

Challenging the stereotypes of the prejudiced in Sport



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I'm Gay

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Challenging and overcoming stereotyping is key to tackling homophobia, just as it is for racism and sexism. Why do the prejudiced stereotype others? Because they fear the challenge posed to their conditioned thinking about fellow human beings, who, because they differ in some way to themselves, seemingly threaten – through merely existing – their own inherited and acquired prejudices that ultimately make them incomplete and unhappy individuals pushed about by the self-harmful emotion of hate.

Interest or participation in Sport/athletics and the pursuit of fitness and related good health unite all peoples across the world. The pursuit of excellence for practitioners in the former being mirrored by respect and admiration by viewers/spectators and fans, whilst enjoyment of the latter brings more immediate rewards in terms of lifestyle and health.

Great and very welcome progress is being made at government and major sports bodies levels to combat homophobia in sport, and the accompanying pdf provides details of these. However, for these top down initiatives and directives to succeed they will need to address one key issue above all others for meaningful change to occur.

Challenging and removal of stereotyping is key to tackling homophobia, just as it is for racism and sexism. Why do the prejudiced stereotype others? Because they fear the challenge posed to their inherited and conditioned thinking about those whose very existence seems to threaten all they cherish as core to their individual and group identities.

Note: Please also see the 'What is in a word/label' section, at the end of this article, to better appreciate how deeply ensnared the prejudiced can be through the stereotype/labelling phenomenon and its implications for them.

Ever Decreasing Circles: The self-defeating character of homophobia

In seeking to deny the reality of diversity/individuality [race, gender, sexual orientation] in others, by labelling them in denigrating and inaccurate ways, the prejudiced steadily diminish their own identities, restricting themselves to living life through a very limited set of confrontational opinions and aggressive behaviour entirely removed from the perfectionist and inclusive ethos of sport.

Ironically, sportspersons and fans who are heterosexual but inclusive-minded and LGBT sportspersons and fans, interrelate harmoniously, whilst the former have only the slightest connection with homophobic (and invariably, racist and sexist) sportspeople/fans. The latter are prisoners of their own time-warped prejudiced thinking that connects them not with sport per se, but with lynch-mob and witch-hunt mentalities of pre-Enlightenment kinds.

This is seen directly in abusive names said in children's playground-type cowardly asides, or shouted from the relative anonymity of football stadium benches. However, an ever-growing majority of sportspeople and fans and broader society have only increasing contempt for the sexist, racist and homophobic outbursts of those who follow a 'the women's place is in the kitchen [or in semi-nude tabloid press images], and 'gay people aren't capable of being sportsmen, because they aren't Real men' world view. 'Real men and real women' are of course socially competent, self-respecting and inclusive – people who contribute to society and on this basis cannot be so personally insecure as to countenance or engage in behaviour governed by prejudices and related discriminatory conditioned thinking that they enslaved by.

The increasing running out of patience of all but the most homophobic/racist/sexist – 'me Tarzan, you Jane' philosophy of life – inclined individuals, has led to a further challenging of more subtle stereotyping, and also to positive input from lesbian and gay people themselves. LGBT sportspeople have, for instance, formed professional and amateur level sports associations from international to local levels, and even created tournaments/competitions in which they display their sports skills: the common denominators being love for and practice of sports in contexts free of discrimination.

This phenomenon is an indictment of the recurrently proven disinterest – perhaps strengthened by sections of the UK tabloid press that pander for commercial reasons to the prejudiced – of some elements within particular sports to tackle this issue (and that of sexism or racism) with any sense of urgency or seriousness.

It is a testimony of devotion to those sports amongst many lesbian and gay people that prejudice by the ignorant has not turned them from them: the Gay Football Supporters Network [GFSN] is an example of this, amongst many others including at international level (The Gay Games – <http://www.london2018.info/history/index.html>).

This said, it is recorded that whilst 60% of LGBT people with interest in sport maintain their enthusiasm despite discrimination designed to make them feel unwelcome, 40% are discouraged – meaning that unchallenged bullying carries a heavy cost to sport in terms of loss of dedicated supporters and potential amateur and professional level athletes and players from the LGBT community in the UK.

