"When the RP gets in the way of the F": Star Image and Intertextuality in Real Person(a) Fiction

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[0.1] Abstract: This paper uses a case study from the Hockey RPF community to explore textual processes in Real Person(a) Fiction, and particularly the intertextual relationship between different facets of the star image and the RPF character. I argue that the crisis in legitimacy faced by the fandom revealed a dense of web of intertextuality between the celebrity's public and official private personas, the imagined real person behind them, and the RPF character, all involved in a "side by side" reading (Derecho 2006) of the similarities and differences between the celebrity fan object and the fan work. I build on Derecho's (2006) concept of archontic literature as well as Stasi's (2006) concept of "intertextuality in the second degree" to highlight the complex relationship between celebrity persona, RPF character, and other seemingly unrelated elements which may be drawn into an "archive" by RPF readers and writers and show the collectively created RPF character was overwhelmed by these other elements.

[0.2] Keywords: real person fiction, Hockey RPF, celebrity, star image, intertextuality, archontic literature

1. Introduction

[1.1] Real Person(a) Fiction (RPF) - fan fiction based on real life celebrities or historical figures - is a controversial practice within fan fiction communities. Existing academic work on RPF focuses and builds on issues of celebrity and the tensions between a celebrity's public persona and private self. This paper is based on the crisis of legimacy within the Hockey RPF fandom following the rape allegations against Patrick Kane - a high-profile National Hockey League player and popular fan object within Hockey RPF. I draw on my own membership of this community at the time of the controversy and on the community's discussions around and outside of fan fiction texts in addition to the fan works themselves to suggest that while RPF may frequently build on the public persona of the celebrity, there is ultimately a deep concern with issues of authenticity and the private person. This by extension has implications for what engaging fannishly with a particular celebrity may say about fans themselves. I argue that like in other works of fan fiction meaning in RPF is created in a "side by side" reading (Derecho 2006) of the similarities and differences between different textual constructions of the celebrity fan object and the fan work. I build on Derecho's (2006) concept of archontic literature as well as Stasi's (2006) concept of "intertextuality in the second degree" to highlight the complex relationship between celebrity persona, RPF character, and other seemingly unrelated elements which may be drawn into an "archive" surrounding RPF readers and writers' impression of the "real" person behind the star image. In a moment of crisis such as the rape allegations against Patrick Kane, this intertextual way of reading the celebrity and the associated RPF character then results in a re-evaluation of the legitimacy of the celebrity as a fan object, and one's own legitimacy as a fan.

2. Real Person(a) Fiction in the wider fan fiction context

[2.1] In understanding the textual processes of RPF, Dyer's (2006) concept of the star image provides a useful link between star (or celebrity) and text. The star image, is constructed from publicly available materials ranging from a celebrity's public appearances and performances to gossip and, more recently, social media utterances. The star image concept provides a useful distinction between what is effectively a textual construction and an actual person who may be behind it. Van den Bulk and Claessen (2013) add a further layer between the star image and the private person of the celebrity, distinguishing between the celebrity's public persona, their "official" private persona, and a "real" person behind those (p. 47). This further distinction is useful when considering how RPF manipulates the celebrity text. Busse (2006a) argues that the distinction between canon (the official version of events and characters) and fanon (a fictionalised version of events and characters that is broadly agreed upon by the fan community) in RPF fandoms is often blurred. She dispenses with this distinction in favour of arguing that, unlike in fan fiction based on TV shows, books or movies, RPF does not have a single unified canon. Instead, a canon, like the star image or the celebrity's public persona, is constructed out of publicly available information about the celebrity: their official media appearances, reports and gossip available about them in mainstream media, as well as rumours and accounts of encounters with the celebrity circulating in the fan community. In Van den Bulk and Claessen's (2013) terms, then "canon" is predominantly (though loosely) based on the celebrity's public and official private personas. The canon is constructed through choices around which of these pieces of information to accept and incorporate and which to discard. Not everyone within a community will necessarily agree on the precise combination of such pieces that makes up canon, but a core set of events is still formed. Busse (2006a) argues that authenticity is not necessarily an important factor in whether a given piece of information is incorporated into canon. Drawing parallels between RPF and fans' online interactions and constructions of personas, she ultimately argues that "any belief in clear separation of the real and fictional are [sic] illusory" (223). Busse also examines RPF as a tool for identity construction – both that of the fan and the star they are writing about. She argues that fan writers "shape and alter the star to their own specification, making him more interesting, intelligent, or vulnerable, and thus more desirable, identifiable, and available." (2006b, 260)

