

# STANDING ON THE LINE

A film by PAUL ÉMILE d'ENTREMONT

STUDY GUIDE





# STANDING ON THE LINE

## STUDY GUIDE

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### SYNOPSIS

In both amateur and professional sports, being gay remains taboo. Few dare to come out of the closet for fear of being stigmatized, and for many, the pressure to perform is compounded by a further strain: whether or not to affirm their sexual identity.

Breaking the code of silence that prevails on the field, on the ice and in the locker room, this film takes a fresh and often moving look at some of our gay athletes, who share their experiences with the camera. They've set out to overcome prejudice in the hopes of changing things for the athletes of tomorrow.

Watch the film here: [nfb.ca/film/standing-on-the-line](http://nfb.ca/film/standing-on-the-line)

**Recommended Age:** 13+

#### Themes:

Human Rights, Identity, Bullying & Discrimination, Sexuality

#### Keywords/Topics:

Sexual Orientation, LGBTQ2+, Sports, Athletes, Allies

### GUIDING QUESTION:

How does sexual orientation affect athletes in the world of sport?  
What role does representation and allyship play in the inclusion of people of all orientations in athletics?



### ACTIVITY 1

Exploration of issues surrounding sexual orientation in sport: Word cloud and group discussion

#### VIDEO SEGMENT TIMECODES:



**Anastasia Buccis** Duration: 5 min.



**David Testo** Duration: 8 min. 28 sec.



**Brock McGillis** Duration: 7 min. 18 sec.



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**Olympiens high school football team**

Duration: 7 min. 6 sec.

**Before viewing** the video excerpts, have students brainstorm possible issues gay athletes face within the world of sports. Encourage them to think outside the box, considering, for example, what issues they might face on the field/ice/court, in the locker room, or in relation to their teammates/coaches/parents.

You could have students share ideas verbally and record them as a mind map, or use a collaborative word cloud creation tool (like [this one](#) from [mentimeter.com](#)), allowing students to submit their ideas anonymously.

**After viewing** the video excerpts, ask students to add to the list/word cloud based on what the athletes who were profiled in the film shared about their experiences. Once students have had a few minutes to add to the cloud, discuss some of the words that show up the most. Ask students to share (if they're comfortable doing so) what sparked them to include that word. Ask if they feel they can empathize with any of the issues or feelings listed. Ask them to identify the issues that everyone can empathize with, and then the issues that straight athletes would not be able to empathize with.

Use the following quotes from the athletes to help students frame their thoughts or as discussion points while reviewing the word cloud:

"I have a million friends, but I didn't have one gay friend. I was alone in that closet." - Anastasia Bucsis

Can students empathize with feelings of loneliness, alienation, or secrecy?

"I didn't want to scare anyone, offend anyone, I didn't want to make people feel uncomfortable [in the locker room]." - David Testo

How is this experience different from that of a straight athlete? How would needing to have "heightened senses" in the locker room change one's experience of and participation in team sports?

"It got dark because I'd been hiding my sexuality for so long. I would cry almost every night." ...

"[I felt] a disconnect between being a hockey bro and who I actually was. [There was] pressure to conform." - Brock McGillis

If the students lead the discussion towards "dark" feelings or suicide, be sure to guide them with appropriate trigger warnings. You could share that LGBTQ2+ "youth are almost five times as likely to have attempted suicide compared to heterosexual youth" ([Trevor Project](#)). Why is it important to understand statistics like that when we talk about sexual orientation in sport, and in society at large?

### GO DEEPER

One of the themes that came up again and again in the film was the idea of *worthiness*. Anastasia Bucsis felt she "didn't deserve" to be at the 2010 Olympics. David Testo felt he needed to use soccer as a way to "prove" his worth as a person.

As a quick Think, Pair, Share activity, have students unpack the idea of worthiness and what makes a person worthy or unworthy of a position on a sports team or as an athlete. Give them 3-5 minutes to organize their own thoughts and 3-5 minutes to pair with someone close to them and discuss their thoughts on the idea, and then ask each pair to share with the whole class one thing that came up in their discussion.



