

**BALANCING BETWEEN IDENTITIES: A GAY ATHLETE'S EXPERIENCES  
IN SPORT AND EXERCISE DOMAINS IN FINLAND**

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## ABSTRACT

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Sport is perceived to be one of the last fortresses of heteronormative and homonegative attitudes that cause psychological and social issues for LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) athletes, especially in their self-confidence and self-concept. Furthermore, these negative mindsets challenge LGBT individuals' participation in organized sport and physical activity. To offer effective consulting services, it is vital for sport psychologists to be aware of the issues that LGBT athletes might struggle with throughout their sport careers. Adopting 'queer theory' as a theoretical framework, this study strives to understand a gay male athlete's experiences in sport and physical activity in Finland, and how these experiences reflect in sexual identity development and management, and relationships to others in sport. Autoethnography, an 'autobiographical genre of writing', and narrative analysis was utilized in this study as it enables the reader to vicariously share author's own experiences in sport and physical activity. Self-observational and self-reflective data was gathered from author's exercise and personal memory logs. Findings are presented in the form of narrative, which is constructed based on the data produced by the author. The story reveals the challenge of sexual identity development in- and outside of sport, and the constant negotiation between social and athletic identities. Interpretations of the findings are discussed with relevant theories of sexual identity development, and previous LGBT research in sport. This study shows albeit there are general positive change of attitudes towards LGBT people in Finland, homosexual athletes can still have various difficulties in developing and expressing their sexual identity in organized sport and physical activity. Queer practice has a potential to confront the unequal and oppressive heteronormative constructs in sport and physical activity domains. However, more studies and stories are needed to understand the experiences of LGBT people in sport to develop programs and interventions aimed at increasing athletes' and sport practitioners' openness to LGBT athletes.

*Keywords:* autoethnography, homosexuality, sport, heteronormativity, homophobia

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Birth of the study and preconception

Already before I started my sport psychology studies in Jyväskylä University, I was interested to study sexual minorities in sport. As a gay athlete, I found LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) research in sport intimate and important field due to my own experiences in building and maintaining my sexual identity in sport world. I've always loved sports, but in order to be as a proper athlete I've felt the necessity to meet certain expectations. Everyone was assumed to be heterosexual per se and there were no other openly gay or bi athletes around. Therefore, hiding my own sexuality, albeit in very sexually charged sport world was self-evident. Indeed, deviant sexualities were, and still are nearly absent and silenced in sport where I'm involved. However, I doubt that I am alone with my experiences and surely there are other athletes who share similar experiences with me.

Many international researchers who study homosexuality in sport and physical activity have claimed that organized sports can be highly heteronormative and homophobic institution where homosexuals have to endure discrimination and anxiety (e.g. Anderson, 2005; Elling & Janssens, 2009; Hemphill & Symons, 2009; Clarke, 1998; Hekma, 1998; Symons, Sbaraglia, Hillier, & Mitchell, 2010; Wolf Wendel, Toma, & Morphew, 2001). Also Finnish research (Kokkonen, 2012; Toivala, 2011) show, that LGBT minorities experience different types of discriminative behavior in sport and physical activity domains, and also in physical education. Moreover, according to the reports of Finnish sport media (e.g. Huttunen, 2012; Koivuranta, 2010; Pylsy, 2007; Koivisto, 2004) gay athletes feel safer to maintain low profile about their sexuality in sports because of prevailing heteronormativity in the domain.

Meanwhile, attitudes toward LGBT minorities have clearly developed to more positive and accepting direction during the past decade in Finnish society. Currently some LGBT people's rights are actively debated in public, such as same-sex marriage and adoption right for same-gender couples. An openly gay candidate was elected to the second round of the Finnish presidential elections in 2012. Some positive signs towards tolerance can be noticed in Finnish sport domain too, when a first pro-gay campaign was launched to stand for LGBT athletes' rights and increase the awareness in sport domain (Uskalla.fi, 2012). LGBT minorities are also rather well presented in the Finnish media,

having more visibility than ever before in different entertainment television series, programs, and magazines. Moreover some coming outs of the celebrities has boosted the notion that the issues and struggles that sexual minorities has battled against for long time have now been defeated.

Indeed, Finland alongside with other Scandinavian countries has often been seen as a rather open country for LGBT people. However, I agree with Olavi Uusivirta, a Finnish singer-songwriter and ambassador of LGBT rights that Finland has always tolerated sexual and gender minorities in polls, political keynote addresses, and statistics, but the street level reality is often different. “The ghost of prejudice is regularly hidden in between the lines, actions, looks, and in tones of voice” (Mollgren, 2012). Also, it is easy to be taken with media, and with the “hype” that sexual prejudice has been mostly vanished from our society. However, as I’m scrutinizing it from a gay individual’s perspective, I would be more critical about the phenomenon and claim that the perception boosted by media is more or less distorted. We easily overlook the fact that the image we get from the media is usually brought by relatively privileged perspective and the voices of not-that-privileged ones often remain unheard.

I can acknowledge to the positive change in attitudes towards LGBT people in Finnish society. I can express my sexuality rather freely in my everyday life, but in sport I am still careful to express, let alone disclose my sexuality. It has complicated throughout my life and athletic career, for example in making close friendships with people in sports, without speaking embedding them to my social life outside of sport settings. In fact, my “sport life” seems to be, more or less, separated from my ordinary social life. This puzzle has persecuted me to date, and consequently became my study objective. Therefore, in this study I will introduce some of the issues that gay athletes may confront in sport domain in Finland where sexual minorities are still rather invisible.

## 1.2. Overview of theoretical and methodological approaches

This study adopts *queer theory* as a theoretical framework and as a directive thought behind the whole study. Queer theory refuses the notion of sexual identities per se, or the categorization of them overall and therefore expands beyond the issues of gay men in sports by questioning the heteronormative oppression in society (Sykes, 2006).

I chose *autoethnography* and *narrative analysis* (Oliver, 1998) as my research methods because of its autobiographical and story-telling nature. This combination allowed me to make sense of my own experiences by writing them down into narratives,

and eventually connect them to broader context by interpreting with existing theories and previous research in the field. In short, autoethnography explores the personal as a reflection of the social. Autoethnography also gave me a unique opportunity to work as a researcher and as a participant (McIlveen, 2008). Moreover, it is not just a method that helps to study the social world around us, it is a self-reflective process where the researcher and the readers may get new aspects and learn new from their self and from the other.

### 1.3 Significance

This study responds to the demand of research of gay men in sport (Krane et al. (2010) by giving the voice for a gay athlete and his experiences in sport and physical activity domain. Although an interest in LGBT related studies in sport sciences have been increasing in western countries throughout the past decade, there is only one study about LGBT minorities in sport and physical activity domains in Finland (Kokkonen, 2012), and another about homophobia in physical education in high school (Toivala, 2011). This only proclaims the urgency for LGBT studies in the Finnish sport domain. Therefore, this study is meaningful simply from the fact that is rather unexamined area in the field of Finnish sport sciences. It is important for sport practitioners to hear the voice of sexual minorities, which is frequently suppressed in the sport world.



## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Key terms and definitions

We can notice the cultural preference from different psychological, social, and cultural processes in our society that heterosexuality is more preferable than other forms of sexualities (Herek, 2004). In this chapter I will define concepts of different attitudes and mindsets that privilege heterosexuality over the other forms of sexuality, and which concurrently are behind the marginalization and discrimination of sexual and gender minorities.

Dichotomy and strong confrontation between heterosexuals and homosexuals, and emphasized status of ideal and desired heterosexual masculinity and femininity is typical in *heteronormative* mindset (Kokkonen, 2012). Heteronormativity is based on the assumption that men are always masculine and sexually and romantically attracted to women. Women in contrast are feminine and attracted likewise to men (Mauer-Starks, Clemons, & Whalen, 2008; Rossi, 2006). Furthermore, heteronormativity sees heterosexuality as a normative and legitimate sexual orientation, a norm that creates a standard to be met. “This standard has been enshrined into law, transforming a social custom into a legal control mechanism, a sort of natural law theory of gender” (Weiss, 2001, 124). For example, Finnish marital law is based on heteronormative mindset by denoting that marital relation is most fitting for a man and a woman.

*Heterosexism* refers to cultural ideology that perpetuates structural and societal sexual stigmatization (Herek, 2004; Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009). ‘Sexual stigma’ is a socially shared knowledge that homosexuality is dismissed in society and that homosexuals has lower societal status than heterosexuals. Therefore, heterosexism leads to the absence of other non-heterosexual lifestyles, as everyone is presumably heterosexual and heterosexual acts and relationships only with opposite sex are normal and natural (Kokkonen, 2012). While heterosexism describes a cultural ideology manifested in society’s institutions, *homophobia* refers to individual attitudes and actions deriving from that ideology (Herek, 2004). Before, term homophobia had a slightly different meaning, referring rather pathological fear of homosexuals. Nowadays, term homophobia refers to all kinds of interpersonal or societal prejudice, discrimination, harassment, or violence that is based on fear, disgust, mistrust or hatred towards sexual

minorities, and is fixed on gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transsexual people (Fassinger, 1991; Hemphill & Symons, 2009).

According to Pharr (1997) homophobia works as a “weapon of sexism” because it is joined with heterosexism. He states that “heterosexism creates the climate for homophobia with its assumption that the world is and must be heterosexual and its display of power and privilege as the norm” (Pharr, 1997, p.16). Dreyer (2007) states, that both, heterosexism and homophobia together mirror the culture of heteronormativity. She also concludes that heterosexism leads to prejudice, discrimination, harassment and even violence and it is driven by fear and hatred. Therefore heterosexism includes both the cultural precedence of heterosexuality and what is commonly referred to as homophobia. As we can notice, these two definitions intertwine and they are not easily distinguished from each other, and often these terms are used to promote the same purpose. However, term ‘homophobia’ is widely used in sport and exercise related literature, but also in psychology and sport psychology (Kokkonen, 2012). Therefore I also use the term homophobia (and homonegativity) in the similar manner as I mentioned above, to describe negative attitudes and behaviour towards homosexuals and other sexual and gender minorities.

Anderson (2002) introduces a concept of *hegemonic masculinity*, which refers to an aggressive and domineering masculinity that is reproduced, reinforced and valued in sports (Anderson, 2002; Hepmhill & Symons, 2009). In hegemonic masculinity athlete represents the ideal of what it means to be man, which opposites what it means to be feminine and/or gay (Anderson, 2002). As Connell writes, “Gayness, in patriarchal ideology of hegemonic masculinity, is a repository of whatever is symbolically expelled from hegemonic masculinity” (as cited in Hardin, 2009, p. 184), therefore, compulsory heterosexuality and homophobia are key elements in construction of idealized masculine identity. Hegemonic masculinity is characterized by many “manly” qualities that boys adopt in organized sports such as domination, aggressiveness, competitiveness, athletic prowess, stoicism, risk taking, and control (Cheng, 1999; Hartill, 2008). One way to “prove” hegemonic masculinity is to act aggressively, or showing superiority in other ways toward “femininity”, such as women and homosexuals (Cheng, 1999). Griffin (as cited in Anderson, 2002, p. 861) suggested that gay male athletes, who bear the stigma of being weak or feminine, but are as strong and competitive as heterosexual male athletes may threaten the perceived distinctions between homosexual and heterosexual men. Therefore homosexual male athletes may threaten sport as a prime site of hegemonic

masculinity and masculine privilege. Similar to hegemonic masculinity, Wellard (2006) introduced a concept of *exclusive masculinity*, which refers to particular types of bodily performance that derive from traditional forms of hegemonic heterosexual masculinity. He continues that “These bodily displays signal to the opponent or spectator a particular version of masculinity based upon aggressiveness, competitiveness, power and assertiveness. Body practices also present maleness as a performance which is understood in terms of being diametrically opposite to femininity.” (p. 109)

Hegemonic masculinity and exclusive masculinity has similar characteristics, yet exclusive masculinity refers more on body practices of masculinity. However, both concepts involve the subordination of competing forms of masculinity and femininity (Wellard, 2006), and exclusive masculinity can be understood as a derivative of hegemonic masculinity (Wellard, 2002). I will use both terms in this study trying not to mix these concepts together. Therefore in this study, hegemonic masculinity refers to actions, attitudes, and behaviour that subordinate homosexuality and femininity, whereas exclusive masculinity refers to body practices that derive from hegemonic heterosexual masculinity.

## 2.2 Layered homophobia in society

Gilbert argues that homophobia can be institutional, cultural, interpersonal, or internalized (as cited in Hemphill & Symons, 2009, p. 398). Institutionalized homophobia often appears in legislation and policy making, for example homosexual acts are still punishable in many nations. Most recent example of institutionalized homophobia we can demonstrate in Russia, where policymakers found a rather vague law that all kinds of ‘homosexual propaganda’ in public is prohibited and can be punished. Institutionalized homophobia also appears in societal institutions in Finland. Especially some homophobic statements and actions from the church representatives and politicians have recently got attention in Finland. Especially a Finnish political party, True Finns, has gained attention with their members’ anti-gay and racist statements and policy. For example one of their representatives in parliament opposed the same-sex marital law by comparing it to marriages with animals.

Institutionalized homophobia can be identified in sport as well. Tom Waddell, an American former decathlete, and creator of a gay-friendly Olympics, or “Gay Olympics”, was accused by United States Olympic Committee (USOC) by using the name “Olympics” which infringed on their exclusive use of the term. However, USOC

never reacted to those who started the Police Olympics, Special Olympics for disabled athletes, or even North Carolina State University College of Veterinary Medicine's Dogs Olympics (Davison & Frank, 2006). In addition, Finnish cities Espoo and Helsinki refused to participate in anti-homophobic campaign in sport and physical activity, 'Uskalla' (Uskalla.fi, 2012), by denying attaching campaign posters to their public sport and exercise facilities (Kokkonen, 2012; Setälä, 2009).

Cultural homophobia refers to everyday cultural messages, standards and norms that naturalize heterosexuality. Cultural homophobia conveys in different cultural products, media, and in educational materials, and also in the rules of society that steer communication and behaviour of individuals (Hemphill & Symons, 2009; Kokkonen, 2012). One example of cultural homophobia would be the systematic rejection of an idea that our much worshipped baron and former Finnish president of war times, Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim, would have been homosexual or even had any interest to the same sex. Not to mention the possibility of gay individuals serving in military, or having same-sex encounters or affairs during their military service. Image of a girlfriend or a wife waiting for her soldier to return from a war or from military is repeatedly reinforced in the public.

Interpersonal homophobia appears in interactions and encounters between people, such as in joking, mocking, and in different degrees of violence (Kokkonen, 2012). Internalized homophobia refers to a multidimensional construct that includes one's own negative feelings of being gay as well as negative perception of other's attitudes towards homosexuality (Pacilli, Taurino, Jost, & van der Toorn, 2011). Therefore, internalized homophobia is a major obstacle for gay individuals to come in terms with one's sexuality, by complicating the already complex self-defining process (Fassinger, 1991). People at the target of homophobic acts might internalize the negative attitudes pointed at them and connect these attitudes to themselves, particularly intensive feelings of shame and guilt about their sexuality, and become to think heterosexual people as a superior and heterosexuality as a better form of sexuality (Herek et al., 2009; Kokkonen, 2012; Pacilli, Taurino, Jost, & van der Toorn, 2011; Williamson, 2000). Typical in homophobia are groundless negative attitudes and simplified formal conceptions about sexual minorities (Kokkonen, 2012). For example there is prevailing negative stereotype of gay men who are "first and foremost interested in sex rather than in love and commitment" (Garnets, 2002, p. 122) or that bisexuals are over-sexual and

willing to have multiple simultaneous sexual and romantic relationships (Kokkonen, 2012).

### 2.3 Discrimination towards sexual minorities

Negative attitudes, such as strong adherence to traditional norms of masculinity, and prejudice increase the probability of discrimination, such as aggression towards sexual minorities (Parrott, Peterson, & Bakeman, 2011; Vincent, Parrott, & Peterson, 2011). Haas et al. (2011) describe discrimination towards sexual minorities as individual and institutional. According to them, individual discrimination is commonly experienced in the form of personal rejection, hostility, harassment, bullying, and physical violence. Institutional discrimination results on legislations and public policies that lead to de-equalization (Haas et al., 2011). For example, I would agree with Kokkonen (2012) in the notion that Finnish marital law is discriminative and against human rights by denying marriage between gay or lesbian couples. Also Haas et al. (2011) study in United States demonstrated how same-sex couples suffered from the bans of same-sex marriages because they were denied the benefits that heterosexual couples get in a marriage e.g. in health-insurance coverage.

Makkonen states that discrimination can be observed from its direct-, indirect-, and “multibased” reasons (as cited in Kokkonen, 2012, p. 13). Direct discrimination refers to unfair or unequal treatment of sexual or gender minorities. Indirect discrimination refers to seemingly neutral and somewhat unintended actions, procedures or decisions that put LGBT individual in unequal position. Multibased discrimination refers to a situation when LGBT individual is discriminated based on many factors, for example because of his sexual orientation, age, race, and hobby or profession. It is based in Finland’s legislation of equality that all kinds of harassment, such as any kind of insults, disparage, humiliation, or threatening climate are classified as discrimination. This can appear in many forms of behaviour, from allusive gestures and rancid joking all the way to physical or sexual harassment as sexual proposing, touching, or even rape (Kokkonen, 2012).

Franklin’s (2000) study shows that name-calling and other “moderate” antigay behaviours are socially acceptable even in politically liberal and reputedly tolerant region and therefore they are often unnoticed and unreported. Gill et al. (2010; 2006) studied undergraduate student’s attitudes and perceived climate toward gays and lesbians, and other minority groups in physical activity settings. Their results confirmed that sexual

prejudice is still there in society and especially in physical activity settings with males particularly showing negative attitudes towards gay men. (Gill et al, 2006) Moreover, Gill et al (2010) found that perceived attitude climate towards LGBT youth and other minority groups in physical activity settings were more inclusive for ethnic/racial minorities and most exclusive for gay/lesbians and people with disabilities.

#### 2.4 Effects of LGBT discrimination

Heteronormative, homonegative and homophobic attitudes have been discussed to have several negative implications on LGBT people's well-being and mental health. However, I am not going deeper in what kind of consequences discrimination can have to the well-being of LGBT people, since that goes further away from my study purposes. However, a brief overview of the effects of discrimination is probably appropriate to demonstrate how discrimination can have serious effects, especially for young LGBT people.

King et al. (2008) conducted systematic review and meta-analysis of the prevalence of mental disorder, substance misuse, suicide ideation and deliberate self-harm of LGB people. Their results support the perception that LGB people have higher risk for different mental disorders, suicidal behaviour and drug misuse than heterosexual people. Although, study doesn't tell whether homosexuality itself was causing the results, it is strongly plausible, that social hostility, stigma and discrimination that most LGB people experience is at least part of the reason for the higher rates of psychological morbidity observed. Also Haas et al. (2011) state that LGBT minorities suffer significantly more from mental disorders and have eight times higher suicidal risk compared to heterosexual population. Conron et al. (2010) found that sexual minority people are in higher risk for catch chronic disease, victimization, mental health problems and lower health care access. Especially internalized homophobia has been hypothesized to be a valid cause of different psychological and social problems in LGBT people e.g. low self-esteem, feelings of shame, and avoidance of social situations (Williamson, 2000). Although Kokkonen's (2012) study didn't show visible mental consequences caused by discrimination in Finnish LGBT participants in sports and physical activity, three dozen of participants (out of 419 participants) reported self-harming and suicidal thoughts or plans within a year because of discrimination in sport and physical activity. Moreover, participants reported fear to some extent for going to practice, and thoughts about dropping out from the sports, or changing the coach or team (Kokkonen, 2012).

## 2.5 Sexuality and discrimination in sport

Despite the current dominance of heteronormativity in Finnish social and legitimate constructs, the attitudes toward LGBT people in Finland seem to be changing to more positive and accepting direction during the past two decades. Just recently, pro attitudes towards homosexuality were proven, when an openly gay candidate, Pekka Haavisto, was elected to the second round of the Finnish presidential election in 2012. Open LGBT representatives are appearing more frequently in the media and in the public. Popular TV-shows and movies have an increasing number of LGBT characters and personalities portrayed in their projects. Moreover, gay rights and social justice issues of LGBT people, such as same-sex marriage and adoption right are frequently debated in the public discussions.