[2.2] Marshall (2006) accounts for the impact of new media on celebrity, arguing that it poses significant challenges to the traditional economic model of celebrity. As a result, different modes of celebrity engagement emerge: scandal, for instance, becomes a means of generating more media coverage and promoting both the celebrity and their work. Moveover, digitisation allows audiences to more easily rework the celebrity image for their own purposes and circulate those reworkings. Both social media and, as Holmes (2005) argues, newer types of gossip magazines such as *Heat,* encourage greater consideration of issues of authenticity and the exact relationship between the textual construction of the celebrity and the person behind them. Hagen (2015) examines the effects of this increased proximity to celebrities through social media and search for authenticity in an RPF context. He argues that the immediacy and constant influx of new information through social media caused issues for RPF fans in Bandom (a fan community focused on a group of emo rock bands

around My Chemical Romance, Fall Out Boy, and Panic! at the Disco). It risked overdetermining the fan object by not leaving enough gaps for fans to fill with their stories. Piper (2015) investigates the parallels between RPF and biopic films such as *The Social Network* in order to trace the textual processes involved in turning a real person into a fictional character. She argues that "both [RPF and biopics] appropriate elements of celebrity bodies to recontextualize the existing public self through the representation of a fictionalized private self." She notes, however, that there is a major difference between the two forms in their level of intertextuality and in how audiences interact with them. A biopic, being often the only one of its kind and the first and only time the majority of its audience will engage with the subject, makes a much stronger implicit truth claim than a piece of RPF, which is one of often hundreds or thousands about that particular celebrity. The circulation of many different, clearly fictional, accounts of the same "canon" events in RPF communities therefore results in a stronger awareness that the limited information available can be interpreted in a variety of ways, and thereby emphasises the constructed nature of the star image, highlighting the distinctions between public persona, private person, and fictionalised character.

[2.3] There is a tension in these analyses between showing audiences as treating the celebrity as purely or predominantly textual (e.g. Busse, 2006a; Piper, 2015) and showing audiences seeking the authenticity of the "private" person behind the celebrity text (e.g. Holmes, 2005; Van den Bulk and Claessen, 2013; Hagen, 2015). Examining RPF fandoms and the textual processes behind them, particularly at points of crisis caused by contradictions in the star image, is a fruitful way of understanding and potentially reconciling this tension. The question here becomes: what does the crisis of legitimacy Hockey RPF fandom experienced in the wake of the rape allegations against Kane tell us about the relationships in RPF between different elements of the celebrity persona, a real or imagined private person, and a collectively constructed RPF character?

[2.4] To approach this question, I build on two key metaphors commonly used when discussing the intertextuality of fan fiction based on fictional works: that of the palimpsest (Stasi 2006), and that of the archive or archontic literature (Derecho 2006). Both authors acknowledge that fan fiction is not only in dialog with the "originary" (Derecho 2006, 65) text but also with other fan fiction texts, as well as texts not obviously related to the originary text. Stasi calls this "intertextuality in the second degree" (p. 126). In using the metaphor of the archive, Derecho argues against a hierarchical relationship between the originary text and texts based on it. Any new text added to an archive changes the entire archive. Additionally, she highlights a common feature of many fan fiction texts: repetition with a difference, that is repeating a scene, a setting, or a trope while making subtle variations to some of its constituent parts. She argues that in this way, reading any fan fiction or other archontic text always entails reading the originary text at the same time. Meaning is therefore constructed in this side by side reading from both similarities and differences between the two (or more) texts. Using the Hockey RPF case study, I trace these processes of intertextual meaning making in RPF to show that RPF, like other fan fiction, relies on different kinds of intertextuality to create meaning, and that some of these types of intertextuality point not to the celebrity as text, but rather to the celebrity as a person.

3. The Hockey RPF community and the Patrick Kane rape allegations

[3.1] Hockey RPF is fan fiction centred predominantly on the National Hockey League (NHL), which is commonly regarded as the highest professional level in men's ice hockey. With nearly 11,000 works on the Archive of Our Own as of January 2016, it is the largest Sports RPF fandom. Investigating fan fiction based on high-level European football, Waysdorf (2015) identifies key features of football - and more generally of high-level team sports - which make them an attractive site for RPF. There are multiple media narratives surrounding the sport: official promotional material as well as outsider perspectives such as journalistic reporting. These function as a set of paratexts accompanying the sport itself. Even in team sports like ice hockey and football, individual players are promoted as a way of fostering fans' personal investment in the sport, and this has the effect of turning star players into star images (Dyer, 2006) highly attractive to RPF communities. Additionally, an overarching narrative is created over the course of a season or tournament, so that individual games acquire meaning beyond the ninety (or in the case of hockey sixty) minutes of play time. It is these individual and team narratives and the interplays between them, as players emerge as stars, are traded, or retire, that provide the starting point for sports-based fan fiction.

