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## Typologies of Men's Friendships: Constructing Masculinity through Them

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# Typologies of Men's Friendships: Constructing Masculinity through Them

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## Abstract

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Male friendships are often identified as being instrumental, avoiding expressive intimacy within their friendships. Past research has focused too much on friendship being an outcome of being male or having masculine attitudes, limiting analysis of the social construction of friendships in relation to masculine performances. Focusing on the individual production of friendship limits consideration of the construction of different dyads within one social network. Open-ended interviews with twelve men about each of their close friendships focused analysis on the dyad and not the individual. From the study, it was found that men established four different typologies of friendships (non-active, closed active, open active, expressive). While each friendship dyad differed in form and intimacy, all were influenced by the social construction of masculinity in these men's lives.

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**Keywords:** friendship, dyad, social network, masculine attitudes

# Tipologías de Amistades Masculinas: Construyendo la Masculinidad a través de Ellas

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## Resumen

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Las amistades masculinas a menudo se identifican como algo instrumental, y los hombres evitan establecer una intimidad expresiva dentro de sus amistades. Investigaciones anteriores se ha centrado demasiado en la amistad como un resultado del hecho de ser hombre o de tener actitudes masculinas, limitando de esta forma el análisis de la construcción social de las amistades en relación con la construcción masculina. En este caso nos centramos en la producción individual de los límites de la amistad considerando la construcción de diferentes parejas dentro de una red social. Se han realizado doce entrevistas abiertas con hombres sobre sus amigos íntimos centrando el análisis en las parejas y no en el individuo. A partir del estudio, se encontró que los hombres establecen cuatro tipologías diferentes de amistades: no activa, cerrada-activa, active-abierta, expresiva. Si bien cada pareja-amistad difiere en la forma y en la intimidad que se establece, todas las tipologías están influenciadas por la construcción social de la masculinidad en la vida de estos hombres.

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**Palabras clave:** amistad, parejas, red social, actitudes masculinas



Researchers have consistently concluded that friendships are different for men and women (Fehr, 1996; Messner, 1992; Swain 1989; Wheeler et al., 1989), with women developing more expressive relationships through the process of self-disclosure. In contrast, men’s same-sex friendships are found to be more instrumental, centering around shared interests and activities (Messner, 1992; Swain 1989). While focus in research has extended beyond discussions of male-female differences, the emphasis remains on how an individual’s characteristics lead to differences in intimacy with friends, such as how being more masculine results in less expressive friendships (Morman et al., 2013). While such research allows for the engagement of a more social dynamic of friendship, the discussion sustains a static dialogue about gender and resulting friendships. Focusing on the individual and how or why he produces friendships is limiting, assuming that friendships are outcomes. The focus should be on the social construction of friendship as a part of gender performance (Felmlee et al., 2012). Research on the relationship between gender and friendship should consider the interactions among friends (Thurnell-Read, 2012), in particular close friends, as another performance of masculinity and not a result of being a man (Migliaccio, 2009). Furthermore, focusing on friendship as an outcome limits the analysis of the existence of a diversity of friendships within one person’s network. This exploratory study analyzes the relationship between intimacy and masculinity within close friendships, with a focus on the dyad in an effort to better comprehend the social construction of masculinity through friendships and the diversity of friendships that can exist among men.

### **Men’s Friendships**

In general, it is believed that men and women differ in friendship form, with women developing more expressive friendships and men more instrumental. Studies, however, have identified that women are just as likely to have instrumental relationships (Wright & Scanlon, 1993). Furthermore, men have been shown to engage in discussions similar to women (Wheeler et al., 1989), displaying expressive connections (Thurnell-Read, 2012). While the general belief persists that males are not as intimate with same-sex friends as women, “critics argue that women’s friendships

appear to be more intimate only because intimacy has been conceptualized and measured in a female-biased way” (Fehr 1999, p.135) (Cancian 1986; Sherrod, 1989; Swain, 1989). While defined from a feminine standpoint, research has shown that men tend to idealize self-disclosure as one of the most important components of intimacy (Monsour, 1992).

### **Masculinity and Intimacy**

While men idealize more expressive intimacy, they do not establish it in their friendships. Arguments have been made to link this directly to the patriarchal system in which Western society is couched, which limits a man’s ability to display feelings and emotions to others, including friends (Kimmel & Kaufman, 1994). This is largely based on the expectation that men are expected to avoid anything that is feminine (Fehr, 2004; Morman et al., 2013). The avoidance of femininity is the focal point of men in Western society (Doyle, 1995; Kimmel & Kaufman, 1994). The establishment of masculinity is not so much a performance to be accepted as male, but a performance to convince others that he is not female nor feminine, which would marginalize or emasculate him (Goffman 1967; Migliaccio, 2009). As Michael Kaufman (1998) stated, “masculinity requires a suppression of a whole range of human needs, aims, feelings and forms of expression” (1998, p.37). Similar expectations arise among men concerning the self-disclosure of intimate issues with male friends, for intimacy and self-disclosure are defined as being feminine (Cancian, 1986). This was confirmed in Felmlee’s study on cross-gender and same-sex friendships. She found that men are less accepting than women of a friend engaging in feminine behaviors when they interact (1999). A later study by Felmlee, et al (2012) found that men consistently have lower expectations of self-disclosure within their friendships. Furthermore, men are held to lower standards of expressive intimacy than are women in their friendships, even in cross-gender friendships.

