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# 'The Bonds of Teammates' An Exploration of Men's Friendships Between Gay and Heterosexual Athletes

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‘The Bonds of Teammates’

An Exploration of Men’s Friendships Between Gay and Heterosexual Athletes

A thesis presented by

Brenner Green

to the Department of Psychology

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

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## **Abstract**

This study examined friendships between gay male athletes and their heterosexual teammates. Six gay college athletes from various athletic and geographical backgrounds, recruited through a gay sports website and a gay sports documentary, were interviewed. These athletes identified a straight teammate and friend for additional interviewing. Both athletes answered questions about their mutual friendship. The interviews were analyzed through grounded analysis to identify seven “zones of intimacy” and five other unique friendship themes. These intimacy zones and friendship themes were investigated for homosocial patterns, relationship reciprocity, and self-disclosure, among other themes. Despite sports culture’s homophobia, these friendships exhibit as much intimacy, if not more, than friendships between two heterosexual teammates.

## **Dedication**

The 'bonds of teammates' are especially strong within my own cross-country and track teams at Connecticut College. My friendships with my teammates are very intimate and special to me. My teammates have all accepted me as an openly gay athlete and treat me with the respect and friendship that every teammate deserves. I dedicate this study to them, and especially to Dan, Doug, and Colin who have been the best teammates and friends for our four years together at Connecticut College.

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Many thanks to all of the participants in the present study who offered their time and dedication to the interviews. Without them, of course, this thesis would not be possible.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my parents and my brother, Jeremy, whose love and support provides me with strength and comfort

Finally, I would like to thank my own teammates who have inspired this project. I have developed intimate and positive friendships with all of my teammates on the Connecticut College men's cross-country and track and field teams. I value these bonds that are not only strong, but also lasting. Thank you.

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“Bromance” may be underlined in red when typed on a Word document (and in fact was in this paper), but open a copy of the *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (2011) and one can find the recently coined word used to describe a close nonsexual relationship between men. This new word was added to the dictionary in August 2011 after frequent usage around the U.S., especially in the media, to refer to friendships between celebrities such as Ben Affleck and Matt Damon, George Clooney and Brad Pitt, and Justin Bobby and Spencer Pratt (MTV reality TV stars) (O’Toole, 2011). Bromances are popular in recent films as well, including *Wedding Crashers*, *Superbad*, and *I Love You, Man*. Although the word is gaining popularity, the concept itself is nothing new. Still, there is very little psychological research to analyze, explain, or document men’s friendships. Furthermore, neither research nor the word “bromance” itself offers much insight about such relationships when one of the men is straight and another is gay. In fact, popular usage of the concept implies the heterosexuality of both men in a “bromance.”

In this thesis, I go beyond the media’s sometimes humorous and sometimes homophobic notions of men’s friendship to look more deeply at the under-studied phenomenon of friendship between gay and straight men. In particular, I focus on a domain of society in which homosexuality has often been hidden or shunned – high school and college athletics. As our culture slowly moves toward a greater acknowledgement and acceptance of homosexuality, it is critical to examine how this trend has affected the



relationships among gay athletes and their heterosexual teammates. The purpose of the current study was to interview gay college athletes and ask them to identify a straight teammate and friend who might also be willing to be interviewed. Both athletes answered a series of questions about their experience of being teammates and developing a friendship. The goal was to learn more about the nature of these friendships, how they are similar to and different than other friendships between men, and what unique dynamics the friendships might have due to the lingering problems of homophobia and prejudice.

### **History of Homoeroticism in Athletics**

The recorded history of men's friendships, sexuality, and sports begins in Ancient Greece circa 700 B.C. with the creation of *gymnikos agon*, "nude competitions" (Miller, 2004). According to Miller (2004), modern day athletics originated as nude activities in Ancient Greece. Furthermore, the word *gymnasion*, which we now refer to as *gymnasium*, was literally a place for nudity, a place for training the nude body as well as the mind. In the *gymnasion*, older men would pursue younger athletes and even touch them during nude wrestling (Dover, 1978). Nude competitions evolved into athletics. A dimension of sexuality and desire was common in the homosocial environment of early athletic competitions. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Freud considered sports to be a substitution for sex; sports "push sexual activity back upon its autoerotic components" (Scanlon, 2002, p. 200). Scanlon (2002), who wrote about eros in Greek athletics, stated that the ancient Greeks had a special

appreciation for physical beauty, which may have translated into the association of athletic nudity with beauty.

According to both Scanlon (2002) and Miller (2004), this association of nude athletics and physical beauty caused Greek male athletes to develop feelings of admiration and even sexual desire for one another. Inscriptions of personal names on the entrance to the fourth-century stadium at Nemea are followed by the adjectives “beautiful” and “handsome,” which suggest admiration for fellow athletes (Scanlon, 2002). In exploring this unique culture of nude athletics in ancient Greece, it is important to consider how men’s friendships evolved among athletes in the context of homoeroticism. This history of sports and sexuality helps us to understand both the progression of relationships between male athletes and teammates as well as the evolution of homoeroticism into homophobia in the homosocial world of sports.

The bonds of intimacy between men transcend the centuries and travel from one homosocial sphere and/or medium to another. The Greek ideal of intimate friendship is paralleled by the relationships among knights of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Middle Ages. According to Zeikowitz (2003), the “ideal chivalric bond between two knights is informed by mutual love and affection as well as concern for each other’s security and well-being” (p. 32). Homoerotic relations between two knights were manifested in knighting rituals, in which an older and experienced knight dressed a naked novice knight, as well as in their everyday activities. Zeikowitz (2003) also uncovered medieval texts that emphasize homoeroticism and desire between men in the 14<sup>th</sup> century chivalry

code. His example of the Green Knight from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* shows that the narrator overtly admires the physique of the knight, almost "touching him" in his sensual observations of his physical qualities. The narrator's observations demonstrate the male-male gaze associated with chivalric desire. In other words, novice knights desired the bodies and actions of more experienced knights in order to become better knights. This relationship between knights is similar to that of athletes, as both groups admire the physique of both comrades and opponents within their groups.

Camaraderie is an important form of companionship between men. Camaraderie is a type of brotherhood that exists in many homosocial groups including athletics and the military. In medieval history, the camaraderie between knights established strong friendships among men, friendships that were rooted in homoeroticism and physical admiration. Although the history of these friendships is traceable through centuries of European texts and cultures, one can find this current in American men's expression of the ideology of masculine camaraderie during the formation of the American republic in the late 1700s. George Washington was a "visionary" who instilled values of loving brotherhood into republican citizenship in the 1780s and 1790s (Godbeer, 2009). Washington encouraged strong, intimate, and loving bonds among the men in the Continental Army; in his words, "friendship," personal "attachment," and "sentiments of the purest affection" were linked significantly to "love to our country" (Godbeer, 2009, p. 75). Therefore, affectionate relationships existed among the soldiers during the revolutionary

period. Godbeer (2009) also has analyzed myriad journal entries and letters between young men growing up in revolutionary America and has found that the friendships between these men are *more* than just platonic as they entail physical intimacy and explicit expression of love. In one letter from a man named Stith Mead to his friend John Kobler, Mead expressed his love for his friend in the form of a poem:

Although we ride so far apart,  
I love you in my very heart.  
I've often thought, if I could be  
A pattern as in you I see,  
I'd often feel [God's] spirit beam  
And catch hold of the living stream.  
O could I see your solemn face,  
I'd take you in my arms embrace (Godbeer, 2009, p. 83).

This poem reveals explicit love between the men (“I love you in my very heart”) as well as physical intimacy between the friends (“I'd take you in my arm's embrace”). This intimate brotherhood and camaraderie between men was the ideal form of socialization between men during the formation of the U.S. as a country.

The question arises whether or not this camaraderie was seen as gay. However, sexual orientation is anachronistic to this revolutionary period of the 1790s. Therefore, this love between men was not considered to be “homosexual” or “gay.” The only sin would exist if men had sex together, an

act labeled as “sodomy.” As sexual acts were not necessarily a component of these men’s friendships, expressive emotionality and physical intimacy between male friends were both accepted and encouraged.

Chivalry and intimate male friendships continued from the American colonial period into the Victorian era of the late 1800s. Masculine desire was a salient theme in Victorian art and literature, and it is prominent in works by renowned writers such as Tennyson and Wilde (Dellamora, 1990). These works focus on the significance of men’s friendships and men’s desire for the male body. Statues of the Greek adolescent male athlete were the epitome of beauty during this period, obvious objects of men’s desire. The admiration and desire for this image of beauty is shown beautifully in Housman’s 1896 poem *To an Athlete Dying Young*. The poem describes the glory a young runner has achieved, the admiration his townspeople had for him when they carried him on their shoulders on the day he won a race, and the admiration they still had for him when they carried his coffin to the cemetery on the day of his funeral. The poem ends with the following stanza:

And round that early-laurelled head□  
Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead,  
And find unwithered on its curls□

The garland briefer than a girl's (Housman, 1971 p. 32).

Efrati (2002) analyzed this poem as a homoerotic piece of Victorian literature. Her analysis focused on the poem’s concept of ideal beauty: this young athlete who dies in his prime body after athletic glory and with victory. The poem

suggests that the athlete was a “smart lad” for dying before his fame died. Furthermore, the poem reflects Housman’s, and other Victorian men’s, ideal of beauty, which was the Greek image of a young man, well-shaped and pure in virtue (Efrati, 2002).

Housman was not the first author during the Victorian era to write about themes of men’s desire, male beauty, and male companionship. In fact, there was a movement that started at Oxford University in the 1850s and lasted for approximately 30 years, where male homosociality flourished and college life was a brotherhood of men living a shared life with common interests (Dowling, 1994). During this period of intense homosociality, Pater and Symonds created a movement at the university that redefined masculinity and male friendship (Dowling, 1994). Influenced by the works of Plato on male love and the Greek aestheticism that they learned in their Classics courses, Pater, Symonds, and other members of their Old Mortality Essay Society began to write extensively on men’s desire and friendship (Dellamora, 1990).

Those men rejected hegemonic masculinity, which is traditional masculinity rooted in toughness, aggression, and heterosexuality, and they promoted their “new chivalry,” which proposed man-to-man relations as a solution to ending overpopulation and augmenting beauty (Dellamora, 1990). In his essay on “the new chivalry,” Kains-Jackson wrote: “intimacy of constant companionship, of physical and personal knowledge is also a power of help and aid which cannot be put into words” (1894, as cited in Dellamora, 1990, p. 158). Although this “new chivalry,” which is now considered to be

homosexuality, has never been accepted to the degree that the men of Victorian Oxford had hoped, the homosocial structure of men's strong bonds and friendships exists today in high school and college sports. Male athletes spend a lot of time together on and off the field, forming friendships that mirror those shared among men of the Victorian era, the revolutionary period, the medieval times, and beyond. Nevertheless, these friendships are framed in a homosocial context.

Around the same time Symonds and Pater were examining homosocial desire among men, the field of sexology emerged, mainly as a subspecialty of forensic psychiatry. Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902) is considered to be the pioneer of sexology, whose *Psychopathia Sexualis* reflects his observations of his clients and prison inmates who had a variety of sexual perversions categorized and defined by Krafft-Ebing (Duggan, 2000). These sexual perversions were considered by Krafft-Ebing and his colleagues to be immoral, criminal, and pathological. The work of Krafft-Ebing inspired Karl Ulrichs (1825-1895) to invent a unique category of sexual perversion of man-man love and defined its practitioners as Urnings; Urnings were people with male bodies and female psyches (Duggan, 2000). Language has evolved from "urning" to "homosexual" and "gay," but with the categorization of homosexuality, the homosociality already in existence was now viewed with suspicion. In other words, with this new pathological category of homosexuality, men who shared homosocial bonds with other men, were suspected of being gay themselves.

Sedgwick (1985) proposed a theory of desire, in which desire between men is expressed indirectly, mediated by a woman. In other words, men will form relationships with women in order to impress their male peers and friends. Thus, women become pawns in the men's game for approval and admiration from/for one another. Here, Sedgwick, coined the terms "homosocial" and "male homosocial desire" to challenge the idea that homo-, hetero-, and bisexual men could easily be distinguished from each other, because these men all can share intimate bonds and erotic tendencies. Thus, a sports team is a "homosocial" environment where intimate bonds and friendships can exist among teammates. If an openly gay athlete exists on the team, he either threatens this fragile line between homosociality and heterosexuality, or he "entices" his teammates. If he is seen as a threat, he is often met with homophobia and bullying from his teammates, but if he entices his teammates with his sexuality, he may actually initiate a more open display of intimate and sexual gestures/desires among his teammates. An athlete's identification as gay is thus either a barrier or a conduit to intimacy between men/heterosexual teammates.

### **Gay Athletes**

To understand the relationships between gay male athletes and their straight teammates, it is important first to review the context of gay men's existence and experiences in athletics. Whereas there has heretofore been no professional athlete who was openly gay during his professional career, openly gay men do compete on both the high school and collegiate levels. In the past



decade, research has been conducted on gay athletes' motivation to play sports, on their relationships with teammates and coaches, and on their overall experiences as gay athletes. Research has also been conducted on how straight athletes and coaches perceive gay athletes. The following is a comprehensive review of recent research on gay male athletes.

