentation of a very specific type of interaction – male homosocial intimacy. The bromance is potent not only for its ability to capture attention, its significance is also discursive, a point that is captured in discussion of masculinity and expressions of homosocial intimacy by film scholars examining fictional

bromances. As such, the bromance contains and generates a form of capital that becomes a valuable resource in contemporary media landscapes.

Final thoughts and future directions

The bromance examples in this volume originate from American and British cultural contexts. The bromance is a notion that engages with culturally specific expressions of masculinity, physical manifestations of intimacy that intersect with tropes (or stereotypes) of homosexuality and varying expressions of male homosocial intimacy. As such, conceptualisations of masculinity, homosexuality and heterosexuality in different cultural contexts will influence the expression, presentation and reception of bromances. Indeed, the term itself emerged from a specific American subculture, and was appropriated to articulate shifts in representations of male relationships in American media. Thus, further exploration outside of the American/British context is required. Specifically, how notions of male homosocial intimacy map to discursive considerations of masculinity in Asia, Africa, Australasia, Europe, South America and so on, offer starting points for further investigation.

The volume has explored the utility of the bromance and bromance capital in the entertainment industries. Here, bromance capital is leveraged to garner attention for celebrity pairings and the works they represent, integrated into the mechanisms by which the celebrity is valued and brings value. Originating within the process of celebrity commodification as it does, the bromance fits seamlessly into the logic of the commodity celebrity culture. However, as noted in Chapter 1, the bromance is not only a notion which operates within the entertainment industries, it is utilised in other arenas as well. How the notion is operationalised within these other arenas, for instance within the political sphere, is also an area for further investigation. In particular, exploration could provide insights into changes in the notion as it moves through different discursive contexts, as well as its utility in the logics of different industrial systems.

Additionally, while Chapter 5 initiated an exploration of bromance-like dynamics in mixed-gender pairings, female homosocial intimacy and group dynamics, it does not fully examine the discursive contexts, implications for the formation of joint persona and processes of commodification that render these dynamics fertile areas for further investigation. In particular, the impact that social movements such as #metoo and #timesup have on shifting representations of female homosocial and mixed-gender dynamics is an area for further investigation. When much of the humour associated with the bromance (and to some extent female homosocial dynamics) is based on innuendo-laden banter, questions addressing an underlying culture of casual misogyny may be overlooked. In the wake of social movements calling for a shift in industries that tolerate cultures of ingrained and casual sexual harassment, the use of sexualised banter by both male and female celebrities needs to be scrutinised.

As a notion, bromance capital expresses the commoditisation of relationships between male celebrities founded on the presentation of an intriguing authenticity puzzle within the context of ongoing interest in male friendships. How comradery capital manifests and which elements of celebrity interactions intrigue audiences are areas for further exploration, potentially through employing empirical methods with audience and fan groups.

This volume has presented a close examination of the bromance in one cultural context through an exploration of case studies contemporary to the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It is hoped that explorations of the bromance (or equivalent concept such as comradery capital) continue, taking into consideration diverse cultural and industrial milieu.

Notes

1 For instance, a similar notion of celebrity pairings exists in Chinese celebrity culture, articulated as "CP," literally the "coupling" of celebrities or characters. The term is applied equally to same and mixed gender pairings and generally implies a romantic undertone to the relationship.
2 For more on boundaries of fandom, see Hellekson and Busse (2006) and Lam (2018).
3 When presented with fan art on the *Graham Norton Show* in 2014, McAvoy jokingly expressed his disagreement with some of the depictions.

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Index