However, according to the Finnish sport media (e.g. Huttunen, 2012; Koivuranta, 2010; Pylsy, 2007; Koivisto, 2004) sport is still perceived to be domain where heteronormative and homonegative attitudes are present. Also many international researchers who study homosexuality in sport and physical activity have claimed that organized sports can be highly heteronormative and homophobic institution where homosexual athletes have to endure discrimination and homophobia (e.g. Anderson, 2005; Elling & Janssens, 2009; Hemphill & Symons, 2009; Clarke, 1998; Hekma, 1998; Symons, Sbaraglia, Hillier, & Mitchell, 2010; Wolf Wendel, Toma, & Morpew, 2001). In addition, Sparkes (1997, p. 25) describes how gay males are “an absent *other* in the world of sport in general”. Carless (2011) conforms that while homosexual men are getting more visibility in particular sections of society; sport remains an arena where only few ‘out’ homosexual males are seen. Hemphill and Symons (2009) joins the same notion that “despite improvements in other sections of society, continuing accounts of heterosexism and homophobia in sport suggest that the environment is still a difficult one for same-sex attracted males” (Carless, 2011, p. 2).

We can point out the invisibility of gay athletes in elite level by the observation that in the 2012 London Olympics there were only three openly gay males among 12,602 competitors (Buzinski, 2012a), although the numbers are slightly better compared to 2008 Beijing Olympics, 1 to 10,708 competitors (Buzinski in Carless, 2011, p. 2). Like Elling and Janssens (2009) states, there is lack of openly homosexual sport role models for (young) gays.

### 2.5.1 Heteronormativity in sport and physical activity

*“Sport helps to reinforce the dominant definitions of masculinity through the exclusion of ‘others’—gay men, women, and some of those who are physically challenged.” (Davison & Frank, 2006, p. 181)*

According to Hemphill and Symons (2009) societally prevailing conceptions of masculinity and also femininity strengthen in sport and exercise domains, and heterosexuality is widely considered as a norm. Especially in many male sports, athletes are considered to be all heterosexual, “unless proven otherwise” (Cox & Thompson, 2001, 10). In organized sport and as well in physical education boys have pressure to establish their hyper masculinity and heterosexuality to others since homosexual men and women are considered as inferior in the gender hierarchy of sport (Hartill, 2008; Hemphill & Symons, 2009). Moreover, homosexual athletes are considered as a threat to the gender/sexual hierarchy, and to the perceived distinctions between heterosexual and homosexual men in sport (Anderson, 2002). Gay athletes are also seen as a threat to the values of team sport, the norms of masculinity, and self-conceptions of heterosexual players (Davison & Frank, 2006; Jones & McCarthy, 2010) as gay men are widely considered as “not being tough or competitive enough” in sports (Jones & McCarthy, 2010, p. 164).

While most sports are generally perceived as auspicious sites of establishing heterosexual masculinity, some aesthetic sports such as figure skating, dancing, and gymnastics are generally considered as feminine, and boys involved in such sports are easily considered as “sissies”, or “fags” (Elling & Knoppers, 2005; Rave, Perez, Poyatos, 2007). Similarly, women who are involved in high-risk and aggressive, physically rough sports that require hard physical contact (Davison & Frank, 2006; Fallon & Jome, 2007; Howe, 2001) are easily considered as lesbians. However, since athleticism is often linked with masculinity, women who participate in any competitive sport may also be easily stigmatized as non-heterosexuals (Jacobson, 2002). Therefore, also heterosexuals can suffer from heteronormativity and homophobia, which narrows their possibilities to enjoy, express themselves, and enhance their physical skills in sport and physical activity (Kokkonen, 2012). Moreover, fear of being stigmatized as homosexual or lesbian can result as a resist in heterosexuals to participate in sports, or even drop-out from the sport they love and change it to more socially normative sport (Davison & Frank, 2006; Elling & Knoppers, 2005). Interestingly, whereas girls who play rough team sports can be



easily stigmatized as lesbians, often some homosexual male athletes participating in masculine sports are in unique position to disrupt the unity of heterosexual masculinity among men in sport by “covering” their sexuality and easily pass as a ‘straight’ man (e.g. Davison & Frank, 2006; Eng, 2006; Wellard, 2006).

One example of a heterosexual athlete being stigmatized as non-heterosexual is Finnish world top alpine skier Tanja Poutiainen, when she got into the target of Finnish tabloids (Iltalehti, 2011) that rumoured her being lesbian after showing repeatedly in public with a same woman. To cut the wings of these rumours, she had a press conference where she announced herself being a single heterosexual and the woman is just a good friend of her, not a partner. Afterwards she unfolded in an interview how the lesbian rumours hurt her, but also her inner circle when reporters were contacting them to verify these rumours.

In physical education boys and girls are expected to move and behave in certain characteristics. According to Garcia (2011) boys are expected to move in coordinated and explosive way, whereas girls’ movement is expected to be rhythmic and balanced. In result, children who don’t move in gender stereotypical way can easily be mocked by peers and even by the teacher (e.g. expressions as “you throw like a girl”, “that’s so gay”) (Garcia, 2011). Similarly, Larsson, Redelius, and Fagrell (2010) found that boys who are considered as “normal and heterosexual” embodied masculine appearance and self-confidence by showing aggressive and competitive behaviour in team ball games. Boys who showed reluctance towards aggressive or competitive behaviour in connection with ball games were considered as “effeminate” or “poofs”. Girl’s good coordination and rhythmic abilities, combined with feminine appearance and reluctance to participate in aggressive sports was considered as “heterosexual and normal” (Larsson et al., 2010).

In addition to moving style, motoric skills, and sport selection, also physical appearance and turnout can question one’s sexuality (Gorely, Holroyd, & Kirk, 2003). Australian swimmer champion and Olympic winner Ian Thorpe’s sexuality was repeatedly questioned by the sport media because of his flamboyant appearance and “non-heterosexual” style, and because of his peculiar interest in beautiful things and aesthetics. In fact, he described himself as a heterosexual nerd who like different things and also happened to be good at sports. Apparently he was hurt by the gossips and suggestions that media reinforced in their reports. In his own words he’s heterosexual but doesn’t “fit into the typical stereotype of what Australian athletes have been in the past” (Buzinski, 2012b).

### 2.5.2 Homophobia in sport and physical activity

Although the situation of sexual minorities in sport domain has improved during the last decade according to some studies made in US and UK (Adams & Anderson, 2011; Anderson, 2011a, b, c; Bush, Anderson, & Carr, 2012; Kian & Anderson, 2009), it is still equivocal that well-being and physical activity enhancing conditions come true in sport and physical activity domains for sexual minorities (Kokkonen, 2012). According to the report of European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (as cited in Kokkonen, 2012), most of the sport organizations acts against racism rather than against homophobia in sport and physical activity, and sexual minorities don't have a real chance to express their sexuality in sport because of discrimination and harassment.

Indeed, homophobia is still common in modern sport domains, both in individual sports (Thorpe, 2010) and especially in team sports (Hemphill & Symons, 2009). Davison and Frank (2006) state that "one of the greatest barriers that gays and lesbians face regarding full and equal participation in both amateur and professional sport is discrimination based on homophobia" (p. 180). Hemphill and Symons (2009) affirms that "homophobia creates 'hostile' or 'conditionally tolerant' environments for lesbian and gay sportspersons" and that "day-to-day challenges and stresses on these sportspersons can hurt their performances, enjoyment, career prospects, and monetary rewards, forcing most to remain deeply closeted" (p. 401). Furthermore, previous international qualitative research show that LGBT athletes often feel fear and anxiety, experience being humiliated and isolated by others, and have to endure discrimination and even physical violence in sport environments because of their sexual orientation (Kokkonen, 2012). Homophobic acts and comments are often perceived as part of everyday life in sport domains. Especially in team sports, homophobic comments and jokes are not seen as discriminative, but as a central part of the hyper-masculine and heterosexual communication of sport culture (Elling & Janssens, 2009; Lilleaas, 2007). Similarly, Cashmore and Cleland (2011) studied soccer spectators' perspective on the homophobic language in sports. Spectators perceived their homophobic 'slogans' and 'catchphrases' as a good humoured joking and part of the sport culture.

Homophobia is rather common in physical activity domains as well. Many LGBT exercisers perceived the social climate in physical activity environments often unsafe, hostile, and homophobic (Elling & Janssens, 2009; Symons et al., 2010). In addition, Elling and Janssens (2009) found that in Netherlands homosexual exercisers

hide their sexuality more often in sport environment, than in work or studying environments. Kokkonen's (2012) recent study about discrimination experiences of Finnish LGBT people in sport and physical activity amplifies the presumption that sexual- and gender minorities have to endure discrimination such as name-calling, insinuation, heterosexism, and despised looks in sport, physical education, and in other physical activity domains. Toivala (2011) concluded in her study that homophobia is a burden in Finnish schools and physical education classes that steals resources from the educational learning.

### 3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.1 Queer theory

I utilize *queer theory* in this study as a theoretical framework, and as a directive thought behind the study. Queer theory refuses the notion of sexual identities per se, or the categorization of them overall and therefore expands beyond the issues gay men face in sports by questioning the heteronormative oppression of society (Sykes, 2006). Queer theory is influenced by post-structural ideas about identity and sexuality. Many theorists have brought their own flavour to the theory. In fact it is still evolving set up of ‘theories’ that use term ‘queer’ for different purposes, and it is in constant flux and development ( Jagose, 1996). Queer theorists are interested how categories like ‘heterosexual’, ‘gay’, and ‘lesbian’ came to be seen as stable identities, and attempts to reveal them as fragile constructs, constantly reliant on the successful performance of gender (Watson, 2005). Watson (2005) notes that the strength of queer theory, among other things, “lies in its potential application to relational fields, as a framework to shake the heteronormative, taken-for-granted positions and assumptions about sex, gender and sexuality in which sexual minorities are rendered as problematical against a stable heterosexual norm” (p. 79). As Krane et al. states “confronting heteronormativity includes not only being inclusive of LGBT people, but also resists the privileging of heterosexuality” (p. 154).

It can be said that I’ve carried out this paper wearing “queer lenses”, since I’m already striving to queer the sport and physical activity domain by doing this kind of study. By using the term ‘queer’, as a gay athlete/researcher, I intentionally reverse the heteronormative notion that everyone in sport is heterosexual (Krane et al., 2010). Within this study, I’m criticizing and trying to impact on the prevailing heteronormative and heterosexist constructs in sports. Therefore, this study has also rather obvious political function. Though, the queer researchers never have denied the political agenda of their studies (Jagose, 2006; Krane et al., 2010).

#### 3.2 Queering the sport

*“Queer infers an overarching commitment to social justice and inclusion, which then compels compassionate and inclusive practice”*  
(Krane et al. 2010, p. 172)

To queer sport means destabilizing heteronormativity while recognizing the presence of LGBT identities (i.e. queer identities) in the field of sport (Krane, Waldron, Kauer, & Semerjian, 2010) and by doing that, we confront institutionalized dominant practices that privilege heterosexuality and build alternative practices that include and value all the varieties of identities. By recognizing queer existence we question, and eventually change heteronormative structures, behaviours, identities and discourses in sport (Eng, 2006).

Issues such as homonegativism, transphobia and heterosexism are not only minorities' problem; it is problem for all the athletes participating in sport who don't fit in heteronormative sex/gender-scheme by not showing conventional expectations of masculinity or femininity (Eng, 2006; Krane et al, 2010). In other words, homophobic reactions can harass everyone in sport, not just LGBT representatives. Anyone can experience sexually discriminative and repressive acts that can harm mentally, physically, and emotionally, consequently leading drop outs from sports or having negative attitudes towards sport and physical activity. Eng (2006) argues that queering should happen inside the sport, such as via rule and policy changes, and as Johnson and Kivel adds (as cited in Krane et al. 2010, p. 154) queering should be done by heterosexuals as well as LGBT people.

So, when examining this study through queer lenses, the aim of this paper is to make one gay athletes voice heard in sport society and question the ambiguous heteronormative values and hegemonic processes that diminish homosexuality in sport, and try to find solutions to make sport and physical activity domains more inclusive. In other words, I'm 'queering' the sport by exposing queerness in sport domain that is expected to be heterosexual (Eng, 2006). By hearing the voice of silenced minorities and recognizing queer existence, sport leaders, practitioners, athletes and the audience can acknowledge the repressive power relationship of dominant and the different other, and work towards making sport more inclusive and fair domain for everyone.

#### 4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

In this study I strive to describe, interpret, and understand the experiences, thoughts, and feelings that I've had while participating in sports, and in physical activity as a homosexual athlete and exerciser. As a source of data, I will use my self-produced data; autobiographical memoirs and reflections, and sport and exercise log that I kept for over a month. By reaching this objective, I will interpret the findings using theories and LGBT research in sport.

The purpose of this study has got its final form over time, in the resolution of interaction with existing literature and my own thinking, which increased and deepened my understanding of the topic. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand a gay male athlete's experiences in sport and physical activity in Finland, by asking the following research questions.

1. How Finnish sport and physical activity domains are experienced by a gay athlete?
2. How these experiences reflect in his sexual identity development and management?
3. How these experiences reflect in his relationships to others in sport?

## 5 METHODOLOGICAL RESOLUTIONS

This is qualitative autoethnographic study with narrative features. In the following I will refer briefly to the methodological resolution taken in this study, qualitative research and autoethnography, and how data collection and analysis were carried out.

### 5.1 Qualitative research

Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 11) describe *qualitative research* as a term that includes any kind of research that is not using statistical procedures or other quantification in order to produce findings. Qualitative researchers usually study person's lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions, and feelings. Also organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomena, and interactions can be studied in qualitative research. Contrary to quantitative research, qualitative analysis strives to discover concepts and relationships in raw data by nonmathematical methods of interpretation. Qualitative and quantitative research differs also in research frames of each method, nevertheless both methods has common grounds in the field of research and both strives to conceptual understanding of the world. Saaranen-Kauppinen and Puusniekka (2010) lists typical features of qualitative research in their article, and some of them actualize also in this study, such as: autobiographical data collection, examinees perspective, inductive analysis, unhypotheticality, and narrativity of the study.

### 5.2 Autoethnography

Autoethnography has recently got popular in the field of qualitative research. Even in sport and exercise sciences autoethnography has been utilized in different topics (Collinson, 2003; Hockey, 2005; Jones, 2009; McMahon & DinanThompson, 2011; Martin, 2011; Purdy, Potrac, & Jones, 2008) and there are also autoethnographies that covers sexuality and gender issues in sports (Carless, 2011; Dorken & Giles, 2011; Drummond, 2010).

Autoethnography is self-reflexive research method that combines cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details, and follows the anthropological and social scientific inquiry approach (Chang, 2008). It entails the researcher performing narrative analysis pertaining himself as intimately part of a particular phenomenon or

social world under study (McIlveen, 2008; Hockey, 2005) such as Anderson (2006a) states that an autoethnographer should be a *complete member researcher*.

Autoethnographic research can be divided in two types of orientations: *analytic autoethnography* (Anderson, 2006a), and more free-form style, *evocative autoethnography* (Ellis, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2000), from of evocative approach is the most employed so far among these two autoethnographic genres. Evocative autoethnography draws from postmodern sensibilities and distinguishes itself from realist and analytic ethnographic traditions (Anderson, 2006a; Chang, 2008), which apply more traditional and objective ways of writing and ethnographic analysis and description. Evocative autoethnography invokes more on writing process and the outcome, and avoids analysing and interpreting the “reality” for the readers, since the story itself is analytical as such. So, in evocative autoethnography narrative stands alone focusing more on autobiographical and revealing description, where author’s lived experience intertwine with the cultural (Chang, 2008), striving to find resonance and affect the reader, and ultimately “break reader’s heart” (Ellis et al. 2011; Ellis 2004). In the end, reader makes the final interpretations, and conclusions of the validity and authenticity of the story.

According to Anderson (2006a) the central principles of analytic autoethnography are: 1) researcher is complete member of the group/phenomenon under studied, 2) reflexivity or researcher’s awareness of his relationship and influence on the surroundings and informants under study, 3) researcher’s visibility in the research text, 4) dialogue with self and other informants, 5) commitment to analytical, which closes off “nothing but” telling personal experience, or evoking an emotional reaction in readers. Chang (2008) as a supporter of more traditional autoethnography distinguishes it from descriptive or performative story-telling and writing i.e. evocative autoethnography, by combining the narrative with cultural analysis and interpretation, which follows the more traditional anthropological and social scientific inquiry approach. She argues that “autoethnography should be ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation” (p. 48).

Both autoethnographic genres has distinguished themselves, and even criticized each other’s philosophy of doing autoethnography (Anderson, 2006b; Butler, 2009; Denzin, 2006). Truly, both genres have their methodological differences, yet they have similarities as well. Both approaches strive to understand culture around the self (Chang, 2010). Also Anderson (2006b, p. 452) points out that in both approaches “attempts to do



ethnography are guided by the same commitments to social justice, civility, openness, and resistance to fundamentalisms that I see in the writings of alternative ethnographers.”

### 5.3 Narrative method and narrative analysis

Story telling is essentially associated in humanity and being as a human since we all tell stories all the time. We are storytellers. We build our identities and give meaning to our lives in narratives that we construct (Oliver, 1998). We understand the world narratively through the stories we tell ourselves and others about our experiences, and the cultural stories that are told about us (Bruce, 1998). Ultimately, when we tell our story, we live our story (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006).

Narrative analytic approaches suits for studies that are interested on individuals freely told stories about their lives and experiences. When doing research, we can examine how personal stories align to cultural stories; what kind of cultural elements stories contain and how these cultural conventions affect in developing narratives. When doing narratives we report, defence, take a stance, criticize, make things understandable, and impose ourselves and others. In narratives we e.g. work on our life changes; or bundle together different personal experiences, social and societal needs, demands, objectives, wishes, and attitudes (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006).

Interviews, tales, diaries, or other personal accounts like autobiographies are examples of narrative data forms. They can be public or private, long or short. Narrative in its advanced form has specific features of a story. It follows certain, at least timely logical structure. It is a description of a scene or series of scenes that is bind together with a plot that may have beginning, middle-part, and ending. Yet, narratives can also be anything that in some ways has narrative content that requires interpreting (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006).

*Narrative analysis* suggested by Oliver (1998) uses a plot in analytical means. In fact, the final product of narrative analysis is a new narrative, or set of narratives, where the data is organized into a timely and structurally coherent story.

*The data are configured into a narrative, or set of narratives, through the use of a plot, which gives meaning to the experiences of the people involved (...) Just as stories has mini plots that can help us to better understand the “why” questions, narratives are also constructed through the use of a plot and can help us begin to better understand the bigger “why” questions. (Oliver, 1998, p. 250)*

Virtually, data can be developed in core narratives, from where we can see the condensed plots of the stories. From these core narratives researcher can create a bigger narrative that illustrates the big picture, or the main points of the data (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006).

Smith and Sparkes (2009) separate narrative researchers in two categories: story analysts and storytellers. Story analysts collect stories for its data and turn these stories into a form to be formally analysed, extrapolates theoretical propositions and categories from them, and represents the results in the form of realist tale (see analytic autoethnography). Storytellers refrain from adding another layer of analysis and theory and prefer instead to let the story work as an analytical and theoretical in its own right. In other words, storytellers argue that story is analysis (see evocative autoethnography) (Smith & Sparkes, 2009). After all, narrative analysis or narrative inquiry is not just univocal and coherent analytic method. It is rather an ‘umbrella term’ that includes multiple methods for interpreting stories form texts (Smith & Sparkes, 2009; Riessman, 2001). Therefore, there are no specific regulations of conducting the method. Every researcher perceives the method in different ways; yet similar to all is the multidimensionality of the method and its usability in multiple ways.

In this autoethnographic study I am the source of my data by writing down narratives of my past and present experiences in sport and physical activity domains. I decided to use narrative analysis since it allowed me to construe and analyse my data without facing the dilemma of objectivity and subjectivity. It would have been difficult, even impossible task to analyse my self-created data objectively. In fact, subjectivity is the tool, and the strength in the analysis of this study. My own use of the method is not direct derivative from any complete narrative analysis guideline as such. Yet my use of the method certainly has influences from storytelling (Smith & Sparkes, 2009), as I am building a bigger story from core narratives that emerged from the data, suggested by Oliver (1998) and Polkinghorne (1995). I will give more insight how I conducted the narrative analysis in the ‘procedure’ section in this study.

