

## Peer relationships among elite adolescent athletes: Comparing sport friends, non-sport friends, and team-mate relationships

Meghan H. McDonough & Peter R.E. Crocker  
The University of British Columbia

Peer relationships among youth athletes involve relationships with multiple individuals in a variety of contexts; however, most of the research has examined either global perceptions of peer acceptance or friendship quality with one's closest friends in sport. The purpose of this study was to compare characteristics of elite adolescent athletes' relationships with their close friends in sport, other teammates, and close friends outside of sport. 30 male and female provincial-level athletes between the ages of 14 and 18 participated in one 30-60 minute interview about their relationships with their sport friends, other team-mates, and non-sport friends. Sport friendship qualities were similar to those identified in previous research (Weiss & Smith, 1999), and included companionship and pleasant play, self-esteem enhancement and supportiveness, loyalty and intimacy, things in common, and conflict. Relationships with other team-mates were characterized by lower friendship quality, specifically less intimacy and time spent together outside of sport, and more conflict. However, 93% of participants identified that they generally got along and worked well with their team-mates. Quality of friendships outside of sport fell into the same dimensions as sport friendship quality. Many participants identified that they had equally close relationships with their friends inside and outside of sport, but that they needed both relationships, as their sport friends provided companionship, intimacy, and support in sport, and their non-sport friends provided these functions outside of the sport context. Some participants did not have, or found it difficult to maintain, close friends outside of sport due to training demands. These findings have implications for the study of peer relationships and social support in adolescent sport.