Research on gay athletes originated in the Netherlands in the 1990s. Hekma (1998) interviewed and surveyed 200 gay and bisexual male athletes about their experiences in organized sports in the Netherlands. Only 8 of the men came out to all of their teammates and 33 of the men to some of their teammates, which means that over 79% of the participants had not come out to any of their teammates. Furthermore, Hekma (1998) found that, not only did these men hide their sexual orientation, but they also internalized the homophobia in sports; one man even said that he did not blame straight athletes for beating up gay athletes if the gay athletes behaved with effeminate and flamboyant mannerisms. Recently, several Dutch male adolescents reported that they "pass" as straight only in the environment of sports, but are completely out in all other life domains (Green, 2011). These studies on gay male athletes in the Netherlands show that, even in a tolerant and progressive nation, gay men and boys still struggle to compete openly in athletics.

Since Hekma's (1998) research was published, several studies were conducted in the United States to study American gay male athletes. Zamboni, Crawford, and Carrico (2008) examined sports motivation among gay and bisexual men and found that gay male athletes report higher levels of intrinsic

motivation than extrinsic motivation. In other words, gay men participate in sports for their own enjoyment and satisfaction rather than for the external rewards or benefits. Zamboni et al. (2008) also reported that higher intrinsic levels of motivation were associated with higher levels of traditional masculinity, which suggests that gay male athletes may be motivated to participate in sports to seem more masculine. As homosexuality is usually equated with femininity, a motivation to be masculine might help to explain why the men from Hekma's (1998) study and Green's (2011) study hid their sexual orientation during their participation in sports. When gay men compete openly in sports, they may attempt to protect their masculinity.

Anderson (2002) conducted the first ever study of openly gay male athletes in mainstream, educationally based sports. His research showed that, although they were not verbally or physically harassed by their teammates about their sexuality, the gay athletes in the study were among the best athletes on their teams. Therefore, Anderson (2002) concluded that "the ability to come out was dependent on maintaining high sporting, and therefore high masculine, capital" (p. 251). Billy Bean, a former Major League baseball player, who came out after his professional athletic career, affirmed that "The simple truth is that for a player to be open, he's going to have to be better than his peers" (Bean, 2003, p. 235). Other results of Anderson's (2002) study indicate that the majority of gay athletes participate in individual sports (e.g., swimming, running, tennis) rather than contact sports (e.g., football, hockey, basketball), and that one-half of the participants played on a team where a

“don’t ask, don’t tell” culture existed that silenced the voices of gay men.

These results support the previous research on gay athletes that indicates that gay athletes rarely come out to their sports teams, but, when they do, they often exhibit a high level of masculinity on their teams.

Anderson later replicated his earlier study with a new cohort of gay athletes. He was interested to see whether the climate of educationally based sport teams had changed for gay male athletes. Anderson (2011) pioneered a new theory of masculinity to help explain the cultural decline of *homophobia*, the fear men maintain of being socially perceived as gay: His theory, called “inclusive masculinity theory,” maintains that hegemonic masculinity (i.e., the traditional masculine gender role) is a product of homophobic cultures, so when homophobia declines in a society, acceptance of multiple masculinities increases. Consequently, Anderson (2011) hypothesized that his inclusive masculinity theory would account for differences between the 2002 and 2010 cohorts of gay male athletes.

Indeed, Anderson’s (2011) study on a more diverse sample of gay male athletes in both individual and contact sports showed that these athletes had more accepting and less homophobic teammates than did the athletes in the earlier (2002) cohort. Furthermore, all but 2 of the 26 athletes from the recent cohort were on teams that talked openly about sexual orientation, a clear sign of progress from the “don’t ask, don’t tell” culture of the 2002 teams (Anderson, 2011). Finally, Anderson (2011) found that only 6 of the 26 men he interviewed reported being among the top athletes on their teams, which

shows that, since his earlier study, fewer gay athletes had to achieve the highest standard on their team in order to participate openly. The inclusive masculinity theory maintains that these positive changes in the experiences of gay male athletes in high school and collegiate sports are a product of a decline in societal and cultural homophobia. With the successes of the gay and lesbian rights movement and as more people, including celebrities, come out, homophobia has decreased, which allows for more acceptance of gay people, including gay athletes.

Not many studies have been done specifically to examine straight individuals' perceptions of gay and lesbian athletes. However, Wolf-Wendel, Toma, and Morphew (2001) interviewed a myriad of straight athletes, coaches, and athletic administrators from five American college campuses about their perceptions of gay and lesbian athletes. Overall, the analyses of the interviews indicate hostility to gay men and lesbians on nearly all teams and at all the study sites. It was common for coaches and athletic directors to negate the presence of gay athletes on their teams and/or athletic programs, and it was common for the straight student-athletes to look beyond a teammate's sexual orientation as long as he or she was an asset to the team (Wolf-Wendel et al., 2001). These results support Anderson's (2002) theme of the importance of high sporting and high masculine capital in men's sports.

To summarize the research on gay athletes, it appears that gay men are still struggling to find a voice in athletics. Studies conducted in the past decade show that gay men are motivated to play sports and to be out in sports

when they are among the best players on their teams. However, when they are among the strongest competitors in their sport, gay athletes usually do not talk about their sexual orientation with their teammates. Furthermore, the research indicates that student-athletes, coaches, and athletic directors have overall negative and hostile attitudes towards gay athletes. Anderson's (2011) study is the only one that presents generally positive experiences of gay male athletes. Although the results of his research indicate that gay men are becoming accepted in sports to the point where they can even consider themselves "average" players on their teams, there is still much more room for progress in athletic equality.

### **Identity Development and Personal Narratives of Gay Athletes**

The previous research on gay athletes and their identities employed quantitative methods and data analysis. However, in order to learn more about the subjective experience of gay athletes, life stories and personal narratives can be used to supplement quantitative data. By interviewing gay athletes and collecting their personal narratives, a researcher can gain valuable information about how these individuals narrate and construct their homosexual identity.

Schacter (2004) provided some insight into the narrative analysis of personal stories through his examination of a potentially conflictual identity issue among modern Orthodox Jewish young adults (i.e., their religious vs. sexual identity). The personal narratives of these young Jewish participants revealed important themes about how individuals configure conflicting

identifications in the process of identity formation: They either a) choose to express one identity and suppress the other, b) assimilate the identities so that they are no longer conflicting, c) keep both identities in parallel rather than reject either, or d) keep both identities for the thrill of dissonance between identities (Schacter, 2004). These identity configurations would be interesting to explore with gay athletes. An examination of gay athletes' personal narratives may reveal similar themes of configuring both a gay identity and an athlete identity.

Plummer (1995) identified the “coming out” story as another discourse for the construction of identity and identity configuration. The coming out story is a dominant life narrative for gay men and lesbians; this story is a Western genre of story-telling that has certain elements: childhood as an unhappy time, the discovery of being gay, meeting other gay men and lesbians, and achieving a sense of gay identity (Plummer, 1995). The coming out story also produces the evolution of the gay identity, a four stage process of sensitization, signification, sub-culturalization, and stabilization (Plummer, 1995). These stages are marked first by feelings of sexual difference, then the confrontation of known stigma attached to the emerging identity, followed by a coming to terms with the gay identity, and then stable acceptance and self-disclosure of that identity. It is important to treat the coming out story as a narrative genre so that researchers can examine how gay athletes narrate and construct their gay identity formation as it intersects with their formation of an athlete identity.

The relationships between gay athletes and their teammates are likely to have a major impact on the identity development of these athletes. These friendships are rooted in the themes of agency and communion, both of which are integral to one's development and expression of identity (McAdams, Kaplan, Machado, & Huang, 2001). Agency is one's sense of independence and autonomy; it also relates to achievement, status, and empowerment, ideals and values associated with athletics (Singer, 1997). Communion is a more interdependent aspect of identity that manifests itself in love, friendships, and community (Singer, 1997). In athletics, communion is expressed in the intimate bonds between teammates and between teams and coaches. This communion is similar to the camaraderie among knights in the medieval ages and among American men during the 1700s (Godbeer, 2009; Zeikowitz, 2003).

Former Major League baseball player Billy Bean's identity as a gay athlete was formed and shaped as he compared himself to straight athletes. His autobiography, a perfect example of Plummer's (1995) coming out story genre, explores the theme of agency and self-mastery in comparison to straight teammates:

*It's you against him, and you're better,* was the guiding philosophy of my early days as an athlete. But the reality of my big-league career was more like *It's you against yourself, and you both lose...* I spent far too much time wondering whether I measured up to the guys around me, whether I could match their toughness, ferocious competitiveness, and even their masculinity. From my earliest days on

the playing fields of Southern California, my coaches and teammates equated homosexuality with weakness and failure...With the dawning realization in my twenties that I was gay, I began to internalize this equation. When I'd strike out or roll over on a fast-ball, tapping a weak grounder to second, I berated myself on my way back to the dugout.

*You're a fucking pussy. Get some balls. Swing the bat like a man!*

(Bean, 2003, p. 229).

The themes of agency and communion common in life narratives interact here to shape Bean's identity as an (gay) athlete. The other athletes' homophobia caused Bean to internalize homophobia, which affected his agency and identity as an athlete. Bean's narrative here is also important as it highlights his enduring sense of self-concept. Singer (1997) equated individuals' life story with their identity. By telling his life story, Bean is revealing not only to others, but also to *himself*, who he is. Evident in Bean's narrative is how important other athletes' identities, opinions, and behaviors were in shaping his own self-concept and identity as a gay athlete.

Identity formation as a gay athlete is reflected in other coming out narratives of gay athletes. For example, Gough (2007) analyzed Internet coming out stories of gay athletes in order to examine common themes in the athletes' experiences. Two themes common to their identity development emerged. The first, *sport as distraction from sexuality*, suggests that gay athletes hide their gay identity behind sports, as sports are viewed as normal, masculine, and heterosexual. Thus, if gay athletes form close friendships with



straight teammates, their friendships might mask the homosexuality of the gay athletes. The second theme that Gough (2007) identified as evident in these athletes' coming out stories is *invisibility and isolation within sport*. The athletes found it difficult to reconcile a gay and an athletic identity due to the heterosexism of athletics and the homophobia of their teammates. The events that led up to the athlete's self-disclosure to his teammates were usually stressful, but the results documented themes of support, loyalty, and interest. In fact, some of these narratives indicate that the straight teammates used playful jokes and teasing to express support of the gay athlete's sexual orientation: "My teammates even joke about my being gay now, which definitely shows me that they're comfortable with it and accept it" (Gough, 2007, p. 168). Joking provides an outlet for talking about sexual orientation in sport and reinforces intimate bonds and friendships between gay and straight teammates.

Bean's relationships with his teammates in particular were very important to him. Although he was not out when he played professionally with them, his friendships with his teammates were vital:

Trevor cared so little about my homosexuality that he barely made mention of it when he, Brad, and I got together for a reunion dinner in Del Mar. "The next time you're in town, dude, let's go surfing," he suggested. "Just like the old days." *Dude, let's go surfing*. That simple sentence was music to my ears, the reassurance that nothing really changed in the minds of the ballplayers I respected, these icons of

masculinity and traditional values... The bonds of teammates, I was learning, were far stronger than prejudice. (Bean, 2003, p.217)

The last line of this narrative is especially powerful and important. Bean explained that the bonds of teammates transcended homophobia. Teammates have strong, intimate friendships based on the foundations of camaraderie and competition in athletics. This vivid account of Bean's relationships with his teammates indicates that friendships between gay athletes and straight athletes, or among athletes in general, are vital to an athlete's sense of communion and connection, but, at the same time, form a backdrop to self-acceptance that nurtures a sense of agency and continued self-development.

### **Men's Friendships of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

We see them playing video games together, shooting hoops outside, watching television. Male friends are everywhere and do many things together, yet we still know little about their friendships. According to Kimmel (2008), "a male friend can keep a guy sane" (p. 278). Kimmel further characterized men's friendships as "...the biggest risk a guy can take. It means being strong enough to show vulnerability, independent enough to brave social ostracism, courageous enough to trust another. A male friend reminds you that you are a man; he validates your gender identity" (p. 278). Therefore, a compromise in masculinity must exist in order to establish and maintain friendships: It entails expressing vulnerability in order to have one's gender identity validated. Walker's (1994) research confirmed that, although intimate friendships exist between men, such close friendships are rare; the typical

friendship between two men involves competition and the struggle to express feelings to one another. Both competition and the concept of “the sturdy oak” are common values associated with masculine ideology (David & Brannon, 1976). If one of the other values of traditional masculinity is *antifemininity*, which can manifest into *homophobia* (Kilmartin, 2010), then gay men would be considered to be feminine, and their values and friendships should be different than those of the straight men studied by Walker and Kimmel.

