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## **Cuddling and spooning:**

### **Heteromascularity and homosocial tactility among student-athletes**

#### *Abstract*

This article examines the prevalence of homosocial tactility and the contemporary status and meaning of heteromascularity among British male youth. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 40 student-athletes at a British university, we find that 37 participants have cuddled with another male. In addition to this cuddling, participants also engage in ‘spooning’ with their heterosexual male friends. Demonstrating the pleasurable aspects of being a man in this culture, we argue that the expansion of esteemed homosocial behaviors for heterosexual men is evidence of an expansion of changing conceptions of masculinity in contemporary culture. We call for the discussion of heteromascularities, and contextualize our findings using inclusive masculinity theory.

Key words: heteromascularity; homophobia; cuddling; spooning; homosocial tactility

Critical Studies on Men (CSM) have established that masculinity is neither cohesive nor unified, constituted instead by a diverse and often contradictory set of attitudes, behaviors and social norms (Connell 1995; Kimmel 1994; Mac an Ghail 1994). Alongside the recognition of multiple masculinities, scholars also documented the harm that dominant forms of masculinity inflicted on heterosexual males (Plummer 1999; Pollack 1999). Socially esteemed gendered behaviors for boys and men precluded numerous behaviors: including expressions of emotion other than anger (Goodey 1997); engaging in homosocial tactility (Floyd 2000); and enacting behaviors socially coded as feminine or gay (Epstein 1997; McCreary 1994).

However, recent research documents an expansion in the available forms of masculinity in Anglo-American cultures (Adams 2011; Anderson 2009; McCormack 2012); and CSM is witnessing a diversification of how masculinities are theorized in contemporary culture (Beasley, Brook and Holmes 2012; Haywood and Mac an Ghail 2012; Hearn et al 2012). This article follows this trend. We examine the sustained cuddling practices of heterosexual male athletes—men who have traditionally been labeled the arbiters of esteemed forms of masculinity—yet who engage in behaviors that contest the male hierarchies documented in the CSM literature (e.g. Connell 1995; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009).

Drawing on 40 interviews with heterosexual male undergraduate athletes at a British university, we examine the forms of homosocial intimacy that heterosexual men can engage in while maintaining a heteromasculine identity. First, these men are able to share beds with other men without risking their socially perceived heterosexual identity. Second, they engage in a range of cuddling behaviors with close friends, including cuddling and “spooning.” We then explore the implications of these homosocial behaviors for understanding heteromascularity among this generation of British sport undergraduates.

## **Heteromascularity and Homophobia**

The emergence of CSM in the early 1980s signaled that men, whose gendered power had traditionally been unrecognized, were becoming a focus of analysis (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985; Kimmel 1994). This foundational work established not only that men maintained cultural prestige and social power over women, but that the privileges of being male were *unevenly* distributed between groups of men (Connell 1995; Mac an Ghaill 1994). A significant body of research focused on how particular groups of men were oppressed, including: sexual minorities (Plummer 1999), those of color (Harper 1998), and those from working class backgrounds (McDowell 2002).

However, while white heterosexual men maintained social privilege, another key development in CSM was the recognition that many were also disadvantaged by this social organization of masculinities (e.g. Salisbury and Jackson 1996). A stratification of masculinities was inscribed by the regulation and punishment of men who did not conform to the characteristics of the esteemed archetype of masculinity (Connell 1995). Given the extreme levels of cultural homophobia at the time (Loftus 2001), and the cultural conflation of masculinity with heterosexuality (Schwartz and Rutter 2000), accusing someone of being gay and deploying homophobic language (Plummer 1999; Thurlow 2001) were the most effective ways to regulate masculinities (Britton 1990; McCreary 1994).