#### 5.4 In between postmodern and modern

This study has influences from both autoethnographic genres. It has much in common with evocative autoethnography, which draws upon postmodern sensibilities (Anderson, 2006; Ellis, 2011) and storytelling (Smith & Sparkes, 2009), but it also

extracts from more analytical and realist approach of autoethnography suggested by Anderson (2006) and Chang (2008). Therefore, it could be said that this study has influences from *postmodern* and *modern* scientific philosophies. Modern philosophy of science is considered as objective and reliable, and therefore desirable. Modern scientific tradition believes that there is truth out there that can be reached by doing modern objective research. Postmodern scientific philosophy challenges the assumptions of grand theories of modernism. In contrary, postmodernists believe that there is no one major truth to be achieved. Science is, eventually, made by humans and the truth value of the science is relative (Ihanainen-Alanko, 2005; Rail, 1998). Matters and phenomenon seem different from different perspectives, and the world is fragmented into many isolated worlds (Rail, 1998).

To continue with postmodernism, Michel Foucault (as mentioned in Rail, 1998, p. xiii) emphasized the inadequacies of metanarratives. As a postmodernist thinker, he also sees the truth as partial, localized versions of reality and argues that the discourse is the site where meanings are contested and power relations determined. Therefore, the false power of hegemonic knowledge can be challenged by counterhegemonic discourses that offer alternative explanations of reality (Rail, 1998, p. xiii). In conclusion, postmodernism, as it is characterized by leading postmodernist thinkers (e.g. Lyotard, Foucault, Derrida, and Baudrillard) is mostly in terms of breakdown of belief in scientific truth and objectivity since any attempt to represent anything in language or text, will necessarily be incomplete, inaccurate, and biased (Rail, 1998).

I acknowledge the strength of the both scientific philosophies. Therefore, in this study, the narrative (the findings) is left for the readers to see and live the subjective experiences of the writer. Consequently readers can make their own interpretations from the narrative, and eventually evaluate and judge it from their own perspective. Moreover, it is impossible for me to control all the meanings in the narrative, therefore the story builds continuum between the readers and me as a writer. In this sense, the narrative continues to live its own life in readers' minds, detached from its writer, and acquiring new meanings and interpretations for the story (Ihanainen-Alanko, 2005). For example, I reckon that heterosexual athletes might see different things from the story, and interpret it differently than I do. Physical activity teachers or coaches might also have their own vision about the story. Yet, I believe there are plenty of athletes, coaches, or other sport practitioners who can identify to the experience in the story and interpret it more or less

the same way as I do. So by telling the story and leaving it to the “readers’ hands”, I’m implementing the postmodern scientific approach in to the study.

The narrative works also as “empiria” of this study that I will interpret and construe with relevant theories and previous research in the field. By doing this I’m striving to bring social explanations to the narrative. This can also be seen as a validation of the findings and readers can make their own judgments to what extent they can agree with my interpretation. By interpreting the narrative with theories and previous research, I’m implementing more traditional approach of (auto)ethnography that has influences from modern scientific philosophy.

### 5.5 Reflexivity in research

Autoethnography is a self-reflexive process where the researchers come to understand themselves and others. Reflexivity in ethnography also refers to researcher’s awareness of his relationship and influence to the study and the process (Anderson, 2006). I kept ‘research log’ during the whole research process. I kept it for updating the happenings in and around the research process, and also for reflexive purposes to express my feelings and thoughts about the research process, and to work on my own thinking about the limitations and strengths of my study. It was particularly helpful tool to get from inside, to outside of the study. I will demonstrate parts from my research log in this study to enlighten my feelings and resolutions of the research process in the data collection and data analysis process, and when considering ethical issues and limitations of this study.

According to McIlveen (2008) “Reflexivity in research and practice offers more than a checking process; it is a process which in itself proffers new understandings and actions—transformation.” (p.6). Self-transformation may be also therapeutic for the researcher or the reader, when dealing with sensitive and delicate issues, or when it’s about healings from the emotional scars of the past (Chang, 2008).

*When manifested in increased self-reflection, adoption of the culturally relevant pedagogy, desire to learn about “others of difference”, development of an inclusive community, or self-healing, the self-transformative potential of autoethnography is universally beneficial to those who work with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. (Chang, 2008, p. 54)*

I believe that by doing this autoethnographic study, and because of its self-reflexive nature, it changed my perception considering the LGBT sports and my perceptions of

non-heterosexuality in sport domain in general, and also helped to understand better my own experiences and the others in sport and physical activity.

By reading previous research and literature related to the field, I got more insight to the topic. Most of all, it evoked the self-reflexive process of my experiences in related to the culture and surroundings where I am living. Doing this autoethnographic study helped me to understand myself and others, and continuingly help myself and hopefully others to correct cultural misunderstandings, and to be more sensitive cross-culturally and respond effectively to the needs of cultural others (Chang, 2008).

### 5.6 Ethical considerations

Certain research related ethical principles apply to autoethnography, like in any other qualitative research method. In this study, ethical concerns are heightened especially in issues of researcher's position, participants' anonymity, and in the questions of objectivity and subjectivity. Always when conducting a study, researcher is responsible of participants' well-being, and that their experiences are studied objectively. When deliberating between various methodologies to use in this study, I struggled with the question of authority to analyse and interpret others experiences (i.e. interviewing and interpreting other gay athletes' experiences without letting my own experiences to bias the data collection and analysis). However, although I ended up focusing to examine my own experiences, and *myself*, it doesn't mean that the study does not have *others* included. I had to keep in mind that other people are present in my self-narratives, as active participants or as associates in the background (Chang, 2006). Such as Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) states that researchers do not exist in vacuum. We all are connected to social networks that include friends and relatives, partners and children, co-workers and students, and we work in different environments such as universities and research facilities. That means I indeed combine others when I write and conduct autoethnography. When we read traditional ethnographies, we sometimes can identify the location of communities, and in some cases, even participants being featured in the study (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

Often autoethnographers maintain and value their interpersonal ties with their participants after the study, like I do with my current and previous teammates and coaches, and relatives. Participants in my research are not just impersonal "subjects" and source of data. They are, and will continue to be part of my life when my research is completed, so I "have to be able to continue to live in the world of relationships in which

my research is embedded” (Ellis et al. 2011). I am taking a conscious risk when doing this autoethnography. For example, my homosexuality comes obvious in this study and it might change my relationships with others in sport that weren't aware of my sexuality before. However, I've considered the pros and cons of this matter and I'm ready to carry the responsibility and consequences what the possible “disclosure” can bring to my life.

When conducting and writing the autoethnography, I have to consider how I imply the others in my work and assure their anonymity. I might have to alter identifying characteristics such as circumstances, topics discussed, or characteristics like race; gender, name, place, or appearance to protect the privacy and safety of others (Ellis et al. 2011). I also considered the issue while collecting the data:

Research log 10.1 2013

*...I've also considered how to write and introduce “others” when writing my own experiences. I don't want them to be identified from the text. I use fake names at the moment, because I want the readers to get real feeling about persons around me, and identify them as real persons. Still, I'm bit afraid if I reveal too much....*

I have also taken this issue into account in the narrative by writing it in the third person. I've also changed the names of the persons, events, and environments to make it difficult to locate or identify anything from the story. Acknowledging, that the narrative is a creation based on the data, and not necessarily a detailed and objective description of ‘how it all went’, serves also for the ensuring anonymity of others in this study.

In some cases, however, ensuring anonymity can be impossible thing to do in this kind of “ethnography”. Then I have to consider how I will write about those, whose anonymity I can't ensure, but still remaining truthful and loyal to my data. In these cases, I needed to balance between the essence-meaningful or detailed-truthful story. During the writing process I had to constantly consider how these protective devices influence the integrity of the research, as well as how the work is interpreted and understood (Ellis et al. 2011). Moreover, I had to consider myself as a participant when writing the narrative. My data included some very private information, my feelings and experiences as a gay athlete in sport. Therefore I had to take this account by negotiating what was essential private information for the study and therefore needed to be included in the findings, and how I will do that by not doing harm to myself. In this procedure, I had to leave out some parts of the data, which might have been too personal, or I didn't find the proper way to present them in narrative, let alone would they brought any more notable meaning to the

study. I also decided to leave out my family and relatives from the whole study since I would've not been able to ensure their anonymity in this study. I will discuss more about these "untold stories" under the 'procedure' section of the study.

## 6 PROCEDURE

### 6.1 Data collection

Qualitative data can be text, visual, or audio recorded material. It can be arisen depending on, or regardless of researcher's influence. Some examples of qualitative data are interviews and observations but it might also include autobiographical logs and diaries, letters, documents, films, or videotapes as well (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

As a source of data, I use my sport and exercise diary that contains self-observational and self-reflective material about my daily experiences in sport and exercise domains; and autobiographical log that contains written stories and memoirs of my past experiences in sport and physical activity domains from my elementary school times up to recent experiences. Thus, the data I use in this study is qualitative, narrative, and personal.

Data collection took approximately two months occurring on January and February in 2013, and it was done concurrently with the background research process. I wrote almost daily basis to my sport and exercise log approximately for one month. I wrote about my thoughts, feelings, and behaviour in sport training and other physical activity, but also my experiences outside of sport domain (e.g. social encounters with team/practicing mates, writings about sports in media or in social media). I tried to write down my experiences immediately after training session, or whenever something related to sport and my sexuality occurred. Of course, not always I was able to write them down immediately after occurring. Sometimes there was couple of days between the experiences and putting them down into log. Writing autobiographical data (i.e. memoirs) took around one and a half months. In autobiographical memoirs I wrote all kinds of experiences I've had in sport and physical activity domains from primary school times all the way to recent experiences. All together approximately 60 pages (30 pages each) of written data (spacing 1, 15) accumulated during in data collection.

Data collection wasn't as easy as it would sound to write about self-experiences and feelings. I had doubts if I was able to write meaningful and enough qualitative data for the study, and if my personal data would be any useful. I have never kept any kind of diaries or logs in my life (counting off compulsory learning diaries in school). Therefore writing and reflecting my experiences in a diary was not natural activity for me.

Research log 10.1 2013



*...Already in the beginning I found it a bit awkward to write about myself and my behaviours and feelings. I doubt the importance of the content that I'm writing. Is this any useful?*

Also quantity of the data concerned me during the data collection:

Research log 10.1 2013

*One of my concerns is to get enough quality data. How much is enough? I'm not happy how I've procrastinated the data collection for this long. I feel that I should have started earlier so I'd have more time for collecting.*

In the end my concerns turned out to be irrelevant. Both the quality and the quantity (60 pages) of the data are satisfying. In fact, the amount of data is rather plenty for this size of a study. In retrospect, there would be enough data for more studies. One way to determine the sufficiency of the data is when new events don't bring any new information to the study. This occurred particularly in my sport and exercise log, when I realized that similar experiences occurred repeatedly.

I had doubts when writing autobiographical data about my past. I was concerned if I remember the things right, if the data that I was writing was truthful.

Research log 16.1 2013

*Today I wrote about my childhood and adolescence experiences in sport. Gosh it was hard. So hard to recall that is far away in past. I even started to doubt the stories I wrote. I question the way I see and interpret my past experiences now, but at the same time I'm writing as truthfully as I can...*

*...Constant self-reflection is so overwhelming and numbing, that I feel I get lost sometimes; that I don't know what is true...*

Stories of our experiences are limited interpretations and descriptions of our past. We use words and symbols to contextualise and re-telling them to ourselves, and to the others. Therefore, it is impossible to totally "nail them down" how we actually experienced them in our stories. Time also can bias and change our experiences. We might feel differently now about the experiences we had long time ago. It's also impossible to recall every experience from the past. I could have spent more time for recalling my past experiences in sport and physical activity domains, but considering the time limit, and the size of this study, I had to finish the data collection at some point. For recalling my past experiences, I used external artefacts (Chang, 2010) such as photographs, diplomas, and sport medals to help and recall my memories.

Data collection was not easy process emotionally either. In addition to numbing self-reflections and heaviness of recalling my past experiences, at times I questioned my ability to put me and my experiences under the focus of the study. Just like in the beginning of this autoethnographic journey I wrote in my research log:

Research log 30.5 2012

*...During the past weeks I've been thinking my feelings towards this study. How deep I can actually go into my feelings and thoughts about myself. Am I really going to open myself as much as I want to make this study successful...?*

Even the feelings of fear occurred, when revealing own experiences and feelings in sport and physical activity by writing the down to the autobiographical and exercise logs:

Research log 10.1 2013

*I'm a bit afraid of revealing my deep and personal thoughts to public, but at the same time I want to do it. Actually I'm not afraid of showing them, I'm more afraid how other people think about the way how I feel and judge me because of it.*

Ellis (1999) notifies in her article that confronting things about oneself that are less than flattering is difficult in self-questioning autoethnography. She continues:

*Believe me, honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and self-doubts – and emotional pain. Just when you think you can't stand the pain anymore, well that's when the real work has only begun. Then there's the vulnerability of revealing yourself, not being able to take back what you've written or having any control over how readers interpret it. It's hard not to feel your life is being critiqued as well as your work. It can be humiliating. (Ellis, 1999, p. 35)*

Surely, I've experienced self-doubts during the whole study and concerns how much I dare to reveal my feelings and write about them in a public thesis paper. For example, writing about intimate issues like discrimination experiences and same-sex attractions, or my own thoughts and relationships to others in sport made me to think about the ways I could write about them, without “humiliating” myself, or not being interpreted in disadvantageous ways. Still, I tried to be as honest as I in my writing, without twisting the “truth” how I felt and experienced it. Moreover, these self-doubts and fears even strengthened towards the end of the research process, but at the same time I was more convinced that. I am in the right path and that these experiences certainly have some worth of telling.

Then there were language issues. I'm not a native English speaker, therefore it wouldn't be the first language to use when I want to express my feelings, and put my experiences in words. I pondered quite a long time if I should have used my native language, Finnish, in writing autobiographical data and sport and exercise log. In the end I decided to use English in my diaries, since supervision and the research paper was going to be either way in English. Retrospectively we can discuss how much this choice limited the quality of the data. However, I am rather happy with the data collection and I don't feel the language limited my expression too much in the end.

## 6.2 Data analysis and writing the narrative

Data driven narrative analysis was employed for organizing and analyzing the data in this study. In earlier section I described the narrative analysis as a method. In this chapter I will give some insight how it was actually used in this study.

In qualitative research it's possible to analyze the data without any preconceptions or definitions by conducting a data driven analysis. When conducting data driven analysis the primary stress of the study relies on its data, meaning that the analytical units are not set beforehand and the theory is built from the data (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006). This also refers to inductivity in research, which drives from singular observations to more general arguments. Therefore, data driven analysis asks discipline from the researcher when trying to keep own preconceptions and theories out from the data analysis and interpretation (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006). The data of this study was analyzed by utilizing data driven narrative analysis. In short, I analyzed the data by reducing it, and making a synthesis from it without letting the knowledge and theories to affect the analysis. In this study, the outcome of the analysis is a narrative, which illustrates the big picture, or the main points of the data (Saaranen-Kauppinen & Puusniekka, 2006). Therefore, the findings of this study, the narrative, are more a synthesis (Polkinghorne, 1995) than a theory.

However, purely inductive and data driven analysis is often difficult, merely impossible to conduct, because it's supposed to rely on objective description without any preconceptions about the phenomenon under study. Our observations always include some theoretical conceptions. Also research design is set by a researcher and therefore questions the objectivity of the findings. Self-reflexivity of the actions and resolutions made in the study, and reflexivity of the reliability, validity, and limitations of the study are emphasized when conducting this kind of analysis (Saaranen-Kauppinen &

Puusniekka, 2006). I've tried to solve this issue by making this study as transparent as I can by denoting the methods and procedure I've applied in this study, and reflecting the limitations and strengths of these resolutions. I've also clarified my preconceptions to the readers in the 'introduction' so that they are aware of starting point and the perspective used in this research.

During the whole research process I noticed that it's hard to avoid the influence of existing theories and knowledge. I also wrote about these difficulties in to my research log:

Research log 14.1 2013

*It's difficult not to think about the analyzing part when writing my personal data. I do the background research while data collection that includes writing and reading. I can recognize how some of my experiences connects to some researches or literature I've read. I try not to give the literature lead my personal data. Now I know what Noora (a friend and a colleague) meant when she warned me of reading too much literature before data collection...*

Existing theories and previous research relating to the study purpose can affect in many phases of the research process, especially in data collection. The more I read about the literature about LGBT experiences in sport, the more my understanding of the data increases. However, I think that my preconceptions and the increasing knowledge about the topic didn't affect too much the data collection, since I think I'd have written pretty much about the same experiences without knowing anything about LGBT research. However, I can't deny that my preconceptions would have had some affect in the data collection, but also in data analysis and interpretation. Therefore, I chose to use the narrative analysis method in the way it's conducted in this study, by telling a new story based on the autobiographical logs and showing it for the readers to evaluate its truthfulness and reliability. Furthermore, while conducting the narrative analysis and writing the story, I prevented myself to read related theories and research during these research phases.

The narrative analysis proceeded as it follows. First I organized the autobiographical data in chronological order. Autobiographical log consisted narratives all the way from my early experiences of physical activity in school's physical education to present experiences in sport and physical activity domains. I read both data sources many times, and reduced each story by I taking the most important and meaningful content from them. We can call this phase as a "coding" process, although it didn't

follow the orthodox guideline of coding process, which is normally used in other qualitative analysis methods. Using these core narratives I started to build a “new story”.

There were certain themes that repeatedly emerged from both data sources. The narratives I wrote in exercise log did support the narratives I wrote in autobiographical memoirs, bringing additional information about the recurrence and the composition of different experiences in sports and physical activity. However, the narratives in sport and exercise log were more descriptive about the experiences, what I did and how I felt in sport trainings or in physical activity. However, many of the logs in exercise diary were quite short, and few of them were written in story kind of form. Narratives in my autobiographical memoirs had a fine narrative structure, since they were written more in story form and had clear plots. Therefore, I decided to use some of the narratives from my autobiographical memoirs in the final narrative by enriching it with the data that emerged from the exercise log. However, in the final narrative the events, names, and places are altered to make the story coherent and to protect the anonymity of others, and also to protect my own privacy. By considering this, the narrative analysis was used in reducing the data by taking the most important content for this study and construing them as a new story.

The writing process was surprisingly heavy and frustrating, when trying to create a coherent, fluent, and interesting story that would ‘resonate’ with readers to feel the experiences I felt in sport and physical activity. In the other hand, I wanted to keep the story ‘informative’ in a sense that it wouldn’t be too sprawling and misleading to blur the ‘essential findings’ from the data. Then again, as a non-native English speaker, I had great difficulties especially in making the story fluent to understand and interesting for the readers, and not creating too dull and simple narrative in literary perspective. Evocative autoethnographer, such as Richardson, emphasize the literary and esthetical input in autoethnographic writings, in order to not be boring and also the ability of the text to “enable the reader to enter the subjective world of the teller” (as cited in Ellis et al., 2000). However, I hope the narrative I’ve created will fulfill at least some of the ‘esthetical’ requirements of evocative autoethnographic writing.

The final narrative consists from 12 ‘chapters’ that demonstrates a gay athlete’s experiences in physical activity and sport domains and how these experiences affected the negotiation of his sexual identity and its development in- and outside of sport. Some of the chapters are more informative, giving more general perspective of the experiences

and feelings of the individual, and some narratives gives more detailed description of the events how the experiences of a gay athlete contextualize in his 'everyday life'.

### 6.3 Stories untold

As I mentioned earlier, I had to leave out some of the findings from the final story that would have somehow disturbed the emergence of the essential findings by making the story too complex. Indeed, here we can argue the judgment I used when measuring the significance of findings over others, yet I needed to focus on certain features of the narrative. It would have been hard to include everything I found from the data to the final narrative. However, it doesn't mean that these "left out" findings are totally absent in the final narrative.