Friendships between gay men tend to redefine the traditional masculine gender roles that are maintained and affirmed in heterosexual men’s friendships. Nardi (1999), an expert on gay men’s friendships, has suggested that gay men exhibit more disclosing and emotional interactions with other men than straight men do, which contradicts the limitations of David and Brannon’s (1976) “sturdy oak” aspect of the masculine gender role. For gay men, friendships also embrace a political ideology that friends are family and friends are survival (Nardi, 1999). These intimate and emotional friendships unite gay men to challenge and/or endure heterosexist politics and ideologies. Gay men’s friendships involve strong emotional connections that also unite gay men in identity development, activism, and, especially in the 1980s and early 1990s, even social support in the face of AIDS (Nardi, 1999). In comparison to heterosexual men’s friendships, gay men’s friendships are more likely to allow traditional masculine gender roles to be bent or broken altogether. Engaging in traditionally feminine activities, such as shopping, for example, is more acceptable for gay male friends, and offering emotional

support for one another is also more common than in straight men's friendships.

The previous research by social psychologists on gender and masculinity presents trends in specific kinds of men's friendships. Not all heterosexual men have emotionless friendships, and not all gay men form families together. Masculinity and friendship are complex. In fact, friendships do not exist exclusively between heterosexual men and between gay men. Relationships also occur between gay men and straight men. These friendships exhibit qualities and values similar to those found in any friendship. Price (1999) interviewed 56 gay and straight male friends and discovered that close friendships between gay men and straight men resemble women's friendships and gay men's friendships more than they do heterosexual men's friendships or friendships between men and women (i.e., cross-sex friendships). These friendships usually involve the strong emotional support and affection found in most friendships between women and friendships between men and women, but unlike cross-sex friendships, where women offer more emotional support to their male friends and put more into the friendship than the men do, the gay men and straight men value their friendship equally. Men in these friendships also do many activities together, including sports.

Sports are outlets for emotions; they are often about expressing emotion verbally and physically. West (1996) explained that sports are the one area in a man's life where he can safely release built up emotion and pressure. Men are allowed to get into big arguments over whether the Patriots or the

Giants will win, or what kind of offense is best for the Lakers. When a team wins a championship, the players and fans can be seen laughing, crying, and hugging each other. Steinfeldt, Wong, Hagan, and Hoag (2011) compared football players' differences in restrictive affectionate behavior between men (RABBM) with their teammates and RABBM with their other male friends. This study included 153 male football players from two universities. These participants responded to the Gender Role Conflict Scale (GRCS), which contains 37 items that measure the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral consequences associated with masculine gender role socialization. Participants also responded to the Satisfaction With Life Scale, which was used to measure their overall life satisfaction. Finally participants were asked two open-ended questions: (a) Are there differences between how you express your emotions within the environment of football and how you express your emotions in your life outside of football? Please give some examples; and (b) Are there differences between how you express your affection for your teammates and how you express your affection for men in your life outside of football? Please give some examples (Steinfeldt et al., 2011).

Quantitative results from this study show that, when scores on the restricted affectionate behavior between men (RABBM) subscale of the GRCS is lower for college football players with their teammates, their life satisfaction is higher (Steinfeldt et al., 2011). However, this relationship does not exist for the players' male friends in other life domains outside of football; this finding suggests that sport is a unique space where men can show emotion and

affection for other men. The answers to the qualitative questions also demonstrated that these college football players found more freedom to be emotionally expressive and affectionate with other men in the sports environment than outside it (Steinfeldt et al., 2011). This study suggests that men have lower GRC in sports than in other life domains. Hence, the homosocial environment of sports allows for intimate and emotional friendships to form between men.

Griffin (1998) explained that, in athletics, men can openly express physical affection and love for other men because teammates spend an enormous amount of time together, especially in settings that suggest a high degree of physical closeness or nudity, such as locker rooms, hotel rooms, showers, and whirlpool baths. Furthermore, Griffin (1998) argued that, in the social context of athletics, men can “admire other men’s bodies and their physical accomplishments openly without arousing suspicions about their heterosexuality” (p. 22). This homoerotic atmosphere mirrors the homoeroticism in the knights’ chivalric code of the Medieval times and that of the men from Oxford in the Victorian period. Sedgwick’s (1985) supports Griffin’s point that homophobia is used to mask homosocial love, intimacy, and bonding between men, especially in the environment of sports.

### **The Present Study**

Although the homosocial structure of sports allows for the formation of intimate friendships between men, no research has yet been done on the formation and nature of friendships between gay and straight teammates.

Gough 's (2007) work offers some insight into positive relationships between gay athletes and their teammates in high school sports, but no detailed or personal accounts of these friendships exist beyond that study. The present qualitative study is the first examination of how friendships between gay and straight teammates develop and maintain meaningful bonds between the athletes. It was expected that these friendships would be more intimate and free in emotional expression than those between two heterosexual teammates.

In addition, it was hypothesized that these friendships would serve both agentic and communal purposes to improve the identities, life perspectives, and satisfaction of the athletes, and also connect them to their team and sport. It was also hypothesized that friendship with a gay athlete would change the negative beliefs a straight athlete initially might have had towards gay men. Thus, the straight teammate would have a more accepting and open-minded identity than he did before he had a gay teammate/friend.

In order to explore these unique friendships in the most candid and unbiased manner, each member of the friendship dyad was interviewed separately. It was hypothesized that, in these separate interviews, similar stories, experiences, details, emotions, and feelings would appear in both the interview with the gay athlete and the interview with the straight athlete. Thus, these friendships would be egalitarian; each teammate would contribute equally to the friendship, sharing equally their emotions and affection for/with each other. Their bond with each other would produce reports of the friendship that provide a common portrait of acceptance and respect.

## Method

### Participants

Four dyads of former college male athletes (age range: 21-24 years) were recruited through <http://www.outsports.com>. In each dyad, one participant identified as gay, and the other participant identified as straight/heterosexual. One dyad was recruited from the documentary *Out for the Long Run* and the last dyad was recruited from a small liberal arts college in New England. All 12 participants identify as White. Table 1 provides a visual description of these 12 participants and separate dyads. Brief descriptions of these dyads, using pseudonyms for the names of the participants are as follows.

**James and Rick.** James, 21-years-old at the time of his interview, identifies as gay. At the time of his interview, he was a senior member of his Division III hockey team for a small liberal arts school in New England. James is from Wichita. His best friend and teammate, Rick, was 22-years-old at the time of his interview. Rick is from Chicago and identifies as straight. He was also a senior captain of the hockey team at the time of the interview.

**Ben and Ethan.** Ben, 23-years-old at the time of his interview, identifies as gay. He is a graduate of a small liberal arts college in Maine, where he was the captain of his Division III lacrosse team. Ben is originally from Needham, Massachusetts. His friend and teammate, Ethan, was also 23-years-old at the time of his interview. Ethan is from Medfield, Massachusetts and identifies as straight.



**Bradford and Thomas.** Bradford, 23-years-old at the time of his interview, identifies as gay. He is a graduate of a university in Maryland, where he competed as a diver for a Division I program. Bradford is from Los Angeles. His friend and teammate, Thomas, was 24-years old at the time of his interview. Thomas is from Westminster, Maryland and identifies as straight. While Bradford dived for the team, Thomas competed in the swimming events.

**Seth and Stephen.** Seth, 23-years old at the time of the interview, identifies as gay. He is a graduate student at a small university in Wisconsin, where he used to compete as a Division III tennis player. Seth is also from Wisconsin. Seth's teammate and friend, Stephen, from Wisconsin as well, was 24-years-old at the time of the interview. Stephen identifies as straight and is also from Wisconsin. When they were on the team together, Seth and Stephen were co-captains.

**Brendan and Henry.** Brendan, 20-years-old at the time of the interview, identifies as gay. He attends a university in New York where he competes on the school's Division I soccer team. Brendan is originally from Ottawa. His close friend and teammate, Henry, was also 20-years-old at the time of the interview. Born and raised in Missouri, Henry identifies as straight. Both Brendan and Henry were in their junior year of college at the time of their interviews.

**Larry and Matt.** Larry, 21-years-old at the time of the interview, identifies as gay. He is a graduate of a university in Boston where he

competed on the school's Division I rowing team. Larry is originally from Seattle. His friend and teammate, Matt, was 22-years-old at the time of the interview and identifies as straight. Matt is originally from upstate New York. When Matt was a senior, he and Larry served as co-captains of their rowing team.

Table 1 presents the previous information about the 6 six dyads. This table should serve as a scorecard when reading the results section.

Table 1

*Descriptive Data about the Six Dyads*

Dyad (n=6)	Gay Athlete	Straight Athlete	College	Sport
James and Rick	James	Rick	Small liberal arts, New England	Hockey, Division III
Ben and Ethan	Ben	Ethan	Small liberal arts, New England	Lacrosse, Division III
Bradford and Thomas	Bradford	Thomas	University in Maryland	Swimming and Diving, Division I
Seth and Stephen	Seth	Stephen	University in Wisconsin	Tennis, Division III
Brendan and Henry	Brendan	Henry	University in New York	Soccer, Division I
Larry and Matt	Larry	Matt	University in New England	Rowing, Division I

## **Measures**

**Recruitment text (see Appendix A).** Each gay-identified athlete received a recruitment text before he volunteered to participate in the research. The recruitment text informed participants that the study was about friendships between gay male athletes and their heterosexual teammates. This recruitment text was posted with permission of the website's founder on <http://www.outsports.com>. When the gay athlete identified a close straight teammate, he passed the text on to the teammate so that the straight-identified teammate could learn about the research project without having had his personal contact information communicated to me. The wording of the text was chosen to provide a very clear explanation of what the research interest was and how each of the participants in each dyad could provide a meaningful contribution to the research.

**Interview guide for gay men (see Appendix B).** The gay men in the study answered questions about their friendships with their straight teammates. Questions were based on those in the interview guide developed by Price (1999). As Price did not look specifically at the role of athletics in the men's friendships, additional questions focused more on this topic. Questions were divided into three categories: Introduction, Friendship, and Coming Out. The introduction was biographical and demographical information. Questions on friendship focused on the athlete's best and worst times with his teammate, what he likes about his teammate, what he dislikes about his teammate, and whether they exchange emotions and affection with each other. The coming out questions referred to when and how the gay athlete's coming

out affected his team and his teammate. Specific emphasis was placed on the difference between the friendship with the straight teammate and friendships between other teammates. These questions served only as a guide for the interview; new questions were added as interviews developed, and some questions in the guide were omitted depending on the direction of the conversation.

**Interview guide for straight men (see Appendix C).** The straight men in the study answered questions about their friendships with their gay teammates. Questions were based on those in the interview guide developed by Price (1999). As Price did not look specifically at the role of athletics in the men's friendships, additional questions focused more on this topic. Questions were divided into three categories: Introduction, Friendship, and Coming Out. The introduction was biographical and demographical information. Questions on friendship focused on the athlete's best and worst times with his teammate, what he likes about his teammate, what he dislikes about his teammate, and whether they exchange emotions and affection with each other. The coming out questions referred to when and how the straight athlete's teammate's coming out affected his team and the straight teammate personally. Specific emphasis was placed on the difference between the friendship with the gay teammate and with friendships between other teammates. These questions served only as a guide for the interview; new questions were added as interviews developed, and some questions in the guide were omitted depending on the direction of the conversation.

**Informed consent for participants (see Appendix D).** All participants read and signed informed consent forms before participating in the research. The consent form explained the objectives and methods of the research and informed them that their interviews would be confidential material to be transcribed and handled only by me. They also were informed that their identity would be anonymous in the research, and that only a pseudonym would be used in publication. They were also informed that their participation in the study was not binding, so they could withdraw from the interview and/or study at any time. For participants who lived long-distance, a consent form with a typed signature that was e-mailed to me was employed.

**Informed consent to record and tape interviews (see Appendix E).** All participants also specifically gave informed consent to me to record and tape interviews. This form explained the purpose for recording the interviews, as well as what would be done with the tapes, how long they would be retained, and the security of the tapes. For participants who live long-distance, a consent form with a typed signature was e-mailed to the researcher..

**Debriefing form (see Appendix F).** Participants received a debriefing form that restated the purpose and objectives of the study. They also received recommendations for readings about the topic of men's friendships and gay athletes as well as online support networks for gay athletes.

**Coding manual (see Appendix G).** The coding manual was developed after the process of grounded analysis was used to decide on important themes present in the interviews. The manual describes seven zones of intimacy,

provides examples of these zones of intimacy, and provides instructions to readers on how to code for the presence of these intimacy zones in the interviews. The manual also describes five other important themes related to the friendships. Examples from the interviews of these themes are also provided in the manual along with instructions for readers on how to code for the presence of these themes in the interviews.

### **Procedure**

After I recruited the gay athletes, I asked them to provide my e-mail and Google telephone number to their straight teammate in order for the straight athlete to obtain a more complete description of my research project and the informed consent form. The gay athlete also provided the recruitment text (see Appendix A) to the straight-identified teammate. This method of recruitment allowed for the straight teammate to volunteer himself to participate in my research without having had his personal contact information communicated to me in advance.

Due to time and travel constraints, I purposefully selected a small number (12) of participants (6 dyads), and interviews were conducted either in person (two participants), via Skype (six participants), or via Facebook chat (four participants) using the interview guides (see Appendices B and C). Participants completed their own consent forms, which includes a specific taping consent form, before participating in this research (see Appendices D and E).