With such a strong societal link between expressive intimacy and femininity, a man would likely avoid such behaviors, such as self-disclosure so as not to be emasculated in the eyes of others, regardless of his personal needs. In a study of married and single men, Reid and Fine (1992) found “men wanted to be more intimate with their male friends, but

feared a negative reaction if they attempted more intimate interaction” (in Fehr, 1999, p.139). It is the fear of being labeled as effeminate, weak, or, even worse, a woman that spurs a male to avoid intimacy, even though they would benefit from engaging in more feminine styles of intimacy (Reisman, 1990; Sanderson et al., 2005).

This is not to assume that men do not share with other men. Men have been found to experience more expressive intimacy with friends; however, the sharing is shrouded in a more masculine context. Men engage in activities that allows for self-disclosure to occur (Kiesling, 2005). As Walker (2001) showed in her discussion of male phone conversations, “Although most men reported calling friends for instrumental reasons, many men reported that their telephone conversations were not limited to the reason for the call” (2001, p.229). Similarly, Thurnell-Read (2012) found that men can be emotive and expressive in a highly masculinized activity, such as a stag party (bachelor party).

Beyond activities, men also utilized distinct methods of sharing intimate issues (Walker, 2001) to masculine interactions, such as humor (George, 1994). “Joking relationships provide men with an implicit form of expressing affection” (Swain 1989, p.83). Humor allows a man to discuss sensitive issues that might initially characterize a man as feminine. While useful to connect men, humor can also be utilized to mark boundaries for acceptable behaviors with the intention of marginalizing men who challenge the hegemonic standard (Collinson, 1992). These methods of sharing do not completely open the channels of communication between men; but, by situating men in comfortable, masculine contexts, the ability to self-disclose becomes more acceptable. Even when alternative methods are not employed, men will label emotive experiences as anything but intimate or expressive to avoid being affiliated with femininity (Evers, 2010).

While research has moved beyond a notion that “being a male” impacts friendships, there persists a focus on the role orientation of a person influencing friendships, which maintains a notion of individual identity driving friendship (Bank & Hansford, 2000). More recent research has focused more on the socially determined expectations by analyzing masculine expectations. They have found that more masculine individuals are less inclined to engage in self-disclosure in friendships (Morman et al., 2013). While more socially prescribed, these studies persist in focusing on

the individual and not the social relationship that is created when friends interact. Focusing on the individual presents a static analysis of gender as a causal factor as opposed to an interactive component that exists within relationships and interactions. As Patrick and Beckenbach (2009) argue, “social construction must be taken into account when examining experiences of intimacy” (p. 55). In a sense, how men engage with their friends can be considered an aspect of the performance of masculinity (Felmlee et al., 2012). More important, “male friendship is an integral and defining ingredient” (Thurnell-Read 2012, p.250) in the production of masculinity. In a study of men in two gender designated occupations, it was concluded that men “do gender” through the means in which they interact with friends (Migliaccio, 2009). Still, even in this study, it focused on how individuals construct a singular type of friendship, even if it is in relation to other social factors, like occupation and masculinity, as opposed to analyzing different friendships and how each dyad is constructed.

Interviewing men about their close friends focuses on the dyads, moving beyond past studies that have emphasized singular ideas of the construction of friendship (Thurnell-Read, 2012). Focus on the dyads allows for a broader analysis of friendship as a flexible experience that is influenced by the social construction of masculinity, but not driven by it. Through these interviews a better understanding of how friendships relate to and reflect the social construction of masculinity can be gained, as well as allow for the existence of a diversity of friendships within the network of each man. Simply, the construction of friendship as a reflection of masculinity can result in multiple forms of relationships.

## **Methodology**

This exploratory study of male intimacy used non-probability sampling to locate a sample of twelve men. All of the men (see Table 1) were white, heterosexual, professional males who had received Bachelor’s degrees, with seven of the participants having received advanced degrees. While there were a higher number of married individuals in the sample, the overall experiences did not seem to reflect disparities between single and married men. There was also an extensive range in the ages of interviewees, from 28-65 years old. While the explanations expressed by the younger men tended to be shorter and less developed, the overall experiences and even



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the number of close friends were generally similar, regardless of age. The period of time each had lived in their present living situation was also collected, assuming that it might impact the number of and closeness of friendships. Of the respondents, only one had been in the area less than eight years (Jack, 2 yrs). (There were three who had only recently moved to their present residence, but had grown up in the area and had returned often to visit) (Appendix A: years lived in area). Regardless, there did not appear to be any differentiation between any of the respondent’s comments (including Jack’s) about friendship in relation to their time having resided in an area. The focus for the sample was to interview men who epitomize the dominant standard within Western society, since that is the group from which the hegemonic masculine standard is more explicitly meant to reflect. This is not to assume that all of these men achieve or display it but rather that they are most likely accustomed to these judgments that derive from the hegemonic standard. Simply, to explore how this standard influences friendship construction, it is important to evaluate those men who most likely closely adhere to the standard.