Anderson (2008) argued that homophobia is particularly important in masculine behaviors because anyone can be suspected of maintaining same-sex desire; homophobia serves as a mechanism for simultaneously distancing oneself from same-sex desire and stigmatizing other men. Drawing on Harris's (1964) one drop theory of race, in which a dominant white culture viewed anyone with any portion of genetic African ancestry as "black," Anderson (2008) argued that *any* same-sex sexual experience is equated with a stigmatized homosexual orientation for males. Calling this the "one-time rule of

homosexuality,” he posited that homophobia serves as a cultural mechanism that conflates desire, orientation, identity and the social construction of sexual acts into a hierarchical binary of straight and gay. Thus, homophobia has been the primary way of policing masculinities because any behavior or attitude that can be coded as gay can be used as a mechanism of gender regulation (Plummer 1999).

The prevalence of homophobic attitudes and behaviors for men also demonstrated the importance of heterosexuality to masculinity (Richardson 2010). Heterosexuality was a necessary and presumed component of being a man (Epstein and Johnson 1998), for which the synthesis of heterosexuality and masculinity has been conceptualized as ‘heteromascularity’ (Pronger 1990).

### **Heteromascularity and Same-Sex Touch**

While men who embodied orthodox heteromascularity gained privilege and prestige, they suffered in a number of ways from this socially elite status. One of these was through the stigmatization of homosocial tactility (Britton 1990; Derlega et al. 2001; Mac an Ghail 1994). Klein (1993) contended that men’s avoidance of physical intimacy is perpetuated by a myth that such intimacies are inspired by sexual desire and are thus precursors to sexual intimacy. Similarly, Plummer (1999) highlighted how homophobic codes tended to dominate in settings where physical proximity is likely to occur, such as in shared dormitories or in changing rooms. Homoeroticism is thus excised from same-sex interactions through homophobic stigma, leaving little but physical violence and particular ritualized sporting activities as outlets for male same-sex touch (Plummer 1999).

This rejection of homosocial intimacy was evident in many contexts and social institutions (Floyd 2000; McCreary 1994). For example, Derlega et al. (1989) showed heterosexual males rated photos of men hugging as significantly more ‘abnormal’ than photos

of men standing alongside each other; they did not rate mixed-sex couples or women hugging as abnormal. Similarly, Field (1999) found that American youth were much less tactile than adolescents in France, where heteromascuine ideals are less firmly entrenched. She also documented American youth enacting aggressive verbal and physical behavior in place of the stroking and cuddling that French adolescents engaged in.

Yet this restricted set of masculine behaviors has expanded in recent years (Anderson 2008; Coad 2008; McCormack 2011a). McCormack and Anderson (2010) documented the prevalence of hugging and soft touch among 16-18 year-old British high school students. They described behaviors including hugging, lying together, and back rubs without social regulation or the use of homophobia to consolidate their heterosexual identities (c.f. Plummer 1999). However, McCormack and Anderson (2010) also documented that boys would, on occasion, ironically proclaim same-sex desire; calling this form of identity management, ironic heterosexual recuperation—a form of banter whose implicit meanings are shared across the social group (see also McCormack 2011b).

Baker and Hotek (2011) found similar behaviors among scholastic wrestlers, without such forms of identity management. Adams (2011) also documented that the participants in his study of US soccer players regularly engaging in gentle forms of same-sex touch, including hugging as a greeting and as a way of providing comfort and support (see also Anderson, McCormack and Lee 2012; Kaplan 2006; Roberts 2013). These behaviors are markedly different from the heteromascuinity of prior generations and are not readily explained by theories of the 1980s and 1990s (Anderson 2009; Hearn et al. 2012). Of course, as we argue in detail elsewhere (McCormack and Anderson in press), the links between homophobia and same-sex tactility will vary significantly in different cultures—particularly those such as Iran where same-sex touch has not been conflated with sexual desire.

## **Theorizing the Expansion of Heteromasculine Behaviors**

Recognizing the profound changes that have occurred to the social organization of masculinities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, scholars have developed new ways to think about masculinities (Anderson 2009; Beasley 2008; Thorpe 2010). Evidencing this, Haywood and Mac an Ghail (2012) argue that theories of masculinities from the 1980s and 1990s no longer account for the diversity of experiences reported in the contemporary literature, while Hearn et al. (2012) contend that there has been a “third phase” of research on men and masculinities in Sweden. Beginning at the turn of the millennium, they argue that this body of work is characterized by “diversity and critique, which includes work by a new generation of scholars not embedded in the frameworks of the 1980s” (p. 37). Indeed, research that has documented a softening of masculinity has tended to eschew Connell’s (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity; frequently using Anderson’s (2009) inclusive masculinity theory instead (e.g. Dashper 2012; Haltom and Worthen in press; Morris-Roberts and Gilbert 2013; Roberts 2013).