Interviews lasted approximately 20-30 minutes. Participants could refrain from answering any questions that made them uncomfortable, and they also could stop the interview at any given time. In two interviews, the Skype connection obscured some of the sound. In those situations, missed questions were e-mailed to these participants to answer via e-mail. After the interviews were recorded, each participant was provided a debriefing form, which reminded them about the purpose of the research, as well as provided them with resources for further information and/or support and counseling (see Appendix F).

**Narrative analysis.** The interviews were transcribed onto a computer into Microsoft Word files so that the narratives could be saved for use in the coding and analysis process. I used a “guided multiple reading” (Brown et al., 1998; Tappan, 1990) approach in order to develop and recognize the most prominent themes in these interviews. The current study relied on methods similar to those of Schacter (2004). I read through all 12 interviews thoroughly in order to identify the most salient and repetitive themes. The grounded analysis of the interviews resulted in the discovery of 7 various zones of intimacy that exist in the dyad friendships. Each zone of intimacy represents a different level of intimacy between the gay athlete and straight teammate. These zones of intimacy are not unique to any of the 6 dyads in this study, and not every dyad is restricted to only one zone of intimacy. In fact, some dyads have almost all 7 zones of intimacy. The 7 zones of intimacy ranked from “least intimate” to “most intimate” are as follows:



1. Share Compliments
2. Homoerotic Gestures
3. Intense Emotion
4. Meaningful, Personal Conversation
5. Intense Quarrel
6. Relationship Reciprocity
7. Openness of Love

In addition to the seven zones of intimacy, the interviews were also analyzed for five additional themes. These themes are not necessarily considered to be intimacy zones, but are important themes related to the athletes' friendships. Dyads' interviews may contain more than one of these themes in their discussion of their friendships, or none at all. These five themes are as follows:

1. Boundary Line of Attraction/Affection;
2. Willingness of Straight Athlete to Defend Gay Teammate;
3. Teammates as a Unit;
4. The Friendship as Special Friendship;
5. The Friendship as a Transformative Friendship.

All 12 themes will be elaborated on and discussed in the results section. Based on these themes, a coding system for the zones of intimacy and the other significant themes was developed. This coding system was then refined into a coding manual for use by other readers (see Appendix G). These two readers

were graduate students recruited through the Personality and Clinical Psychology Research Group. They coded for the presence of the themes in all interviews. Finally, I calculated intercoder reliability by hand to determine the percent agreement among the two coders and myself. The intercoder reliability averaged 85% among the three coders. Disagreements were discussed until agreement was reached.

## Results

The purpose of the present study was to examine the nature of friendships between gay male athletes and their heterosexual teammates, and in particular how intimate and meaningful these friendships are. The participants interviewed did not constitute a representative sample of all gay-straight male athlete friendship pairs, but they did come from various geographical and athletic backgrounds.

The following results provide descriptive statistics for each intimacy zone and the five friendship themes. The statements of each member of the pair were evaluated for each theme, and when the theme was mentioned, it was counted as a positive score for that individual. Total scores for gay and straight individuals across the pairs were tabulated to form percentages for each zone and friendship theme. When both members of the pair made mention of a zone or theme, it was counted as a positive score for the pair on that item. Percentages were also generated for the total number of pairs who mentioned each theme and zone. The percentages for the gay and straight athletes, as well as for the athlete pairs, are presented in Tables 2 and 3 for zones of intimacy and friendship themes, respectively. The number of zones and other friendship themes represented in each dyad was also calculated and reported in Table 4.

Table 2.

*Percentages of Athletes who Mentioned Zones of Intimacy in Interviews*

Zone of Intimacy	% of Gay Athletes who Mentioned Zone in Interview (n=6)	% of Straight Athletes who Mentioned Zone in Interview (n=6)	% of Pairs where Both Members Mentioned Zone in Interviews (n=6)
Share Compliments	33	17	17
Homoerotic Gestures	50	50	33
Intense Emotion	67	83	67
Meaningful, Personal, Conversation	100	67	67
Intense Quarrel	33	33	17
Relationship Reciprocity	83	67	50
Openness of Love	17	50	17

Table 3.

*Percentages of Athletes who Mentioned Friendship Themes in Interviews*

Friendship Themes	% of Gay Athletes who Mentioned Theme in Interview	% of Straight Athletes who Mentioned Theme in Interview	% of Pairs who Mentioned Theme in Interviews
Boundary Line of Affection/Attraction	50	17	17
Willingness of Straight Athlete to Defend Gay Teammate	50	50	33
Teammates as a Unit	67	83	67
Special Friendship	50	67	50
Transformative Friendship	83	67	67

Table 4.

*Percentages of Zones and Friendship Themes Present in Dyads*

Athlete Pairs	Percentage of Zones and Friendship Themes (n=12)
James and Rick	83%
Ben and Ethan	75%
Bradford and Thomas	66%
Seth and Stephen	66%
Brendan and Henry	83%
Larry and Matt	41%

## Sharing Compliments

Complimenting a friend is a simple way of expressing care and affection for him. Compliments can be about a myriad of physical and personal characteristics, accomplishments, actions, and other topics. In the present study, compliments were coded for explicit mention by the interviewee of a time or times when he had made a complimentary statement to his friend. Simply saying a complimentary remark about the friend during the interview was not coded as “sharing compliments” with the friend. Thirty-three percent of the gay athletes talked about having complimented their straight teammate, whereas 17% of the straight athletes talked about having complimented their gay teammate. One pair, or 17% of the six dyads, mentioned the exchange of compliments. In other words, in that particular dyad, both athletes discussed having shared compliments with their teammates in their individual interviews.

Ethan, a lacrosse player, was always willing to compliment his gay teammate, Ben, whenever appropriate:

*I've told him several times how big of a deal I think his career at [college] has been. I've talked to him about how much he's changed since he came out freshman fall...becoming a leader on campus...top-notch athlete...done well in school. I tell him he's a stud for lack of a better word. Haha, and he knows it.*

In the friendship between Brendan and Henry, Brendan makes every effort to compliment his straight teammate:

*I like pointing out things he does well and making him feel good about*

*who he is. Sometimes if he is looking good, I will tell him or give him a wink. He always smiles or laughs back. If he says something that I really value or agree with I'll tell him too. It's hard to describe the situations but I definitely make an effort to compliment him.*

### **Homoerotic Gestures**

It is not uncommon for male athletes to wink at each other, slap each other's butts, or express other affectionate gestures with one another. According to Griffin (1998, p. 22), "Fanny slaps and chest bumps are common-place in men's athletics, especially in team sports. It is not a coincidence that expressions of male-to-male physical affection and love are acceptable in few other contexts. In athletics men can admire other men's bodies and their physical accomplishments openly without arousing suspicions about their heterosexuality." Thus, homoerotic gestures shared with openly gay male athletes might arouse these suspicions about the straight-identified athletes' sexuality.

Nevertheless, only 50% (n=3) of the straight athletes interviewed talked about having exchanged homoerotic gestures with their gay teammates. Likewise, 50% (n=3) of the gay athletes interviewed talked about having exchanged these gestures with their straight teammates. Furthermore, two of the six pairs (33% of the dyads) talked about their exchange of homoerotic gestures in the friendship. In other words, in two pairs, *both* of the athletes mentioned the homoerotic gestures. These gestures include winking, flirting, and hugging, among other physical expressions.



Bradford, who was very open about his sexuality with his teammates, exchanged many homoerotic gestures and maintained a very playful relationship with his teammate, Thomas. Bradford remarked about Thomas:

*He can be kind of touchy feely... It's funny, because Thomas is 100% comfortable with his sexuality, being a straight guy, like he really likes women. But, I think he feels really comfortable being touchy feely with me, which is like, whatever. I don't care, because I'm a touchy feely person. I don't know, like I don't know if you have any straight guy friends who over-exaggerate the butt grabs, or whatever, and that's what Thomas does. Like, I don't not like it, but some people are uncomfortable.*

Thomas also mentioned the presence of homoerotic gestures in his interview about Bradford:

*I was always able to take a hug from him or give one to him without thinking anything of it, so yeah, we could joke and laugh with each other without thinking any of it was sexual. But, we both knew our boundaries.*

### **Intense Emotions**

Examples of intense emotions include but are not limited to: anger, sadness, frustration, embarrassment, envy, concern, and love. These emotions can be expressed externally through such means as crying, yelling, and hugging, or might be expressed internally within someone's own personal feelings and thoughts. Sixty-seven percent of gay athletes interviewed talked

about intense emotions in their friendships, whereas 83% of the straight athletes interviewed mentioned these intense emotions. Sixty-seven percent of the dyads discussed these emotions.

One example of intense emotions from the interviews is a time when Seth encountered a homophobic incident in his residence hall on campus. His frustration about dealing with the incident combined with his loneliness on campus influenced his performance on the tennis courts and his friendship with his teammate Stephen:

*Because that took so much extra energy and effort, and still feeling lonely at my college and still holding a grudge against Resident Life, it indirectly affected my game. I couldn't put points together, I was angry, pissed and it came out on the court. I kept on trying to reboot and nothing was working. I finally came out to my coach and told him what I had been feeling. He wasn't too much of help, because frankly he probably didn't know how to handle this situation. So I turned to Stephen and we had a couple of discussions on trying to have more camaraderie, which will help fill the void of having a very small LGBTQ community on campus. He knew where I was coming from, so it helped. My performance on court was still erratic, which disheartened me, after having a record breaking prior season, I had pressure to excel even further than I had already. I had a very emotional win for my first match of the season, then I played a string of foreign players who crushed me. I was trying too hard. I still feel*

*remorse about that season. I was in such a rut I could not get out of it and I hated it. So I sort of threw away that season at the end and came into my senior year a different player, and it helped. I guess Stephen helped me by being someone close and older I could turn to if I needed help. He didn't directly help me through my junior year slump but it helped knowing he was a consistent person I could go to if I needed anything.*

Therefore, Seth expressed feelings of loneliness and frustration in front of Stephen, but Stephen was available for Seth to console him about these intense emotions. Feelings of anger and more negative emotions were described in the interviews as having been vented with, and even directed towards, teammates. For example, Mike would channel his anger related to the sport of rowing into his relationship with his gay teammate Larry:

*Our senior year we were still close, but I feel like we were on edge a lot more, and that was probably due to the situation we were in as a team rather than our relationships as teammates. Is there anything I don't like about him? Not... I mean, I just have these memories of him and I yelling and fighting our senior year, but that was just because we're in this very competitive sport and the competition got the better of us... probably got the better of me... and I was on edge a lot more.*

### **Meaningful, Personal Conversations (M.P.C.)**

Whereas some male teammates tend to talk mostly about sports, classes, movies, music, and other “surface level” topics, these athletes

described very meaningful conversations that involve topics such as sexual orientation, romantic relationships, and personal issues or achievements. Openness and self-disclosure were important to these friendships/conversations. All of the gay athletes interviewed (100%, n=6) reported having had such conversations with their straight teammate; of the straight athletes interviewed, 67% (n=4) reported having had such personal conversations with their gay teammate. Finally, 67% (n=4) of the dyads mentioned M.P.C. in their interviews.

Thomas reported having had meaningful, personal conversations with his gay teammate Bradford, who would be there for Thomas to listen to him talk about any problem:

*I would say with my relationships with dating women, he was always able to give better advice than any other guy. Also he was very good at getting me to open up if I was down with bad performances in the pool where the guys would just say "suck it up" "you better be better next time." He would be able to express that I was mad at myself and then make me happier by the end...I think that's why we were good friends.*

*We could both be able to just listen.*

Brendan also had a very open relationship with his straight teammate Henry.