Table 1  
*Demographics of Respondents*

Name	Occupation	Age	Education	Years lived in area	Marital Status
Ben	Insurance Salesman	28	B.A.	1(28)	Married
Jerry	Teacher	35	M.A.	3 (19)	Married
Laurel	Multimedia Program Manager	38	B.S.	8	Single
Hardy	Professor	55	Ph.D.	31	Separated
Larry	Professor	58	Ph.D.	35	Married
Mo	Computer Technician	56	B.S (two)	24	Married
Curley	Entrepreneur	48	B.S.	28	Married
Butch	Retired Health Practitioner	65	Doctorate	19	Married
Sundance	Health Practitioner	60	Doctorate	29	Married
Manny	Computer Programmer	58	B.S.	36	Single
Karl	Adjunct Professor	45	M.A.	2 (19)	Single
Jack	Professor	32	Ph.D.	2	Single

*Note:* The number is the time having lived there most recently, while the one in parantheses is linked to length of time having had roots here, meaning they were raised in the place and have recently moved back.

Each interview lasted between one and two hours, and was conducted in an open-ended format. Topics that were covered included general

definitions of friendship and intimacy, personal assumptions concerning differences between male and female friendships, and how masculinity relates to interactions among men. The primary focus of the interviews was on a description of each of the close friends of each respondent in an attempt to understand the distinct dyads and how masculinity was constructed through the relationships. No definition for “close friendship” was given to the respondents, asking them instead to identify who they saw as close friends and discussing those friendships specifically. Each interview followed the interests and ideas expressed by the interviewee, identifying what they found important in relation to friendship. Still, all of the major areas identified above were addressed in each interview as each respondent discussed every one of his close friendships. Finally, it should be noted that the analysis of the interviews is a study of the accounts of experiences with friends by the respondents, and not an analysis of the friendships themselves (Scott & Lyman, 1968; Weiss, 1994). The statements by these men, however, do reflect their own beliefs about their friendships, which impact their behaviors, both with their friends and society in general, including their social construction of masculinity both in the friendships, and even in their interactions with the interviewee as they described their friendships.

## **Results**

While the men were asked to discuss their close friendships, no definition was given to them to determine this, nor were they asked to clarify what makes a close friend, as the focus was on who they perceived as close friends and the interactions among the friends. They were allowed to introduce a definition if they desired. While none gave an explicit definition, all of the men offered some notion of a definition to best determine which of their friends they should discuss, relying on key concepts, such as “trust,” “support” and “connection.” While most of the respondents identified groups of friends with whom they spend time, most were able to explicitly differentiate between those in the group who they saw as “friends” or “acquaintances” and those who they considered “close” friends. The distinction was that “close” friend connections extended beyond the present activity, as they “would spend time with them outside of the group” (Laurel) or who they “knew would be there for them if he

needed them” (Duncan & Owens, 2011). As Curley clarified, “I have a lot of friends, but most of those guys are just guys I do things with. We have a great time and I like them, but it is not the same. They are not the guys I think of when I want to do something. They are just guys who are there.” The distinction for these men between close friends and others was the persistent relationship and connection beyond the immediate moment. In their final determination of who their close friends are none of the men had more than six friends who they designated as “close”, often times perceiving of the friendship as one that would be “a lasting one” (Butch). Sundance sums it up in his determination of those he spends time with and those who are close friends:

Some of the guys are great. And I like them a lot. They are fun to be around, but I don’t have the connection with them that I have with others, like Andy and Bill. We just get along beyond the immediate activities. It is not a conscious choice but when I think of doing something, those are the guys I contact. And I think that is how they feel too.

Regardless, all of the guys seemed to have a sense of who their close friends were but could not give an explicit definition as to why they felt this.

### **Intimacy**

While the focus of this study is on the development of close friendships among men and how that relates to the social construction of masculinity, to give context to the response and behaviors, it is important to first understand how these men perceive intimacy, and in general how they react to it. All twelve of the men relied upon a definition that was akin to a feminine understanding of intimacy. Curley expressed that “intimacy is when you want to be close to someone, share with them things that you would not tell anyone else.” Similarly, Larry claimed, “intimacy is sharing information with a person.” These examples display how these men equate intimacy with self-disclosure, which is more akin to feminine style of interaction (Cancian, 1986). Defining intimacy from a feminine standpoint has been found in other studies about men’s friendships (Monsour, 1992; Reid & Fine, 1992).