[3.2] Patrick Kane - one half of the long-term popular Patrick Kane/Jonathan Toews pairing within Hockey RPF - is known among sports fans and within the Hockey RPF community for "off-ice issues": public behaviour which does not fit with the role his team, the Chicago Blackhawks, presents him in as a "franchise player" and role model. While there are several incidents regularly discussed in the Hockey RPF community, the one which received the most attention prior to 2015 was Kane's drunken weekend in Madison, WI, which included allegations of him attempting to choke a woman at a party (Dickey, 2012), though no police report was made and no charges were filed in relation to that incident. After the Madison incident, the media controversy around Patrick Kane faded, and, aided by his and the team's sporting success, he was portrayed by the Blackhawks as having matured and re-focused on hockey. Yet on August 6th 2015, a local newspaper in Kane's hometown of Buffalo, NY, broke the story that Kane was subject of a rape investigation (Michel & McCarthy, 2015). Over the following three months Kane kept public appearances to a minimum. With media attention on the ongoing rape investigation, the Chicago Blackhawks nonetheless made the decision to let Kane participate in training and games in the early 2015/16 season (Elgas, 2015). On November 4th 2015, it was announced that Kane's accuser had stopped cooperating with the investigation, and two days later the investigation was formally closed without charges being filed (e.g. Gretz, 2015). Almost immediately after this, the NHL and Chicago Blackhawks resumed their use of Kane in promotional material and events, for instance through prominent coverage of his points streak (NHL.com, 2015).

4. Extending the Patrick Kane "archive"

[4.1] The news about the Patrick Kane rape investigation spread quickly within the Tumblr-based Hockey RPF community (note 1). The key question for Patrick Kane fans very quickly became whether one could continue to be a fan - and produce fan works about - a celebrity who had been accused of rape. While some fans advocated for ending all involvement with Patrick Kane as a fan object, others sought to justify their continued activity in the fandom. Both approaches to this questioning of legitimacy were strongly informed by

considerations of the relationships between the star image, the public private persona, the private person (imagined or real) and the collectively constructed RPF character.

[4.2] Questioning, suspending or outright ending involvement and activity in the the Hockey RPF or Patrick Kane fandoms was a common reaction from many community members very early on. Even before any details were known beyond the fact that a rape investigation was being conducted, many readers and writers declared their intent to withdraw from the community.

> [4.3] It almost doesn't matter whether he did this thing or not– I believe he could have, and that realization makes me sick to my stomach. It might not be enough to convict him in any court, but it's enough to make me put down my pen where he's concerned. (oddish)

[4.4] Oddish's comment clearly acknowledges the uncertainty around the case, and in fact her full post deals extensively with the problem of uncertainty in rape allegations in general and the Kane case in particular. She also makes a clear distinction between any judgement she as an individual makes based on information she has, and what may or may not be enough to convict a person of rape in a court of law. Most importantly, it is the realisation that - from what she knows - she believes that Patrick Kane (the person) is *capable* of rape which ultimately drives oddish's decision to no longer write about Patrick Kane (the Hockey RPF character). This indicates that a boundary has been crossed where the alleged actions of the real person overshadow any textual construction of a star image - that even if the fictional character based on the celebrity persona showed clear departures from that real person, there is still enough of a link between the two in the minds of community members that the allegations against real-life Kane have an irreversible impact on the RPF character.

[4.5] This boundary breach can be understood by examining the background against which Hockey RPF exists - the sports culture it draws from. Rape and sexual assault allegations against athletes at all levels and from a range of team sports across Western cultures occur with some regularity (e.g. Nurka 2013, Toffoletti 2007), though convictions are much rarer (Burke 2015). In the higher education setting, Dempster (2009) finds a strong link between sports and lad cultures at a UK university and identifies three key components present in both: sexualised behaviours (including the indictment of homosexuality), aggression and violence (especially in the sports context when there is a perceived threat to the player's position and standing within the hierarchy), and heavy drinking. Some of these elements of sports culture - particularly heavy drinking and sexualised behaviours - are often featured in Hockey RPF stories. Oddish's comments reveal that it is these similarities and differences between what Hockey RPF readers and writers know of this culture and how they portray it in their fiction that are a key element of the meaning-making process. In Derecho's (2006) terms, a fictionalised Patrick Kane who drinks heavily and displays sexualised behaviours but is also unashamedly in love with Jonathan Toews can be seen as a "repetition with a difference" of the celebrity athlete Patrick Kane, and it is in part this difference which makes stories about him meaningful to their readers. The rape allegations against Kane, however, change the available meanings, and bring the problematic aspects of sports culture into the foreground for Hockey RPF community members. This is what oddish alludes to when she says she believes Kane - the athlete - capable of rape.

[4.6] Kane's long history of off-ice issues can be read as a history of moments where the private person has publicly been shown to be in conflict with both the public and the official private persona constructed, especially by team and league publicity Given this history, the question arises of why it is only now that a boundary has been breached, the alleged actions of the private person irredeemably overshadowing the public persona. This was also a key concern for many Hockey RPF community members. Oddish elaborates on this in another post:

> [4.7] I need to own that as an RPF writer, I have two very different Patrick Kanes in my mind– one, the character that I see when I read or write who is a flawed but loveable idea that we have cooperatively created. The other is a real human being who for all the media attention he receives is unknowable- and deeply problematic. In fiction, we can create scenarios that suggest favorable interpretations and allow for character development… but those scenarios are clearly fiction.
>
> [4.8] Where life seemed to be imitating art, and Patrick Kane seemed to be improving himself as a human being, I was selfishly pleased, because it allowed me to enjoy my fiction all the more. But the recent accusation of sexual assault changes things. (oddish)