Brendan reported a great deal of self-disclosure in his conversations with

Henry:

*There's nothing that I don't want him to know. He's the only guy in my life who will actually ask about a guy. It's not something he does often*

*but none of my other friends do it at all. I share more with Henry than I do any of my other friends. I just feel our level of comfort with each other is high enough to share anything. I know he would never judge me. It's just like having someone to talk to no matter what you are feeling. Good or bad, happy or sad, I'd want Henry to know so I can lean on him to help me through it. What I'm trying to say is that Henry knows me from all sides so we just talk about more things. Like I could tell him anything, if that makes sense.*

### **Intense Quarrel**

Almost a rite of passage for any serious friendship, an intense quarrel is usually a nonphysical emotionally-charged argument between friends, that when resolved, tends to strengthen the friends' relationship. Thirty-three percent of the gay athletes and 33% of the straight athletes interviewed discussed an intense quarrel existing in their friendship with their teammate. Only one dyad had both straight and gay athlete talk about their quarrel in separate interviews. The most prominent quarrel that appears in the interviews is the one intense quarrel that both Brendan and Henry talked about having occurred in their friendship. The following is Brendan's account of this quarrel:

*We had gotten into a fight (verbal) one night over something gay related, and I was super angry at him. We ended on a bad note and didn't speak the next day. Not speaking was literally torture but once*

*we started talking the next night, I forgot about all that. It's really a hard thing to describe, but I've never experienced anything like that night. We talked and talked and talked. There was nothing I wanted more than to just stay in those moments. I saw Henry in a different light and it was honestly the best conversation I've had with anybody. It's a night that I cherish and will never forget. So in terms of overall quality and feeling, that night was my best time with him.*

Even though this quarrel was “literally torture” for Brendan, his resolution of the conflict with Henry solidified their friendship and made him see Henry in a more positive light. Here is Henry’s account of the quarrel:

*We had just gotten back from a formal party, and he happened to have my phone. He went through a conversation I had with a friend and he ran across a text from that friend from a few days prior, where he mocked Brendan in the text for being a “fag” and accused me of acting like a “faggot” like Brendan because I had not pursued something he thought I should. He was basically calling me a “pussy” and thought using Brendan and the fact that he was gay was the best way to compare how I was acting. I didn’t say it, but I also did not defend Brendan and instead just answered the text message as if he was not talking about my best friend. I felt all of these emotions over the next day after he confronted me about the text and neither of us spoke to each other. I was angry he had gone through my phone. I was angry how he told me, which was when we were both drunk and other people*

*were in the next room. I felt shame and embarrassment because I then realized how wrong I was about not doing anything about the text. I felt anxiety because I didn't talk to him for over 24 hours after the incident and it was just absolutely killing me. This was where the turning point was in our relationship. I realized how much I missed him and how much it hurt me to know I had hurt him. I asked him to talk the next night and we talked about the incident and we took turns telling our sides of the story. We talked until 9 in the morning about everything. This was the first time I really started opening up to him, way more than I ever did before. Since then we have talked about more and more together, and I believe enjoyed talking to each other more as well. I have never felt closer to him than I do now, and it had to do with this moment and how much I realized I loved and needed him. I feel like every night we talk we open up to each other more than we did the previous night. It was something that used to scare me but now I treasure it. It is fascinating to me though that, what was one of the worst nights and days of my life, turned out to be the best thing that could have happened. It made me realize how I need to step up for more and stop being so reserved and passive. Also, while I knew how much I loved Brendan, the 24 hours not talking to him made me realize I really could not live without him. It was just a powerful feeling for me, something hard to even explain, but it has changed my life.*

## **Relationship reciprocity**

Reciprocity in a relationship encompasses other zones of intimacy, including self-disclosure, which is part of any meaningful, personal conversation. Reciprocity refers to statements that indicate a sense that there is an equal give-and-take in both actions and self-disclosure in the relationship. For example, reciprocity of self-disclosure suggests that both athletes disclose personal information in a roughly equivalent manner.

The interviews with the gay athletes indicate that 83% (n=5) of them have reciprocity in their friendship with their straight teammate, and 67% (n=4) of the straight athletes interviewed reported that they have relationship reciprocity in their friendship with their gay teammate. Furthermore, 50% (n=3) of the pairs talked about relationship reciprocity in their interviews.

On a basic level of relationship reciprocity, Seth could talk to his straight teammate Stephen about anything, and Stephen could do the same.

Says Seth about Stephen:

*But yea, definitely when I was a junior and a senior, I would talk to Stephen more than I would with anyone else on the team, because Stephen is smart and Stephen could hear me out... and I would hear him out too.*

James talked about this give-and-take relationship with his straight teammate Rick:

*We probably fight together on average three times a week, just on the ice, we yell at each other pretty good, but it's just because we know*



*that each of us should be held to a higher standard. Like if he makes some kind of silly mistake, I'm going to let him hear about that, because he knows that he's better than that. If I make a dumb mistake, he'd say the same thing. So, sometimes it gets a little fiery, so yes, sometimes we argue passionate arguments. I have only seen Rick cry once away from the rink. I have nothing to hide from him. I'm definitely an open book with Rick. We're able to talk about anything together now.*

Here, James discusses a reciprocal exchange of intense emotion (yelling) with Rick that reflects their desire to see each other succeed on the ice. Off the ice, they are both able to self-disclose with each other. Thus, James and Rick have relationship reciprocity via their actions and their self-disclosure.

### **Openness of Love**

This zone is the most intimate of the seven. Openness of love that one teammate has for the other is a very clear and candid expression of affection. This openness of love is more than just compliments and homoerotic gestures between friends/teammates. Rather, this openness of love is powerful and emotionally charged.

Seventeen percent of the gay athletes (n=1) expressed openness of love for his straight teammate in his interview, and 50% (n=3) of the straight athletes interviewed expressed open love for their gay teammates. Seventeen percent of the pairs of athletes (n=1) reported openness of love in the individual interviews.

The pair of athletes who epitomized the zones of intimacy was Brendan and Henry. Each of the two athletes talked candidly and passionately about their love for each other. The following is an excerpt from Brendan's interview regarding his love for straight teammate Henry:

*I think he's made me a better person just by being himself. He gives me all the credit for making him more open, but I think it's because I feel so open with him that I can say that. So I guess it goes both ways. Our friendship has opened my heart too. I realize now how much I can care about a person and it's something I'm really learning to appreciate. I love him a lot and I love being with him. I'm honestly lucky to have a friend like him. I don't think many people will ever experience a friendship like ours.*

Henry expressed a similar love for Brendan in his interview:

*I have hugged him before and as time has gone on, the more I have felt the love for him. Not only is it because I'm closer with him, but he has helped me "feel" more. I have tried to not feel emotions as much before, but because of him, because I have told him so much now, it just feels like so much more now. It's really powerful.*

When Henry talked about his intense quarrel, he also revealed, quite openly, his love for Brendan:

*I have never felt closer to him than I do now, and it had to do with this moment and how much I realized I loved and needed him. I feel like every night we talk we open up to each other more than we did the*

*previous night. It was something that used to scare me but now I treasure it. It is fascinating to me though that, what was one of the worst nights and days of my life, turned out to be the best thing that could have happened. It made me realize how I need to step up for more and stop being so reserved and passive. Also, while I knew how much I loved Brendan, the 24 hours not talking to him made me realize I really could not live without him. It was just a powerful feeling for me, something hard to even explain, but it has changed my life.*

### **Friendship Themes**

#### **Boundary Line of Attraction/Affection**

The first friendship theme found in the interviews is the metaphorical existence of a boundary line of attraction/affection between the gay athlete and the straight teammate. When the athletes mentioned this boundary line, they did so in the context of talking about their exchange of homoerotic gestures with the other teammate. In other words, the athlete reported having a very playful or flirtatious relationship with his teammate, but at the same time, there was a clear line between this playful behavior and real sexual attraction or deep romantic affection.

This theme was more significant to the gay athletes; 50% (n=3) of the gay athletes interviewed talked about such a boundary line, but only 17% (n=1) of the straight athletes did.

Thomas was the only straight athlete to mention this line with his gay teammate Bradford:

*I was always able to take a hug from him or give one to him without thinking anything of it, so yeah, we could joke and laugh with each other without thinking any of it was sexual. But, we both knew our boundaries.*

Bradford talked about this boundary line more in depth, regarding his friendship with Thomas:

*Once I set a line, that's the line. That's something I've always done my whole life, so once Thomas and I became friends and I knew Thomas was straight and he knew that I'm gay... that's cool with him and cool with me. That's just the line that's set and I don't allow myself to I guess, cross that line, because I don't want to lose a friend.*

### **Willingness of Straight Athlete to Defend Gay Athlete**

As out gay men, the gay athletes in this study are vulnerable to verbal and physical harassment from homophobic individuals. When the interviews were analyzed for friendship themes, a common theme in the interviews of both gay and straight athletes was the willingness of the straight athlete to defend his gay teammate.

Fifty percent (n=3) of the straight athletes interviewed said they have in the past, or would be willing to, defend or stand up for their gay teammate. Likewise, 50% (n=3) of the gay athletes interviewed reported that their straight teammate has in the past, or would be willing to, defend or stand up for them. Thirty-three percent of the pairs reported this friendship theme in their interviews.

Stephen had no qualms about standing up for his gay teammate, Seth, when another teammate wore an inappropriate t-shirt:

*There was one example where one team member wore a shirt with a not-exactly in-your-face kind of gay slur, but it was... I don't remember what it was, but there was a gay slur on the shirt and so he [Seth] noticed it and I noticed it and we didn't say anything about it at the time, but we did say something to him afterwards and then I think I mentioned it to him again afterwards- "Hey, your shirt was inappropriate. Please don't wear it again."*

Ben talked about how his straight teammate, Ethan, and all his teammates, would defend him immediately in any homophobic situation:

*If an outsider were to give me a tough time, they'd step up and support me in a second...there was one time a football player said he wouldn't have supported a gay teammate at a random party, and it blew up quickly and all of my teammates shot him down pretty fast. They explained that I'm one of their best friends, how could you possibly just ditch a friend because they come out.*

### **Teammates as a Unit**

One theme that was salient in the interviews described the nature of several friendships in this study. In these friendships, the two teammates talked about their activities, living situations, and other personal matters, as frequently involving their teammate. For example, an athlete would go to class, practice, dinner, and even parties and other social venues with his

teammate. Some athletes interviewed have lived or currently live with their teammate.

This “teammates as a unit” theme was found in 67% (n=4) of the gay athletes’ interviews and 83% (n=5) of the straight athletes’ interviews. Furthermore, 67% (n=4) of the pairs of athletes reported that they have this “unit-style” friendship.

James discussed having a close relationship with his straight teammate, Rick, in which both athletes not only played on the ice together, but even attended the same classes as economics majors: *“Yea, we play on the same line. We have similar builds so we have the same biplans, the same workouts, the same major. I mean, pretty much everything I do at this school, I do with Sean.”*

Seth talked about being a unit with straight teammate, Stephen, in a slightly different manner, as they had to be leaders and role models on their team of mostly younger, immature athletes:

*When I was a junior and we played together and he was a senior, we were the only upperclassmen on the team. So him and I were the captains and it was interesting because we were the only upperclassmen. Over half the team were underclassmen and him and I played with underclassmen in doubles and I played one single... but we were both the older, mature people on the team, definitely, because our team was so young and very, very immature, so we kind of stuck*

*together and fought through it together, because it's just a different thing when you're 18 years old.*

### **Special Relationship**

Many of the athletes reported their friendship as a special, meaningful relationship. For these athletes, the friendship was more intimate than their friendships with other teammates and other friends. Usually, the athletes identified one or more of the seven zones of intimacy as indicators of their special relationship with their teammate.

Fifty percent (n=3) of the gay athletes interviewed reported this special relationship with their straight teammate, whereas 67% (n=4) of the straight athletes interviewed reported their friendship with their gay teammate as more special and/or meaningful than their other friendships. Fifty percent (n=3) of the athlete pairs discussed having these special friendships.

Brendan talked about how his friendship with Henry impacted him in a way that his other friendships had not:

*Henry is one of two people I don't feel gay at all around. Like I don't feel like I carry that label with him. I'm not saying my other friends care, but I still sometimes feel "gay" around them. I don't feel that with him, I just feel like me no matter what. I think he's made me a better person just by being himself.*

Henry also reported having an especially meaningful relationship with Brendan that cannot be put onto the same friendship level as his other friendships:

*I used to think it was a good thing that my relationship with Brendan was the same as everyone else's. I used to say to myself, "Isn't it great that I have just as good a relationship with Brendan as everyone else even though he is gay?" But that's not how I feel anymore. I am closer to him than other people because of what I said before: that I can talk to him about anything, that he feels comfortable talking to me about anything. He has given me the courage to stand up for what is right by looking at what he has done in the past. I look up to him. It would be a disservice [to Brendan] to say I have the same relationship with him that I do with my other friends. It is a better relationship. He has made me a much better person and I couldn't live without him.*

### **Relationship as Transformative**

One of the most powerful outcomes of these friendships is a transformation of the athlete. Straight athletes interviewed discussed ways that their friendship with their gay teammate had improved the straight athlete's character and perceptions of the gay community. In the previous friendship theme example, Brendan, a gay athlete, said that his friendship with straight teammate, Henry, allowed Brendan to feel accepted for who he is as a person and not for his sexual orientation. The nature of these friendships as transformative experiences in the athletes' lives is an unexpected outcome of these friendships.

Eighty-three percent (n=5) of the gay athletes interviewed reported that their friendship with their straight teammate was transformative (for the gay



athlete and/or his straight teammate). Sixty-seven percent (n=4) of the straight athletes interviewed said that their friendship with their gay teammate was a transformative experience in the straight athlete's life, and 67% (n=4) of the athlete pairs talked about their friendships as transformative.