While the men generally defined intimacy in a more expressive context, they generally avoided such forms of intimacy within their relationships. The need to avoid expressive intimacy within friendships is summed up best by Jack, who stated that he sanctions himself before sharing with his friends. “Men are much more reserved about their personal lives. Men are just not as intimate as women.” Again, relying upon a female definition of intimacy, he explained that he avoids this for fear of having his friends see him as different, more feminine. Jack further stated, “Sometimes it would be nice to share fears and feelings. But I would not want to make them [his friends] feel uncomfortable.” While all of the men shared a similar perspective, only Karl reflected on the differences between male and female intimacy in his explanation concerning the definition of intimacy. He did not discuss them in terms of a hierarchical structure, but rather as two different concepts. One was no more important than the other. As Karl stated, “I am not sure you can compare the two. They are just different. All of my friendships serve a purpose and are all important.” Still, he acknowledged part of the reason he does not institute more expressive intimacy with many of his friends as he does not want to make them feel uncomfortable. What Karl was also able to articulate was that not all of his friendships followed the same pattern, each offering him a different experience, and as a result, were dynamically distinct. While not as clearly stated as Karl, all of the men’s close friendships displayed a level of diversity, even though they were all influenced by masculine expectations. Simply, the men’s perceptions of masculinity influenced all of their friendships but did not produce the same types of close friendships.

### **Friendship Typologies**

Initially it was difficult to categorize friendships, focusing on the individuals and how they formed their friends. The dyads of the respondents, however, could be categorized distinctly into three typologies (see Table 2 below). These findings do not assume that the men’s friendships that are linked with a typology are all exactly the same. Instead, they represent common characteristics that distinguish it from the other types of friendships. The discussion below, however, presents the existence of friendship dyads of these men and more important that their friendships

are not determinant of the specific individuals but rather an interaction among factors, in particular, masculinity that aid in the social construction of friendships.

The different types of friendship are as follows: non-active, active, and expressive. Within the “active” category, there were two distinct friendship dyads, which can be classified as “closed” and “open,” While each category represents a dyadic relationship that has specific characteristics that differentiates it from the other categories, all are influenced by expectations and concerns surrounding masculinity and masculine performances.

### **Non-Active**

These relationships can be identified by the limited contact the individual may have with each friend. The existence of disconnected but close friends has been noted in other studies (Thurnell-Read, 2012). As Table 2 displays, these types of friendships were common for these men. In fact, of the respondents, only one claimed to have only one friendship that might be listed under this category (Ben, who stated he only has two close friends overall), while all others had two to four friendships that fit within this typology. Ben’s limited number may be a result of only having been away from home on his own on one occasion, his Mormon mission, which is where he met his “non-active” friend.

Table 2  
*Typology of Male Friendship Dyads*

Names	Non-Active	Active	Expressive
Ben	1	1	0
Jerry	2	2	0
Laurel	2	3	0
Hardy	2	3	0
Larry	1	2	0
Mo	2	3	0
Curley	3	2	0
Butch	2	3	0
Sundance	3	3	0
Manny	2	2	1
Karl	2	3	1
Jack	1	3	0

*Note:* The ranking hierarchy stems is as follows: 0, 1, few, some, many

All of the other respondents claimed to have developed multiple “non-active” friendships while involved in extended activities away from their home of origin. While some linked it to college (both graduate and undergraduate), others connected it to military service. Past studies have noted a close, even empathetic relationship among men in the military (Migliaccio, 2008; Morgan, 1994). Similar claims can be made about college experience, as it is a time in the lives of men during which they develop identities, which are supported by friendships (Weisz & Wood, 2005). Close friendships established during developmental periods bear importance for these men. As Larry expressed, “It is great to have these friendships. They are a part of who I am. Or at least where I came from.” Most of the respondents referenced their history as a means for connection

with these friends, although that was not the sole defining characteristic of these friendships.

All of the men identified that these friendships are distinct from other friendships formed at the same time. Most of the men could not explicitly articulate how they differed, but that they were different. As Jack expressed, “we just got along when we first met. But it was more than that because I got along with a lot of guys at school. But with Tom and Jim, it was different. And later, we just always kept in touch, which was easy to do.” The connection that persisted beyond the initial experience is what differentiated these friendships from others during that period of time. As Larry expressed, “While I had a lot of friends while at school, there were just some that it seemed natural to stay in touch with as I got older. They are just the ones I have always thought to call, not that we even talk all that often. I guess I will always see them as my good friends no matter what happens.” While none of the men could fully explain why the relationships persisted, none of the men felt it was surprising to have such friendships, and appreciated them.

It was also clear that all of the men shared a belief that these friendships do not necessitate constant management to remain close, which was distinct from the other close friends they had at the present time. Manny summarizes the idea that contact and interaction does not impact these close friendships, “Some friendships don’t need constant attention. Mine have been solid since we first met. These friends will always be there for me and I for them.” Similarly, Hardy stated, “some friends you rarely see or hear from, and yet still feel intimate with them.” He went on to emphasize how even after years of absence from his life, contact with these friends never seemed strained or uncomfortable. “It is like you just saw them yesterday.” While an individual who has a non-active friendship may maintain the relationship through phone calls and/or e-mails, the majority of the men in this study reflected on how there was no need to consistently maintain the relationships. “They just are, without any work” (Sundance). Ben’s one non-active friendship shared similar qualities. When questioned as to why he still believes the relationship exists, he explained that it was a sort of “unspoken bond.” He attributed much of this to shared interests, specifically sports and church. While his explanation offers an example of Swain’s (1989) “intimacy in the doing,” it also references this recurring

idea that the men relayed: the idea that the relationship does not necessitate discussion or sharing, but that the closeness is simply understood. This is what sets these friendships apart from more traditional, instrumental friendships, as there is limited interaction, i.e. “doing,” and yet the closeness endures.