Some narratives were very private in content and I couldn't find a proper way to incorporate those findings in to the narrative without making the plot too complex and nuanced, furthermore, exposing them could have been harmful for me, and probably for others. In the end I can notice that construing these findings in the narrative would not have been significant for this study's purpose anyway. Those stories contained issues of e.g. same-sex attractions within sports and physical activity, which undoubtedly are obvious issues that gay athletes may confront in homophobic sport and physical activity domains. I could have also focused more in detail on gay athlete's personal relationships to others, particularly to other LGBT people in sport and physical activity. However, I included some indications to same-sex attractions in sport domain to the final narrative, but more as a 'side note plots'. Indeed the narrative shows the relationships to others in sport, but not focusing too much on them. To conclude with the 'untold stories', and as I mentioned previously in the 'data collection', there is most probably enough data to even make another study from different perspective. For example same-sex attractions or gay athletes personal relationships to others within sport and physical activity could be potential focus for another study.

There were also some periods and issues that I decided to leave out from the data collection. For example, I decided not to write about my physical activity experiences in military service. Although there were indeed lot of physical activity and sports included in military, the period and the environment was so extraordinary to normal circumstances that it would not have given appropriate data for this study. Moreover, although my family and relatives have strongly involved, influenced, and

encouraged me in sports and physical activity, I didn't want to make them as a focus of my data collection for the sake of privacy and ethical reasons.

## 7 CEDRIC'S STORY

'Cedric's story' contains the most essential findings that emerged from the data. As I have already emphasized, this is autoethnographic study and the research has been conducted from gay athlete's perspective and bases mostly on subjective scientific philosophy. In short, the story tells about a gay individual called Cedric, and his experiences of physical activity in school and sport domains. The story begins from his early experiences in physical education and sports all the way to his experiences as an adult competitive athlete. The story is fictional in sense that it's re-constructed from the autobiographical data, and the events, places, and the people in the story are altered or fictitious. Cedric's story is fictional also in postmodern sense, which doesn't mean that the story is opposed to truth, it's rather fabricated or fashioned version of truth, and ultimately represents the author's truth (Bruce, 1998).

Autoethnographic study sets many ethical, philosophical, and practical issues. I've discussed these issues earlier in this study and tried to bring these issues up clearly to the readers. However, it's important to keep these issues in mind while reading the story and my interpretations of it. In the end, story gives an opportunity for anyone to examine it from their own perspective and for their own purposes. Cedric's story, anyhow, construes the findings of this study and works as an empiric data for further interpretations and discussion.

### *Chapter 1 – 'Once upon a time...'*

Once upon a time in Finland there was a boy called Cedric. He was a normal boy, just about to start his first year in elementary school. He lived in a sleepy suburb town in Southern Finland that was not too big, neither too small in Finnish standards, with approximately 25,000 citizens, locating right next to a bigger city with nearly 100 000 citizens. He had lot of friends to play with, one of the closest of them being his little sister, not much younger than him. Consequently, besides playing boy's games with other boys he was also introduced to girls' plays by his little sister and her friends. In fact, he enjoyed playing with boys and girls equally. No restrictions were set for his plays how or with whom he ought to be playing, as long these plays didn't hurt anyone. One of his favourite "playground" was the sport centre ran by his family. Four big squash courts and gyms were inspiring spaces for different games and activities, but also for exploring different sports.



*'...in primary school'*

It was the year of 1990 when Cedric started in primary school. There were approximately 20 pupils in Cedric's class, equal amount of boys and girls. He got along very well with all of his classmates. In 1st and 2nd grades Cedric got his first experiences of "organized" physical education. Cedric's teacher was a strict, but caring lady in her 50s, who taught all the subjects for the class, also physical education. First physical education classes included mostly different playground games, only a few sports were included. Not much competition was included in those games, only moving and improving motoric skills was the main purpose, in the name of playing. In the second grade of elementary school sport and competition was more included in physical education, and consequently Cedric got his first experiences in sport competitions. His first ever prize in sport was from the cross-country skiing competition organized for all the 2<sup>nd</sup> graders in his school. Although he finished 9th place, he received a "golden spoon", which was typical prize in school competitions. Cedric felt extremely proud of the prize, and showed it for the weeks to his relatives.

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In 3rd grade Cedric started in music-oriented class, and therefore also majority of his classmates changed, but now there were only nine boys with twenty-one girls in the class. Changes didn't bother him much, since many of his friends from the previous class followed to the same music oriented class. He also got along well equally with girls and boys. However, physical education classes changed radically, at least from Cedric's point of view. Boys and girls were split in separate groups in physical education, which was new for Cedric since he had always played in mixed groups. Since there were only few boys now in his class, they were integrated with the boys of a collateral class in physical education. Now he had a male teacher, between his 30s or 40s. The first impression of him was that he was very determined and professional and took his work very seriously. Cedric wasn't impressed, instead he was bit shocked by the new arrangement. He was much more comfortable with his own classmates, and in the mixed group, than with the strange boys from the other class. Boys from the collateral class were so different from the boys in his class, so aggressive, rough, and so loud. He felt self-conscious when being with them, not to say when having to do sports with them.

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From the first physical education classes Cedric got understood that he wasn't that good in sports. He couldn't keep up with the stronger and more aggressive boys. His

self-esteem in sports decreased, while the stronger boys mocked him and also the other boys who couldn't respond them. He felt he was weak and clumsy, especially in team sports, and got reminded about that often, not just by other boys, but also by the PE teacher. "Sissy", "pussy", "idiot" and many other names was used by the stronger kids to the ones who weren't able keep up with them in the physical education. In 4th and 5th grades new concepts, such as "faggot" or "gay", got place in PE classes. Without having any idea of what these words meant, Cedric thought they were undoubtedly connected with something negative and undesirable...or possibly to a person. Teacher in physical education didn't intervene much to the mocking or insulting. Instead, he seemed to give a silent approval to what was happening in PE classes. Boys who dominated in team sports, the strongest and the most competitive ones, seemed to get in teacher's favour. The weaker boys instead got the teacher's attention when not performing in the correct way, receiving comments from their failures.

Cedric was, by no means, bad in sports. In fact, he did pretty well individual sports where he didn't have to mind others reactions, or opinions. Individual sports in physical education were literally a relief, while team sports made him nervous already a day before the class. He was one of the best swimmers in his class. He was decent cross-country skier, he went to gymnastics twice in a week, and above all he ruled everyone in all racquet sports, such as in squash and badminton. But it was all about team sports, about how you kicked the ball in soccer or slammed the puck in ice hockey, about how you stole the ball in basketball. Being weak in team sports was considered being weak in other aspects in physical activity. Individual sports were seen just as an additional component in the hierarchy of sports and in school physical education. Being good at individual sports gave little respect from the peers, and from the teacher. However, some team sports suited for Cedric. In baseball and in volleyball he could use his powerful strokes that he got from the racquet sports. Nevertheless, for Cedric's misfortune, physical education classes in school was mainly about aggressive team sports such as ice-hockey, floor-ball, futsal, and soccer, where he didn't feel having a chance against the others, or a chance to perform the way he wanted to without being let down and discouraged by the others. However, with the right company, with his friends, he could find some enjoyment from these sports.

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Cedric learned in the school the differences of girls' and boys' sports. In 5th and 6th grades he got secret passion to figure skating after seeing it from television. He

admired the athleticism and smooth movement and expressive style of these beautiful athletes. Philippe Candeloro, and Surya Bonaly were his favourites. The power and the beauty of their movement were so intriguing that he wanted to try it out himself. However, figure skating was meant for girls, and therefore it was only girls who got to do it in physical education. Boys played ice-hockey, of course. Male figure skaters were rarity, which was not surprising, since they were generally stigmatized as “sissies” or “fags”, just because of practicing the sport. Even showing an interest to figure skating was peculiar enough to call boys as “sissies”. Cedric was very discreet about his passion. He went almost every night to practice spins and jumps on the ice-rink next to his home when there were no other skaters. He didn't have proper skates for figure skating, but ice-hockey skates fulfilled the purpose well. During the daytimes he practiced in his family's sport centre without skates, secretly, hidden from the eyes of others. ‘I'd be much better than them...’ he thought when seeing girls practicing their jumps and spins in the ice-rink, while he was walking to physical education class to play another two-hours of ice-hockey, the sport he hated the most.

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In 6th grade Cedric found the more competitive side of his personality. He got better and better in squash, after playing for so many years by himself and with his friends in his family's sport centre. He gained some success in school sports too, by representing his school in the regional championships in shot put. He was aware that being good at sport or being a sportsman could give the reputation that he wanted. Sport made him feel more comfortable about himself. He wanted to show off to his schoolmates, and to his PE teacher, and didn't want to be considered as weak and geeky boy anymore. Eventually, he asked his father to take him to nearest squash club in the main city. Quickly he was member of the junior team of the club and took part in his first squash competition. He won comfortably his first ever official squash match, and ended up 4th in the same junior tournament. Cedric's “athletic career” had started.

*Chapter 2 – ‘I'm not a fag!’ he thought.*

Cedric started in high school at the age of 12, in the year of 1996. The high school was one of the biggest in Finland. Actually, it was the only high school in the town. He continued in the same music class, where he started in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. His class remained more or less the same and they had a good spirit inside the class. That made Cedric to feel safer when moving from familiar primary school environment to a massive

and strange, even frightening high school environment. In high school he started to realize that he liked boys after having his first crush to another boy on a school trip to Portugal. That followed with more crushes and desires to other boys in school. Being very confused by his feelings, Cedric denied them. Actually, he wasn't sure the meaning of those confusing feelings. 'I'm not a fag!' he thought in his mind, without telling anyone about them, not even to his closest friends, or his family, hoping that these feelings would be temporary.

These confusing feelings never left Cedric alone. He also felt alone with these feelings. Despite the size of the school there were no openly homosexual or lesbian pupils. It wouldn't have been good idea to "come out" with these feelings anyway, since he would have been surely bullied right after he would have even mentioned about them. There was a language teacher in the school who was rumoured to be gay, because the feminine way he talked and behaved. At least Cedric was sure that he was a gay. 'Why on earth anyone would act like that for fun anyway?' he thought. Language teacher was teased a lot by other students, and lot of jokes and rumours about him were circling around the school. There was also a gang of girls who were bullied all the time by the students. The way they dressed and behaved, the way they talked, and how they hung all the time together was sufficient indicator for calling them 'dykes'. Deep in his mind Cedric didn't have anything against these people. He actually liked them, but didn't want to be connected to them either. Insults and derogatory jokes about homosexuals and lesbians could be heard everywhere. It was part of the culture and Cedric took part in this culture as well, just like everyone did in school.

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Physical education classes weren't as bad experience for him as it was in primary school, much to do with his new PE teacher who managed to consider individuals and their needs in his classes. Cedric kept on succeeding in individual sports. PE teacher acknowledged it too, which showed in his PE grade and in his increasing motivation for physical education. In high school he could also choose optional courses where individual sports were emphasized. Still his revulsion towards team sports remained. He started slacking in the PE classes when other options weren't offered. Bad experiences in team sports didn't leave Cedric alone. It was better not to even try. It wouldn't make any difference if he tried or not, he thought. He didn't want to show weaknesses and therefore to be humiliated and hurt by the others. Individual sports kept him away from the peers' evaluation and commenting. 'Why can't I do what I want?' he

thought at 9 am in the physical education class, sitting on a substitutes' bench with hockey stick beside him, watching the other guys rushing around the ice rink.

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Squash and sport became more important in Cedric's life in high school whereas his motivation to study music decreased. He had talent in music, but it was terrifying idea for Cedric to make a career of it. Sport and everything around it started to be more interesting. He truly loved sports from all his heart, but he was also aware that it was much "cooler" to be involved in sports than in music. He started to sacrifice more and more time in practicing squash and eventually quitted music studies in conservatory. 'I don't have time for music, because of sport' was his excuse for quitting music studies. Now he could start to be, and identify as a sportsman when music was out of the way from his athletic plans.

Cedric had decent relationship with his teammates in squash club, yet he didn't hang out much with them outside of sports. He reluctantly participated in organized team practices, partly because the club was bit far away where he lived, but he also didn't like the organized and therefore restrictive group practices. He also felt different from his practicing mates in the club, not being able to find the "same tone" with them. They were more competitive than him and he wasn't always comfortable when being with them. There were no girl players in the club, which he found bit disappointing. Having girl players around would have definitely made him feel more "safe" in the sport environment.

Cedric took a lot individual responsibility from his training. He spent quite a lot time practicing and training alone, or arranged training sessions with different players, individually, by inviting them to come over to his family's sport centre to practice. This helped him to regulate his own training by making it more comfortable for himself. He felt most comfortable when training one-to-one with another player, especially when he could choose the practicing mate he liked. He was one of the best junior players in his club, which motivated him to practice more. He liked winning and enjoyed success in competitions. He gained some success in the national junior competitions, and he nearly got selected to represent his country in European Junior Championships.

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Cedric kept on crushing to other boys in school, and also in sports. These feelings confused him and he still was never able to express or talk about his feelings to anyone. Even a thought about it was embarrassing. He was ashamed and disappointed,

when he started to be more and more convinced that he didn't have any sexual desire on girls. To turn out to be as gay was definitely going to be considered as weakness, as an embarrassment, especially in sports. A gay squash player didn't feel convincing at all. No one would take him seriously, in sports or in school. People would stop training with him. Cedric suppressed his same-sex feelings and desires in sports, and also in his social life. No one would notice anything if he just acted out being a normal and 'straight' guy.

*Chapter 3 – Looking for the “inner-gay-sportsman”*

Cedric was 16 when he finished in high school, and moved to upper-secondary school. At this age, he seriously started to question his sexual identity. Also, in the same year he got Internet at home, which he soon found a practical place to meet new people, or even to make friends. Through Internet he could easily meet the people similar to him, other gay, bisexual, or questioning guys. There he could express himself and share his feelings with the people who understood him. Internet started to get more room in his social life. He got to know other gay and bi people through Internet, but he never really felt related to them. So-called “gay culture” and the people who represented it were distant for him and he didn't want to be part of it. Instead, he wanted to see himself different from other stereotypical gay people, as a “normal” athletic guy, who loved sports. He felt like a rebel, against the people or a culture he was supposed to belong. Gay community didn't offer him much, and it was hard for him to find other guys similar to him. Homosexual guys were absent in sports, and sporty guys were absent in gay community. They were deeply in their closets, just like Cedric was.

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Squash became even more serious to Cedric in upper-secondary school. He gained success in junior competitions and he participated in some international junior competitions too. Being an athlete started to be a big part of Cedric's social identity and self-concept in school and in sports, and sport gave him a lot of self-confidence. Since he practiced on a daily basis, he spent more time in the sport centre where his club and team tend to practice, and also in his family's sport centre. Consequently, his social life started to shape into these sport environments. He also started to build good friendships in the sport centre with other athletes who practiced in the same club. In fact, he was much liked person in his club because of his friendly and approachable personality. Some girls in the sport centre fancied Cedric, and he started to see some of them, but only to fit in to give even some straight impression to others. It would have been more peculiar if he didn't

see other girls, but he made sure it never got too serious. He never was comfortable of doing it. In reality he just fancied guys, and got badly crushed to some of them in the sport club. But like always, he never let that show or talked about it to anyone. He thought that being gay was totally unacceptable in sports and it didn't fit to his social identity and his self-concept as an athletic and sporty guy at all.

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Cedric's relationship to his teammates remained appropriate throughout the upper-secondary school, but their relationship didn't get closer than that. Sometimes he spent time with them outside of the sport settings, reluctantly, since usually the main activity was to go on talking about girls or hook up with them in clubs or parties. Later he started making more excuses to avoid such activities and rather stayed at home, socializing with his friends in the Internet. Cedric started to avoid all the social situations where he likely had to somehow prove his heterosexuality to others, or "contribute" by commenting or telling about his sexual feelings or experiences. Over time, acting out being 'straight' was getting more overwhelming, and he was even more self-conscious of spending time with his teammates, and his friends in school. Still, he thought that disclosing his homosexuality to others would have been very risky, and damaging to his social relations in school, and in sport environments.

Cedric continued taking responsible from his practicing, arranging individual training sessions with his teammates, but also with other players in the sport centre. He did go to organized team practices occasionally, but he preferred to choose people to practice with, people with whom he felt comfortable in- and outside of the squash court, with whom he didn't have to put his masculinity, or sexuality under test. He practiced quite a lot with female players, who were a rarity in his club. Sometimes Cedric's teammates questioned him for practicing with women, who were supposedly weaker and therefore couldn't give a proper training. Cedric didn't understand their point of view, in fact, he enjoyed practicing with women. It was a good change from playing with his regular teammates. He also felt more comfortable when socializing with women players and therefore he could concentrate more on the practicing as well. In spring 2003, twenty year old Cedric graduates from upper-secondary school, and is about to start his year in military service. In the same year he also played for the first time in the main draw of the national championships.

#### *Chapter 4 – Coming up with (social) gay identity*

After spending a year in military, and another year working in a library, Cedric got accepted to study physiotherapy in to the local university of applied sciences. He could finally move away from home, at the age of 22. So he moved, to the bigger city right next to his hometown. This life change apparently changed his social life too. He got new friends from the university and started to hang out with them regularly. With some of them he made rather close friendships and he was more comfortable being in the university surroundings. People in the faculty of health care seemed to be open-minded, and the majority of the students were girls. Despite being more than comfortable in his new environment, there was one thing he couldn't reveal about himself to others. He started to feel bad for not being able to talk about his sexuality to his close friends in the university, although he was quite sure about his intuition that he could trust them and nothing bad would happen if he'd come out to them.

Eventually, Cedric came out to his closest friends for the first time after finding his first real boyfriend. The experience was very positive and unique. Like heavy burden had got off from his shoulders. 'There was nothing to worry about after all!' he thought and couldn't stop the tears of happiness falling from his eyes. Soon Cedric started to come out gradually to his other friends in school, and they all were encouraging. Cedric got more and more confidence to be open about his sexuality in public. Being gay started to feel rather as strength than weakness after noticing that he could build closer relationships to people when he was open and truthful about himself. Having a boyfriend certainly eased the process of being open and proud about his sexuality. He wasn't scared of other people's rejection anymore, since he had the support of his boyfriend and friends.

#### *Chapter 5 – “May I introduce my boyfr...friend”*

Nevertheless, Cedric still couldn't come out in his sport surroundings. He wasn't sure how the people in sport centre, especially his teammates would react if he'd tell about his boyfriend to them. He had a feeling that most of the people would not take it well, at least in the beginning. There were no openly gay athletes in his sport surroundings or in sports in general. No-one really talked about them. Only homophobic jokes and degrading language about sexual minorities could be heard. Cedric had some good friends in the sport centre that seemed more open for diversity, without showing any negative behaviour towards homosexuals or other sexualities. He thought a lot about



coming out to them, but didn't find the proper moment and conditions to do it. It was also too risky, since he wasn't sure about their attitudes after all. He wanted to maintain good relationship with them and with other people in sports, so that no-one would start treating him somehow differently just because of his sexuality. He didn't want to lose his practicing mates either. After all, being homosexual was not in his mind when he practiced with them or when they shared the same locker room. It didn't seem important when doing sports. But at the same time he was disappointed of himself not being able to come out to the people in sports. He felt like a coward.

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Cedric and his boyfriend, Jaime, lived in different cities most of the time during their two and a half years long relationship, but both visited each other's places regularly and often. Both introduced their friends to each other and showed around places where they spent their time. Naturally, Cedric also wanted to show his sport surroundings to his boyfriend. After all he practiced almost daily basis and spent a lot of his free with the people in the sport centre. The people there were like a second family to him. Some of them knew Cedric since he was a little kid.

Cedric introduced Jaime to some people in the sport centre, but just as a friend. It was controversial for him, since obviously Jaime was much more than "just a friend". Cedric just feared that someone would make a big number about their relationship. Same-sex couples were unseen in his sport centre, and generally in Finnish sport world. It was normal for straight people to show up with their girlfriends or boyfriends in the sport centre, but Cedric felt it was better not to make a fuss about him and Jaime. He just hoped that people would realize what was going between them, since he took Jaime quite many times to the sport centre.