[4.9] This comment echoes Busse's (2006b) analysis of how RPF writers shape and mold the celebrity persona in their stories. It also clearly references the way RPF constructs canon from selecting, arranging and interpreting publicly available pieces of information about the celebrity (Busse 2006a). It is precisely the way RPF uses the celebrity's public self to create versions of a private self (Piper 2015) which poses a particular problem for oddish and other Hockey RPF writers, as that fictional private self is often presented in the most favourable light and depicted as capable of learning, development and overcoming the celebrity's publicly known character flaws. As the fan work becomes part of the wider Patrick Kane archive for Hockey RPF community members, the fictional Patrick Kane, the celebrity persona, and inferences about the private person are read "side by side" (Derecho 2006). This in turn leads to a changed perception of the celebrity - both as celebrity persona and as private person - within the fandom community. This perception is now at odds with the new information emerging about the celebrity. In many cases such new information can be absorbed into a re-arranged and re-constructed shared canon, and I will examine to what extent this happened in Patrick Kane fan fiction after both the Madison incident and the rape allegations below. However, there is an indication here that the nature and severity of the allegations against Kane is what ultimately makes an engagement with the real person behind the star image necessary and therefore continued involvement in a fandom based on the public persona impossible. Rather than reading the fictional character and the celebrity persona side by side, and constructing meaning from the similarities and differences, the knowledge of what Patrick Kane - the private person - is alleged to have done overwhelms any possible fan interpretation and imposes meanings which many Hockey RPF fans find distressing. What oddish is effectively suggesting here is that continued involvement with Patrick Kane as a fan object would require either accounting for the rape allegations or a "repetition with a difference" which would be tantamount to erasure, disbelieving the accuser, and thereby reproducing rape culture. This is supported by a number of community

members' accounts of the highly personal stories they had told through the character of Patrick Kane - including stories about sexual assault survival - and the feeling that in light of the rape allegations against the real-life Kane, the fictional character was now in some ways tainted for them. This conflict is so deep and significant for individuals and the Hockey RPF community as a whole that one commenter characterised it as a struggle to "live our values" in light of past involvement with the Patrick Kane fandom and the allegations against Kane.

[4.10] While this process of re-evaluating the meanings of Hockey RPF and Patrick Kane stories was common across the community, not all community members reached the same conclusions. An alternative view was given voice in a long post by voltorb:

> [4.11] A huge part (the overwhelming portion, really) of my delight with hockey is rooted in the fantastic irony of a bunch of intelligent, sassy, powerful women taking a hegemonic male structure and turning it on its head: refashioning this world and these people to our purposes. It's a subversive act. (voltorb)

[4.12] Here, voltorb is weighing the meanings Hockey RPF has accrued for her over time against those imposed by the rape allegations against Patrick Kane, but the outcome of this process is exactly the opposite of oddish's re-evaluations. Rather than finding other meanings overwhelmed by the rape allegations, she constructs a different hierarchy where the subversive meanings she finds in Hockey RPF directly challenge rape culture and hegemonic masculinity. A cornerstone of this argument is the observation that Hockey RPF characters are better, more compassionate human beings than the celebrity personas they are based on, echoing Busse's (2006b) observation that RPF writers humanise the celebrity persona by giving them an inner life, and shaping them to be "more interesting, intelligent, or vulnerable, and thus more desirable, identifiable, and available" (260). Voltorb recognises that the sports culture depicted in Hockey RPF is likely to be a significant departure from real sports cultures (e.g. Dempster 2009). For her, however, it is this contrast between hockey culture as perceived by the fandom community and as depicted by them which attracts her to Hockey RPF. Effectively, for her Hockey RPF only acquires meaning through a side by side reading, and crucially through repetitions with a difference (Derecho 2006), of the sport and media spectacle (Waysdorf 2015) it is based on. Elsewhere in the post, voltorb also acknowledges - in language very similar to oddish's "living our values" comment - the conflict she experiences in deriving enjoyment from a sport so deeply mired in rape culture. Voltorb, however, argues that it is Hockey RPF, through what she perceives as its subversiveness, which helps her reconcile some of these tensions. In this case, she is reading hockey as a sport side by side with the meanings she has derived from her engagement in Hockey RPF, which in turn alters how she views the sport. Thus the concept of side by side reading is implicated in making meanings within Hockey RPF regardless of which set of meanings - those made by the community or those imposed by, in this case, the rape allegations - community members regard as more important.