While closeness persists among these friends, the men clarified that these friendships are different from women’s friendships. Jerry, in his assessment of his closest friend elaborated on why their relationship survives. He stated twice during the interview that the distance and limited contact (not spoken in over a year) does not affect the friendship. When questioned as to why he continues to feel close to his friend, he concluded, “I guess it has a lot to do with having a lot in common with one another.” He further explained, “Men don’t need constant interaction to maintain friendships.” While such a statement highlights a disparate intimacy for men, it is more Jerry’s designation of his relationship as being different from those of women’s that emphasizes his avoidance of linking his friendships to women’s experiences. This was a common theme among the men as they explained their continued connection sans regular interactions. As Hardy expressed “Men don’t need to regularly talk to be close.” The men consistently differentiated their “non-active” friendships from women’s friendships. “Women tend to need or even demand contact to maintain friendships. Men do not. We just have to know we can trust these guys, regardless if we talk to them,” as Jack shared. In an example comparing his wife’s experience, Laurel expressed:

My wife would get annoyed when she had not heard from her friends in a while. I don’t think she could go for years as I have without talking to her closest friends and not feel the friendship was affected. That is how we are different from women’s friendships.

This description, while not explicitly about a performance of masculinity it is a justification of the friendship through the differentiation between men’s and women’s friendships. Simply, these men project their friendships in a different form from women’s. Even more important, they perceived of the difference as a gain as it solidified the relationships over time.



**Active**

The active group appears to be the most common friendship model of the three, as can be seen in Table 2 above. The dyads present in this group tended to be a more direct representation of Swain’s “intimacy in the doing.” These friendships emphasized activities as a primary focus in friendships. However, within the active group, there could be perceived differences between two types of friendships that can be classified as “closed” and “open” (see Table 3). For the Closed group, activities were the force that maintained the friendship, while within the Open group the activities appeared to be more of an avenue through which the relationships grew.

Table 3  
*Active Dyads*

Names	Closed	Open
Ben	X	
Jerry	X	
Laurel		X
Hardy	X	X
Larry		X
Mo		X
Curley		X
Butch		X
Sundance		X
Manny		X
Karl		X
Jack		X

**Closed**

Three men, who through their descriptions of their close friends, could be identified as having “closed active” dyads. They expressed that there was an emphasis upon the shared interests and activities with the friends. The friendships were contingent on common pursuits, but did not extend into connection through other means. For example, Ben relayed that his other

close friend (he only has two total) was a workout partner. He emphasized that his connection to this friend is directly linked to the activity. This example both displays the masculine form of intimacy, as well as highlights the primary characteristic of the closed group, which is the emphasis upon interests and activities in the maintenance of a friendship. As Ben stated concerning his development of friendships in general, “I am always looking for a friend who plays both soccer and basketball.” To him, without commonalities, he assumed a friendship would cease. Ben consistently shared in his comparison by gender and friendship that men’s friendships in general survive through common interests and that “women share feelings.” For Ben, there was no discussion of developing expressive intimacy through the shared activities. The relationship appeared to be explicitly instrumental, which is a key component of a “closed dyad.”

In another example, Jerry talked about a regular trip he and several of his friends made to a baseball game. When asked if any of the four had ever attempted to discuss an intimate issue, he stated, “We discussed ideas and sports, not feelings. This was an extremely testosterone driven experience,” meaning an avoidance of feminine ideas was expected. Pressed to determine the possible reactions if an individual had attempted to share a personal issue, he claimed a joke would probably be made concerning it, and then nothing further would be stated. As discussed above, humor is a common tool to masculinize interactions. In this instance, the joke is less a signifier of sharing, and more an expression that inappropriate behavior will not be tolerated. By making light of it, the others involved are informing the individual that further transgressions would result in similar, if not worse chastisements, which might affect the dynamics of the trip, as well as the friendships. These close friendships, while important to Jerry, are limited in disclosure.

All three of these men distinguished these close friends from other friends and acquaintances based on connection and trust. For example, Jerry identified only two friends that could be categorized as active friends, but his group of friends who went to the baseball games comprised four to five at any given time. When asked about how he distinguishes between them, he shared that the two he sees as close friends are “guys he would look to in a time of need.” He acknowledged the others are “great” guys, but does not

really see them in that way, or really feel comfortable “relying on them” for important things.