The central concept of inclusive masculinity theory is homophobia, which is defined as the fear of being socially perceived as gay. As homophobia lessens, homophobia ceases to be an effective way to regulate masculinity because it is no longer effective in stigmatizing heterosexual men (Anderson 2009). It is argued that as cultural homophobia decreases, gendered power becomes distributed more evenly between men, independent of sexuality or masculine capital (McCormack and Anderson in press). Anderson (2009) describes stratifications of masculinity moving from vertical (dominating) to horizontal (progressive) forms in these settings.

Anderson (2009) and others (Adams 2011; McCormack 2012; Roberts 2013) have demonstrated that as homophobia decreases, men’s gendered behaviors become more tactile, soft and gentle. In other words, there is an expansion of the set of actions that men can

perform and still be considered heteromascuine (Anderson, Adams and Rivers 2012; Savin-Williams and Vrangalova 2013). While this expansion of heteromascuinity has included hugging and similar behaviors (McCormack and Anderson 2010), there are still bounds to acceptable touch. For example, spooning has only been documented in the literature in exceptional circumstances (e.g. Anderson 2008).

### **The British Context**

Attitudes toward homosexuality vary according to geographical location, and it is important to recognize that while Britain and America share many discourses of gender and sexuality, the social dynamics of men and their attitudes toward homosexuality will vary between these countries. For example, Anderson's (2009) comparison of General Social Survey data in the US with the British Social Attitudes survey reveals that there is approximately a 10 percentage point difference in attitudes toward homosexuality—that British attitudes toward lesbians and gay men have been somewhat more liberal but, importantly, that the changes in attitudes have been remarkably similar, with both countries experiencing a peak of homophobia in the late 1980s.

Homophobia has decreased at a remarkable rate in British culture since the turn of the millennium. Weeks (2007) highlighted the social, cultural and legal transformations that have occurred, arguing that they form a “long, unfinished but profound revolution that has transformed the possibilities of living sexual diversity and creating intimate lives” (p. X). Supporting this, data from the British Social Attitudes survey show that only 29 per cent of adults think same-sex relationships are wrong, down from 46 per cent in 2000 (Curtice and Ormston 2012). Similarly, Cowan (2007) reports that 86 per cent of British citizens would be comfortable if a close friend was gay, and Cashmore and Cleland (2012) find that 93 per cent of football fans would accept an openly gay player on their team. Indeed, McCormack (2012)



finds heterosexual male youth are using the freedom afforded by this decreased homophobia to redefine masculinity in a softer, more progressive manner.

To discuss the British context is not to argue that these findings do not maintain relevance for the US, however. In a statistical analysis of GSS data, Keleher and Smith (2012: 1232) argue that American's "willingness to accept lesbians and gays has grown enormously since 1990," arguing that "we are witnessing a sweeping change in attitudes toward lesbians and gay men" (p. 1324). Furthermore, recent PEW (2013) research finds that 70% of those born after 1980 support same-sex marriage, and 74% of these Americans believe that homosexuality should be accepted by society (for similar findings, see also Baunach 2012; Loftus 2001; Pryor et al. 2011). Research suggests that these improving attitudes are having similar effects on masculinities in the US as the changes that are occurring in the UK (e.g. Adams and Anderson 2012; Gottzén and Kremer-Sadlik 2012; Michael 2013). We suggest that changes in the UK can be interpreted as an indicator of potential future trends in masculinities in the US.