### *Chapter 6 – Coming out experiences, coming out to Mona (and Rafael)*

It was a warm and sunny summer day in June 2009 and Cedric had just arrived home from his three months trip in Spain where he did practical training for his studies. He was bit upset of leaving Spain with sunny beaches and Mediterranean lifestyle only to return to Finland for a summer job in a local hospital. Idea of coming back to Finland wasn't tempting, although he liked the decent salary he'd get from his new job. Nevertheless, Finnish summer weather surprised him positively. 'I must have taken the sun with me' he thought, while walking in the city harbour which was in his neighbourhood. It had been cold and rainy summer so far in Finland. People in the

harbour were pale white, whereas Cedric was brown as a bean after three months under sun of Andalucía. Besides the warm sunny day, had he more reasons to be happy. His boyfriend, who lived in Spain at that time, was going to come to visit Cedric in couple of weeks. It was their two years anniversary of being together.

While wandering around the harbour Cedric saw a girl waving at him from one the dock. She looked familiar, yet he couldn't recognize her from the distance. 'Cedric?' she calls. 'It's me, Mona!' She takes her sunglasses off and smiles at Cedric. Now he could recognize her. Mona is a squash player who apparently started to date with his best practicing mate, Rafael, while he was in Spain. Cedric smiles at Mona and approaches the dock. 'Long time, no see' he greets and gives her a hug. 'So you are sunbathing here. Isn't it nice weather? I just arrived from Spain, you know...' Cedric looks around him and thinks it would be rude not to stay for a longer chat with her. 'Can I join you?' Mona invites Cedric on the dock and they start catching up about their doings.

'So, how's your love life' Mona probes 'Do you have a girlfriend?' Cedric is caught by surprise due to Mona's question. 'Well...not really...' he answers carefully. Mona smiles suggestively at Cedric. She clearly has something in her mind. 'Well, you know what... Two of my friends will come here soon to visit me and one of them is single...' Mona pauses for a second and observes Cedric's reaction. Cedric tries to remain cool giving no facial expressions, but in his mind he gets nervous. He didn't see this coming. 'I really think that you both would get along really well, if I match you guys together' Mona continues 'what do you say, Cedric?' Cedric laughs nervously and sputters something clever as a response, trying to find a way to smoothly get away from the situation and change the topic. All his friends and family knows that he is gay, and about his relationship with Jaime. He hasn't come out to anyone in sport yet. 'Come on, Cedric. You will like her. She's really pretty!'

Cedric considers his options. He could quickly make an excuse to get away from the situation, or in the other hand he could "share some wisdom" with Mona. They are together, just two of them. Mona is a young woman from the metropolitan area. Cedric has always felt more comfortable to talk about his sexuality with girls. He's happy about his boyfriend's visit. It's a perfect summer day. Cedric sputters for a while, until he pulls himself together.

'I don't have a girlfriend, but that doesn't mean that I'm single...' he starts suddenly. 'Oh, really? What do you mean? Mona wonders, being bit confused by Cedric's comment. 'Well, I'm with Jaime. My partner's name is Jaime.' Cedric pauses

for a moment and observes Mona's reaction. 'So that means I have a boyfriend. I'm gay'. Cedric feels his heart beating rapidly. He feels the cold sweat dripping from his armpit. The silence after his disclosure feels tormenting and long. He can't believe he just said that to Mona, to a girlfriend of his best practicing mate. 'Oh...ok...well that's great!' Mona replies, after processing what she just heard. 'Well yeah, it is!' Cedric agrees and gives a small embarrassed smile. 'You see...I haven't really talked about this in sports...' Mona looks at Cedric showing sympathy to him and smiles. 'I understand, Cedric. Thank you for telling me.' Cedric continues to tell about his boyfriend to Mona. He feels extremely relieved and good about coming out to her. It was right decision. In fact, he hopes that Mona will tell about it to her boyfriend Rafael. Coming out to Rafael has been in his mind for a quite long time already.

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*"No pressure over cappuccino..."*

Although Cedric never brought up his sexuality with Rafael, he did get the news soon from his girlfriend Mona. Rafael didn't bring up the topic with Cedric either. Nothing really changed between these two friends. They practiced and spent time a lot together in the sport centre the same way they always did. One night they went out together, accompanying two other friends of Cedric. Cedric seldom introduced his friends in sports with the friends outside sports, because of fearing his sexuality would easily come up. Rafael was now an exception. He felt that he could trust him.

After having a pre-party at the local bar they decided to move to the nightclub in the next block. While walking there one of the friends blurts out a joke of finding a new boyfriend for Cedric. Cedric noticed that Rafael heard the joke. 'You know my taste! So I will count on you...' Cedric replied to his friend, realizing that Rafael knew about him and didn't seem to mind. He just smiled at Cedric. 'He knows!' Cedric thinks, and feels happy that finally the topic that had bothered him for few years now was disclosed.

The next day Cedric brought up his sexuality with Rafael when they decided to go for a coffee to recover from the previous night's party. Cedric wanted to know what Rafael thought about him. 'Yeah, I knew about it...' Rafael affirmed to Cedric. 'Mona told me that you're gay a couple of months ago. I think it's really cool and I'm OK with it...We are friends you know.' Cedric felt good about Rafael's words. 'Yeah I know. I just wanted to tell about it a lot earlier. I'm still the same person after all' Cedric continues. 'You know...I'm still very careful to tell about it in sports. I'm more open about it off the sport...' he mumbles until Rafael interrupts him. 'I think it's just smart

from you being discreet about it in sport...’ Rafael tells and show understanding to Cedric’s situation. Homosexuality wasn’t a topic in their sport surroundings; if it wasn’t something negative about them, and some of the people had really prejudiced attitudes towards sexual minorities. Cedric was very happy that Rafael was not one of them. He felt like their friendship got in the new level after his disclosure.

*Chapter 7 – Coming out experiences, coming out to Martin*

It was December 2009. Cedric was playing badminton with his friends, Charles and Jack, in the sport centre. While having break they sat on a bench watching tennis players practicing in the next court. They saw a dark foreign young guy accompanying the tennis coach. Cedric had heard rumours about a new tennis coach from abroad who was going to take an open coach vacancy at the sport centre. This new guy noticed Cedric and his friends by the tennis court, and came to introduce himself with slightly poor English. ‘Hello guys. My name is Martin. I’m the new tennis coach’. Martin tells them that he came to the country just recently, and how fortunate he was to hear about the open vacancy at the sport centre. Martin used to be a tennis coach in South Africa for many years before moving to Finland.

After a brief talk with Martin, Cedric and his friends continued playing badminton while Martin went back to follow the tennis practice. ‘He seems a nice guy’ Jack says about the new coach. ‘I wonder how he manages over the winter time, after all its December now...’ Charles comments. Cedric agrees with his friends, yet he is happy about the new coach in the club. He usually gets on well with foreign people, plus Martin would bring some fresh breeze of internationality in to the sport centre.

Cedric and Martin meet again in the locker room where they change few words. Martin asks for tips to get familiar with the city, and good places where to go out. ‘Hey, maybe we could go for a drink someday?’ suggests Martin while they are walking out from the sport centre ‘You know there are not much people I could hang out with, and I need to improve my English...’ Martin says, and gives embarrassed smile. ‘Yeah why not’ Cedric is happy about Martin’s offer. He suggests going out for a drink on the following weekend. ‘That would be great!’ Martin says and smiles to Cedric. Guys change their numbers and say goodbyes to each other.

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Cedric and Martin became friends pretty fast. They meet each other often in the sport centre and start hanging out together more often. Although the apparent language

barrier, they enjoy each other's company. Martin is very keen about Finnish women and talks a lot about them to Cedric. He is also curious about Cedric's love life and asks often about his girlfriends or lovers. 'No girlfriend... Actually I broke up few months ago' Cedric replies vaguely to Martin's question. He doesn't want go in details, trying to be as honest as he can to Martin. In fact, he broke up with his boyfriend just a couple of months before.

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One night Cedric and Martin decided to go out for a big time. They arrive in to a half empty club. After ordering drinks they take their places next to an empty dance floor. The nightclub seems dead. Cedric doesn't feel comfortable in the empty nightclub and is about to suggest to go another club. Suddenly DJ starts to play their favourite music. Cedric and Martin, much encouraged by the alcohol start to dance on the empty dance floor. Cedric notices a group of girls staring at them and smiling. One of them is flirting to Cedric. 'Wow man did you see that? Martin says to Cedric 'They're looking at you! You should go talk to them' he demands. Cedric feels troubled by the situation. He smiles to the girls politely and then looks at Martin. 'You think so?' he asks, feeling bit insecure 'I don't know really...' 'Yes, you should! Come on, you are single!' says Martin and drags him to the girls. Cedric feels awkward by the situation. Their conversation with girls falls short, since Cedric's not interested at all talking with the girls. Cedric concentrates more on drinking his beer. 'Should we go to another club? I mean this club is half empty...' Cedric suggests carefully to Martin. Martin looks at Cedric bit surprised by his reaction, but agrees with him.

'I understand...' Martin says while they are walking to the locker room. 'They weren't that interesting... They were too old!' Cedric smiles at Martin. 'Mm...yeah maybe...let me take our coats. I wish there are more people in the other bar.' While friends walk to the other bar Cedric thinks to about the incident on dance floor. He doesn't want the same thing to happen in the other bar. He doesn't want to pretend this night. Therefore sharing some details about him would be good idea. They haven't known each other for long time and Martin haven't built too strong image of Cedric. Cedric feels that he can trust Martin. After all he can't be too narrow-minded, if he has travelled long way from Spain to the cold country of Finland.

'Martin, I need to tell you something before we go into that bar' Cedric starts. 'Of course, please tell me' says Martin. 'You know, about what just happened in the club...I think you shouldn't do that for me...' Martin looks puzzled. Cedric takes deep

breath and continues. ‘If you necessarily want to search company for me, you should look for guys...’ Martin is clueless, not sure what Cedric is trying to tell him. ‘I’m gay, you know. You shouldn’t match me with the girls’. Martin takes few seconds to process what Cedric just told him and then smiles at Cedric. ‘Oh, really? I would never have guessed!’ Cedric feels confused, not really sure how Martin took his disclosure ‘Well, yeah... I am...’ ‘That’s ok man, you are my friend!’ Martin replies finally ‘Why didn’t you tell me earlier? I have some gay friends in South-Africa too.’ ‘Well, I didn’t know if I could trust you, you know...’ Cedric explains to Martin ‘We haven’t known each other for too long’. Guys burst in to laugh and hug each as a gesture of reconciliation, and enter to the full bar. Cedric feels relieved after coming out to Martin. His intuition that he could trust himself to Martin was right. They party late on that night, until the small hours.

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Cedric and Martin became very good friends over time. They saw each other almost every day after Cedric’s coming out. They could talk about almost anything to each other. They both got support from each other when they needed it. Furthermore, Cedric valued his friendship with Martin a lot since he rarely built that close friendships with his male friends.

#### *Chapter 8 – “Fags in the swimming hall”*

Cedric finished his studies and graduated as a physiotherapist by the end of the year 2009. After graduation he had lot of free time, which he spent by practicing squash and having fun with his friends. Although he was unemployed, was he happy about his life, especially after coming out to some of his best friends in sport surroundings. Cedric’s close friendships with Martin, Rafael, and with some other friends in the sport centre increased his self-confident in sport domain. He felt that more people started to be aware of his sexuality. ‘People talks, you know...they know!’ did Martin used to say to him now and then, with a smirk on his face. Anyway, Cedric was still insecure expressing his sexuality in the sport centre.

He still experienced all kinds of negative behaviour towards gay people in sport domain, and not just in the sport centre. It was easy to throw negative sexist opinions and jokes about homosexuals in social media, for example in Facebook. Although they weren’t directed at Cedric personally, were they provoking and very discouraging to come out as a homosexual, especially when some of the designated people behind such

behaviour were the ones with whom he practiced or met regularly in the sport centre, or in the competitions.

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One day Cedric was training with one of his regular practicing mates, Peter, a senior player around his fifties, and one of the best players of his age group in Finland. Cedric liked him and therefore they played regularly, almost weekly basis. After one and a half hour training they both were heading to the shower and sauna, where they continued analysing their training session. At one point they started talk if there were any gyms in the city with affordable prizes. ‘You know, there’s a good gym in the swimming hall...’ Cedric suggests and continues ‘...but they just raised their prizes. You can use the swimming facilities with the same prize...’ Cedric used the swimming hall’s gym quite often. It was cheap, but not too fancy gym. Still it was much better than one in the sport centre. ‘Yeah... but I don’t want to go to swimming hall...’ Peter answers immediately. ‘Why is that? Is it too small for you?’ Peter looks at Cedric and smiles ‘No it’s not that, but swimming hall is full of ‘fags’...you better not to go there either!’ ‘Haha, alright...’ Cedric replies, being bit amused by Peter’s comment and his attitude in general.

Cedric understood Peter’s point though. Swimming halls were stereotypically perceived to be meeting places of non-heterosexual men. Possibility of being stared at by other men seemed to concern Peter not to go to swimming hall. He seemed to be serious with his opinion and idea of sharing a shower or sauna with other gay men was repulsive for him. Cedric is amused by the situation that they are having the conversation at the shower. Obviously Peter didn’t know that Cedric was gay, neither didn’t Peter seem to expect that there could be gay men in the showers of the sport centre. Cedric didn’t think about the whole thing, the fact that he was gay, until Peter started to tell about “fags in the swimming hall”. He didn’t identify himself from Peter’s story whatsoever. Neither had he thought about doing any “checking” on Peter in the locker room. He didn’t do more “checking” than any other guys.

Prevailing prejudices and stereotypes about homosexuals were stigmatizing and it made Cedric concerned what people would think about him if he would come out. Would it change their view on Cedric radically, if they knew about his sexuality? Would they start behaving differently when being with him, or even start avoiding him in certain situations, just like in the locker rooms? Fortunately, he had friends who didn’t seem to mind in any circumstances. Although he rarely had negative experiences when being out, he knew that there were people who might have issues with gays in their locker rooms, or

generally in sport. Just like Peter. His comments didn't catch Cedric by surprise; neither did the comments hurt him. Still, he liked Peter and kept practicing with him regularly. Peter could keep his attitudes, and Cedric could disregard them. They weren't close friends anyway.

*Chapter 9 – Moving on...Change of the environment, change of the team*

It was June 2010. Cedric was swimming with his friends at the local beach. He was still unemployed on that summer, which didn't bother him much. Summer was extremely warm and he had lot of free time to enjoy the warm summer days. When coming back to his flat, he finds thick envelope lying on the floor. It's from the University where he had applied for two different master degree programs. He already received a rejection letter from the other program, and therefore he didn't have much expectation to get in the second program either. Nonetheless, the envelope was too thick to be a rejection letter. He opened it and found out that it was an invitation letter to study the Master's degree of physiotherapy. He was very happy and excited about the invitation. It was the University where he always wanted to continue his studies. The University and its environment were so motivating to study, plus he had a lot of good friends already studying there so he wouldn't have any problems to get in to the circles.

Despite all the excitement and happiness of getting in to the University, Cedric realized that he had to leave his home city and all his friends there. Previous year had been extraordinary good for him. He got lot of new friends, and even came out to some of his friends in sports too, which was quite a milestone for him. He was happy with his life. Although he already knew lot of friends in the same University where he was invited, he didn't know much about the local squash club there. He knew some of the local players, but they obviously weren't as good friends as he had in his home city. He wasn't sure if he could build the same kind of friendship with them. With mixed feelings, Cedric called to his friends to tell the news.

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Cedric moves to the new city after two months of receiving the invitation. He becomes quickly acquainted with his new home city. He gets easily into the university circles through his friends in the university. His new "home city" seems more laid-back and open-minded city comparing to his home city he left behind. The University has an obvious effect on the atmosphere. Cedric gets lot of new friends across the faculties,



from different cultures and backgrounds. He was happy with his decision of moving to the new place, although he still dearly missed his friends and family in his home city.

Soon he visited the local squash club and met the players there. New “teammates” welcome him warmly. He knew some of the players from the tournaments, and there were also some of his former teammates, Lorenzo and Mike, who moved to the same city to study couple of years earlier. However, Cedric had slightly distant relationship with them, although he had known them from the beginning of his career. Only thing that connected him with the other players was the sport. By changing the team, Cedric felt like going back to the situation where he couldn’t be fully himself in sport. He hoped that things would change eventually in his new club, after getting to know better with his new teammates.

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*“...and the life goes on, just like in the old days...”*

Cedric started to practice in the new club regularly after settling in to the city. He wanted to be sure to get his “training routine” going as soon as possible. Eventually he started to represent his new club in the national league and in competitions. He got along well with all the players in the club, but some of them he liked more than others. He participated in organized team trainings as much as he could, but he also started arranging individual trainings with players he preferred to practice with. Although Cedric got along quite well with the new team, he was rather discreet about his private life. It was better to keep his social life separated from sports, he thought, sensing that his teammates wouldn’t like to know what he was doing with whom outside of sports. They were questioning Cedric’s love life, asking and teasing him about his “girlfriends” that they saw many times accompanying him. Cedric disregarded their comments with humour, and changed the topic right away.

Cedric didn’t participate in the social events with his teammates, such as regular sauna parties and night outs, because he felt uncomfortable in those situations. He didn’t want to “act out” anymore, and therefore avoided the situations where his sexuality would have been “tested”. He couldn’t come out to them either, because he wasn’t sure at all how they would take it. He wasn’t as confident with his sexuality anymore in sports as he used to be in his home city.

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Although being discreet about private life to his teammates, Cedric’s social life was going well outside of sports. He was active, participating in many student events and

parties with his friends in the University. He was more comfortable with the academic and educated people of the University who seemed more open minded and tolerant to diversities. Cedric got also introduced to some local LGBT people and participated in some events organized by the local LGBT organization, although quite reluctantly since he still didn't seem to find other "like-minded" people from the community.

Nevertheless, although Cedric didn't make a number about it, he could express his sexuality freely in his social surroundings. He was very satisfied about his life and studies in his new city, which started to feel like home.

### *Chapter 10 – 'Pekka-Fest', and homophobia at team practice*

In spring 2012, presidential election was held in Finland. Second round of the election was underway and there were two candidates remaining, Sauli Niinistö from National Coalition party, and Pekka Haavisto from the Green party. Election was historical in many aspects. Against all the odds, Pekka Haavisto, an openly homosexual candidate in registered partnership with an immigrant husband made his way to the second round of the election. Sauli Niinistö as a more conservative candidate was the greatest favourite for a president from the beginning of the election.

However, it was the first time ever when there was an openly homosexual candidate in presidential elections, and the first time for the liberal Greens to get their candidate in the second round of the elections. "Pekka-hype" was everywhere. There were supporting concerts for Pekka's campaign in many cities all over the country. Still, Sauli Niinistö was clearly leading the polls, and although there were also considerably lot of opinions against a homosexual president, was the change of attitudes distinguishable to more tolerance and acceptance towards LGBT people in the Finnish society.

Cedric was delighted about the prevailing positive ambience due to Haavisto's success. "Pekka-hype" certainly got Cedric. Something good and revolutionary was going on. Many of his friends in the university supported Haavisto as well. Cedric went to celebrate Haavisto's success to a local supporting festival, Pekka-Fest, which was held in several bars around the city. Cedric, and his friends Ryan and Sam, stepped in to the bar which was full of Pekka-supporters. They ordered drinks and took the only available seats next to the bar desk. 'Guys, what do you think will be the final result in the election?' asks Ryan while they are listening a local band playing on the stage. 'Close but sufficient victory for Pekka!' Sam declares. 'You really think so?' Cedric asks surprised. 'Man, I wish but I really doubt that would happen. 65 to 35 per cents is my guess, like all

the polls say.’ Others nod for agreement. ‘But I don’t mind. Getting to the second round is already an accomplishment. So cheers for that, guys!’ Friends raise their glasses continue partying until the final hour.

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The following day Cedric went to team practice. Despite partying late, he was determined to go to practice, since his team was going to play national league round at home soil in the following weekend. However he had lack of energy due to frenzied partying and decided to call it off after one hour of intensive training. ‘Thanks guys for good training, but I think I’m done for now. I’m still bit tired from the last night...’ ‘What?! Did you go out last night?’ Roger, the captain of the team interrupts him with a blink on his eye. Also other players get curious. ‘Where did you go? Tell us more!’ Sean requires ‘Was there any good chicks around?’