While the three men whose close friendships were closed had other types of friendships, these three respondents had the smallest number of active friendships. Furthermore, of the three, only one had an open active friendship (Hardy: one open and two closed). Even Hardy’s “open” friendship appeared to be limited in self-disclosure, although it definitely differed from Hardy’s other friendships, as he explained (discussed below). Even with the existence of this friend, Hardy, along with the other two expressed concerns about sharing with other men. As Jerry stated, “we don’t ever discuss intimate topics.” He further shared that men don’t share because that is what women do. In contrast, all three chose instead to rely predominantly on their wives for self-disclosure. As Ben stated, “I would first share with my wife, then maybe my family, but most likely not my friends. I don’t really like to share with anyone. I would prefer to figure it out by myself.” Ben’s impetus to “figure it out” reflects a common masculine behavior of being self-reliant (Harris, 1995; Migliaccio, 2001). But if a man is going to self-disclose, sharing with a spouse would be one way to avoid being emasculated by those around him, as it is acceptable to share with a female (Felmlee et al., 2012), and in particular, establish one’s spouse as the primary relationship (Gilmartin, 2007). The choices of these men to engage in predominantly instrumental friendships support the masculine expectations of feminine avoidance by men and ultimately being less expressive in their friendships (Felmlee et al., 2012). This discrepancy between the men who have closed active friendships and the other men does offer some credence to the focus of past studies that individuals, or the characteristics of individuals impact the form of friendships. These men tended to reflect on a more traditional notion of masculinity, explicitly distancing themselves from femininity. Still, even with the perceived differences between the men, the individuals and their friendships could not be categorized concretely. For example, all of the men in both groups had “non-active” friends that were similar in form and interaction style to all of the other “non-active” dyads of the men in the study, which differed from the “active” friendships. Furthermore, as with Hardy, he had both a closed and an open active friendship, limiting the claim that an individual’s characteristics alone construct friendships.

## Open

The “open active” friendships, while related to shared activities, differed from the “closed active” in that the intention and really the importance of the friendships (and often the reason for interacting) is a feeling of comfort, reliance and understanding of one another. The friendships were based upon an idea that extended beyond activities and interests. As Hardy explained in his distinction of his friends, “there are some, like the guys I work with that we just enjoy one another’s company. Then there are others, like Jeff, who we like to hang out together and do stuff but it is more than that. It is hard to explain but I feel more comfortable being around him, talking to him.” This, however, does not remove the use of activity from the relationship. In fact, all of the men in this group, when explaining their close relationships that were characterized as “open active” referred to activities in which they engaged with friends. As Mo explained:

Every Sunday Aaron and I play golf. Sometimes we talk about our week, but other times you just don’t want to go over all of the bad things that have happened. And that we understand one another’s needs. When we want to talk. When we don’t want to talk. And even when we don’t want to talk, but need to.

This offers another example of “intimacy in the doing,” as was also seen in the closed group; however, it is not the activity or similarities that are the focus of the relationship, but rather the activity offers a comfortable environment in which to engage with other men. This allows the men to interact in masculine activities while still attaining intimacy with friends. This can be noted when Sundance explained a weekly event in which he and a group of his close friends engaged:

We would go to afternoon baseball games in San Francisco. Every week, the four of us would drive down, all the while eating food we were not supposed to eat, using language that was inappropriate in other situations. Just doing things guys are not allowed to do. It was very important to all four of us. Not just to get away, but because we could feel close to other guys in a relaxed setting.

While the activity was similar to the one that Jerry experienced with his friends, but the dynamics differed, as did the intention for hanging out. As with Jerry, it was about doing “guy things,” while, through Sundance’s explanation, it was about feeling closer to the other guys. The activity becomes the avenue to experience that.

In another example, Laurel described an incident directly following his break up with his girlfriend. He and a close friend had gone out to bars, but never discussed the issue. He expressed the positive feeling he felt about going out with a friend without having him “bug me by asking about it. He knew all about it, and what was needed. So we went out and got drunk.” Similarly, Butch, who had recently retired, and whose best friend was several years younger than he, offered a description that conveyed what was important in his friendship. His friend lived several hours away from him, so he would drive down to have lunch with him during the day and often play a round of golf. He relayed that while his friend appeared to enjoy golf more than he did, he always looked forward to those days. As Butch stated, “I can just relax around him.” All of these examples display how activity and shared interests are important but not the driving force in the relationship (unlike in “closed dyads”). Instead, it is the positive feeling that exists between the individuals that forms the intimate connection. Messner (1992) calls this “covert intimacy.” It is interesting to note that these men did not discuss friendships that appeared more “closed” as being close friends, except for Hardy, who, overall focused on avoiding more expressive forms of intimacy with his friends but still developed it, to some degree, within one of his friendships, or at least moved beyond the over-emphasis on activity within the friendship. The potential is as Hardy further develops this friendship, he may also alter his definition of what a close friendship entails.

Regardless, the activity in an open active friendship is part of the masculine performance as it is an acceptable (i.e. masculine) arena in which to interact with same-sex male friends, which allots for the existence of more feminine dynamics within the friendships (Migliaccio, 2009). Jack, in his reflections concerning his close friendships, offered a comparative explanation: “Males engage in activities, while women share thoughts. I am not sure I would call it intimacy; but, it is a feeling of closeness.” Jack was articulating that through the shared activities, the intimacy with his

friends differed from women's intimacy. This denial of the term intimacy to reflect the closeness men experience can be linked to the expectation that intimacy is a feminine concept. And, as discussed above, males avoid any idea or behavior that would equate them with being female. As Butch stated, "men don't like the term intimacy."