Thomas said that his friendship with his gay teammate, Bradford, taught him:

*That I shouldn't judge people by their sexual orientation, that I can do a lot of things, like he gave me a lot of confidence, also that he has taught me to never put a guard up and judge people before I actually get to know them, straight or gay: base everyone as an equal and put others before yourself always. He was very good at that.*

Rick had a similar transformation from his friendship with his gay teammate, James, regarding the use of homophobic language:

*Being with James, I watch my vocabulary a lot now. I don't think he'd really care, but you know, kind of as a respect for him. I hold other guys accountable for what they say. He's helped me grow a lot, so I don't know. Hanging out with him and being my best friend... I mean you can learn things in school and everything, but to have the real life interaction with James is the best learning experience you can have.*

Henry, whose narrative thus far, has already shown that his relationship with Brendan has been transformative and meaningful for him, even has become a sometime activist for gay people as a result of this friendship:

*While I never agreed, I used to respect people's opinion on disliking gay people. Now, knowing Brendan and having the relationship with him that I do now and really understanding the magnitude of everything, I realize it is not an opinion. It is flat out wrong and ignorant to feel negatively about someone just because of his or her sexual preference. I lose respect for them and I think it shows a lot about their character. On the other hand, I know people that just don't have the first-hand experience that I do either and maybe aren't bad people, but just don't have any relationship with someone that is gay. I find it my responsibility now to, maybe "educate" isn't the right word, but at least let them know exactly my stance on it and why- at least give them something to think about and hopefully do something to change the way they feel about things.*

## Discussion

Prior to the present study, no formal research had examined the friendships between gay male athletes and their heterosexual teammates. This study is the first of its kind to explore the intimacy of these friendships and to present perspectives on these friendships from both sides- that of the straight athlete and that of the gay athlete. The levels of intimacy and other unique themes present in these friendships challenge prejudices that gay men might threaten athletic teams with their “femininity” and sexuality, and that straight athletes would be unwilling to form close or intimate friendships with their gay teammates. In fact, the six dyads in this study reveal that straight male athletes can form even more intimate friendships with their gay teammates than with straight teammates or other straight male friends.

At first glance, the sheer number of intimacy zones and friendship themes found in the friendships between interviewed athletes should prompt the reader to recognize the unique quality of the bonds between these teammates. Through the process of grounded analysis, seven salient intimacy zones were discovered in the interviews, and five additional themes were identified as well. These zones and themes were not unique to any one dyad. In fact, each dyad mentioned at least five of the zones and themes in their friendships. Two dyads had ten of the twelve total intimacy zones and friendship themes in their relationships.

It is important to note that 67% of the straight athletes interviewed in this study reported having friendships with their gay teammate that were more

meaningful and more intimate than their friendships with their straight teammates or other straight male friends. Fifty percent of the gay athletes interviewed in this study also identified their friendships with their straight teammates as meaningful and special. These intimate friendships certainly contradict Walker's (1994) description of men's friendships as competitive and devoid of emotional expression/self-disclosure. In fact, all of the gay athletes interviewed in this study reported having had intimate and personal conversations with their straight teammates.

The friendships explored in this study more closely resemble the friendships among gay men described by Nardi (1999) and the friendships between gay men and straight men studied by Price (1999), which were infused with affection, support, and self-disclosure. As 83% of the straight athletes interviewed and 67% of the gay athletes interviewed talked about intense emotions in their friendships, the friendships also challenge traditional masculine ideology, especially the concept of men as "sturdy oaks," stoic and taciturn (David & Brannon, 1976).

The interviews in this study also provide insight into the dual homosocial and homophobic environment of sports. Griffin (1998) proposed that sports are a masculine environment, in which the homosocial and heterosexual nature of sports "legitimizes" homoerotic gestures and physical admiration between male athletes. Sedgwick's (1985) theory of homosociality further argues that male athletes use homophobia to create a buffer around this homosocial admiration and love between the athletes, while projecting a

surface heterosexuality. Based on these theories, it could be hypothesized that openly gay male athletes would threaten this homosocial environment, as their homosexuality both challenges the locker room homophobia and locker room physical contact. Nevertheless, the exchange of homoerotic and physical gestures was a salient zone of intimacy found in the friendships of the participants in the present study. Fifty percent of the gay athletes reported that these gestures exist in their friendships with their straight teammates, whereas 50% of the straight athletes reported the existence of homoerotic gestures in their friendships with their gay teammates. Therefore, these results show that the physical homosociality of sports does not always have to exist in opposition to homosexuality, but can actually exist among both straight and gay male athletes. In other words, as the presence of gay athletes becomes normalized in sports teams, it might allow males to express their warmth and enjoyment of each other more openly without needing to deflect concerns about the appearance of being “gay” or “unmasculine.”

Quantitative results do not do justice to the expressions of intimacy and the intense nature of these friendships conveyed in the interviews. The qualitative component of this study, the narratives from the athletes, themselves, is what genuinely provides the voice and authenticity to these friendships. The rich and emotional narratives from the interviews were the foundation for the zones of intimacy and friendship themes. As previously mentioned, intense emotions between the athletes were so common in their friendships, that the category of *intense emotions* qualified as an intimacy

zone, contradicting research on men's friendships that lack open expression of emotions. Recall Seth's story about how Stephen, his straight teammate, helped him through a tough time, consoling the very emotional Seth. In this narrative, Seth used emphatic phrases like "I was in such a rut I could not get out of it and I hated it" and that he was "disheartened," "angry," and "pissed." Not only did Stephen embrace his teammate who expressed these intense emotions to him, but also he made himself available to Seth when he needed him the most, a mark of authentic friendship.

The openness of love for a teammate found in the interviews was unexpected and further contradicts the image of the emotionally repressed 21<sup>st</sup> century man. Brendan and Henry's narratives are especially charged with these emotions and openness of love with such phrases in their interviews as "Also, while I knew how much I loved Brendan, the 24 hours not talking to him made me realize I really could not live without him," "I realize now how much I can care about a person and it's something I'm really learning to appreciate," and "I don't think many people will ever experience a friendship like ours."

Given the nature of how the dyads were solicited for this project, it is clear that this study presents relationships between heterosexual male athletes and gay teammates in a highly selective and positive light. For every positive friendship that exists between gay and straight athletes, there are many more incidents and attitudes in the sports world expressive of homophobia. In April 2011, NBA superstar, Kobe Bryant, used a homophobic slur during a game

when a referee called a technical foul on him (Beacham, 2011). At the time of this study's completion, University of Nebraska assistant football coach Ron Brown, argued against a bill that would protect gay people from discrimination and publicly announced that if he had a gay athlete on his football team, he would try to convert the athlete to being heterosexual (Zeigler Jr., 2012). These incidents are only two examples that expose the homophobia that still exists in professional sports.

The exploratory nature of the present study raises several limitations worth noting. Ideally, gay male athlete dyads and straight male athlete dyads would have been included in the study to provide appropriate comparisons with regard to the quality and depth of their respective friendships. Since this project sought to create a conceptual framework for looking at the friendships between gay and straight teammates, its initial focus was only on these dyads. Now that this framework has been developed, it would be extremely valuable to conduct further studies to determine its applicability to these other friendship configurations.

Due to sensitive nature of this thesis topic and the labor and time-intensive nature of locating, securing agreement, and interviewing pairs of participants, its sample size of six dyads (or 12 participants) is limited. This small sample size places constraints on the diversity of the participants as well as the legitimacy of extrapolating its findings to account for the range of gay and straight athlete friendships that might exist. On the other hand, the themes

that emerged from the dozen interviews certainly provide a basic set of relational themes that can now be examined in a larger set of dyads.

Other limitations of the present study include the recruitment method for obtaining participants. The sample of athletes was convenient rather than random, and the majority of the athletes were recruited from sources in which gay athletes are open about their sexuality and have spoken up about more positive experiences after coming out to teammates. Thus, this sample does not reflect struggling relationships between gay athletes and their straight teammates, nor does it represent any closeted gay athletes.

Due to how spread out geographically the members of the twelve dyads were, only two of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, whereas the majority of interviews were conducted via Skype or Facebook chat. Consistent approaches to the interviews and maximal opportunities to have face-to-face contact would improve future research.

Finally, the main method used in the present study was grounded analysis, a procedure that I used to create the zones of intimacy and friendship themes. Furthermore, I created the coding manual, which two coders used to analyze and code the interviews. Had I conducted a more laboratory-based study, I would have supplemented this grounded analysis approach with some further quantitative measures.

The present study was a first exploration of friendship between gay male athletes and heterosexual teammates. Perhaps, this study can inspire continued research on this topic. Future researchers should recruit larger and



more diverse samples of participants. A larger sample should be more ethnically diverse than that of the present study, and/or a sample that has a larger distribution of geographical background (i.e., more participants from western and southern states or other countries). Although the purpose of this study was to explore the friendships between gay *male* athletes and their heterosexual teammates, future researchers might explore the same type of friendships between lesbian and straight *female* athletes. It would be interesting to explore how intimacy in the friendships differs between more traditionally masculine sports (i.e., football, lacrosse, hockey/helmet sports) and individual sports (e.g., running, swimming, tennis) that might be less homophobic. Due to the small sample size of the present study, no significant comparisons can be made between the two types of sports in terms of intimacy of friendships.

Fortunately, the environment and culture of sports are moving in the direction of positive change for gay athletes. During the course of the present study, three national non-profit organizations/campaigns emerged to tackle homophobia in athletics. Taylor Hudson, a heterosexual NCAA Division I wrestler for the University of Maryland, created *Athlete Ally* in January of 2011, "...a not-for-profit organization, with the mission of educating, encouraging, and empowering straight athlete allies to combat homophobia and transphobia in sports" (*About Athlete Ally*, par. 2). *Athlete Ally's* website (<http://www.athleteally.com>) provides a pledge for anyone to sign to promise to work towards full inclusion of all individuals in sports. Recently, the Gay,

Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) initiated their own sports project, called *Changing the Game*, whose mission

...is to assist K-12 schools in creating and maintaining an athletic and physical education climate that is based on the core principles of respect, safety and equal access for all students, teachers and coaches regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression and integrating these efforts into overall school plans to ensure a safe, respectful school climate and culture (*About the Project*, par. 1).

This project provides resources for schools to use for trainings, lesson plans, and workshops.

The most recent organization established to combat homophobia in athletics is the *You Can Play Project*, a movement created by Brian Burke, the general manager of the Toronto Maple Leafs (National Hockey League team), and his son Patrick, in memory of Brian's son and Patrick's brother, Brendan Burke, an openly gay activist, who died in a car accident in 2010 (Steinberg, 2012). The You Can Play Project is spearheaded by NHL heterosexual players, who deliver public service announcement videos that place importance on the athletic ability of athletes rather than the athletes' sexual orientation (Steinberg, 2012). The headline of the project's website homepage is simple but powerful: "Gay athletes. Straight allies. Teaming up for respect" (<http://www.youcanplayproject.org>). The involvement of straight allies in this project, as well as Athlete Ally, is of considerable importance. These projects

were begun by straight male allies who want to change the culture of athletics to be more welcoming and accepting of non-heterosexual athletes.

The straight athletes interviewed in the present study valued their relationships with their gay teammates, so much so that 67% of them described their friendship as transformative. Some of these athletes even discussed defending their gay teammates and/or educating themselves about the gay culture and community. Their involvement in the present study shows athletic stakeholders that intimate friendships can exist between gay and straight athletes and highlights the value of gay men in athletics. Recall Henry's loving words about his gay teammate Brendan:

*It would be a disservice [to Brendan] to say I have the same relationship with him that I do with my other friends. It is a better relationship. He has made me a much better person and I couldn't live without him.*

These words place importance on the friendship of a gay teammate. Henry's narrative and friendship with Brendan, among the other narratives and friendships presented in the study, provide hope and confirmation that friendships formed through sport can be a catalyst for social change.

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## Appendix A

### Recruitment Text

#### **Seeking Participants for Study on Male Friendships Between Gay and Straight Teammates:**

Hi, my name is Brenner Green and I am a senior undergraduate student at Connecticut College majoring in Psychology. I am writing to tell you about a study that I am conducting for my senior honors thesis.

My research interest is in the friendships between gay and straight high school (and college) male teammates. I am interested in what makes these friendships meaningful and how they may differ from the friendships between two straight-identified male teammates.

My research involves the gay athlete and the straight teammate in each friendship pair being interviewed separately about their friendships (approximately a one hour interview via Skype or in-person).

If you are under the age of 18 and decide to participate in this study, you will be provided a parental consent form that one of your parents must sign in order to obtain consent for the research. Therefore, your parent should recognize that either you are gay or a straight-identified friend of an openly gay teammate (for gay interviewee and straight-identified interviewee, respectively).

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved this research study. If you are interested in learning more about this study, please contact Brenner either via e-mail at [bgreen@conncoll.edu](mailto:bgreen@conncoll.edu) or by phone at (860) 451-9853.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Brenner Green  
Connecticut College  
Class of 2012

## Appendix B

### Interview Guide for Gay Men

#### *Introduction*

1. Tell me about yourself- where you grew up, age, family, sport you play

#### *Friendship*

1. Tell me about your friendship with \_\_\_\_? How long have you been friends? How did you meet? What do you like to do together?
2. What do you *like* about \_\_\_\_? Can you remember complimenting him about any of these things you like? When was it? If so, what happened? If not, why not? Can you remember receiving a compliment from \_\_\_\_? What happened in that conversation?
3. What was one of the *best times* you had with \_\_\_\_? Where were you? What were you doing?
4. Do you ever talk with \_\_\_\_ about things going on in your life? If not, why not? If so, what have you talked about with him recently? How did \_\_\_\_ react? Is there anything you won't discuss with \_\_\_\_? Why not? Do you share the same amount with \_\_\_\_ as you do with other teammates? Why or why not and do you share more or less if you answered no?
5. Does \_\_\_\_ talk with you about what is going on in his life? If not, why not? If so, what has he recently talked with you about? How do you react? Do you think you were helpful? Is there anything he doesn't discuss with you? Why not?
6. (a) Have you ever felt happy, compassion, sad, worried for \_\_\_\_? Did you express this to him? If so, what happened? If not, why not? (b) Have you ever cried or been upset in front of \_\_\_\_? How did he react? Have you ever cried or been upset in front of your other teammates? Has \_\_\_\_ ever cried or been upset in front of you? How did you react? (c) Do you love him? Have you ever hugged him? (d) Do you trust \_\_\_\_? Do you have any secrets you shared with him?
7. What do you *dislike* about \_\_\_\_? Have you ever told \_\_\_\_ about any of these things you dislike? When was it? If so, what happened in that conversation? If not, why not? Has \_\_\_\_ ever told you about something you do that bothers him? When was it? What happened in that conversation?