Cedric thinks that it was a bad idea to say anything about the other night. He doesn’t want to tell about the ‘Pekka-Fest’ he attended, nor does he want to go in details with whom he was there. ‘It was alright...live music and stuff...’ he mumbles as an answer while taking off his sweaty jersey. ‘I didn’t drink that much, you know...but I’m quite tired because it took so late...’ Cedric looks at his teammates hoping that his answer satisfies them. Other players look each other and grin suggestively. ‘Anyway, it didn’t seem to disturb me to kick your ass in squash court ...’ Cedric jokes and tries to change the topic. After some additional comments, Cedric’s teammates leave Cedric alone to change his clothes.

Cedric is almost done with changing and is ready to leave the squash club. Then one of the experienced players of the team, Juan, arrives to the squash hall. He has a weird glance in his eye while rushing in, like he’d have something important to say. ‘I just gave my vote to the election...’ he starts while taking off his coat. ‘Did you vote already? Did you give your vote for Sauli?’ Other players answer him vaguely, and they are bit surprised by Juan’s rushing in. Cedric doesn’t say anything. He knows what is coming next. ‘You know you better vote for Sauli!’ Juan continues ‘Not that other thing...the fag... That would be disaster, a fag president!’ Juan looks at other players with the same glance in his eyes, waiting for their comments ‘That would be a disgrace to Finland!’ Others refrain to answer Juan, but no-one questions his statements. ‘Silence gives consent’ Cedric thinks, while putting his shoes on. He doesn’t give any look at Juan. He feels anger because of Juan’s comments, feeling that he should stand against his opinions and challenge him, but he won’t. Arguing with him would be useless, and how

would the others react? Still he feels frustrated about not being able to demonstrate. ‘They can keep their opinions. I won’t let them bother me’ he thinks while Juan continues with his declaration to the other players. Cedric decides to leave others for a while to have some water.

Events from the previous night come to Cedric’s mind while he drinks water in the toilet. He recalls the open and friendly spirit of the festival and the good time he had with his friends in the bar, without being stigmatized, without prejudice, and without other negative attitudes towards homosexuals. He couldn’t share these experiences with his teammates. Reality of the sport world splashed on his face by Juan’s words. He felt hurt, although Juan’s comments weren’t directed at him. He had learned to cope and live with such attitudes around him. Cedric sips more cold water and calms down little by little. He returns back to the squash courts to thank his teammates from training session. They are all back in their training, determined to do well in the coming league round at the home soil. Cedric is determined to play well too. It will be an important event for the whole team.

### *Chapter 11 – “When the two identities collides”*

Cedric had lot of friends in the city and majority of them were girls, which lead to several awkward situations where his teammates teased him about his many “girlfriends”. Cedric took it with humour, although it was also frustrating and uncomfortable for him at times, since he would have liked to cut the wings from such rumours.

It’s 3pm and Cedric wakes up to his phone ringing. He slowly gets up from the bed to answer the phone. His head starts hurting when he stands up. He’s still recovering from the previous night’s party. He answers to the phone. It’s his friend Reeta, asking to go for drinks with her and her friend Sara. Cedric kindly rejects their offer to drink, but decides to go to meet them in the bar. He needs fresh air, and a little chat probably would cheer him up.

It’s sunny and warm spring day, the first one in the year. The bar is just around the corner, next to his place in the city centre. People are taking off their jackets because of the warm weather. Everyone’s smiling. Sunny weather does miracles to otherwise very gloomy Finns. When just about to step in to the bar, Cedric notices his teammates Jack and Sean on the terrace. They also went out on previous night. It was their club’s championships on the previous day, followed by a sauna party. Cedric didn’t participate

to the tournament, neither to the party. Instead he went out with his friends from the university. He decides to change few words with Sean and Jack before entering the bar where Reeta and Sara are waiting for him.

‘Hey guys! How was the tournament?’ Cedric greets his friends. ‘It was ok! Tough matches...’ Sean replies ‘Why didn’t you come?’ Cedric realizes that he forgot to tell them that he won’t show up. ‘Ah well... I had some other things to do. I actually went out last night. In fact, I don’t feel very well at the moment...’ Sean and Jack laughs. They seem pretty tired too, recovering from their party. ‘Where did you go?’ Sean asks. ‘The party was in the University. I went there with some of my school mates...’ ‘Oh I see...!’ Jack interrupts, and is about to ask more details from Cedric, until Juan comes out from the bar. ‘Damn, Cedric! Where were you? We had a tournament and sauna party yesterday!’ Cedric feels bit defensive now. ‘Like I would normally go out with them...?’ he thinks in his mind. ‘Well ha ha... I was just telling that I had other things to do last night...’ ‘You went out last night right?’ Juan suggests ‘I can see it from your eyes...’ he laughs for a while and invites Cedric to join them ‘Roger and Lorenzo are also here’. Cedric is surprised that all his teammates are in the same bar. Seems that they are going to party another day in a row... He feels uncomfortable, since he’s about to meet Reeta and Sara in the same bar. ‘Well...I’d like to, but I’m just about to meet some other friends here. They are already there waiting for me...’

Cedric leaves his teammates, hoping that they won’t follow him to the end of the bar where Reeta and Sara are already enjoying their fancy drinks. ‘Sorry girls. I’m late. I just met my teammates on the terrace.’ Cedric starts telling them about the party of previous night. He tells about a guy he was with, and how the night ended up. They all have a good laugh while gossiping and catching up with the latest news.

Suddenly Cedric sees Roger and Lorenzo walking to the end of the bar, clearly searching for him. ‘Others must have told them that I’m here...’ he thinks. Cedric doesn’t feel comfortable to talk with his teammates right now. Reeta and Sara don’t know them at all, and he doesn’t feel like introducing them either. Girls notice Cedric staring to the other side of the bar. ‘Is everything alright, Cedric?’ Sara asks. ‘Yeah, seems that my teammates decided to come here ...’ Reeta looks around to get some more chairs. ‘No it’s okay...’ Cedric tells to her ‘I didn’t invite them. I can talk with them later when I’m leaving. So, where was I...?’

Roger and Lorenzo notices Cedric from the distance. Cedric greets them with a nod and grin, and continues talking with the girls. His teammates realize that Cedric is

busy and decide to take standing places from the other side of the room, for Cedric's relief. They wouldn't have understood what they were talking about anyway.

After talking with the girls for almost an hour, Cedric starts feeling tired. Girls are about to finish their drinks. It's perfect time for Cedric to leave his friends. 'Will you take another drink? Cedric asks from Reeta. 'I don't know... maybe... what do you think Sara?' 'No, I think I'm alright' Sara replies. Girls decide to leave the bar with Cedric. 'I'd like to have some water' Sara says while they are leaving the table. Reeta accompanies her to the bar to get glass of water. Cedric sees now there is good chance to chat with his teammates who were now sitting at the table in the end of the bar. They all stare at Cedric, with a strange smile on their face. Cedric greets them 'So, you all decided to come here... what a coincidence' he says with a bit sarcastic tone. 'Yeah, but you had some nice company there so we didn't want to disturb you...' Lorenzo replies and smiles suggestively. 'Oh yeah, I told the others that I will meet some friends here...' Cedric answers without reacting to Lorenzo's suggestive gestures. 'So how was the tournament?'

Teammates start telling him about the previous day. They all seem talkative and cheerful, partly because of the pints they're having. Suddenly Sara taps on Cedric's shoulder. 'Hey, are you coming? Reeta is waiting for us outside. There are some other friends too...' Cedric tells to Sara to wait for him 'I didn't know you were already leaving. I'll be right there...' Cedric's teammates looks at him again with weird smile on their face. Cedric smiles back. He knows what they are thinking. 'Ok... I better go now. My friends are waiting outside and they won't leave without saying goodbyes' he explains. 'Yeah right!' Sean shouts and starts searching something from his pocket. He finds a small plastic bag. 'I think you are going to need these... or do you have any with you?' Sean hands a pack of condoms for Cedric.

Cedric gets seemingly disturbed, but also amused by the situation. 'Fortunately my friends are not seeing this...' he thinks. 'Come on, Sean! They are just good friends of mine. What are you thinking?' Cedric tells to him and laughs. 'Well just in case. Anything can happen you know...' Sean continues teasing Cedric 'They are pretty girls!' Cedric looks at the others. They all are still smiling at him. 'Nah, I don't really need these...' Cedric politely declines Sean's condoms. 'So are you going somewhere tonight?' Roger asks. He tells that they are planning to continue to another bar and invites Cedric to join them. Cedric decides to stick in his plan to go home to sleep. He greets his teammates and joins his friends who were waiting outside.

*Chapter 12 – Coffee table discussion. ‘Coming out’ and ‘being out’ in sports*

In spring 2012 Cedric had a meeting with an old friend, Evan, from his high school times. They spotted each other from an LGBT Internet community and agreed to meet for catch up after so many years. Last time they saw each other was seven years before. They weren't close friends, but Evan was regular customer in Cedric family's sport centre back in the days. He was involved actively in team sports in that time and used their gym regularly. Cedric was working there often in the reception taking in customers. They agreed to meet at the cafeteria, next to Cedric's university, since Evan was visiting the city because of working matters.

Both order regular coffees. Last time they met both of them were “deep in their closets”. It was bit awkward reunion for Cedric, and probably for Evan too. Lot of things has happened since the last time they've met. They sit on the table and taste their coffees. Either of them doesn't know how to start the conversation. After long silence Evan breaks the ice. ‘You know, I was so surprised to see your profile in the LGBT website. First I wasn't sure if it was you. Then I read that you mentioned squash and assured it's really you.’ Cedric smiles to Evan and sips his coffee. ‘Yeah it's pretty long since we met last time. I had to double-check your profile too to recognize you’ he replies. ‘So how are you doing? Do you still play squash? Seems that you are studying in here?’ Evan asks. Cedric tells about his studies in the university, about his relatively good and active life in the city, and that he's playing in the national league. In turn, Evan tells about his career and studies in sports. He used to study his bachelor degree in the same school where Cedric graduated as bachelor of physiotherapy.

Then Evan takes the conversation more personal issues ‘You know. I came out just recently to everyone. I even came out to myself really late. In our hometown, as you might remember, I acted straight for so long. I tried to fight against my feelings and didn't accept myself being homosexual. I was deep in the closet in high school and upper-secondary school. I came out to myself when I was 25 and after that to other close people. My life really changed after that to more positive have to say. Nowadays I'm living with my boyfriend. I'm also active in LGBT organization in my region.’

Cedric is impressed by Evan's story, particularly how much similarities he found between his and Evan's stories. They both were in the closet in their high school and upper-secondary school times. Both had difficulties to come in terms with their sexuality during their lives in- and outside of sports. Now Evan was an active member in

the LGBT community of his region, whereas Cedric rarely participated in LGBT events, but was open about his sexuality in his social life. ‘It’s great to hear your experiences. I’m really happy for you!’ Cedric congratulates Evan and continues ‘it needs real guts to come out indeed, but in the end everything will go well. I wasn’t out either in high school and in upper-secondary school, but nowadays I’m rather open about my sexuality, although I don’t “advertise” it out loud on the streets. What it means “being out” anyway?’ Cedric smiles questioningly to Evan. ‘So cool!’ If I would have known that you were gay in our school times...Never know what would have developed between us...I mean it would have been so much easier to come terms with...’ Evan gives a suggestive grin and they both laugh ‘...but you know, the small town of ours...and the schools we went ...no gays around. You remember that guy who was bullied because of his girly behaviour?’ Cedric nods ‘Yeah I remember him. Did you know that he has a beautiful wife and two children nowadays...?’ both laughs ‘who would have guessed?’

Cedric and Evan start to talk about their coming out experiences. They both had similar, mainly positive experiences when coming out to their friends and families. Still, they shared the same feeling, that sometimes coming out to new people can be very stressful and frustrating. ‘It feels that you have to come out to over and over again to different people...’ Evan describes his experiences. Cedric agrees with him. ‘It would be so much easier if people would just realize it...you know, without saying anything...or see it somehow... I think it wouldn’t be such an issue then.’ Cedric often had to consider in different situations if it was necessary to mention about his sexuality, if others were ready to hear about it, or if it was even a good idea to come out. These self-negotiations were so usual and prevalent especially in sport surroundings. Once he started to be comfortable with his sexuality in his sport surroundings, then he had to change the team after moving to another city, which was frustrating. Cedric’s sexuality didn’t show in his appearance. He never adopted the identifiable manners of being gay, or style that would be connected to non-heterosexuality. Neither did Evan.

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*“More coffee please...” – Thoughts about the LGBT sports*

Guys decide to take another cup of coffee, and begin to talk about sports. Evan didn’t play team sports seriously anymore, but he played handball with his friends once or twice a week recreationally. Cedric still competed and represented his team in national league, although he had shifted down his practicing a lot in the last couple of years because of his studies. Evan makes a suggestion ‘We are going to EuroGames in



Budapest this summer. Do you know about it? It's an international LGBT sport event with different sports included in the program. We have a handball team there and there are others in the group who will participate in other sports. Next year games will be in Antwerp and squash will be included in the program. I think you should come!

Cedric gets curious about EuroGames, although he has always been sceptical about LGBT sports. He doubted the standard of the games, and if the level would be really high there. He wasn't sure about the real purpose of these games either.

'EuroGames sounds fun, but what about the level there? Are there different categories in the sports? I mean...I doubt that EuroGames would fully satisfy me, if it's just about playing for the sake of having fun you know...' Cedric did some sport once and a while with other gay friends, but he never found anyone who'd take sports as seriously as Cedric. In fact, he never had met another gay athlete, let alone having one as a friend. 'Well...we play in the lower division, because there are some beginners in our team, but I think they do have different categories in other sports too. I think you can find your match there....'

Cedric is not convinced and doubts that the games would be his cup of tea. 'Would it be like Gay Pride events, angel wings and rainbows? Like a big carnival?' he thinks in his mind. Supposedly gay sport culture was to be something different than "mainstream" sport culture he was involved in, since they have their own games. Cedric didn't feel comfortable with so called "gay culture", nor didn't "LGBT community" offer him anything more interesting, than the communities he already was part of, his friends and the university. LGBT community and the LGBT culture felt so different to what he was, or perceived of himself. So he wasn't sure if he'd feel comfortable in a LGBT sport events either. In the other hand he wanted to give it a chance. Maybe it would open his eyes, and in the best case, he could meet other LGBT people similar to him. 'Thanks for telling me about it, Evan. I definitely will think about it. I like Antwerp a lot. I've been there once, so it can't turn out to be a bad trip anyway.' Cedric and Evan finish their coffees and agree to keep contact more often from now on. Cedric was happy about their "reunion". He was happy for Evan, who seemed to be very satisfied with his life. Cedric left the cafeteria with an idea if of start making closer relationship with the LGBT community in sports, and attending to his first LGBT sport event.

## 8 DISCUSSION

*“In interpretation of text, every interpretation can be disputed, and every interpretation can be presented with a counter interpretation or other alternative interpretations, therefore any interpretation can’t give an exhaustive picture about a phenomenon...Every interpretation is relativistic...and there are no univocal standards how to put interpretations in rank order.”* (Palonen in Ihanainen-Alanko, 2005, p. 41)

The following interpretation of the story is autoethnographic and it represents subjective philosophy of science. My interpretation, after all, represents only one perspective. However, readers can read the story, the birth of the study, background research, and the methodology and resolutions made in this study and make their own conclusions, if they can agree with the following interpretation. However, I will support my interpretations by comparing them to existing theories and previous research in the field. In the beginning of this paper I clarified my own preconceptions about homosexuality and its position in society and in sport, and I can’t deny these preconceptions had their effect on the study process, but also to the interpretation.

### 8.1 Interpreting sexual identity development

The purpose of this study was to understand a gay male athlete’s experiences in sport and physical activity in Finland, and how these experiences reflected on his identity development and management, and relationships to others in sport. The findings (the story) construe a gay individual’s experiences, and how these experiences has affected one’s sexual identity construction and disclosure in and outside of sports. Because the story has so much to do with disclosing sexuality, or “coming out” (of the closet) in the sport, and how sport and physical activity had effected the gay identity process, would it be appropriate to examine this phenomenon from identity development point of view, and compare it the frameworks concerned.

Fassinger (1991) states that the coming out process and its developmental tasks is generally considered as rather lengthy and difficult process for homosexual people, depending on gender, race, ethnicity, culture, age, social class, religion, geographic location, and other factors. Gay individual must confront negative social attitudes, but also one’s own internalized negative concepts of oneself, repeating the process over and

over again in new circumstances, where one's sexuality is not known (Fassinger, 1991). Also in this study the narrative shows how homosexual identity development, coming out, and "maintenance" of sexual identity across different circumstances can be lengthy and ongoing process with various issues and challenges to deal with. Number of researchers has shown interest in sexual identity development research, and some of them have attempted to describe this process with different models and theories. In the following, I will introduce some of them and reflect them to the findings of this study.

There are various stage models suggested to describe homosexual identity development, and coming out process (e.g. Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Troiden, 1989). These theoretical models suggest that LGB individuals move through a series of identity development stages, usually during the teenage years or early twenties. The number of stages and their names vary across theories, but they have similar characteristics and the models follow a similar pattern (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). In first stage, *sensitization* (Troiden, 1989), *identity awareness* (Cass, 1979), or *pre-coming out* (Coleman, 1982) individuals notice that something is different about themselves, but can't explain what, or they just disregard their feelings. Second stage - *identity confusion* (Troiden, 1989), *identity comparison* (Cass, 1979), or *coming out (to oneself)* (Coleman, 1982), individuals acknowledge that they may be homosexual, yet they may not have a clear perception about their sexuality, or yet they try to act as heterosexual (Cass, 1979).

In third stage, *identity assumption* (Troiden, 1989), *identity tolerance* (Cass, 1979), or *exploration* (Coleman, 1982) stage, individuals realize and come out as homosexual and experiment with their sexual identity. In Cass stage model fourth and fifth stages, *identity acceptance* and *identity pride*, refers to individual's exploration and becoming active member of gay community. In the last stage of Troiden's model, *commitment stage*, and also in the last two final stages of Coleman's model individuals learn same-sex relationship skills and adopt a homosexual lifestyle, following the integration of their public- and private self to create integrated homosexual identity, just like in the last stage of Cass (1979) model, *synthesis*, where individual fully accepts him- or herself and the other LGBT members.

It is good to keep in mind that although these stage models represent the developmental process of homosexual identity with some accuracy, they are generalized and based on samples of openly gay males. Furthermore, they fail in describing the fluid nature of sexuality, and the complexity of sexual identity development and construction (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005). Moreover, these stage models describe sexual identity

development to be more or less linear, that there is an end-point for sexual development and questioning, which is stable, disclosed, and integrated positive gay identity, i.e. “complete” homosexual identity. Ultimately, stage models do not consider the social and environmental aspects of sexuality development.

I think one of the interesting findings in this study was the dichotomy of sexual identity development in and outside of sport surroundings, and how sport, or athletic identity supposedly had its impact to the sexual identity development and vice versa. If we look at the findings from the perspective of stage models, Cedric’s sexual identity and the disclosure seemed to reach more advanced stages in outside of sport settings, let say that he was in the final stages of the given stage models. However, he never got as comfortable with his sexuality in sport settings, disclosing himself only to a few close friends. The dichotomy between sport and social worlds and identities seemed to even strengthen after moving from familiar social environment to a new environment (change of the city and the team), where he didn’t disclose himself in sport settings. Although stage models are more or less utilizable in describing the sexual identity development in this case, they don’t explain the differences of sexuality disclosure between these two surroundings.

Indeed, the narrative shows that development of sexual identity is not always an unambiguous process described with stages, leading to coherent disclosed sexual identity regardless of the surroundings. Like the story reveals, Cedric perceived himself ‘rather open about his sexuality’, but acknowledges within the same breath being discreet about it in sports. D’Augelli (1994) offers an alternative model for describing sexual identity development, which might help in interpreting the findings of this study. D’augelli’s “life-span” model takes social context into account in way that the other stage models does not. His framework presents human development as “unfolding in concurring and multiple paths, including the development of a person’s self-concept, relationships with family, and connections to peer groups and community” (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005, p.28). The model addresses that sexual orientation may be very fluid at certain times in the life span and more fixed at others, and that human development is intimately connected to and shaped by environmental and biological factors.