## **Methods**

Data for this article comes from qualitative, in-depth interviews with 40 heterosexual male athletes aged 18-19, recruited from the first author's sociology of sport class at a British university. Given our interest in understanding the practices and meanings of men's homosocial intimacy, we did not seek a generalizable sample of the university at large, but instead recruited participants from a setting where these behaviors might be expected to occur. While college sport has traditionally been an arena for orthodox forms of masculinity (Pronger 1990), recent research has demonstrated the emergence of inclusive masculinities in these settings (Adams 2011; Anderson 2009; Haltom and Worthen in press). All participants

self-identified as Caucasian/white and heterosexual, and the majority self-identified as middle class. This sample reflects the demographics of student athletes at this university.

Interviews were semi-structured, only loosely following an interview schedule created in advance. Participants were encouraged to discuss personal experiences of particular topics, and reflect upon the meaning of their stories. A range of topics were discussed during interview, and each participant was asked about homosocial tactility (hugging, cuddling, etc), sleeping arrangements, nights out, how they expressed their friendship, as well as cuddling behaviors.

Interviews were digitally recorded. Transcriptions of the recordings were thematically coded by both authors independently, and then discussed until interpretations were agreed (Goetz and LeCompte 1984). The themes of cuddling, hugging, spooning and bed-sharing were agreed before analysis, and themes were added or altered during the coding process as guided by the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This data is part of a wider project on youth masculinities, so homosocial behaviors were neither highlighted in the recruitment process nor a criterion for participation.

Ethical approval for this research was secured at the first author's institution. Participants each signed a consent sheet that followed the ethical guidelines of the British Sociological Association, and were informed about the nature of the project and the topics that would be discussed. Participation was voluntary and not credit bearing, hence there is no reason to suppose participants were influenced in their answers. All participants had the right to withdraw from the research and to review transcripts, although none did.

### **Sharing a Bed**

Of the 40 students interviewed, 39 said that they had slept in bed with another male since attending university at least once.<sup>1</sup> Indicating that such behavior is not a significant event for

these men, the remaining student indicated that he could not remember if he had or not; saying, “I might have when pissed [drunk].” Indicating a lack of stigma for bed sharing, all forty participants stated that sharing beds is normal in their respective peer groups. “It’s just what we do,” one commented.

Conversely, no participant responded with a negative reaction about bed sharing. All said that their friends had shared beds, at least occasionally, while at university. Importantly, while there were friendships within this sample (as they were chosen from one sociology of sport class), participants were clear that it was a range of friendship groups in which this occurred, and included friends from other courses as well as friends from participants’ home towns.

There were a range of scenarios in which bed sharing would occur. For example, Joe’s experience of bed sharing was when friends from home came to visit. He said, “Yeah, I’ve shared a bed with mates from school. They just bunk with me when they’re up, and it means we can chat, too.” Tom described a different situation:

One time, me and all my mates went out, and I ended up walking home to my best friends and stayed at his because I couldn’t be bothered to walk the rest of the way to mine...I texted him and asked if I could stay at his.

Once in his friend’s bedroom, Tom stripped to his underpants, and got in bed next to his friend, where they slept until the next morning. He said, “I remember waking up the next day and his mum asking him if he brought a girl back and then realizing that I crashed at his...She cooked us breakfast.”

While bed sharing occurs in a number of ways, Jack’s experience was representative of most of the participants: “Basically, my house is nearest town,” he said. “When we go for a night out, those that haven’t pulled come back to mine and we share a bed. We don’t have

spare sheets and shit like that, so it's just least hassle." Thus, bed sharing was often a pragmatic response to a particular social situation.

Highlighting the prosaic nature of bed sharing for these participants, most indicated that it was not necessary to be close friends to share a bed with someone. For example, Stephen said that he bed shares "...all the time, often at a friend of a friend. Sometimes I barely know the guy I'm sharing with." Similarly, Jamie recalled the time he inadvertently shared a bed with a stranger following a house party. "I don't remember all the details," he said:

but we were at a mates drinking, and I just was like 'that's it. I'm going to sleep.' So I crawled into one of the beds with some guy already in it. I knew who he was, but no, we were not friends per se.

When asked if it felt odd sleeping in a single bed with a guy he barely knew the next morning, Jamie replied, "No man, it's just not a big deal."

However, there is some variance in who these men will share a bed with. For example, Anthony has only shared a bed a few times, commenting that it is only with "...close mates, where we are very comfortable with each other." Even so, the majority of participants indicated that they would share beds with a range of people.