8. What was one of the *worst times* you had with \_\_\_\_? Can you describe an occasion with \_\_\_\_ when you felt anger, shame, embarrassment, anxiety or resentment? Did you express this to him? If so what happened? If not, why not? Has \_\_\_\_ ever expressed anger, frustration, guilt, or embarrassment with you? If so, what happened?

### ***Coming Out***

1. Tell me about when you came out to \_\_\_\_ and/or your team? Where were you? What were you and/or the team doing at the time? How did you tell \_\_\_\_ and/or the team? How did he react? How did the team react?
2. When did you first think about coming out to your team? To \_\_\_\_? What were the issues you considered? Did you talk to anyone about doing it? If so, what did you talk about? What did they say?
3. How did you feel coming out to \_\_\_\_? Was it easier, harder, or the same coming out to \_\_\_\_ than it was coming out to the team?
4. Have you ever expressed affection for another man in front of \_\_\_\_? If not, why not? If so, how did he react?
5. How has your coming out affected the team? Has it affected the team's performance? Has the coming out affected team relationships? If so, how?
6. How has coming out affected your own performance on the team? Has coming out affected your relationships with other team members?
7. How have you either changed or confirmed \_\_\_\_'s stereotypes and ideas about gay men? How might your friendship have made you a different or better person? Has your friendship seemed to have made \_\_\_\_ a different person?

## Appendix C

### Interview Guide for Straight Men

#### *Introduction*

1. Tell me about yourself- where you grew up, age, family, sport you play

#### *Friendship*

1. Tell me about your friendship with \_\_\_\_? How long have you been friends? How did you meet? What do you like to do together?
2. What do you *like* about \_\_\_\_? Can you remember complimenting him about any of these things you like? When was it? If so, what happened? If not, why not? Can you remember receiving a compliment from \_\_\_\_? What happened in that conversation?
3. What was one of the *best times* you had with \_\_\_\_? Where were you? What were you doing?
4. Do you ever talk with \_\_\_\_ about things going on in your life? If not, why not? If so, what have you talked about with him recently? How did \_\_\_\_ react? Is there anything you won't discuss with \_\_\_\_? Why not? Do you share the same amount with \_\_\_\_ as you do with other teammates? Why or why not and do you share more or less if you answered no?
5. Does \_\_\_\_ talk with you about what is going on in his life? If not, why not? If so, what has he recently talked with you about? How do you react? Do you think you were helpful? Is there anything he doesn't discuss with you? Why not?
6. (a) Have you ever felt happy, compassion, sad, worried for \_\_\_\_? Did you express this to him? If so, what happened? If not, why not? (b) Have you ever cried or been upset in front of \_\_\_\_? How did he react? Have you ever cried or been upset in front of your other teammates? Has \_\_\_\_ ever cried or been upset in front of you? How did you react? (c) Do you love him? Have you ever hugged him? (d) Do you trust \_\_\_\_? Do you have any secrets you shared with him?
7. What do you *dislike* about \_\_\_\_? Have you ever told \_\_\_\_ about any of these things you dislike? When was it? If so, what happened in that conversation? If not, why not? Has \_\_\_\_ ever told you about

something you do that bothers him? When was it? What happened in that conversation?

8. What was one of the *worst times* you had with \_\_\_\_? Can you describe an occasion with \_\_\_\_ when you felt anger, shame, embarrassment, anxiety or resentment? Did you express this to him? If so what happened? If not, why not? Has \_\_\_\_ ever expressed anger, frustration, guilt, or embarrassment with you? If so, what happened?
9. Have you ever stood up for \_\_\_\_ when he encountered homophobia? If so, what happened? How did you feel about standing up for him?

### ***Coming Out***

10. Tell me about what happened when \_\_\_\_ came out to you and/or the team? Where were you? What were you and/or the team doing at the time? How did he tell you? How did you react personally? How did the team react? How did he react to you?
11. When \_\_\_\_ came out to you how did you feel? Did you talk to any one on your team about how you felt? Did you talk to someone outside of the team? If so, who and how? What did they say?
12. Have you ever seen \_\_\_\_ express affection for another man? How did you react? If you haven't seen this, how do you think you would react if you did?
13. How has \_\_\_\_'s coming out affected the team? Has it affected the team's performance? Has the coming out affected team relationships? If so, how?
14. How has \_\_\_\_'s coming out affected his own performance on the team? Has his coming out affected his relationships with other team members?
15. How has \_\_\_\_ either changed or confirmed your stereotypes and ideas about gay men? How might your friendship have made you a different or better person?
16. How is your relationship with your other straight teammates different from your friendship with \_\_\_\_? Please describe these differences with as much detail and personal anecdotes as possible.
17. If your relationship with \_\_\_\_ is different from your relationships with your other teammates, why do you think it is that way? If it is the same, why do you think it is that way?

## Appendix D

### Informed Consent for Participants

I hereby consent to participate in Brenner Green's thesis research on male friendships between gay and straight athletes. I understand that this research will involve participating in either a face-to-face or Skype interview. While I understand that the direct benefits of this research to society are not known, I have been told that my personal narrative will offer significant insight into this topic of gay/straight male friendships in athletics. I understand that the interview will be between one and two hours. I have been told that there is possible emotional discomfort for participating in this research, such as changes in my relationship with my friend and the way in which I think about myself, but I also understand that Brenner will provide me with counseling resource contacts in my community, should I wish to talk further about the issues in the interview.

**I have been told that Brenner Green can be contacted at (860) 451-9853 or via e-mail at [bgreen@conncoll.edu](mailto:bgreen@conncoll.edu).**

I understand that I may decline to answer any questions as I see fit, and that I may withdraw from the study without penalty at any time. I understand that I will be assigned a pseudonym in this research in order to protect my personal identity. I have been advised that I may contact the researcher who will answer any questions that I may have about the purposes and procedures of this study. I consent to publication of the study results as long as my identity is protected. I understand that this research is designed for an honors thesis and that the Connecticut College Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved the research. Concerns about any aspect of this study may be addressed to either Dr. Ann Devlin, Chairperson of the Connecticut College IRB (860-439-2333), [asdev@conncoll.edu](mailto:asdev@conncoll.edu) or Dr. Jefferson Singer, Professor of Psychology and Brenner's thesis advisor (860-439-2343), [jasin@conncoll.edu](mailto:jasin@conncoll.edu).

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-----  
I have read these explanations and assurances and voluntarily consent to participate in this research about male friendships between gay and straight high school and college athletes.

Typing my name below will be considered a signature verifying my consent to proceed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name (printed)

## Appendix E

### Informed Consent to Record and Tape Interviews

My signature below indicates that I give Brenner Green permission to record my interview for the purpose of retaining the information from the interview for his research. I also understand the following:

1. I can request that the tape recorder or video recorder be turned off at any time and may request that the tape or any portion thereof be erased. I may terminate this permission to tape at anytime.
2. The purpose of taping is for use in Brenner's research on gay-straight male friendships between high school and college athletes. I understand that Brenner will transcribe the interview content to analyze and present in his project.
3. I consent to publication of the study results as long as the identity of all participants is protected (Identity of participants will be protected by a pseudonym).
4. The tapes will be stored in a secure location and will not be used for any other purpose without my explicit written permission.
5. The tapes will be handled only by Brenner and will be erased after they have been transcribed (process should take no more than 2-3 months after taping).

Typing my name below will be considered a signature verifying my consent to proceed.

---

Name of Interviewee (Please print)

---

Signature

---

Date



## Appendix F

### Debriefing Form

First of all, thank you for participating in this research dealing with male friendships between gay and straight high school teammates. Athleticism and strength are values commonly associated with masculinity, whereas emotional support and affection are associated with traditional femininity. Gay and straight teammates can combine all of these characteristics in their friendships, which make their gay-straight friendship a unique creation of androgyny and a breakdown of traditional gender roles. My honors study seeks to explore this unique friendship between gay and straight male teammates. The interviews from this study will contribute meaningful information about these relationships to both gender and masculinity studies as well as to society at large. To my knowledge, no research has actually focused on male friendships between gay and straight teammates. If you are interested in this topic and want to read the literature in this area, please contact me (Brenner Green) at (860) 451-9853 or at [bgreen@conncoll.edu](mailto:bgreen@conncoll.edu).

Concerns about any aspect of this study may be addressed to either Dr. Ann Devlin, Chairperson of the Connecticut College IRB (860-439-2333), [asdev@conncoll.edu](mailto:asdev@conncoll.edu) or Dr. Jefferson Singer, Professor of Psychology and Brenner's thesis advisor (860-439-2343), [jasin@conncoll.edu](mailto:jasin@conncoll.edu).

Listed below are two sources you may want to consult to learn more about the topic as well as some support websites for gay athletes and their straight allies:

#### **Print Resources:**

Price, J. (1999). *Navigating Differences: Friendships Between Gay and Straight Men*. Binghamton, NY: Harrington Park Press.

Woog, D. (1998). *jocks: True Stories of America's Gay Male Athletes*. Los Angeles, CA: Alyson

Publications.

#### **Online Resources:**

<http://www.outsports.com>

*Gay sports fans and athletes, your place for discussion, stories, and photos.*

<http://www.ourgrouppathletes.org>

*Our Group is an outreach, support and advocacy organization for lesbian,*

*gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) high school and college student-athletes and allies...*

<http://www.athleteally.com>

*A resource to encourage athletes, coaches, parents, fans and other members of the sports community to respect all individuals involved in sports, regardless of perceived or actual sexual-orientation or gender identity or expression.*

## Appendix G

### Coding Manual

When coding, you may use the chart at the end of the manual to record codes (typically a 0 or 1) or you can use your own system. The chart is a visual to help you code each interview.

#### Structured Activities

The athletes engage in structured activities together. These activities include sports, going out to the bar, playing video games, watching TV together, etc. The activities do not necessarily include any emotional interactions, but are more active moments shared between the two athletes.

If there is no presence of the athletes engaging in structured activities together, code the interview with a **0** for **structured activities**. If there is a presence of structured activities, code a **1** for **structured activities**.

Examples of the presence of structured activities from interviews:

- 1. It was almost always team-related. We had practice every day so like 3 hours a day, six days a week and that's a lot of time together just there, but occasionally we'd go out to dinner as a team. Um, so, yea, things like that.*
- 2. We'd play lacrosse, work out, go out and socialize, eat meals together, etc.*

#### Sharing Compliments

One expression of intimacy between athletes is compliments. The gay and straight athletes share compliments for each other on numerous topics, such as athletic ability, intelligence, and even physical appearance.

If an athlete does not explain that he has complimented his teammate, or if the athlete explains that he **has not** complimented his teammate, code a **0** for **sharing compliments**. If the athlete explains that he **has** given compliment(s) to his teammate, code the interview with a **1** for **sharing compliments**.

Example from interviews:

- 1. I've told him several times how big of a deal I think his career at college has been. I've talked to him about how much he's changed since he came*

*out freshman fall...becoming a leader on campus...top-notch athlete....done well in school. I tell him he's a stud for lack of a better word. Haha, and he knows it.*

### **Homoerotic Gestures**

Homoerotic gestures between the athletes are physical expressions of affection for each other that mirror acts of love or lust for one another. Although these teammates are not in love with each other romantically, these gestures can be rather playful, romantic, and suggestive.

If the athlete does not talk about sharing these gestures with his teammate, or if he says that he does not share these gestures with his teammate, code a **0** for **homoerotic gestures**. If the athlete **does** share homoerotic gestures with his teammates, code a **1** for **homoerotic gestures** for that interview.

Examples of these gestures include winking, slapping each other's butts, wrestling, etc.

*1. He can be kind of touchy feely... It's funny, because Thomas is 100% comfortable with his sexuality, being a straight guy, like he really likes women. But, I think he feels really comfortable being touchy feely with me, which is like, whatever. I don't care, because I'm a touchy feely person. I don't know, like I don't know if you have any straight guy friends who over exaggerate the butt grabs, or whatever, and that's what Thomas does. Like, I don't not like it, but some people are uncomfortable.*

*2. Sometimes if he is looking good, I will tell him or give him a wink. He always smiles or laughs back.*

### **Intense Quarrel**

The fighting between the two athletes is similar to the arguing between two lovers. This type of quarrel has a significant impact on the friendship between the two athletes. This quarrel is not physically, but emotionally charged.