D’augelli’s (1994) model has six “identity processes” that operate more or less independently and not as in ordered stages: *exiting heterosexuality*, which refers to recognizing that one is not heterosexual and beginning to tell others that one is homo- or bisexual, which can continue throughout life depending on the pervasiveness of

heteronormative assumptions and expectations of the surroundings; *developing a personal LGB identity* is about developing a sense of personal socioaffectional stability that summarizes thoughts, feelings, and desires, and challenge internalized myths about LGB roles, and also others perception what it means to be non-heterosexual; *developing LGB social identity* is to create a social support network that knows one's sexual orientation and supports (and affirms) one's LGB identity, and realizing that it takes time to determine the true nature of others' reactions about LGB identity; *becoming an LGB offspring* refers to coming out to parents with LGB identity (or others with similar providing role) and redefining relationships with them as LGB offspring; *developing LGB intimacy status* is about engaging in the complex process of forming an intimate same-sex relationship, and challenging the pervasive heterosexist myth of sexually excessive LGB people not being able to form relationships of any duration; and *entering an LGB community* refers to making a commitment to some degree of social and political action, which can set an individual in personally significant risk (D'Augelli, 1994).

Bilodeau and Renn (2005) demonstrate on D'augelli's model how individual may experience development in one process to a greater extent than another. For example, one may have a strong LGB social identity and an intimate same-sex partner, but not have come out as LGB to family (become an LGB offspring). Furthermore, depending on the context and timing, he or she may be at different points of development in a given process, such as when entering a new work setting and chooses not to express his or her LGB identity. The findings of this study compromises with the D'augelli's framework of sexuality development in many matters, especially when social and environmental factors (in- and outside of sport) are taken into account. Cedric operated more discreetly with his sexuality in sport settings whereas he had fewer problems to express it outside of sports. Such as it appeared in the story (chapters 4 and 5), Cedric had a "gay friendly" social network and was in intimate relationship with his boyfriend that was not a secret among his friends and family outside of sport set, yet he hadn't disclosed his sexuality at all to people in sports.

Furthermore, based on the findings we can argue the sport domain as a heteronormative environment, where gay athletes have to negotiate with their non-heterosexuality continuously (exiting heterosexuality), especially in situations when changing from the familiar sporting environment to a new environment. Process of entering LGB community was arguable, when story revealed Cedric's remote feelings to other homosexual people and the difficulty to identify with them or to the LGBT group

(chapter 3), and the occasional reluctance of taking part in LGB community's activity (chapter 9). Also for participating in LGBT sports he had seemingly reserved attitude still in his adulthood (chapter 12). Issues for the process of 'entering LGB community' can be discussed by many reasons, one of them being the community's own forbidding examples for being, and doing homosexuality, or individual's own persistent prejudices towards the LGBT people and community. Most likely it is the mutual effect of both factors. However, I will go deeper this matter later in this discussion.

Fassinger and Miller (1996) developed an inclusive model of identity formation in which disclosure behaviors are not seen as an evidence of developmental progression. It assumes flexibility in disclosure behaviors as the LGB individual "gradually develops an internally coherent sense of self, without the political tyranny of viewing public disclosure as the main route to achieving a healthy, mature identity" (p. 73). Although the model is stage-based (four stages) it is multifaceted and reflects dual aspects of development - individual sexual identity and group membership identity. The first stage is *awareness* – from individual perspective, of being aware that one's different from other (heterosexual) peers, and from a group perspective, awareness of the existence of differing sexual orientations among people. The second stage is *exploration* – on an individual level it refers to exploration of emotions and erotic desires for people of the same sex, on the group level, of how one associate with gay people as a social group. In the third stage individual deepens his or her commitment to this changing notion of identity – on an individual level it is a personalization of the knowledge and beliefs about same-sex sexuality, and on the group level, it is personal involvement with a non-heterosexual reference group, and realizing the existence of oppression and the potential consequences of identifying and socializing with non-heterosexuals. The fourth and final stage, *internalization/synthesis*, is about integration of same-sex sexuality into one's overall identity – from group perspective, it conveys one's identity as a member of a LGB group in all social contexts (Fassinger & Miller, 1996).

Fassinger and Miller take an important notion into account what it comes to disclosing one's sexuality. Very often only openly homosexual individuals are seen as balanced and complete with their sexual identity, and therefore with their selves, contrasting healthy self-esteem, whereas closeted individuals are seen as incomplete, struggling with the others' attitudes and prejudices, and their own self-beliefs about homosexuality. I presume it's difficult or impossible to be totally "out" with one's non-heterosexuality in any given circumstances, at least in the social surroundings where the

rates of heteronormativity, heterosexism, and homophobia are high. I see it also as rather stressful scenario for LGBT individuals when the disclosure of one's identity is overtly emphasized as a final objective in the route for coherent homosexual self. "What it means to be out anyway?" asks Cedric in the narrative when having a conversation with his old friend, after illuminating the similar dilemma of disclosure from his own life of dual identity between his social and sport surroundings (chapter 12). Therefore, in my opinion Fassinger and Miller give a valuable alternative view with their model for examining gay sexual identity development, that individuals who are open with their sexual orientation in one social surrounding, but are more careful revealing themselves in another, are not necessarily seen as in under development and incomplete. Furthermore, when looking at the model from this aspect, it serves to the findings of this study.

However, although D'augelli's framework considers the socio-cultural factors, and Fassinger and Miller's model emphasizes the dual aspects of sexual identity development, both models do not explain accurately why sexual identity development and disclosure fluctuates in different surroundings and what factors can be behind such variation, not to mention the effects of separated identities can cause in LGB individual's life.

The story reveals problems that separated social worlds and identities (chapters 4, 5, 9, 10, and 11) causes in Cedric's life. Moreover the story also shows the continuous challenge of "balancing" between these two worlds and identities, and the willing to integrate them for the sake of making his life easier, and be truthful for people in both surroundings. Some actions to find solutions and comfort to the prevailing situation can be distinguished from the story, for example in the part when Cedric came out to some of his friends in sport settings (chapters 6 and 7), or when he brought his boyfriend to his sport surroundings, hoping that people would realize the "seriousness" of their relationship (chapter 5). However, the process to this point wasn't easy and he needed to have trustworthy relationship to come out for these selectively chosen people in sport. He also wanted people to "be aware" of him when he was getting more self-confident about his sexuality, although he couldn't reveal himself for them personally (chapter 8). Also in the conversation with his friend Evan the invisibility of their sexual orientation was seen as a problem, causing frustration and stress of "coming out over and over again" (chapter 12).

I go with the understanding that eventually gay male athletes, such as in Cedric's story, crave to integrate their sexual identity in to their sport life, not having to

hide it or balance with their sexuality in- and outside of sports. Therefore, in the following I will examine deeper the possible reasons behind the separation of these two worlds and identities, and factors that may have challenged and encouraged the sexual identity development and disclosure.

### 8.1.1 Chapter 1

Although sexual identity development doesn't usually start in the first years of primary school, can experiences and assimilation of attitudes and mindsets of that time affect the future sexual identity development, and how sexuality or homosexuality will be comprehended in the first place. The story reveals how the socialization of heteronormativity, hegemonic masculinity, and consequently homonegative attitudes start already in the early years of school, especially in physical education. This shows in the story particularly when Cedric moved to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade of primary school and the positive experiences of PE classes from the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades of school changed to the challenges to response to the hegemonic norms of masculinity. The 'fun' element, which was found more clearer in the first years of primary school play or 'games', was followed by more serious and organized type of physical education, exemplified by a form of exclusive masculinity based on traditional forms of aggressive and competitive masculine body practices (Wellard, 2002). Especially in team sports, where certain characteristics of masculinity (e.g. dominance, aggressiveness and competitiveness) were privileged, caused rude and destructive behavior (name-calling, teasing, threatening) from the peers, but also from the PE teacher when one couldn't meet the normative masculine behavior. Consequently, those who didn't meet the normative masculine behavior were often perceived as weak, unable, and feminine that was later linked negatively to "gayness" before even knowing the true meaning of the term, or about sexuality overall.

Indeed, previous Finnish research about sexuality and gendering (Lehtonen, 2003), and homophobia (Toivala, 2011) in school and physical education reinforce the findings of this study, that school environment, and especially physical education squeezes students together in the heteronormative mold, where especially boys have narrower leeway to operate and break the frames of sexuality and masculinity. Boys who break the borders of heteronormativity, such as feminine features are seen as negative (Toivala, 2011). This concretizes especially in the physical education curriculum, where boys and girls are separated in their own classes, offered with gender suitable sports which correspond to the normative gendered features. One, who differs from the



heteronormative mold, will be seen as a threat and get easily teased more by peers (Lehtonen, 2003; Toivala, 2011). Furthermore, previous research in Finland states that PE teachers seem to reinforce the dominant forms of masculinity and further support the tradition of heteronormativity, heterosexism, and even homophobia with their language and behavior (Berg & Lahelma, 2010; Lehtonen, 2003; Toivala, 2011), by not intervening and ignoring and therefore accepting the harmful behavior and language in their lessons, or by applying the same actions in to their own teaching method using heterosexist language, or pointing out the “non-masculine” bodily performances.

The problem of gendering curricula of physical education was also seen in the story, when Cedric had an interest for figure skating, to the socially perceived feminine sport that was offered only for girls. It was rather impossible for him to express his interest and to enter a generally perceived feminine sport without the fear of getting pointed out and teased by the others. Findings enlightens how gendering curricula in physical education can be suited in bringing a tedious and discouraging social pressure of entering, or dropping out the sports in order to “fit in” to the heteronormative expectations of the environment (Elling & Knoppers, 2005; Rave, Perez, & Poyatos, 2007). It is plausible if girls’ presence (mixed class), or female PE teacher would have reduced the amount of heteronormativity and gendered embodied expectations of masculinity in PE classes, and consequently increase inclusivity for differences. I would say yes, it would have reduced the perceived expectations of heteronormative masculinity by taking the attention away from the hegemonic and exclusive practices of masculinity. However, according to Toivala’s (2011) findings of teachers’ opinions, if mixed groups would decrease the amount of homophobia in PE is contradictory. Basing my argument on this study’s findings, I’d conclude that mixed groups would decrease the amount of hegemonic (excluding) masculinity in PE classes, giving wider frames for boys to bodily performances.

However, seizing on to homonegative behavior, name-calling particularly, the meaning behind calling others ‘gay’ or ‘faggot’ in Finland is controversial since it is seen very common between boys, and often doesn’t refer the original meaning (homosexuality) of the word. Yet, it is used because it’s a strong and effective word and it has to do with power relations also. Usually it’s used to get attention, or for example when someone has ‘crossed the line’ or whatever similar was in question: the line between right or wrong sexuality, between dumb or wise, or between childish or mature (Lehtonen, 2003). Moreover, often individuals take part in such group behavior (name

calling), although they don't like it personally. It is routine behavior within school-aged boys, and even between the older. However, when looking at the findings of this study it's debatable if such name calling, appropriate or not, can be taken as a reinforcement (of the internalization) of heterosexism and homophobia in school environment, and discouraging for those ones who will start or are at the beginning of their sexual identity development, not to mention the ones who begins to be aware of their non-heterosexuality. Anyhow, according to Lehtonen (2003) it is difficult for teachers, and peers to intervene to such behavior, and to some other homonegative acts, because the controversial meaning behind such behaviors.

Despite being relatively successful in individual sports where such characteristics of toughness and dominance over others were not essential (e.g. swimming, skiing, racquet sports), recognition was not given from them as it was from team sports, which were emphasized in the physical education curricula and also appreciated by the peers, and the teacher. Anyhow, successes in individual sports helped Cedric to correspond to the hegemonic masculinity (Anderson, 2002), and consequently building an athletic identity as a squash player. Athletic identity became important for Cedric to "fit in" and to gain at least some acceptance and appreciation from peers in- and outside of the school, and to respond in some way to the demands of "being a man" and hegemonic masculinity (Anderson, 2002). Nevertheless, certain team sports in where he used to face the most discouraging behavior by the peers remained unpleasant, leading to avoidance or unenthusiastic participation in order to avoid humiliation and protect his masculinity. This undoubtedly had an impact for the sport selection, since individual sports offered a safe space to conduct and practice sport that Cedric, after all, liked to do. This also goes with the findings of previous research that gays have the most negative connotations to team sports, and therefore difficulties participate in them (Elling & Janssens, 2009; Robertson, 2003).

### 8.1.2 Chapter 2

Story reveals how Cedric started to be conscious of his same-sex desires near the beginning of high school. These feelings he first disregarded, and denied as abnormal and disgusting and refused to consider that he may be homo- or bisexual. These findings correspond with the first stages of sexual identity development (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Troiden, 1989). Moreover, being homosexual didn't fit to Cedric's perception of his athletic identity, to the perception of what it means to be a "real man", because of his

undesired connotations of feminine and therefore weak homosexual people that he learned from sports and physical education (Jacobson, 2002, p. 3). Findings shows that undoubtedly Cedric was “exposed” to negative heteronormative and homophobic socialization and internalized negative stereotypes, beliefs, stigma, and prejudice about homosexuality and LGBT people thorough his school time from primary to high school (Fassinger, 1991; Herek, 2004; Herek et al. 2009; Williamson 2000), which resulted as a strong denial and shame of own same-sex feelings and subsequently hiding them from the others in high school and upper-secondary school environments, and also in sports.

Along with denying, suppressing, and hiding same-sex affections, athletic identity worked as a cover to hide features of homosexuality. Since sport was generally perceived as a domain where homosexuals were absent, therefore the heteronormative climate of sport worked for Cedric in covering true sexual identity thorough adolescence years in school environment, and also in sport. The finding corresponds to some extent with Davison and Frank (2006), Eng, (2006), and Wellard (2006) studies that sometimes homosexual male athletes involved in physically rough and masculine sports can hide their sexuality and easily go as a heterosexual. Without taking stance to the masculinity rate of Cedric’s sport, squash or other racquet sports in general, the story shows that sustaining an athletic identity as a squash player had an additional intend to “fit in” to the social environment and to gain some recognition from the peers. Moreover, dating opposite sex was another way for Cedric to go as a heterosexual despite the feelings of uncomfortable. Herek (2004) concluded that internalized homophobia applies to conscious or unconscious behaviors to promote or conform to cultural expectations of heteronormativity or heterosexism that can be in forced outward displays of heteronormative behavior for the purpose of appearing or attempting to feel ”normal” or ”accepted”. Indeed, the importance of athletic and masculine identity in high school and in upper-secondary school (chapter 3) emerges in the narratives by mentioning the achievements and successes in sport, and as comparing one’s superiority to other teammates. However, although athletic identity brought satisfaction and security to some extent in the adolescent years, at the same time it potentially had its effect, alongside with internalized homophobia, in challenging the sexual identity development and disclosure.

### 8.1.3 Chapter 3

Cedric’s story shows how the meaning of sport and the athletic identity strengthen during the high school and upper-secondary school times, as he gained more

success in sports. Concurrently, Cedric gradually started to question his true sexuality and started to ‘develop his personal LGB status’ (D’augelli, 1994), and took the first careful attempts to get acquainted with other LGB people through the Internet. However, for his misfortune he felt rather estranged than comfortable with the “LGBT community” and its people, which in his perspective reinforced the mainstream gay culture that seemed strange, and therefore difficult to identify with. Finding other gay teenagers involved in sports was not easy because they were “hidden” or “closeted” from the public, not to mention Finnish sport domain didn’t have any famous openly gay athletes to look up to.

The similar finding can be seen in Carless (2011) autoethnography of negotiating sexuality and masculinity in school sport. He states that the lack of ‘stories’ “might help make sense of the difficulties that young same-sex attracted males in sport are likely to face” (p. 15) when developing sexual identity. Like Macleod argued (as cited in Carless, 2011, p.15) “the task of being a person in a culture involves creating a satisfactory-enough alignment between individual experience and the story which I find myself in part”. Building his statement to Hall’s notion that unlike sexual orientation, sexual identity is depended on narrative processes (as cited in Carless, 2011, p. 15) he continues that because of the types of embodied same-sex experiences homosexual athletes relate are clearly different from the (heterosexual) stories within sport; it brings remarkable, even impossible challenges to build a coherent and authentic sense of self within this cultural setting.

I will interpret the findings in the similar light as Carless, that along with the heteronormative expectations, and the (internalized) heterosexism and homophobia of the environment, the absence of “others of similarity” in the sport domain and in school challenged Cedric’s sexual identity process from ‘creating personal LGB status’, to ‘exiting heterosexuality’ and ‘creating LGB social identity’ (D’augelli, 1994), not to mention in proceeding in sexual identity development from the perspective of stage models (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Troiden, 1989). It goes together with Rowen and Malcolm (2003) findings that high levels of internalized homophobia, and stigmatizing and repressing perceptions of environment decelerate the sexual identity development. Sport and school environment was perceived very homonegative, furthermore homosexuality still didn’t fit to Cedric’s concept of his athletic identity since there were no models to identify in sport, and neither in LGB community. During his adolescence years in high school and upper-secondary school, Cedric’s social and athletic identities

were more or less intertwined (sport environment being the major social space beside the school environment) and depended on each other, which challenged the process, or development of his sexual identity. Disclosing sexual orientation in one or another setting (sport or school) would have had a risk of being stigmatized and therefore endangered the relations in both environments.

To continue with the findings in chapter 3, (and also chapter 2), individual sport (squash) gave him a possibility to regulate with whom, where, and when he could practice with. Because of feeling “otherness” and therefore uncomfortable in the organized team practices, he could pick players to practice with individually, which he found more comfortable. In person-to-person training sessions there was a decreased risk to confront the dominant practices of hegemonic masculinity (proving one’s masculinity), which possibly estranged Cedric in organized team trainings. At least, when occurring he was more in control to deal with the masculinity practices in individual trainings. Furthermore, by regulating his practicing, he could pick partners with whom he felt himself less threatened (e.g. female players), and therefore could concentrate more on practicing itself. However, these avoiding customs undoubtedly had some alienating effect on relationships to his teammates.

#### 8.1.4 Chapters 4 & 5

Chapters 4 and 5 enlightened some issues that homosexual athlete encounters in the generally perceived heteronormative sport domain, and how gay identity can be negotiated in- and outside of sport by a homosexual athlete. When starting the “student life” in his twenties he entered new environment with new people where minority of the people knew each other beforehand. In new educational environment he didn’t have to maintain the athletic identity that has been relevant in his social encounters with people in high- and upper secondary schools. Cedric had matured since then, and the other people seemed more mature in the new studying environment. Social- and healthcare faculty, in which Cedric was about to start his physiotherapy studies, was more neutral and tolerant for non-heterosexual diversity. Therefore, it didn’t take much time for him to make close and trusting friendships in the new environment, and finally to ‘come out’ for the first time to a close friends.

Like Daugelli’s (1994) model suggests, ‘exiting heterosexuality’ also means telling others that one is LGB, and this disclosure “begins with the very first person to whom an individual discloses and continues through life” and that “the pervasiveness of

heterosexist assumptions makes the development of a continuing method for asserting non-heterosexuality a necessity” (p. 325). Conclusion can be drawn, that ‘exiting heterosexuality’ in Cedric’s case truly started when accessing the encouraging and relatively affirming environment for non-heterosexuals, and when having his first long-term relationship with his boyfriend (‘developing intimate LGB status’), which consequently led in ‘developing LGB social identity’ when more friends became aware and affirmed his LGB identity. Story reveals that majority of the students were girls in the faculty of social- and healthcare where Cedric studied.

However, these positive advancements in sexual identity development and disclosure didn’t show in sport surroundings because insecurities of expressing and disclosing his sexuality. Story demonstrates (chapter 5) what a gay athlete may experience, and what goes in his mind when it comes to disclosing one’s identity in sports after having ‘proceed’ in developing LGB social identity outside of sports. During the time sport domain was not a setting where one could easily express one’s homosexuality, because of the absence of non-heterosexual individuals, and the absence of homosexuality in discourses in sport, if it wasn’t degrading discourse about homosexuals. Going back to the notion that unlike sexual orientation, sexual identity is constructed in narratives, the absence of narratives of other gay athletes in sport domain may have challenged the integration of Cedric’s homosexual identity to his athletic identity (Carless, 2011). Cedric decided not to come out because of not wanting to risk the good relationships with other people in sports (Jacobson, 2002), which he needed in order to fully participate in his sport. He also learned to maintain rather neutral and “asexual” appearance by not taking a stance when it came to sexually content social situations or events. However, according to the findings, it’s notable that the previous efforts of maintaining a heterosexual and privileged ‘masculine athletic identity’ had now slowly changed to the urge of sexual identity disclosure in sports, and consequently integrate both identities as one coherent identity to operate beyond both social surroundings.