Interviews also demonstrated that there is no limit regarding the frequency one can sleep in a bed with the same male. For example, Tom and Pete share a bed nightly: "We share a room to save money. But then again Pete is also my best friend, I love him, why wouldn't I want to sleep with him?" When asked if Tom worried that people might perceive them to be gay, he replied, "Not at all, why would they?" Expressions of love are common among British male youth (McCormack 2011a), and homosocial tactility has been interpreted as being a demonstration of friendship (c.f. Plummer 1999).

## **Cuddling and Spooning**

In addition to the prevalence of bed sharing as a pragmatic response to sleeping arrangements, we find cuddling and spooning as forms of esteemed homosocial tactility to be prevalent between friends (c.f. Mac an Ghail 1994; Plummer 1999). 37 participants said that they have cuddled with another male, and they described cuddling occurring in two locations: on the couch and in bed. We define cuddling here as gentle physical contact for a prolonged period of time.

Cuddling on the couch occurs as a form of relaxation and social bonding. For example, Justin said, “we’ll just be watching a movie and I’ll just put my head on whoever was next to me.” Matt discussed a typical cuddling arrangement. He said his best friend, Connor, is his most frequent cuddling partner:

I feel comfortable with Connor and we spend a lot of time together. I happily rest my head on Connor’s shoulder when lying on the couch or hold him in bed. But he’s not the only one. The way I see it, is that we are all very good and close mates. We have a bromance where we are very comfortable around each other.

Without being prompted, Jarrett repeatedly stressed the amount of cuddling he and his mates engage in. “We’re always cuddling, my lot. We’re all comfortable with each other.” Others highlight that cuddling occurs during the day, and will often be described as “a quick cuddle.” John praised these short interactions, saying “I love a quick cuddle, just so you remember your friends are about and are there for you.”

After commenting that he frequently cuddled with a lot of his friends, Max described his experiences of cuddling:

I probably could talk a lot about this topic, actually. Cuddling is a standard part of my uni life, really. We very often have hangover cuddles and naps together. I have even done it today, actually. I really enjoy it! Seriously, I do it all the time.

The hangover naps described by Max occur on the morning following a night out clubbing. The friends will congregate at one house, where they watch TV, play video games, and “nurse” their hangovers. These activities would include frequent cuddling, which Max described as “feeling good,” adding, “If your mate has a headache you can like massage his head, or you just lie there together holding each other and laughing about how awful you feel.”

In addition to cuddling on the couch (see also Magrath, Anderson and Roberts 2013), participants discuss cuddling in bed, something they call “spooning.” For example, Pete and Tom, who share a room in a student house, frequently cuddle and spoon. Tom said, “Yeah, like proper spoon. He’s my best mate, it’s a pleasure.” Tom elaborated: “We have shared beds loads of time last year, and we thought why not save money and just share a [bed] this year.” Similarly, Matt said, “I don’t see anything wrong with sleeping in the same bed, or even showing that love in a club or even just at uni during the day.” Sam also said, “I spoon, yeah...It is very common for us to go out [late], and then the next day after class receive a text from someone saying something like ‘do you want to come and nap?’”

When spooning, Stephen said that you could cuddle “wherever.” He added, “You can rest your hand on his leg, or his hand, or wherever. There are no limitations.” When Jarrett is asked about sleeping with other males he said:

Me and my mates are pretty close, like emotionally. We let each other know everything so we always have a big hug when we leave...when a couple mates [from back home] came to stay at uni we had to share beds too, like 2 per bed, we always have a quick snuggle before sleeping.

Interestingly, there was no clear system for who cuddled whom (who was “big spoon” and who was “little spoon”). Anthony commented, “It’s just whatever.” Others confirmed. Stephen said, “You switch sometimes. You know, one guy rolls over so you roll over and

now it's your turn to hold him." Thus, cuddling is a part of homosocial intimacy among friends that primarily serves as an expression of friendship and support (see also McCormack 2011a), and appears to be devoid of power relations or masculine posturing. Importantly, the three participants who had not cuddled with another many did not stigmatize these behaviors. Ross's response was representative of these three when he said, "I dunno. It's just never happened. It would be nice I reckon, but it's not a thing I've done with my mates."