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### ACTIVITY 2

Let's talk about visibility and representation:  
Round table discussion



In the film, all of the athletes profiled speak to some degree about their own visibility as a gay person in sport. This discussion will focus on the concept of visibility and representation of LGBTQ2+ people, and why these concepts matter. If necessary, [this article](#) from *Psychology Today* may be helpful in describing the importance of visibility.

Have students arrange themselves in a large circle or U shape to facilitate eye contact between all parties. It helps to briefly introduce the discussion by explaining that some people develop their thoughts internally before speaking, while others speak their thoughts to develop them. Encourage students to chime in and share whenever they feel most comfortable. This discussion should be open and can move in whatever direction the group you're working with takes it. Here are some thought-provoking questions and statements to get things going.

David Testo was the first professional soccer player to come out as gay. He did not play professionally after that.

- His mother stated that she was “worried about how he would be treated growing up in the South” after he came out to her.
- When David came out publicly, his mother asked, “Why rock the boat?”; and in the film she says, “When it came out, things changed... he’s not playing soccer anymore. It seems like it was a death sentence.”

- > Do you think the idea of coming out being like a “death sentence” is a common experience with athletes? Would that be the case more in certain sports than in others? Do you think that view is changing as society progresses?

Brock McGillis was the first openly gay professional hockey player. He states that there was a huge disconnect in his life before coming out, between being a hockey “bro” and being who he actually was. He describes feeling huge pressure to conform.

- Brock says he decided to “come out and create change in society” after he faced backlash for his sexual orientation.
  - > Do you think athletes coming out publicly has an effect on society at large? What kind of effect?
  - > Consider the scene where Brock shares his story with the Sea Dogs players. What sort of effect did he have on those players by being open and vulnerable with them?

Anastasia Bucsis chose to come out publicly in a newspaper interview. When she did so, her mom asked her, “Why do people have to know?” She responded with, “I didn’t want any child or any teen to go through what I went through.”

- She was later criticized by various LGBTQ2+ organizations for not being “out enough” or “politically active enough.” In the film, she responds to this idea by saying “before my race wasn’t the time to be a political activist.”
  - > Do you think athletes in the spotlight have a responsibility to be “out” publicly? Why or why not?

In the film segment about the origins of the You Can Play project, Brian and Pat Burke talk about the legacy of Brendan Burke, and how his coming out inspired the project. Brian speaks about how his entire path to becoming a gay-rights activist was the result of his son coming out. Pat talks about the guilt he feels for creating a homophobic culture in the locker room.

- Check out the project’s website [here](#).



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- How do the experiences of these two men affect their choices now? How have they used those experiences to benefit the You Can Play project?
- Why do you think Pat describes the project as “a shadow of what it would be” if Brendan were involved in it?

### GO DEEPER

There are many groups and organizations that are championing LGBTQ2+ representation, in sport, media, and elsewhere. In this activity, students will be asked to explore one of these groups and the impact they have (or could have) on society and culture.

#### You Can Play project

Be You hashtag (the Canadian Olympic team LGBTQ2+ visibility campaign)

Team Canada One Team Program (they have school resources available for educators as well; just join the team!)



### ACTIVITY 3

Allyship: What does it look like in sports and beyond? Open questions and school plan



Duration: 3 min. 56 sec.



Duration: 5 min. 13 sec.

An LGBTQ2+ ally is defined as “an individual who does not identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ communities, who is supportive of LGBTQ+ communities. Allies believe in the dignity and respect of all people, and are willing to stand up in that role. Allies do not identify as members of the group they are fighting for (e.g., a straight person could be an ally for LGBTQ+ communities; a lesbian could be an ally for trans communities). Allyship is not a status a person can reach, but rather an ongoing commitment to creating more inclusive spaces in an ongoing capacity.”

(Canadian Olympic One Team classroom materials - Must create an account to access this website)

Allyship is integral in creating safe spaces and environments for people of all genders, sexual orientations, and more. In this activity you will be discussing allyship in the context of the film, and then in the larger context of your school or community.

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### QUESTION 1

Start by asking students to brainstorm (in pairs or small groups) on the parts of the film where allies were spoken about or interviewed. Each group could record their ideas on a piece of chart paper or a section of the whiteboard. Ask each group to share one or two of their ideas.