[4.13] At the heart of both sides of this argument is the intertextual nature of fan fiction and how it interacts with the originary work - where in this case the originary work is the media spectacle of ice hockey and the NHL (Waysdorf 2015). There is a disagreement over how far the "archive" (Derecho 2006) surrounding Patrick Kane's persona extends, and what the

precise relationship is between different items in that archive. Patrick Kane the person and Patrick Kane the celebrity clearly alter that archive on a day-to-day basis: a smile, a goal celebration, a particularly emotional post-game interview, a points streak, a public drinking spree, allegations of rape. Fans react to these additions to the archive with additions of their own: stories, gif sets, cartoons of Patrick Kane as a unicorn, hand-made soft toys, authors' notes, and fan discussions. Some fans felt that their own additions to the archive were an empowering way for them to take control of the situation. Many, however, felt that there was, after all, a hierarchy within the archive, and no amount of fan subversiveness and creativity could negate Patrick Kane's alleged and perceived transgressions. The argument here centres on how precisely the different components of the archive interact, rather than on whether they interact at all. This shows that for the majority of Hockey RPF community members discussing and reacting to the Kane rape allegations, it was the conflict between the public persona and the allegations against the private person that drove - and ultimately put limits to - their engagement with Hockey RPF: the act of side by side reading and the making of meaning from similarities and differences between fan fiction, the originary "work", and other elements which over time became part of the archive. Both subject positions established in these arguments are constructed as responses to rape culture: oddish and those arguing for a disengagement from the fandom see continued involvement in it as reproducing it, while voltorb argues that fannish activity is a subversion of it. As I show in the next section, rape culture became a central theme of the continuing controversy within the fandom, and through processes of intertextuality it became part of the Patrick Kane RPF archive.

5. Rape culture as part of the Patrick Kane archive

[5.1] Ehrlich (2001) provides an overview of the position of the rape complainant within the British and Canadian criminal justice systems. In both cases, the prosecution represents the state, not the victim. Instead, the complainant is relegated to the role of witness for the prosecution, for which they get little to no preparation. Mulla (2014) documents rape victims' experiences within the US legal system and highlights prosecutors' probing of the complainant's character, including criminal record, during the investigation and in the lead-up to the decision on whether to prosecute the case. Lees (1993) also investigates the position and experience of rape complainants in the British criminal justice system, finding that "the victim is put on trial, her reputation is attacked, her credibility doubted" (11). She dubs this experience "judicial rape", arguing that it reproduces and amplifies the original violation, leads to low conviction rates for rape and ultimately serves to protect rapists. This asymmetric treatment of accuser and accused within the criminal justice system is exacerbated when the accused is a public figure, including by measures designed to protect the complainant, such as their right to anonymity. This institutional set-up creates a rape complainant who is anonymous, faceless and voiceless. Where Piper (2015) argues that "the appropriation of the celebrity's physical likeness" is a key feature of RPF, such a physical likeness is not available here for the alleged victim. In the absence of any details about Kane's accuser, however, the Hockey RPF community brought other sources of information to bear on their evaluation of the case, notably accounts and experiences of rape survivors within the community as well as discourses about rape culture and the inadequacy of the criminal justice system.

[5.2] There were several prominent survivor voices within the community. These individuals shared their own experiences of sexual violence and encounters with rape culture and, where applicable, the criminal justice system. A key focus of these discussions was the rape kit process, which Mulla (2014) documents extensively in her ethnography of forensic nurses. Mulla highlights the discrepancy between the public and forensic practitioner perception of rape kits, where they are viewed as a vital part of evidence corroborating the victim's account and potentially able to identify an unknown attacker, and their actual role in case dispositions, where they make very little impact as the vast majority of rapes are committed by an attacker already known to the victim. She argues this this discrepancy between the perception of the importance of rape kits and the reality of their limited usefulness is at the heart of the often traumatic process of forensic evidence collection from a rape complainant. Once it emerged that a rape kit had been performed on Kane's accuser, community members repeatedly highlighted the physical and mental invasiveness of forensic evidence collection in sexual assault cases, for instance in this anonymous comment:

> [5.3] "One thing I think tumblr and a lot of people need to learn about is rape kits. The false information being spread of them is painful. But the biggest thing, is if you haven't been through one or know someone who has (and they have told you about them), they are one of the most demeaning, invasive, embarrassing, and cold things to go through. I speak from personal experience. Anyone who goes through one of those who wasn't raped... yeesh." (anonymous comment submitted to pidgey's Tumblr)

[5.4] Here the commenter brings their own personal experience of forensic evidence collection after sexual assault to bear on the information that Kane's accuser also underwent a rape kit. The "demeaning, invasive, embarrassing, and cold" nature of the experience is juxtaposed with the experience of rape itself. The implication here is that no one would voluntarily submit to a rape kit if they hadn't already undergone the more traumatic experience of being raped, and this serves to emphasise the credibility of the complainant's claims. By weaving in a small piece of publicly available information about Kane's accuser - that a rape kit had been performed on her - with the considerably more detailed account of the emotional impact of that process provided by the anonymous commenter, an inner life is created for the nameless, faceless, voiceless complainant, making her more human and relatable (Busse 2006b). The alleged victim's physical likeness (Piper 2015) is not necessary in this process - the reader of this comment and others similar to it is still invited and able to empathise with her. This empathy is produced not through an emotional attachment to the victim herself (as is the case for the emotional attachment to Kane's celebrity persona) but through the intertextual meanings brought into the discussion. The commenter's account of her rape kit experience is read side by side with developments in the investigation. While this has the effect of humanising the complainant to an extent, however, ultimately this side by side reading also - and perhaps primarily - generates meanings in the context of Patrick Kane as a fan object. Stasi (2006) describes this as "intertextuality in the second degree", or the way in which a fanfiction text may have intertextual relationships not just with the originary work but with other texts beyond it. For Hockey RPF community members with access to these discussions, knowledge about the rape kit experience becomes one such

text and thereby becomes part of the Patrick Kane archive, interacting with other elements of that archive to produce new meanings.

