

The bromance is blossoming, says study

June 8 2017, by Adam White



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

After winning Olympic gold in the men's synchronised three-metre springboard last year, British diver Jack Laugher ran, in only Speedos, to his diving partner and housemate, Chris Mears, for a heartwarming victory cuddle. Immediately afterwards, the Daily Mail published a piece entitled "[Steady on chaps!...](#)" questioning the masculinity (and arguably, sexuality) of the champions.

Apparently, two guys embracing each other was too affectionate for the Daily Mail, which suggested the correct code of behaviour was a "pat on the back", as demonstrated by the Chinese pair. After only a few hours, with considerable contestation of this statement, including from its own readership in the comments section, the article was updated with a more positive title: "'The British diver is so hot!!!' Gold medal heart throb sends women AND men into meltdown after stunning show in Rio."

Apparently hugging is not very 'manly'. This backward view of gender behaviour and casual homophobia has to stop.

pic.twitter.com/nuJl1RCMxd

— WayneDavid (@WayneDavid81) [August 11, 2016](#)

The Daily Mail were harking back to an [idea of masculinity from the 1980s and 1990s](#). At this time, the cultural script of masculinity constrained and regulated men's emotional sensitivity. According to this script, physical tactility indicated homosexuality. Sayings like "Man up!" or "Be a man!" were common ways that guys regulated the behaviours of other men to stop them from being excessively emotional, tactile or affectionate with other males.

Fortunately, since the 1990s, homophobia has decreased, and social attitudes towards sexual diversity [have improved](#). Among young people today, [homosexuality is often seen as normal](#). Being gay is not stigmatised or problematic for many (albeit not all) [young men](#) in the UK today, and so heterosexual men are permitted to engage in once-feminised behaviours without fear of being perceived as gay. Chris Mears and Jack Laugher, for example, despite identifying as heterosexual, have both posed for gay magazines and have huge followings within LGBT communities. The product of this social shift is a newer form of man to man friendship: the bromance.

Concerning male friendships, the past decade can be seen as the decade of the bromance. A quick look at films – [I Love You Man](#), [Pineapple Express](#), [21 Jump Street](#) – social media and even politics (think of [Obama and Biden](#)) will give you an indication of how far affectionate bromantic relations between men have come.

It was because of this cultural shift that Eric Anderson, Stefan Robinson and I decided to conduct an academic study of adolescent male's views on the state of the bromance. We wanted to know if the bromance as depicted in film was also seen in daily life.

Academic bromance

[Our study](#), published in *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, was based on in-depth interviews with 30 British undergraduate sports students. We asked: do bromances exist in real life? What do they look like? And why should we care?

We wanted to understand what a bromance was, why men have them and how they form. With sport previously being a hyper-masculine environment, and universities being the first time many people have independence, sports students are a good indicator of future gender attitudes and their transformation. That said, we make no generalisation that this is representative beyond our sample, but suspect it may well be.

A bromance was defined by our participants as a highly close and intimate friendship, where both parties are emotionally invested in each other's well-being. Participants suggested, for example, that a bromantic friend was "someone who is literally there for you all the time" and "will always be there to back you up if you need it". A bromance is between friends whose mutual support is perceived as limitless and unwavering. All of the participants said they had at least one relationship they would class as a bromance.

Compared to a regular friendship, bromances involve higher levels of emotional disclosure, often on highly sensitive issues that show vulnerability. These men say that "there are no boundaries" and "nothing is off limits". They proclaim their love for each other, they share secrets and even discuss health anxieties. Whereas men will often exaggerate the number of sexual encounters they've experienced in regular conversation, there is no need for such inflated claims in bromances.

As well as their [emotional intimacy](#), these guys engaged in non-sexual physical intimacy, too. Kissing, cuddling and spooning were common perks for men in bromantic relationships. All but one of the men interviewed engaged in cuddling and spooning their bromances, and most had kissed their bromances. They said things like: "You can lie in bed with your bromance, have a cuddle and just talk."

Just as men have traditionally bonded over common interests, whether that be sport, cars or other traditionally masculine pursuits, shared interests were also seen as a key characteristic of a bromantic friendship, especially in the formation phases. These men said things like "You have to have extremely similar interests and it has to build from that" and "When two boys meet and they get on well and have similar interests. They bounce off one another ... they will be similar in personality." They described the bromance as being a limitless same-sex friendship that is characterised by shared interests, physical tactility and emotional intimacy.

The impact of the recent cultural approval of the bromance may be significant. In 2015, men were [three times more likely to commit suicide](#) than women in the UK. But men raised in the 1980s have the highest rates of suicide, and young men today have the [lowest rates](#). Emotional restrictiveness and traditional toxic scripts of masculinity have [long been considered](#) a risk factor for mental health concerns, violence and suicide.

Masculinity is no longer this debilitating and deadly curse that forces young men to act in a particularly toxic manner and, as such, these emotionally open and loving bromances are blossoming.

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