Here are some specific examples they might identify or you might want to bring up:

- Parental acceptance
  - > David Testo's mom: "David's David... [but I'm] worried about how he will be treated growing up in the South."
  - > Anastasia Bucsis's parents' response to her coming out.
- Anastasia's friend Kaylin
- Brock McGillis coaching and acting as a mentor for his players
- Brock describing the parent wanting to set him up on a date... they (players and parents) all knew he was gay and kept coming to him. "This is awesome!"
- Football coach Serge Bourque's attitude toward the sport:
  - > "Everyone should be allowed to play football and feel comfortable playing football."
  - > "[Players should] feel free to be themselves."
  - > "The field should be a place where everyone feels safe."
- Serge Bourque is described by his players as "more like a father than a coach"
- The gay-straight alliance (GSA) group at the high school
  - > "Not just about sexual orientation, but life problems, a place where you won't be judged."
  - > "[People] don't understand the impact their comments can have on someone else."
- The principal of the high school and his commitment to creating a safe community for every student

- Brian Burke, a "hypermasculine man's man," becoming a gay-rights activist because of his love for his son
  - > Kids messaging him to say they wished he were their dad, or asking him if he would help talk to their parents.
- Pat and Brian Burke starting the You Can Play program in memory of Brendan Burke



### QUESTION 2

Allies are so important in creating and maintaining safe spaces for LGBTQ+ youth. As a small or large group, discuss how the allies or instances of allyship in the film positively affected their communities in sport and beyond. Have students focus on specific examples in the film.

### QUESTION 3

As a large group, identify the specific ways that the people identified in the film as allies *acted* like allies. What did they do, say, encourage, or discourage that shaped the culture of the community they were a part of?

### QUESTION 4

Pat Burke discusses his feelings of guilt for not acting as an ally to his younger brother by enabling a homophobic culture in the hockey locker room. Brock McGillis, when speaking about language in the locker room, says, "You could be hurting your best friend. You could be hurting your teammate." Share these two examples, and then ask students to individually consider their own responsibility as allies and reflect on whether or not they have previously acted as allies or have behaviours and habits that they need to change. If you'd like, have them write down their thoughts anonymously, then collect their papers and share them in a large group discussion about personal responsibility.



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### GO DEEPER

After completing the above discussion about allies from the film, have the students consider *your* school or community. Begin by having them consider whether or not your school is a safe place for LGBTQ2+ youth. This can be an individual reflection or a group discussion.

Next, dig into *why* your school is/isn't safe. Are there certain places or people that are unsafe? Are there champion allies in your school who loudly and openly create safer spaces for students?

Lastly, have students collaborate as a class or in groups to create a "Safe School" plan. Have them come up with two to three goals or changes that would make school a safer place. Each goal should be accompanied by a series of steps (a plan) to meet the goal. Ask kids to identify "key players" (people in the building who will be needed to help implement each goal or step in the plan).

As a possible closing activity, have students discuss whether or not their plan (or parts of it) is actually possible in the school right now. If there is student interest, this could be a jumping-off point for executing school change.



### EXTENSION ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION ON IMPOSTER SYNDROME

Imposter syndrome is "a psychological term referring to a pattern of behavior where people doubt their accomplishments and have a persistent, often internalized fear of being exposed as a fraud." – *Psychology Today*

Many of the athletes from ***Standing on the Line*** describe feelings that suggest they're experiencing imposter syndrome, but this experience is not limited to LGBTQ2+ persons or athletes. It is becoming more and more common in young people, affects all genders, and can be debilitating in extreme cases.

Below are a number of resources and suggested activities related to the concept of imposter syndrome, for you to use as you deem appropriate for your group of students. The short descriptions of activities detail who they might be most useful for, so you can tailor a lesson or series of activities specifically for your students.

#### Option 1

After reading the article, have your group look at how imposter syndrome affects people through different lenses (athlete, student, career person, researcher or expert; you could separate into small groups to consider each lens) and answer some related questions:

- How does imposter syndrome affect a person? Mentally, emotionally, socially, in regard to "success," etc.
- Are certain groups affected differently? Do certain groups experience harsher consequences due to other intersecting factors (racial or ethnic minorities, gender groups, LGBTQ2+ groups)?

#### Option 2

Take a look at the causes of imposter syndrome described in the article. Have students in small groups break the causes down into categories and relate them to the stories of the athletes from ***Standing on the Line***. Can they match potential causes to each example?