[5.5] Another external piece often brought into the discussions of the rape allegations, and which had a bearing on how Kane's accuser was perceived, was community members' understanding of rape culture, and particularly its prevalence within the criminal justice system.

> [5.6] Tags: BASICALLY reblogging because 'neutrality' isn't really neutral in rape culture and I've picked my side I'm done with Patrick Kane now (tags on a Tumblr reblog by snorlax)

[5.7] In these tags, added by snorlax to a Tumblr post she reblogged, rape culture is used to construct a dichotomy in cases of sexual assault, where one is either on the side of the accused or of the accuser. In this construction, neutrality is impossible and tantamount to siding with the accused. While this particular quote appears quite abstract, many community members expressed similar sentiments with particular reference to the complainant and how she was likely to be treated by the press, the criminal justice system, Blackhawks fans, and the general public. Like the account of the rape kit experience, these comments also generate a relatable inner life for Kane's accuser. Yet they also become attached to the Patrick Kane RPF archive. Through these comments and conversations, and their application to the specific allegations against Kane, rape culture becomes part of the intertext against which meanings about Patrick Kane are produced within the Hockey RPF community.

[5.8] Both the accounts of sexual assault survivors and the discussion of rape culture within the Hockey RPF community therefore function in ways similar to RPF canon construction to humanise and give an internal life to Kane's accuser, who is otherwise left faceless, nameless, and voiceless even by measures intended to protect her. However, because the community's primary interest continues to be in Patrick Kane and his legitimacy or otherwise as a fan object, these elements also become part of the Patrick Kane RPF archive and become available - for those within the community taking part in or aware of these discussions - as resources for side by side reading, intertextuality in the second degree (Stasi 2006), and ultimately the construction of meanings not just about the complainant but about Patrick Kane himself. This is one of the key mechanisms through which meanings generated by the rape allegations overwhelm other meanings constructed by the community. That in turn makes it untenable for many community members to sustain the subject position of subversion of rape culture through fan fiction or continue their involvement with Patrick Kane as a fan object.

6. The unfillable gap: Patrick Kane fan fiction in 2012 and 2015

[6.1] While Patrick Kane's career does not appear to have suffered as a result of the rape allegations or the previous off-ice incidents, his behaviour has been the source of significant challenges for the collective canon formation in Hockey RPF (Busse 2006a). His public image as a party boy - inline with Dempster's (2009) analysis of sports and lad cultures -

has, on the one hand, been attractive to RPF writers, particularly in juxtaposition to Jonathan Toews' more reserved public persona. On the other hand, allegations of violence have overshadowed the Patrick Kane RPF canon, and fan fiction writers have at times struggled to negotiate these. Similarly to the endless stream of new social media content which risked overdetermining the Bandom fan object (Hagen 2015), the visual evidence of Kane's 2012 drinking spree through Madison, WI, as well as the media reporting and fan speculation following the 2015 rape allegations risked directly contradicting much of the collectively negotiated canon which existed at that point. The differences and similarities between ways of managing such tensions after the Madison incident and after the rape allegations are particularly interesting.

[6.2] To understand how the canon construction differed after the two incidents, it is important to understand the basic "canon" relationship dynamic portrayed in fan fiction about the Patrick Kane/Jonathan Toews pairing. Toews has been dubbed Captain Serious by teammates and media, and the contrast between him and Kane is a common theme of Kane/Toews Hockey RPF stories. While there isn't a single prevalent set of characterisations for the two of them in RPF, there are some elements common across many stories which are worth considering. Lamb and Veith (1986) argue that slash protagonists often acquire androgynous characteristics, and this is certainly true of both Kane and Toews in Hockey RPF where such characterisation is used in juxtaposition with the hypermasculine, "laddish" image of professional athletes (Dempster 2009), making them more vulnerable and identifiable (Busse 2006b). Kane is often portrayed as an extremely skilled hockey player, but writers emphasise his short (for a hockey player) stature. He also tends to be depicted as the more emotional of the two, and the range of emotions he expresses in stories covers both typically feminine coded ones such as sadness and vulnerability, and more masculine coded ones such as anger. Toews on the other hand is taller and often written as physically stronger. He tends to be portrayed as more reserved but also as deeply caring. The relationship between them tends be written as one of equals, albeit one where sometimes Kane needs guidance and care which Toews provides. This relationship dynamic is important when it comes to how Hockey RPF readers and writers addressed Kane's various transgressions in their fan fiction.