### **Spooning and Erections**

Given the small size of English beds, and the levels of alcohol consumption that often precede bed sharing, it is possible that these men would be concerned about having an erection while bed sharing or spooning (see Plummer 2006). When asked about whether he feared getting an erection while sleeping with a mate, Sam responded. "No. There are no worries about boners. I mean, of course you get them every morning, [but] it's not a problem." Similarly, Jarrett did not fear getting an erection. "I've woken up with one before. We all have. If we're fully awake, then we'll banter about it," he said. "All the boys piss themselves, maybe saying something like 'happy to see me' or whatever. We love it."

Other men are equally direct about erections. Stephen said, "It's 2013, we don't give anyone shit anymore." When asked if there are limitations as to where guys can touch, he answered, "Never! Sometimes you grab his cock, sort of as a joke, particularly if he's got a semi going." Explaining why, Stephen said, "It just relieves the tension." Stephen added, "It's not like you're going to wank him." While Stephen was referring to the potential tension of an erection being indicative of same-sex desire, Tom's discussion of tension was more prosaic, saying, "Yeah I've woken up with a boner. I told my mate 'morning glory,' and went to the bathroom to relieve the tension."

For the few men who said they did not speak about their erections, they suggested this was through fear that it would formalize their behaviors. For example, John said, “No. You don’t talk about that, there are no rules or anything. Whatever happens, happens.” The only other participant who did not discuss erections when spooning, Henry, said, “Look, everyone gets a boner. What’s the point of mentioning it? Anyway, I’m normally so hungover I can barely speak.”

This method of dealing with erections through banter is best conceptualized as ironic heterosexual recuperation (McCormack and Anderson 2010), where joking about potential desire seemingly dispels its possibility—a way of consolidating a heterosexual identity without being homophobic. Evidencing this, Louis explained the role of joking in his peer group: “It’s banter,” he answered before saying, “We love each other to pieces... and banter is how you show love.” It is also noticeable how several participants use their hangover, and thus high alcohol consumption, when discussing their erections (see Anderson, McCormack and Lee 2012)—situating their behaviors within traditionally masculine practice of drinking.

## **Discussion**

This article extends the body of research that demonstrates a remarkable transition in the esteemed gendered behaviors of male youth (Adams 2011; Anderson 2009; McCormack 2012). In addition to sharing a bed with friends and acquaintances, our participants are able to engage in prolonged acts of homosocial tactility—namely cuddling and spooning—while simultaneously professing love for their friends. As Beasley, Brook and Holmes (2012) call for, we thus demonstrate the *pleasurable* elements of being a man in contemporary British culture—pleasures that were denied to previous generations because of these behaviors’ then-association with homosexuality (Mac an Ghail 1994). Documenting similar behaviors among Australian male youth, Flood (2009) described his participants as “bent straights.” However,



it is our contention that labeling these behaviors as queer or transgressive is problematic as they have become *normative* among British male youth (see also Mac an Ghail and Haywood 2012; McCormack 2014; McCormack and Anderson 2010; Morris-Roberts and Gilbert 2013). Rather than male youth transgressing masculine norms, we find that they have redefined them for their own benefit.

Research in the 1980s and 1990s powerfully documented that masculine identities were fragmented, partial and only kept together through the degradation of the ‘other’—which was most frequently the gay male. Pascoe (2007) called this the “specter of the fag.” Here, heterosexual men would maintain their identities through social marginalization and physical domination of their peers (see Connell 1995). In this framework, it was assumed that an erosion of homophobia would necessarily occur alongside a dissipation of heteromasculine identities—in effect, a queer politics of deconstruction. Heteromasculine identities were conceived as part of the problem, and their dissolution necessary for a more progressive gender project (e.g. Butler 1990; Pascoe 2007).