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### Option 3

Consider the patterns developed by Dr. Valerie Young. Have students consider the five different “types” of people who experience imposter syndrome and match them to the athletes profiled in the film.

A secondary reflection question could be, “Where would you slot yourself in the list of types?”

[This article](#) explores Valerie’s five types in more detail and could be used to guide a more in-depth conversation about specific factors that can lead to imposter syndrome.

Have students connect to [Dr. Valerie Young herself on overcoming IS](#), and then make it personal... have *you* ever suffered this?

- As a teacher, can you share personal experience?
- Can you guide students in identifying these feelings in themselves?

This article digs into “queer imposter syndrome,” or the feeling that one cannot really be gay or be a gay advocate, or that they don’t fit the mould and will be “found out.” This could be a great resource to focus a discussion in a GSA group.

Discuss how this concept is *similar* and *different* from imposter syndrome in general. Here are some other discussion questions:

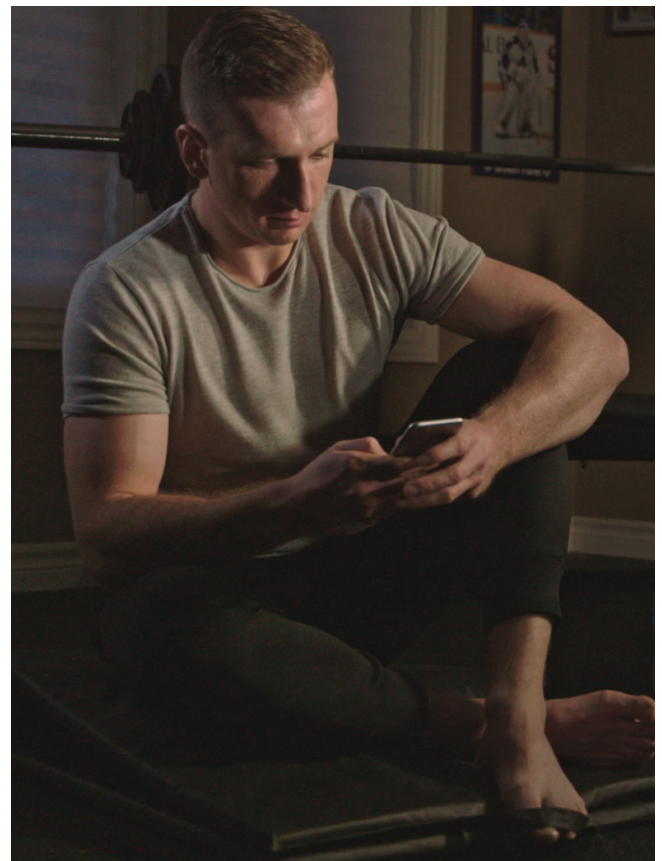
- How would this type of imposter syndrome compound regular imposter syndrome?
- Think about people experiencing multiple types of imposter syndrome at once. How do you think they would be affected differently than a non-LGBTQ2+ person?
- Reading these experiences, why do you think GSAs are important in schools?
- What can we (students and educators) do to support those struggling with queer imposter syndrome?

These are some other personal experiences of those suffering from queer IS:

### [LGBTQ IDENTITY AND IMPOSTOR SYNDROME](#)

#### [Diagnosis: Queer Imposter Syndrome](#)

#### [“What It’s Like to Be a Trans Scientist with Imposter Syndrome”](#)



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### ADDITIONAL ARTICLES ON IMPOSTER SYNDROME

*New York Times* article: [“How to Overcome ‘Impostor Syndrome’”](#)

*This article is female-focused and could be very useful in a girls’ or women’s group.*

The article also has a focus on overcoming imposter syndrome. Read through the strategies described and discuss whether they are applicable in athletics, in school life, and in the world at large. You could break into small discussion groups, turn these steps into infographics or posters, or do an activity where students have to find a creative way of encouraging people to try the listed strategies.

The article opens with a personal anecdote; discuss the author’s experience. Does it sound familiar? How did IS affect her life?

*The Cut* article: [“What Is Imposter Syndrome, Anyway?”](#)

#### Discussion questions

Consider the author’s description of her student days. Can you relate her experience to your life as a student right now? How would IS negatively affect you in different areas of your life?