While the intimacy may differ from more expressive forms, it was more about the men's perceptions that the intimacy they were experiencing was distinct from the intimacy among female friends and not that it was explicitly different. When Larry was divorcing his first wife, he explained that he was able to share about this experience quite easily with one of his closest friends. When questioned further about the manner in which he shared this information, he responded, "We had gone out to lunch and I just kind of mentioned it at some point." He continued, explaining that he did not specifically ask his friend out to share this with him. They just happened to be out for lunch, to catch up, and so he revealed it at that time. When asked why he had waited until this opportunity rather than share as soon as he had realized it was occurring, he relayed that he just did not want to create an awkward situation. As he stated, "We don't need all of that touchy feely crap." In this situation, the same information was shared but what made it, for Larry, more masculine was the context of the interaction. They were out for lunch, an activity, and he "mentioned" it during the meal. Men are allotted greater flexibility in their feminine behaviors if masculinity has been previously established through different means, such as an activity (Migliaccio, 2008; Thorne, 1993). For Larry, what changed it from being "touchy-feely" was why they were interacting, not what was specifically discussed.

The social context of the interaction determines the level of sharing, which includes with whom the person is sharing the information. Karl described a health scare. Karl was one of the men who has a friendship that is labeled as an "expressive" friendship (discussed below), but he stated that he avoided discussing it in any detail with many of his friends. Karl offered an example of an instance when he did share his health concerns with one of his close friends (not the "expressive" friend). He was carpooling with a friend. They were talking about getting physicals when he decided that this was an acceptable time to share his experience. He briefly stated that he had recently been in for some medical tests, which had been negative. His

friend responded by stating “Well, that is good. At least it wasn’t anything serious.” Karl expressed that he felt by his response, his friend did not want any deeper discussion beyond this, so the discussion did not extend beyond this. As he stated:

It is not that I don’t value our friendship. I like being with him and talking to him. And I know he would always be there for me if I ever needed anything. But, in a situation like that, I think any further discussion would have made him feel uncomfortable.

In this context, the situation was not deemed suitable for in depth disclosure. The context of the situation for Karl determined the level of sharing (and/or potentially the person with whom he was sharing).

While context is extremely important, so is the form of the disclosure. Mo explained that there had been a time in his life that he thought he had heart disease. Only after going through tests and learning that it was not a serious problem did he inform a friend about it. As he explained, “I kind of made a joke out of it,” which then became a running joke between the two of them. As long as the issue is couched in the context of humor, it is acceptable to discuss the issue without fear of crossing the gender-boundary (George, 1994). This is different from the other example of how humor is utilized. For the “closed” dyad it was about limiting the disclosure, while in this context, it was an avenue through which sharing could proceed without challenging masculinity. Both individuals involved can engage the issue without fear of being emasculated. Mo furthered explained that he did not want to pursue it any deeper because he felt it had been addressed and he was good with it. Overall, the “open active” friendships differed from “closed active” in that the activities in which the friends interacted allowed for more in depth sharing to occur. The masculine context, however, was important in mitigating any potential negative reaction of over feminizing the interaction through self-disclosure.

### **Expressive**

The use of the term “expressive” identified relationships that two of the men established with friends that are based, at least partially on sharing and self-disclosure. In other words, the dyads that this group displays reflect

characteristics that might be defined as “feminine” intimacy. It appears less connected to the activity-based intimacy the other groups displayed. This includes the “non-active” friendships, which have the potential for being more expressive, but their connection seems to persist through a lack of contact, and none of the men identified self-disclosure as a part of the friendships. As Table 2 above shows, only two individuals, Karl and Manny, described such a friendship (each only had one). Manny described his friendship with Jon: “We just like to get together and talk. Share what is going on in our lives. I always look forward to our conversations.” As can be noted, these friendships reflected different dynamics as those described in the other typologies. As Karl stated, “With Dave I don’t feel judged. I can express fears, feelings and concerns about specific incidences.”

While these men did have these relationships, which they found fulfilling and important, the formation of them differed. For Manny, when asked, he initially was not positive how it came to be, but he did relay that the openness of his friend allowed for it. As Manny stated, “Jon is not a typical guy. Yeah, he likes sports and is married to a beautiful woman, but he is pretty open to most things. He is a stay-at-home dad and he is fine with it. In fact, he enjoys it and would not have it any other way. But it is not just about that. He just is open and accepting. I think that may have allowed me to feel comfortable talking to him.” In this context, Manny was “allowed” to develop the “expressive” friendship because Jon did not appear as limited by social expectations, in particular, masculinity. Still, even in Manny’s description of who Jon is, he seems to want to make sure it is clear Jon still fits within the heteronormative definition of being a man (e.g., “likes sports,” married to a beautiful woman”), as though to limit any questions others (including the interviewer) may have about their relationship.

Karl, however, talked about how Dave and he formed their relationship at a time when he was really sick. Dave would drive up to hang out with him for a couple of days, and to take care of him (Karl explained at least one person had to be readily available in case he needed assistance). Karl explained that at one point he told Dave he did not need to drive up here to do this as much as he was, to which he said Dave replied, “You are my best friend. I love you. I will always be there for you, no matter what you need.” Since then, he and Dave have “been able to talk about most



anything, completely different from my other friendships,” although much of the interactions and conversations continue to focus on shared activities (e.g., they place fantasy football together). Their relationship seemed to be formed less by the characteristics of the individuals, like in Manny’s friendship with Jon (as Karl described, Dave is a very conservative and traditional individual. Karl, while being more liberal politically, is also fairly traditional about gender expectations) and more by the seriousness of the health risk (Karl had cancer at the time). Regardless of the reason, both Karl and Manny appear to have formed “expressive” friendships that they find extremely fulfilling.