Yet the research documenting the declining significance of homophobia to men’s lives also demonstrates the continued significance of heteromascularity (e.g. Anderson 2009). As McCormack (2012, p. 133) argues, “identifications have ceased being a battleground—they are now socially perceived as a true statement of sexuality.” We argue that the combination of these new behaviors and the continued importance of heteromascularity trouble the efficacy of queer politics. Notwithstanding the continued gender inequalities within British and American society, these changes document the power of collective identity movement politics in effecting social change; even though participants are not aware that they are part of a movement.

This research also causes us to question the continued use of the term heteromascularity. While CSM have long demonstrated that there are multiple masculinities

rather than one form of masculinity, these masculinities have traditionally been hierarchically stratified with one archetype maintaining hegemonic dominance (Connell 1995). There has thus been a single, dominant form of heteromascularity, kept in place by the use of homophobia to subordinate any male or behavior that strayed from this norm (Plummer 1999). Yet the changes in heteromascularity documented in this research, as well as research more generally (Adams 2011; Flood 2009; Mac an Ghail and Haywood 2012; McCormack 2012), suggest that thinking of a singular heteromascularity is no longer sufficient and that we must, instead, think of *heteromascularities*. It is this freedom to embody a broader set of gender styles that enables men to engage in cuddling and spooning behaviors in the range and diversity of ways that we document (McCormack and Anderson 2010).

The expansion of gendered behaviors is best explained by changing levels of homophobia, as described by inclusive masculinity theory (Anderson 2009). In the homophobic 1980s and early 1990s, cuddling and other forms of homosocial tactility were socially coded as 'gay' and therefore avoided. But as homophobia began to decline, men were able to associate themselves with behaviors traditionally coded as feminine (e.g. Adams 2011; Harris and Clayton 2007). Significantly, as men engaged in restricted forms of homosocial tactility, the association with homosexuality was further eroded. Described by McCormack (2012: 63) as a "virtuous circle of decreasing homophobia and expanded gendered behaviors," homosocial tactility became part of heteromascularity and was stripped of its "gay" connotations.

Inclusive masculinity theory also explains the shift from heteromascularity to heteromascularities. Whereas previous theories have tended to conceive of a dominant form of masculinity that maintains its position through the subordination of others (e.g. Bourdieu 2001; Connell 1995), inclusive masculinity theory contends that masculinities will not be hierarchically stratified in cultures of low homophobia (Anderson 2011). And it is in these

non-homohysteria settings where multiple archetypes of masculinity co-exist that it is most accurate to conceive of a range of heteromasculinities.

While the socio-emotional benefits for relationships between men are evident in this research, there are substantive questions about the relationship between men and women in these cultures. Indeed, these forms of cuddling appear to be an exclusively male-male phenomenon. While it is extremely likely that these men will engage in similar behaviors with romantic female partners, the absence of male-female bonding raises important questions. It may well be that this form of cuddling occurs less because the potential for sexual desire and/or arousal acts as a disinhibitor, although we did not explicitly ask about this. While we do not doubt the continued inequality between the sexes in a range of spheres (e.g. Walby 2011), there was no evidence of explicit misogynistic attitudes with participants. Thus, a nuanced investigation of the relationship between these progressive heteromasculinities and gender inequality is required in future research.

There are similar questions about the prevalence of cuddling behaviors between heterosexual men and their gay peers. McCormack (2012) has documented heterosexual youth being pro-active in their inclusion of their gay male peers, arguing that homosexuality can even enhance a person's popularity in certain circumstances. More significantly, Anderson (in press) finds that his gay male participants discuss hugging and spooning with their heterosexual male friends. He describes a similar process of bantering that we find in this research as a mechanism by which any awkwardness is dealt with.

When CSM emerged as a pro-feminist sub-discipline, it highlighted both the privilege and damage associated with being a man. While significant questions remain about how male privilege intersects with a range of variables including race, class and sex, a profound shift has occurred in how men can interact with each other. From adopting softer clothing styles (Roberts 2013) to being inclusive of homosexuality (McCormack 2012), heteromascularity

has been rapidly changing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This article documents that what a man can do and still be judged heteromasculine has expanded even further.

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## **Endnotes**

1. Beds in most student accommodation in the UK are known as “singles,” and are approximately 36 inches wide.