Please code a **0** for **intense quarrel** when there is a lack of intense quarrel in the interview and code a **1** for **intense quarrel** when there is a presence of this quarrel in the interview. An example of an intense quarrel from an interview:

*1. I felt all of these emotions over the next day after he confronted me about the text and neither of us spoke to each other. I was angry he had gone through my phone. I was angry how he told me, which was when we were both drunk and other people were in the next room. I felt shame and*

*embarrassment because I then realized how wrong I was about not doing anything about the text. I felt anxiety because I didn't talk to him for over 24 hours after the incident and it was just absolutely killing me. This was where the turning point was in our relationship...*

### **Intense Emotion**

In an intimate friendship, it is common for there to be exchanges of intense emotions. Sometimes, this exchange is reciprocated between the two athletes, while at other times, the intense emotions may be expressed by only one of the athletes. Either way, this expression of intense emotion shows the vulnerability of the athlete(s). Common examples of intense emotion are sadness/crying, anger/yelling, disappointment, embarrassment, envy, love, and concern. Examples from interview:

Please code the interview with a **0** for **intense emotion** when there is no mention of intense emotions, or when there is an explanation that no intense emotion exists in the friendship. Code a **1** for **intense emotion** when there is a mention of intense emotion existing in the friendship. Examples of **intense emotion** from interviews:

*1. We probably fight together on average three times a week, just on the ice, we yell at each other pretty good, but it's just because we know that each of us should be held to a higher standard. Like if he makes some kind of silly mistake, I'm going to let him hear about that, because he knows that he's better than that. If I make a dumb mistake, he'd say the same thing. So, sometimes it gets a little fiery, so yes, sometimes we argue passionate arguments. I have only seen Rick cry once away from the rink. I have nothing to hide from him. I'm definitely an open book with Rick.*

*2. I have hugged him before and as time has gone on, the more I have felt the love for him. Not only is it because I'm closer with him, but he has helped me "feel" more. I have tried to not feel emotions as much before, but because of him, because I have told him so much now, it just feels like so much more now. It's really powerful.*

### **Meaningful, Personal Conversations (MPC)**

This zone of intimacy focuses on the topic of conversation between teammates. Whereas some teammates tend to talk mostly about sports, classes, movies, music, and other "surface level" topics, other dyads have very meaningful conversations that involve topics of sexual orientation, romantic relationships, and personal issues or achievements. Self-disclosure is certainly a sub-

category of these conversations. Openness and self-disclosure is important to these friendships/conversations.

Code a **0** for **MPC** when the athlete does not mention these types of conversations existing in his friendship, or when the athlete states that he does not have these conversations with his teammate. Code a **1** for **MPC** when the athlete **does** have these conversations with his teammate.

Examples from interviews:

**1. *He and I were more open to disclose info and opinions with each other when others would maybe make fun of his lifestyle.***

***I wouldn't say the whole team did but some yes. He and I became able to make light of and laugh jokingly with each other about our sexual orientation when others could not without hurting feeling and emotions***

**2. *There's nothing that I don't want him to know. He's the only guy in my life who will actually ask about a guy. It's not something he does often but none of my other friends do it at all. I share more with Henry than I do any of my other friends. I just feel our level of comfort with each other is high enough to share anything. I know he would never judge me. It's just like having someone to talk to no matter what you are feeling. Good or bad, happy or sad, I'd want Henry to know so I can lean on him to help me through it. What I'm trying to say, is that Henry knows me from all sides so we just talk about more things. Like I could tell him anything, if that makes sense.***

### **Openness of Love**

This zone of intimacy is perhaps one of the strongest and most powerful zones. This zone, the openness of love that one teammate has for the other is a very clear and candid expression of affection for one another. This openness of love is more than just compliments between friends/teammates. Rather, this openness of love is more powerful and more emotionally charged.

Code a **0** for **openness of love** if the athlete either does not talk about this love for his teammate, or if he states explicitly that he does not love his teammate in this way. Code a **1** for **openness of love** if the athlete expresses this love for his teammate and/or if he has shared this intense emotion with his teammate.

Examples of **openness of love** from interviews:

**1. *He gives me all the credit for making him more open, but I think it's because I feel so open with him that I can say that. So I guess it goes both***

*ways. Our friendship has opened my heart too. I realize now how much I can care about a person and it's something I'm really learning to appreciate. I love him a lot and I love being with him. I'm honestly lucky to have a friend like him. I don't think many people will ever experience a friendship like ours.*

*2. I have hugged him before and as time has gone on, the more I have felt the love for him. Not only is it because I'm closer with him, but he has helped me "feel" more. I have tried to not feel emotions as much before, but because of him, because I have told him so much now, it just feels like so much more now. It's really powerful.*

### **Reciprocity of Relationship**

Another theme or zone of intimacy is relationship reciprocity. This reciprocity encompasses other zones of intimacy, including self-disclosure, which falls under the meaningful, personal conversations. Reciprocity refers to statements that indicate a sense that there is an equal give-and-take in both actions and self-disclosure in the relationship. For example, reciprocity of self-disclosure would suggest that both athletes disclose personal information in a roughly equivalent manner.

On the other hand, there may be an **Imbalance in Reciprocity**, in which one of the friends is more giving in action and/or self-disclosure than the other friend. If this emerges in a pair of interviews, then this should be coded as **Imbalance** and the **Direction** of the imbalance of reciprocity should be noted: **Greater Expression of Intimacy by Gay Friend** or **Greater Expression of Intimacy by Straight Friend**.

Code a **0** for **Reciprocity of Relationship** if there is an imbalance of reciprocity, or code a **1** for **Relationship of Reciprocity** if there exists relationship reciprocity.

If you code a 0 due to imbalance of reciprocity, code either a **1** for **Greater Expression of Intimacy by Gay Friend** or a **1** for **Greater Expression of Intimacy by Straight Friend**.

Examples:

- 1. He is a great listener, something I admire and wish I was better at. I admire how he is honest, whether it is the answer I want to hear or*

*not. It is something I am slowly learning to be better about. I don't think I have ever really complimented him about all of these things. I think he knows I feel this way, but I haven't told him really. He has complimented me more than I have complemented him. This is just another example of how honest and great Brandon is, and also of how I am more reserved and maybe not as warm-hearted. Or at the very least less easy to open up. (Greater Expression of Intimacy by Gay Friend)*

- 2. I would say that I was someone he felt comfortable talking to, but Thomas is such a chill guy. I feel like nothing has ever gone wrong with Thomas's life. When we were in college that was one thing- he was really responsible, well he drank a lot... actually he didn't drink a lot in college. I drink more now, but that's a different story. I'm in grad school so it's okay. (laughs) And he never really had any issues. Now that we're older we talk more about adult issues, like "What am I doing with the rest of my life?" but we are comfortable talking to each other, but he has no issues. I don't know if he is a private person, he just has a good life. (Greater Expression of Intimacy by Gay Friend)*

### **Other Themes to Examine:**

#### **Boundary Line of Affection/Attraction**

In many of the friendships, there is a clear boundary established between the teammates for appropriate behavior relating to affection and attraction. The gay athlete usually talks about this boundary and uses it as a method to prevent any strong feelings to develop for his straight teammate.

Code a **0** for **boundary line** if there is no mention or presence of such a line in the friendship, and code a **1** for **boundary line** for the interview if there is a presence of a boundary line in the friendship. Examples:

- 1. Once I set a line, that's the line. That's something I've always done my whole life, so once Thomas and I became friends and I know Thomas is straight and he knows that I'm gay... that's cool with him and cool with me. That's just the line that's set and I don't allow myself to I guess, cross that line, because I don't want to lose a friend. I never wanted to date him or have sex with him. If anything, I am attracted to him and his openness. Like, I like the fact that he*



*can be so open with himself. That's really important to me in a partner and in a friendship. So you can consider the fact that his open personality and funniness is attractive to me, yes, but I've never been attracted to him. He has qualities that I'd want in a future partner, but Thomas specifically, no.*

**2. Do you ever have a jokingly flirtatious relationship with Rick?**

*No, not with Rick. I did in high school with some of my friends, but that's before they knew I was gay. It's definitely common with other guys on the team, like between two straight teammates. It does seem a little uncomfortable for me and I know it would make other guys feel uncomfortable as well.*

**Willingness to Defend Gay Athlete (Standing Up or Failing to Stand Up)**

The straight athlete might come across a specific moment, or at least consider a time in which he has to defend his gay teammate. He may be very willing/ready to defend his teammate or address homophobic behavior/language, or he might be more comfortable in the role of bystander.

Code **Standing Up** when the straight athlete stands up/is willing to stand up for his gay teammate. Code **Failing to Stand Up** when the straight athlete fails to stand up or is reluctant to do so. Examples:

- 1. We had just gotten back from a formal party, and he happened to have my phone. He went through a conversation I had with a friend and he ran across a text from that friend from a few days prior, where he mocked Brendan in the text for being a "fag" and accused me of acting like a "faggot" like Brendan because I had not pursued something he thought I should. He was basically calling me a "pussy" and thought using Brendan and the fact that he was gay was the best way to compare how I was acting. I didn't say it, but I also did not defend Brendan and instead just answered the text message as if he was not talking about my best friend. I felt all of these emotions over the next day after he confronted me about the text and neither of us spoke to each other. I was angry he had gone through my phone. I was angry how he told me, which was when we were both drunk and other people were in the next room. I felt shame and embarrassment*

*because I then realized how wrong I was about not doing anything about the text. (Failing to Stand Up)*

2. *Yea. We definitely tell people to watch their mouths and I can pull someone aside and tell him that it's not appropriate. I don't think James does that as much and says it doesn't really bother him, but I think it does a little bit, so that's why we try to do the best we can. I mean we're best friends so if it was about something else, he'd have the same reaction. It's easy for us. (Standing Up)*

### **Teammates as a Unit**

In some friendships, the athletes talk about always doing things together. The cliché description of this theme is a “package deal.”

Code a **0** when this relationship lacks in an interview and a **1** for **teammates as a unit** when there is a presence for this relationship. Examples:

1. *Yea, we play on the same line. We have similar builds so we have the same biplans, the same workouts, the same major. I mean, pretty much everything I do at this school, I do with Rick.*
2. *Met him the first week of school after heard he played lax. Started hanging out, has been one of my best friends ever since. We played lacrosse together, lived together with some other friends junior/senior year. Share similar interest/knowledge in sports. Hang out, go out, party.*

### **How friendship is more significant or more special than other friendships (esp. between two straight athletes)**

There is a lot of discussion in these interviews about how these athletes' friendships differ from friendships with their other teammates. Some athletes have very similar friendships with their other friends, whereas for some athletes, their friendship here is much stronger/more intimate than their other friendships.

Code a **0** for **Special Relationship** when the athletes' friendships are similar to their friendships with other teammates or friends and a **1** for **Special Relationship** when the athlete talks of his friendship with his teammate as more special or meaningful than his friendships with other individuals.

Examples :

1. *I talk to him about anything going on in my life at least as much as any of my other teammates/friends...likely more...hard for me to explain why. I've talked to him about different personal issues I've had...he knows I had a few obstacles late in my years at college and was the easiest friend to talk to. I think it's because he seemed like the best listener / least judgmental.*
  
2. *I used to think it was a good thing that my relationship with Brendan was the same as everyone else's. I used to say to myself, isn't it great that I have just as good a relationship with Brendan as everyone else even though he is gay? But that's not how I feel anymore. I am closer to him than other people because of what I said before. That I can talk to him about anything, that he feels comfortable talking to me about anything. He has given me the courage to stand up for what is right by looking at what he has done in the past. I look up to him. It would be a disservice to say I have the same relationship with him that I do with my other friends. It is a better relationship. He has made me a much better person and I couldn't live without him.*

**Friendship as Transformative Experience**

A transformative experience occurs in the friendships of some athletes. For the straight athlete, having a close gay teammate can “transform” them into being more accepting, open-minded, emotionally expressive, etc. For the gay athlete, having a close straight teammate might boost his confidence, self-esteem, etc. This transformation is positive and can be very powerful.

Code a **0** for **Transformative Friendship** in an interview when the athlete does not mention this transformation, and code a **1** for **Transformative Friendship** when there is a presence of this transformation. Example:

1. *Being with James I watch my vocabulary a lot now. I don't think he'd really care, but you know, kind of a respect for him. I hold other guys accountable for what they say. He's helped me grow a lot, so I don't know. Hanging out with him and being my best friend... I mean you can learn things in school and everything, but to have the real life interaction with James is the best learning experience you can have.*

	J.J.	S.C.	B.C.	E.T.	B.B.	T.J.	S.P.	S.OR.	H.H.	B.S.	M.P.	L.G.
--	------	------	------	------	------	------	------	-------	------	------	------	------

Structured Activities												
Sharing Compliments												
Homoerotic Gestures												
Intense Quarrel												
Intense Emotion												
MPC												
Openness of Love												
Reciprocity												
Gay Man More Intimacy												
Straight Man More Intimacy												
Boundary Line												
Standing Up												
Failing to Stand Up												
Teammates as Unit												
Special Relationship												
Transformative												