Wilding says that one of the most important negative side effects is low self-confidence, which can lead to depression, anxiety, and exhaustion: *“A lot of times with imposter syndrome, people will overcompensate with overperforming to the point where they really almost hurt themselves, damage themselves physically. Because they’re trying to compensate for that or kind of keep up with this image that they think they have to project.”*

- What are some of the greater effects of low self-confidence?
- How would these effects impact high-level athletes? Can you think of examples from the film that demonstrate these effects?

*MindTools* article: [“Impostor Syndrome: Facing Fears of Inadequacy or Self-Doubt”](#)

“Impostor syndrome has long been thought to affect more women than men.”

Discuss the gendered implications of imposter syndrome. Does this view still hold true according to research?

Were the experiences of the athletes different based on their gender, or did the unifying fact of being an LGBTQ2+ minority overpower the usual gendered effects?

- [“Studies of impostor syndrome](#) show that men are just as likely as women to feel like they aren’t qualified for their jobs—they just aren’t as likely to talk about it.” [Forbes article](#)

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Linked in the lesson:

[Mentimeter word cloud creator](#)

[The Trevor Project](#) (suicide facts and prevention)

[“Why Visibility Matters”](#) (*Psychology Today*)

The impact of the rise of LGBTQ+ representation in the media

[You Can Play Project](#)

[Be You](#) hashtag (the Canadian Olympic team LGBTQ2+ visibility campaign)

[Team Canada One Team Program](#) (they have school resources available for educators as well; just join the team!)

#### For Teachers

[SOGI 1 2 3](#)

“SOGI 1 2 3 helps educators make schools inclusive and safe for students of all sexual orientations and gender identities (SOGI). At a SOGI-inclusive school, students’ biological sex does not limit their interests and opportunities, and their sexual orientation and how they understand and express their gender are welcomed without discrimination.”

The Trevor Project [Education Program for Allies](#)

[Every Teacher Project](#)

[Canadian Olympic One Team classroom materials](#)  
(Must create an account to access this website)



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### [Canada Pride](#)

[Sexual & Gender Identity](#) (teachingsexualhealth.ca); this is a great set of resources for parents.

### [Advocates for Youth Educator Resources](#)

### For Students

#### [It Gets Better Project](#)

“Watch an endless stream of inspiring stories shared by people just like you. Visit our Get Help page to find LGBTQ+ youth support services in your community. Or, sign our pledge to commit to a world where all LGBTQ+ young people are free to live equally and know their worthiness and power as individuals!”

#### [Coming Out Resource Guides](#) (Human Rights Campaign)

#### [Coming Out](#) ([pride.com](#))

### [Canada Pride](#)

### Related NFB films:

[Love, Scott](#) (Directed by Laura Marie Wayne, 2018, 96 min)

[I Like Girls](#) (Directed by Diane Obomsawin, 2016, 8 min)

[Universe Within: Guangzhou](#) (Directed by Katerina Cizek, 2015, 3 min)

[Last Chance](#) (Directed by Paul Émile d'Entremont, 2012, 85 min)

[Cure for Love](#) (Directed by Francine Pelletier and Christina Willings, 2008, 59 min)

[Zero Degrees of Separation](#) (Directed by Elle Flanders, 2005, 90 min)

[Apples and Oranges](#) (Directed by Lynne Fernie, 2003, 17 min)

[Open Secrets](#) (Directed by José Torrealba, 2003, 52 min)

[In Other Words](#) (Directed by Jan Padgett, 2001, 27 min)

[One of Them](#) (Directed by Elise Swerhone, 2000, 26 min)

[When Love Is Gay](#) (Directed by Laurent Gagliardi, 1995, 49 min)

### CREDIT

This guide was written by Alyssa de Leon, a secondary school Science teacher from Edmonton, Alberta. She is passionate about tabletop RPGs and board games, cooking (especially tacos) and painting. She co-runs the GSA at her school and fills the role of learning support teacher, both of which bring her into contact with a lot of students struggling with discovering their personal identities and sexuality. Her passion in education resides in engaging with and supporting her students as they learn about themselves and discover what it means to be a human in the world today. She also enjoys outdoor pursuits like rock climbing, hiking, and camping, as well as ultimate frisbee.