[6.3] A key approach to reconciling the drunk, possibly violent Kane shown by sports news website Deadspin (Dickey, 2012) in Madison, WI, with the highly-skilled athlete presented by the Blackhawks and the loveable rogue of fan fiction was a heavy reliance on the redemption narrative that accompanied much of Patrick Kane's team-issued publicity over the 2013 NHL season. Writers took the Madison incident as the starting point of a number of stories showing how Kane matured and mellowed, often helped by the fictional relationship with Jonathan Toews. Several of these are written from Toews' point of view showing his struggle to reconcile the two versions of Kane he sees. One particularly popular work takes the events of May 2012 as the jumping-off point for a fake marriage trope story where Toews marries Kane in order to stop him from being traded to a different team. Real-life events from the 2012 NHL lockout and 2013 season are interwoven with Toews and Kane's fictional marriage to show Kane's character development and growth. By showing a private, often remorseful Kane behind the party boy facade these stories work to rehumanise the star (Busse 2006b) and portray him as a flawed but sympathetic character. In these stories,

Toews both provides care for Kane and challenges him to become more mature and grow as a human being. Toews also often expresses anger and frustration with Kane, and his forgiveness is far from certain: it has be to be earned through hard work and genuine change on Kane's part. Presenting Kane's redemption from Toews's point of view acts as a proxy for the writer and reader in what Busse (2006b) calls an identification fantasy. By allowing one of the characters to show and process the emotions many fans were feeling and directly demand of Kane to "be better" (a "canon" Toews catchphrase), the redemption narrative and fans' renegotiated relationship with Kane as a fan object is anchored in canon. This echoes oddish's comment quoted above: "Where life seemed to be imitating art, and Patrick Kane seemed to be improving himself as a human being, I was selfishly pleased, because it allowed me to enjoy my fiction all the more." The redemption narrative allowed Hockey RPF readers and writers to fit Patrick Kane's perceived transgressions into the complex web of meanings which had accrued for them around the Patrick Kane archive without necessitating a drastic re-evaluation of the relationship of different parts of that archive with each other.

[6.4] Another way to reconcile the contradictory facets of Kane's public image has been to ignore some of them and be very selective in what is included in the collectively constructed canon. The Madison incident, when mentioned, is generally downplayed as a very public drinking spree, leaving out the choking allegations. The third and final strategy has been to attempt to deny or minimise the problematic elements of Kane's image. Stories falling in this category tend to feature outright denials of the choking allegations by the fictionalised Patrick Kane, as well as attacks on the credibility of sports journalism in general and Deadspin - positioned in these stories as a gossip site - in particular. Stories in this tradition juxtapose real or fictional media reports with close third-person narrative from Kane's point of view, highlighting the differences or offering reasons for Kane's publicly known actions which the reader can sympathise with. Because events are depicted from Kane's point of view, this approach, too, works to rehumanise him, though the private person behind the facade shown here tends to be less remorseful and more indignant. Any blame for the incident is externalised onto exploitative media reporting, and the reader is invited to empathise with Kane's frustration and fears of a trade. In a number of these stories, while there is no direct victim blaming (Anderson and Doherty 2008), Kane's responsibility for the Madison events is mitigated, diffused, obscured or eliminated entirely (Ehrlich 2001). Fans' efforts to minimise Kane's transgressions in their fiction in these ways can be seen as a conscious effort to map out the relationship between the public celebrity persona and the private person. They highlight the disjunctures between the star as depicted in the media and the (fictionalised) private person, thereby opening a space for speculation about the real private person behind the star image. Yet rather than simply making the celebrity more relatable (Busse 2006b), these strategies render visible the conflicts and differences between "canon" and "fanon" Kane and highlight the extent to which meanings in fan fiction rely on such conflicts.

[6.5] The rape allegations of the summer of 2015 have significantly complicated the process of canon negotiation around Patrick Kane. This became very evident in the community debates on Tumblr discussed in the previous section, and it is important to note that in the wake of the rape allegations against Patrick Kane the Hockey RPF community, and particularly the community centred around Patrick Kane and the Kane/Toews pairing, experienced significant turnover of membership, with around two thirds of active authors

leaving the community. While new authors joined, particularly after the rape investigation was formally closed, the result was an overall smaller community producing significantly fewer works. The remaining community's fan fiction output, however, also sheds light on intertextual readings of public and official private personas of the celebrity with the RPF character, and thereby on fans' (in)ability to reconcile some parts of the Patrick Kane archive and their own involvement in the fandom. Compared to post-Madison fan fiction, ignoring or finding ways to minimise the rape allegations became very popular strategies in canon construction, with redemption narratives notable through their complete absence both while the rape investigation was ongoing and in the three months after it had been formally concluded (note 2). Instead, other parts of Patrick Kane's public persona and the 2015/16 NHL season are selected and highlighted, such as his record-breaking points streak, the end of it, and his relationships with new teammates. I want to briefly focus on "Streak" and "Streak End" stories and examine the possible meanings they gain when read side by side with the intertextual knowledge of the rape allegations against Patrick Kane.

