In 2013, I interviewed Stuart, a first year heterosexual undergraduate, and asked him about sleeping in the same bed with his friends. “I do it all the time,” he told me. I inquired as to how often “all the time” was. “Two to three nights a week,” he said. Throughout the course of the interview, Stuart told me who he cuddles in bed with, and why. I asked him about the mechanics of what happens in bed, and the meanings associated with sleeping together. It is here that Stuart told me that he even cuddles in bed with guys, immediately after “fucking a girl.”

After a night of drinking and clubbing, Stuart often brings women home for sex. This is the benefit of living in a hookup culture (Bogle 2008). He has sex with these women in his bed, but does not kick them out immediately after. “You don’t want to send someone out drunk alone on the streets in the early hours of the morning.” But that doesn’t mean that Stuart wants to sleep alongside, or cuddle with, the woman he’s had sex with, either. It is at this point that he leaves her to sleep, alone, in his bed. He then goes to sleep in the same bed with one of his male housemates.

I asked Stuart if he is bisexual. He said that he is not. I asked him why he would then leave a girl in bed to be with his mate. He answered, “Just cuz I like don’t wanna have to deal with them [the girls] in the morning.” He added, “I would rather have time with the boys, who love me, than a girl I lusted after a few seconds ago.” I confirmed the story with Stuart’s housemate. “Yeah, he loves us, what can I say? We’re like that. We all really love each other.”

Interviews with undergraduate athletes both in the United States and the United Kingdom suggest that sleeping in the same bed with another male is normal throughout childhood, but somewhere around puberty, somewhere between 11 and certainly by 14, sleepovers generally end.
for the Americans. In interviewing older British male friends about sleepover practices, it also becomes apparent that males only began sleeping in beds together in the UK, out of choice, in recent years.

Although it is not systematic evidence for the absence of men of Generation X sleeping together in beds in the UK when they were in university, it was not the case for the five British males in their 40s that I interviewed about it. For example, one of my heterosexual British friends, born in 1970, tells me that he stopped doing sleepovers at his friends when he was around 11, and that it was unthinkable to share a bed with a friend unless one was in a hotel on an away match. He said, “There was really no such thing as sleepovers in the UK in the 80s. There was no sleeping in the same bed after being drunk at university or out with mates in any capacity.” He added, “There is the odd time when I have shared a bed with my brother on a family holiday or something and there might have be an odd occasion when it happened with a friend, but I really can’t recall any.” I asked him about sleeping over at other guys’ places after a night of drinking. “There were occasions where a group of us have gone out, and a number of us have crashed on the floor, but not in a bed.”

Another British friend, born in 1985, tells me that sleepovers were regular between ages 8–11 too, but that after that the boys started sleeping “tops and toes,” one guy’s head by the other’s feet, as a way of symbolically indicating that they were not sexually interested in each other. This means that, for this male, as an undergraduate freshman in September 2003 through his final year of university in 2007, cuddling was not happening, at least not with him or with others that he knew of. But unlike my older friend, sleeping in the same bed was occurring—there was just no cuddling.

However, I saw my undergraduates cuddling (the opening vignette of this book) in 2006. Furthermore, in January 2007, the first episode of the British teenage drama Skins aired. The drama took place in Bristol, England, where I lived at the time. I suspect that the show might have been important in reflecting a behavior that was emerging among some straight young men, and while I cannot say with evidence, it seems possible that the show helped spread the behavior.

I liked Skins because it accurately portrayed the interactions of guys I saw both in my research and simply hanging out in my town. The accuracy of portraying teenagers closer to how they actually were (as opposed to American teenage shows like Glee) was perhaps a reflection of allowing youth to write the script, rather than adults. With an average writing age of 21 (according to Wikipedia) and consultancy with teenagers (including