While able to openly express one self and share fears with these friends, these men did identify that the self-disclosure is not to the same degree as the sharing experienced between women. Karl explained, “the focus of the relationship cannot always be on sharing feelings. I would not want to make my friend feel awkward by doing that. And sometimes it is nice just to do things and enjoy one another’s company, and not worry about sharing all of the time.” As this statement shows, it is the awareness of the possible impact this may have upon the relationship that limits the amount of sharing. Regardless that Karl feels comfortable sharing with his friend, norms must be maintained so as not to fully reflect female friendships. Similarly, Manny shared that while conversations were intentional, he still refrained from certain topics that might be awkward. “Right after a long term relationship ended, I was thinking that I might not find someone and end up alone. I got a little depressed. But I did not talk about it with anyone, even Jon. There are some things a guy just doesn’t say to other guys.” Manny did, however, say that while he never talked about his concerns with Jon, during this period he did spend more time with his friend Jon because “the discussions, regardless of the topics, always made me feel better.”

While both experienced interactions with this friend type that differed from their other male friendships, they both distanced the experiences from women’s friendships. Manny identified that it was “no where near the level of female friendships.” Karl further explained that while the friendship was steeped in conversations and sharing, “female friendships I think rely on the sharing to exist. Mine is not that at all. It is just an added bonus. I think my friendship with Dave would still exist even if we didn’t share our thoughts. That just makes it better.” This is not to claim that their friendships are

distinctly different from female close friendships but rather that these two men differentiated them in their descriptions, distancing themselves from a more feminine identified experience.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

As these men described, male friendships are generally based on shared interests and activities, as has been consistently found in past studies (Messner, 1992; Swain, 1989). This does not mean that each friendship dyad will be the same, even for the same person. The friendships of the men in this exploratory study can be categorized into four distinct groupings: Non-active, closed active, open active and expressive. While each reflects a different dynamic for male friendships, each supports a preference of male avoidance of feminine characteristics. Even within the two “expressive” friendships, there was a limitation to the amount of sharing that would be allowed, as well as how the friendship and sharing was characterized. Furthermore, only two of the twelve respondents displayed this type of friendship, relating the rarity with which men actively self-disclose with one another, even though almost all of the men defined the ideal form of intimacy in a more feminine style, and, at times, self-disclosed to some of their close friends, such as those in “open active” friendships.

Still, the existence of expressive dyads among men who in other friendships avoid disclosing information, characterizes the social construction of friendships. It is not simply that a man creates a type of friendship, or that he is more or less masculine than his counterparts, which determines his friendship styles. Instead, it is more about the development of the friendship based on various social factors. There may be contributing factors that increase the likelihood of having an expressive relationship, such as one (or both) of the men being less traditional in their displays of masculinity. The existence of varied relationships raises questions about the definitive outcome of friendships being a result of certain characteristics of the individual. While individual characteristics, such as the acceptance of more traditional masculine expectations can influence friendship construction, the social construction of the dyad is influenced by a number of factors that gets produced throughout the interaction. Further analysis

should examine what factors contribute to the development of different types of friendships, focusing on analyses of the dyads and not on the individuals.

Regardless of the friendship types, all were influenced by masculine expectations, as well as fears of being marginalized by their friends. In fact, as many of the men expressed, their reticence with sharing was more about how they felt friends might react, or how they did react (such as the men did through the use of humor). The desire to have more expressive friendships was limited by the unspoken expectations of performing masculinity, and in particular, avoiding femininity. Even in their descriptions of their friendships, the men distanced the dyads from more feminine forms, even though they have identified this as the ideal form of intimacy. This is regardless if whether or not they engage in self-disclosure or not. It is about the appearance of the interaction, as determined by social context, i.e. masculinity, social situations, the individuals involved, or even how the thoughts are expressed (humor). The men socially constructed their interactions with friends in a masculine context, both during and through their descriptions later. They produced friendships as a reflection of masculine performances. This, however, does not mean all of their friendships were the same. The key seems to be the ability to differentiate the friendship from feminine forms of intimacy, and not so much what the dyad actually looks like. Fear of being equated with being female would marginalize and emasculate a male, so these men drew a distinction between their friendships and women's friendships. As has been stated, the first lesson of being male is that one must not appear female.

Even with the identification of different possible types of friendships, this study offers a limited view of the experiences of white, educated men, and not of men who are marginalized as a result of race, class or sexual orientation, whose friendships may be different than that of the hegemonic group. Furthermore, a more generalizable analysis should be conducted to determine the viability of the typologies of friendships and how masculinity impacts the construction of friendships among men, possibly interviewing each man in the dyad. Along with this, an analysis of how different typologies influence definitions of intimacy should be considered. Regardless, this study offers a starting point for understanding the importance of the dyad in the construction of friendships in relation to masculine performances.

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