[6.6] Kane's points streak features in the background of several stories written in the early 2015/16 season, and celebrating hockey successes like this in fan fiction is not unusual. Even relatively minor milestones and statistical coincidences such as Kane and Toews briefly having the same number of goals in their NHL careers are re-interpreted here as milestones in the two characters' relationship. Stories focusing on "The Streak", however, read very differently if one takes intertextual knowledge of the rape allegations into account. Juxtaposed with intertextual knowledge of the controversy over Kane's participation in the Blackhawks' training camp and his being allowed to play for the team before the rape investigation had been concluded, a clear triumph over adversity theme emerges. Additionally, the end of the points streak also prompted several hurt/comfort stories where depictions of Kane range from extremely vulnerable to surprisingly (to his fictional teammates) mature. "Streak end" stories are predominantly written from Toews's point of view, and similarly to post-Madison redemption stories, here too Toews stands in for the writer and reader. The predominant emotions in these stories, however, are not disappointment with Kane but an almost excessive caring and protectiveness. In some stories, the intertextual references to Kane's off-ice issues are both overt and coy at the same time. His teammates' surprise at the maturity of his reactions to the end of the streak is a direct reference to the Madison incident which followed a play-offs loss. Unlike post-Madison stories, however, what is not shown here is the *process* of character development - the reader is presented with a snapshot which only asserts that Kane is more mature and in control of his emotions. For those community members aware of the controversy around Kane, the streak and its end become a convenient stand-in for the rape allegations and other off-ice issues, and Kane can be shown to be both triumphing over adversity and reacting maturely to situations where in the past he has not. He is thereby given an internal life the reader can relate to, and made more human than the celebrity persona (Busse 2006b).

[6.7] What is notable here is that while "The Streak" is used in a number of ways to show a successful and mature Kane in the wake of a challenging summer, the rape allegations themselves are rarely if ever mentioned in fan fiction. On the few occasions when they are referenced, they are briefly but categorically denied by Kane. Unlike the Madison events, of

which there are several fan fiction accounts, the events of early August 2015 are never featured in fan fiction. No humanising, relatable account from Kane's point of view is ever presented, nor are there redemption narratives directly related to the rape allegations. The summer of 2015 has become an unfillable gap in the Patrick Kane fan fiction canon, indicating that even those fans who either believed in Kane's innocence or chose to remain involved in the fandom for other reasons find it difficult to incorporate those elements into canon. For fans aware of the rape allegations, this intertextual knowledge and the meanings created by it - the presence of rape culture as part of the Patrick Kane archive - overshadow the Patrick Kane canon. While they are still able to derive other meanings and pleasures from reading and writing fiction about Kane, the absence of stories which address the rape allegations directly indicates that even among this group there are challenges when it comes to reconciling the allegations about the private person with a public persona or a fictionalised RPF character.

7. Conclusion

[7.1] The crisis in legitimacy the Hockey RPF community faced in the wake of the rape allegations against Patrick Kane illustrates the complex relationship between the different textual constructions of the celebrity fan object and fan fiction character in RPF. Both fans arguing for abandoning Kane as a fan object and those seeking to justify continued involvement in the fandom strongly relied on arguments which support a "side by side reading" view of meaning-making in RPF. Not only the public persona of the celebrity but also their official private persona and any glimpses afforded at an imagined authentic self strongly inform the fan fiction character through both similarities and differences, and their actions clearly become part of the "archive" accumulating around the RPF character. The Patrick Kane archive was extended beyond the actions of and the allegations against Kane himself, as Hockey RPF fans made use of their knowledge of rape culture and some community members' personal experiences of sexual assault in their meaning-making processes through an intertextuality in the second degree. These conflicts and extensions of the archive were also reflected in the community's fan works output, where the period of the rape allegations and investigation became an unfillable gap in the RPF canon: no account of the rape allegations from Kane's point of view is ever offered. This indicates that while RPF may "shape and alter the star" (Busse 2006b), there are limits to such shaping and altering, imposed by the process of side by side reading integral to meaning-making within fanfiction. Combined with the mass exodus from the fandom of those fans who saw continued involvement with Kane as a fan object as reproducing rape culture, this unfillable gap indicates that at a point of crisis, the public and official private personas of the star are collapsed with the glimpses of the real private person, imposing meanings which overwhelm any collectively constructed RPF character.

8. Notes:

1. The data for this paper is drawn primarily from two sources: Hockey RPF works posted to the Archive or Our Own, and posts by members of the Hockey RPF community on Tumblr, drawn predominantly from my personal networks within this community and covering the period from the rape allegations against Kane first

becoming public to the formal closure of the criminal investigation. The use of verbatim quotes from such posts in this paper is limited in order to minimise the risk of individual discussion contributors being traced through the use of search engines. Where quotes have been used, they have been pseudonymised.

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