#### 8.1.5 Chapters 6 & 7

The narrative shows some examples of the sexuality disclosure in sport domain and the stressful situation of it. In addition, the heteronormative assumption that everyone is heterosexual ‘until proven otherwise’ (Cox & Thompson, 2001) emerges from the chapters 6 and 7. However, being in an intimate relationship, and having a

strong social support outside of sport settings eventually helped the disclosure also in sport surroundings, though to a selectively chosen and trusted friends potentially with pro-gay attitudes (in chapter 6). Interesting was, that the disclosure to a trusted friend in sport domain happened by secondhand, through a concerned friend's girlfriend, which demonstrate the difficult process and the insecurities of disclosing one's non-heterosexuality in very heteronormative and homophobic domain. Instead of facing rejecting behavior from friends, the disclosure was in this case an empowering experience that only enhanced the friendship. It could be also said that by 'exiting heterosexuality' first time in the sport domain begun the 'internalization/synthesis' (Fassinger & Miller, 1996) of sexual and athletic identities, and creation of a social support group in sport domain (D'augelli, 1994). To support my interpretation, also Adams and Anderson (2011) reported positive, even empowering experiences among the teammates after outing a gay individual in an educational based soccer team. However, as it was in Cedric's case, 'sample' was selective in a sense that the team expressed pro-gay attitudes already before the disclosure of a gay player.

#### 8.1.6 Chapter 8

In chapter 8, the narrative shows how Cedric becomes more confident with his sexual identity in sport when having social support group who affirmed his homosexual identity in sport domain. Another finding of increasing self-confidence was the positive self-assessing of other people's awareness of his sexual orientation. However, the narrative suggests that although people in sport settings had an idea of Cedric's homosexuality, it wasn't raised up in the discourses and consequently kept Cedric guessing others knowledge about himself and their true attitudes and opinions towards homosexuality. Moreover, heterosexist and homophobic behavior by some people in sports kept him uncertain about the general attitudes towards homosexuality. Indirect discrimination (Kokkonen, 2012) and cultural homophobia (Hemphill & Symons, 2009) was persistent in the sport surroundings and appeared in everyday cultural messages.

Chapter 8 gives an example how heterosexism and homophobia usually appeared in sport surroundings, which worked as discouraging factor to disclose sexuality more openly. Although the homophobic behavior was not aimed directly at Cedric, it was discriminative in sense it was directed to the minority group Cedric belonged, and therefore was easily to be taken personally. Because of the prevalence of such behavior and attitudes throughout the sport career, Cedric had learned coping

strategies to disregard negative behavior by not taking a stance, or taking them with “sense of humor”. Moreover, having a social support group in sport domain likely helped him to deal with the negative experiences, but it’s probable that these negative experiences affect one’s self-concept and self-esteem no matter how developed the coping strategies are.

The quality of the relationship to other players, or to the people in sport surroundings determined whether or not it was beneficial to come out. Therefore the relationships that were limited only to the sport context usually contributed to the restrained disclosure and expression of sexuality. It can be argued that Finnish sport domain have many similar cases of gay athletes that the “inner-circle” are aware of, yet their disclosure does not reach the bigger circles awareness for the reason or another. It’s probable that although the members of sport community are aware of the sexual orientation of an individual athlete, the silencing and repressing feature of heteronormativity towards sexual minorities keeps homosexual discourses away from the sport domain, consequently maintaining the absence of the sexual minorities in sports and physical activity (Carless, 2011). It may be also that people perceives homosexuality as a more private issue, because of its inferior positioning in comparison to heterosexuality in our society, and therefore protect homosexual individuals by keeping them as a “quiet knowledge” in the sport surroundings.

#### 8.1.7 Chapters 9, 10, & 11

Change of the environment (e.g. moving to other city) can cause a “set-back” in sexual identity development and disclosure. This finding emerges in chapter 9 particularly, and contributes to the Daugelli’s (1994), and Fassinger & Miller’s perception of complexity of sexual identity when social factors are taken into account. Although the change of the environment did not cause setbacks in disclosure of sexuality in educational and social environment, in fact the opposite, Cedric didn’t feel safe to express his sexuality to his new teammates. There were no social support group anymore in the new sport surroundings, and he had to start re-building a trusting relationship with his new teammates. However, because of the prevailing heteronormative assumptions and occasional homophobia in the new sport surroundings, he couldn’t create the kind of relationship with his new teammates to be fully himself for them, consequently leading to ‘closeted’ sport, and ‘open’ social identities from the sexuality perspective.



The dichotomy in two separate identities seemed to strengthen in the chapters 9 and 10, when having active life in in pro-gay environment of the university, and entering the local LGBT community, whereas in sport surroundings Cedric concealed his private life from his teammates, and distanced himself from others by not taking part in the social activities of the club. This can be seen in the narrative, particularly in the chapters 10 and 11. Despite the apparent tolerance towards sexual minorities in the society, or in the educational environment, sport surroundings remained as a domain where heteronormativity and homophobic attitudes were strongly present (Symons, 2009). This contributes to the notion, that gay individual's readiness to disclose his sexuality depends much on the attitude climate of the environment (Rowen & Malcolm, 2003). Furthermore, presidential election in the chapter 10 could be interpreted as symbolical, when widely renowned figures from culture and arts stood behind liberal, green and gay candidate, whereas notable amount of sport leaders and famous athletes were supporting more conservative and heterosexual candidate (HS, 2012; Kaleva, 2012) For me this finding indicates that the values in sports are more conservative and based on heteronormativity, therefore green-liberal gay president is not seen as prominent representative or spokesperson of these values.

It can be argued that Cedric's own perceptions about others' unwelcoming homophobic attitudes in the new sport surroundings might have been, at least partly false. By no means all the people showed homophobic behavior or attitudes in any sport surroundings Cedric was involved. Still, the absence of homosexuality in discourses, and the "approval" silence to derogatory discourses towards homosexuals was experienced discouraging in the perspective of expressing sexuality and sexuality disclosure (Carless, 2011). Like Herek (2009) states, the negative perceptions of others' attitudes towards homosexuality are also part of one's own internalized homophobia. Based on the findings of this study the absence of homosexuality in sport discourses might as well "fed" the gay individual's internalized conceptions about homosexuality in sport.

It should be noticed that unlike in sport surroundings, social surroundings outside of sport gives more freedom for a gay individual to choose in which social contexts or communities one decides to go and operate. Obviously Cedric had drifted to the social spaces and people with open and affirming attitudes towards sexual diversities that consequently strengthen the dichotomy between his sport and social identities. The chapter 11 demonstrates how Cedric feels compelled of balancing between his social and sport identities when these two social worlds "collide". In the chapter he is spending time

with friends who are part of his ordinary social world, as openly gay individual. The coincidence of meeting his teammates in the same environment made him feel uncomfortable, and therefore forced him to evade them in order to avoid introducing them to his friends in social surroundings, and minimize the risk of disclosing himself to the people in sports and the consequences that might have on the relationships with his teammates. This chapter showed another, probably quite ordinary example of how gay individuals who are not totally out in sports balance their sport and social identities in and outside of sports.

#### 8.1.8 Chapter 12

In the last chapter Cedric meets his old friend from high school and upper secondary school times. They share similar history of being “in the closet” during their adolescence years, and they both had sport history. Both agree that the time and the environment wasn’t really welcoming for homosexuals, and that knowing about other gay individuals, or others of similarity would have eased the confusion and the processing of own sexual identity. Now, almost ten years after, both have proceeded rather far in processing their sexual identity, and are clearly happy with their lives as homosexual men. However, both expressed frustration and stress for maintaining their sexual identity because of pervasive heteronormativity in different surroundings, having to disclose themselves “over and over again” in different contexts, contributing D’augelli’s (1994) notion that ‘exiting heterosexuality’ is, after all, a life-long process depending on the pervasiveness of heteronormativity in different contexts.

Cedric expresses a wish that others would recognize his true sexual orientation to avert the occasional embarrassing moments of coming out as a “different”. It is true that invisibility of sexual orientation (if not actively and continuously expressed) may be a blessing, but also a curse by many means for homosexual individuals when having to continuously prove their existence. Sexual orientation doesn’t show in physical appearance, and therefore it’s not immediately recognizable to others, accommodating strange and myth over sexual minorities. I think that if sexual orientation, with all its tactfulness and diversity would be somehow visible, just like the color of the skin, hair, or eyes, it would take some off the stigma of disparity and prejudice that is often connected to sexual minorities all around the world.

Chapter 12 shows the reserved attitudes Cedric still have on the LGBT community’s events, when receiving an offer to join international LGBT sport event

(EuroGames). Story shows Cedric's doubts the other LGBT members' ability to perform in the same level as in mainstream sports where he has always been involved. Sport, in the way how Cedric understood it, represented the masculine values where competition and high levels of performance were appreciated, considering it as a 'true sport', and LGBT sports he considered as a threat to these values. Although being an "openly" homosexual individual, it can be argued that he adopted the values of hegemonic masculinity (Anderson, 2002), and internalized heteronormative or homophobic attitudes (Fassinger, 1991; Hemphill & Symons, 2009; Herek, 2004) in sport and physical activity also affected his notions towards LGBT sports by keeping it as inferior to traditional mainstream sports. Therefore, participating in "inferior" LGBT sport event may have threaten his self-concept as an athlete with a masculine athletic identity. Moreover, it can be argued that LGBT community didn't offer an alternative, or any example for him to identify himself in order express his athletic identity the way he preferred. Again, the absence of gay representatives of mainstream sports in LGBT community may have also caused rejection of LGBT community and its sport events. However, the narrative shows that the offer to participate in EuroGames left him curious and he deliberated the possibility to participate in LGBT sports, which proves the negotiation of more inclusive athletic identity of self, and the withdrawing internalized homophobic attitudes in sport and physical activity.

## 9 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand a gay male athlete's experiences in sport and physical activity in Finland and answer the following research questions: How Finnish sport and physical activity domains are experienced by a gay athlete?; How these experiences reflect in his sexual identity development and management?; How these experiences reflect in his relationships to others in sport?

To begin with, this study succeeded to answer to the research questions in order to describe a gay athlete's experiences in sport and physical activity domains. Although the purpose of this study was not to examine the prevalence of heteronormativity, heterosexism, and homophobia in sport and physical activity domains, the study shows that these negative and discriminative "mindsets" are still present in sport and physical activity in Finland despite the apparent positive changes of attitudes in other domains of society. Such negative climate may challenge gay athletes in developing and maintaining their sexual identity in- and outside of the sport, and also discourage them to enjoy and develop the skills in the sport they love throughout their life and career. This study demonstrates how homophobic and other disfavoured attitudes towards homosexuals can also cause notable amount of anxiety and stress for gay individuals, leading to the closeted identity that prevents gay individuals of being their full self in sports.

Furthermore, it was notable how early experiences in physical education and in sports can shape and reinforce gay individuals' concepts on masculinity and sexuality, and therefore affect the future self-negotiation and development of sexual identity. The heteronormative curricula of physical education, alongside with heteronormative or heterosexist teaching methods may discourage individuals, regardless one's sexuality, in participating sports that are seen gendering. Furthermore, heteronormative values and homophobia can discourage one's participation in physical activity in general when the feelings of inadequacy and failure are experienced because of heteronormative expectations of evaluative, performance, competition, and result oriented physical education. As far as I'm concerned, it would be at least fair to require equal chances and circumstances for sexual minorities to success in sport domains. Moreover, it would be only beneficial for Finnish sports to encourage all the gifted and motivated individuals to do any kind of sports and physical activity they are interested in, no matter their gender or sexuality.

Although the homophobic and discriminative behaviour in the story wasn't relatively severe or continuous, i.e. discrimination wasn't physical neither it was directed personally to the main character, this study demonstrates how homosexuality and other forms of non-heterosexuality are perceived as inferior, unwanted, or incompetent in sport domain, whereas heterosexuality is often privileged and kept as self-evident. The aversion of homosexuality and the intentional or unintentional exclusion of homosexuality in sport discourses can be perceived as one form of discrimination. To continue with, the absence of 'stories' and discourses of homosexuality, and the absence of homosexual athletes and role models in sport domain can challenge gay athlete's identity integration of their athletic and homosexual identities and vice versa, causing separation of a social environment of sport from other ordinary social environments. This, alongside with heteronormativity and homophobia, may distance gay athlete's from the people in sports, such as teammates, coaches, or from other sport practitioners. These finding also demonstrates how gay athletes may find themselves "not fully belonging" in either of social communities, in sport or in LGBT communities.

Furthermore, the findings indicated the infamous 'don't ask, don't tell' convention in sport surroundings in a way that although people are very aware of homosexual existence, there is a tendency of silence, or "not-knowing" about the matter, or the homosexual topics are averted. Just as Anderson (2002) writes "Heterosexual discourse in is so pervasive in sport that it subtly leads gay athletes to feel that they have no right to discuss about their sexuality, despite the overflowing discussions of heterosexuality around them" (p. 874).

The question of gay individual's own perception of homophobia in the surrounding environment emerged from the findings, referring how a gay individual may perceive the sport environment as strongly homophobic, although the actual homophobic or discriminative behaviour in the environment is nominal, or almost absent. Also the study showed that by no all the people in sport show homophobic attitudes. However the absence of homosexuality, and the avoidance or aversion for gay discourses in sports points out that the affirming, i.e. a true tolerance of homosexuality is not yet reality in sport domains.

Last but not least - the findings suggest that in the otherwise heteronormative domain of sport, coming out experiences in sport may be a positive and even empowering experience for a gay individual, but also for the other members in the sport club, consequently enhance the confidence of gay individual to operate and perform in

sport as full self. This certainly indicates positive and enhancing effects to the cohesion and group dynamics in teams or clubs, and encourages the inclusive practice for sexual minorities in sport and physical activity domains.

### 9.1 Limitations

Although autoethnography explores the personal as a reflection of the social, my experience is only one of the narratives of the gay athletes in sport and physical activity domain. Within the subculture, there are different gay individuals who might not experience the sport and physical activity the way I did as a gay athlete. In fact, I'm sure there are gay athletes in who don't see sport domain as heteronormative and homophobic as it shows in this study. Yet, I'm also sure that there are many gay or lesbian athletes who hide their sexuality because of homophobic discrimination in sports. Furthermore, some individuals may express their non-heterosexuality despite the prevailing homophobia and discrimination in the domain. In the end, we all come from and live our lives in different circumstances.

As I've mentioned before, the findings of this study are based on the individual athlete's perspective and therefore are not necessarily generalizable to the gay athletes' experiences in team sports. I collected my data from the individual athlete's perspective. However, although squash is an individual sport, it has social aspects from team sports too since practicing happens normally with another player (it takes at least two players to play squash) or in bigger group of players, such as in other racquet sports. There are also team competitions in squash (e.g. national squash league), such as it appeared in the story. Therefore, squash differs from other individual sports, such as running and skiing, where others are not necessarily needed in practicing. However, team is not as essential in squash as it is in ordinary team sports. Often squash player has possibility to select his practicing partners. In team sports individual has less possibilities to choose with whom to practice. It's difficult for me to take a stance whether or not gay athletes involved in team sports can identify to the findings of this study, however, it is possible that gay athletes are "forced" to come out in team sports sooner or later because of the major social meaning of the team for an athlete in- and outside of the sport. On the other hand, the hegemonic social pressure of the team can also discourage gay individual to disclose themselves because the fear of others rejection. Such As Jacobson (2002) notes that "in team sports the bonds between athletes are so critical that coming out with any personal information that would threaten to undermine or break those bonds is extremely risky for

any gay athlete” (p. 3). In this study, however, the findings showed the same fear of being rejected by other players because of homosexuality. Moreover, it’s hard to say how lesbian athletes can identify to the findings of this study. For example, as Elling and Janssens (2009) noted that especially in team sports lesbian athletes may perceive sport domain as a comfortable environment to express and talk about their sexuality because the involvement to the sport already crosses the traditional gender boundaries and role expectations set for women.

Autoethnography might not meet the traditional scientific criterion of generalizability, but I hope that my research has filled the alternative criteria for autoethnography suggested by Ellis et al. (2011). The meaning and utility of the traditional terms when evaluating a scientific paper such as ‘reliability, validity, and generalizability’ are altered when evaluating autoethnography. In autoethnography, the credibility of the narrator determines the reliability of the study. It includes the questions of the narrator’s position of giving “factual evidence” from the experiences described in the story, if the narrator believes that the experiences he described actually happened to him, or if the narrator took the “literary license” of the story to the point that it is better viewed as ‘fiction’ than as an account based on the ‘truth’ (Ellis et al. 2011). I have described the starting point, and my preconceptions of this study, which increases the trust between me (the author), and the readers. In this study I’ve also described the research procedure and how the data collection and data analysis was conducted in this study strengthen the “reliability” of this study. From postmodern perspective, I’ve stated the fictional feature of the findings in a sense that they don’t represent the ultimate truth, but construe the author’s own version of the truth.

For autoethnographers, validity refers to the work’s verisimilitude, that it convinces the readers that the experience described by the author is lifelike, believable, and possible, and gives them a sensation that the represented story could be true. The story is coherent, connecting readers to writers and “provides continuity in their lives” (Ellis et al. 2011). Like I mentioned earlier in this study, I worked quite amount of time with the narrative to make it coherent and compelling for the readers to “live” the experiences of the author. To increase the “validity” of this study, I’ve interpreted the findings with the previous research of the field. I also expect that the story will gain new meanings in the readers that I haven’t considered in the narrative and that they have learned something new from after reading the study.

The generalizability, as it's understood by autoethnographers, moves from respondents to readers. In fact, the generalizability of the autoethnography is always being tested by readers while they determine if a story speaks to them about their experience, or about the experience of others they know (Ellis et al. 2011). Therefore, readers "validate" the autoethnographic studies by comparing their lives to the ones described in the studies, by thinking about differences and similarities of our lives and the reasons why, and evaluating if the story has given new information about the lives of others (Ellis et al. 2011). In this study I've given the story for the readers to evaluate, and to compare if the story speaks to them about gay athlete's experience in sport. I don't expect that the story speaks to every gay individual in sport and physical activity domains, or the concerned others. However, I do believe that the story in this study can be "generalized" to some extent, believing that there lies some truth in the subjectivity.

## 9.2 Future implications

The study showed absence of homosexual discourses in sport domain. Therefore more studies (or stories) are needed to get insight on homosexual athlete's experiences in sport and physical activity domain, in order to improve their well-being in sports and in life in general. Furthermore, what would be better than getting more self-written narratives or autoethnographies from other gay athlete's in sport domain, and cross-analyse them to get even wider picture of the experiences they confront in sports? Moreover, this study focuses on gay athletes experiences who is partly "closeted" in sport and physical activity domain, therefore it would be interesting to study openly homosexual athletes' 'life-stories' in sport domain and they have coped with heteronormative and homophobic attitudes in the field. Also heterosexual athletes' attitudes towards homosexuality in sport would be interesting topic for examination.

'Queer practice' and queer sport psychology has much to offer in sport and physical activity domains. Queering practice could be implemented in school sport environment when planning the school curricula by not looking at sports from gendering perspective and giving the chance for individual students experience all kinds of sports. Moreover, it's important to educate teachers to be more inclusive for body practice in physical education settings by not favouring or encouraging certain body performances over others. By increasing the awareness of sport practitioners and athletes of LGBT existence in sports, and educating 'queer practice' for PE teachers, coaches, and sport psychologists they could understand the harmful effects of heteronormativity and



heterosexism when implemented and reinforced in sports and physical education. By understanding this, they could start developing tools to prevent such social and cultural forces to make their domains more inclusive and equal for LGBT diversity. Such as Krane et al. (2010) writes, “rather than making athletes (or students) responsible for adjusting their mental states or accommodating the attitudes and behaviour of others, queer practice will assess the team social climate as well as individual mental states” (p. 173). Lastly, this study demonstrated how important it is for heterosexual athletes or other sport practitioners to take the motion in fighting against homophobia in sports. If queering is conducted by only LGBT members, the fewer chances they have to get their voice and agenda heard in sport. Therefore, building inclusive sport domain for all the athletes should be everyone’s concern in the field of sport.

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