Lesbian and gay people and the interconnection of sport and fitness:

The reverse of stereotyping by the prejudiced/intolerant, is the development of a broader awareness by non LGBT people, of the interconnection of many lesbian and gay people with health and fitness that relates to yet extends far beyond sport itself. Many LGBT people are passionate about fitness and keeping healthy, this can include through sports (team or other) whilst working out at gyms is especially popular. In addition, many lesbian and gay people enjoy exercise through activities such as power-walking, and nature- outdoor pursuits such as rambling, etc: there are now groups and professional trainer-led businesses that actively encourage participation by LGBT people with interests in keeping fit in the outdoors/countryside sociable and friendly group exercise activities.

Martial arts:

The practice of martial arts for self-defence by gay men (and also by women who have experienced sexism and heterosexual male aggression) who have suffered homophobic bullying, is a distinct phenomenon, yet only one aspect of the passion they have for these arts which involve both strenuous exercise for fitness, and an ethos of self-discipline and advanced level techniques. Martial arts [especially traditional ones] have an ethos of self-mastery and good character development, and the type of fitness and stamina training involved is renowned for its rigour. Martial arts clubs and schools have a long history of being 'anti-bully' and are celebrated for being welcoming to LGBT people, women, and those from ethnic minorities. It is significant that they also embody the finest element in sport, namely mastery of technique and perfectionism – they have a record of all sports and fitness pursuits, of being the least tolerant of the anti-social and racist, homophobic and sexist.

What is in a word/label?

The extreme homophobe is, it can be convincingly argued on the basis of evidence, a latent murderer and psychopath, as such horrific revelations highlight detailed above illustrate. The recent 'crucifixion' of a young gay man in America, whose sadistic killers were influenced by religious fundamentalist anti-gay hate, provides a further proof of this dangerous latent tendency.



Matthew Shepard
see link below

The origin of the pejorative term 'faggot' for a gay person is often forgot (or unknown) to many, including the prejudiced who use it in not being able to come to terms with non-heterosexuality. It in fact derives from faggots of wood used to burn heretics, gay people, Jewish people and dissenters to death by religious fundamentalist hate possessed lynch mobs and witch hunters in pre-secular/pre-Enlightenment times. Hence the word explains all too clearly the interconnection of homophobia and a particular form of exclusivist religion, also responsible for so many other forms of division in our world, past and present.

This is a very important anti-discrimination/furtherance of mature citizenship point. The prejudiced [homophobic] who use the term 'fag' to describe LGBT people DO need some help in being enlightened as to the actual significance of their adolescent-level and perhaps peer and family inherited use of this term. They almost certainly do not realise that in effect through its use they are aligning themselves with 'people' in past times who enjoyed the hate and fear-of-difference driven act of murder/torture and human sacrifice – burning people to death is not a splendid or credible act or demonstration of spirituality [or the actual value of exclusivist religious beliefs] after all?

When we hear the term 'fag' used we have to reflect that the person using it is one who aligns him/herself to human sacrifice – barbarous values and murder in other words. This realisation is very helpful in being able to differentiate the character and social and spiritual credibility of the prejudiced person from that of the mature and inclusive one.

The following links deal with harrowing subject matter, but are nevertheless beneficial in terms of alerting those possessed by the error and character defect of where discrimination and stereotyping can ultimately lead. They are included to help those who discriminate to see their anti-social and ultimately personally insecure behaviour in through stereotype name-calling, making the lives of others who have never done them any harm [except to be 'different' to their own limited outlooks on different grounds] difficult or much worse.

Norway tragedy experience (an example of an individual with an exclusivist world view who was ultimately influenced by inherited stereotype views about those who didn't fit into his very and sadly limited view of 'how the world should be'):

<http://uk.news.yahoo.com/breivik-trial-survivors-face-norwegian-killer-011941052.html>

The Matthew Shepard tragedy:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthew_Shepard

<http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/shepard.html>

Supportive material and links

The following links and articles are provided to give some contexts for the issues covered on this section of the exhibition material.

Please also view the Appendices pdf for details of Dr Ian Jones (Deputy Dean of the Bournemouth University Sports faculty) concerning the dynamics of stereotyping and discrimination, and the approach to these when encountered by UK higher education establishments such as Bournemouth University.

FA and Premier League slammed by fans for failure to tackle anti-gay abuse

http://www.stonewall.org.uk/media/current_releases/3506.asp

Leagues Behind – Football's Failure to Tackle Anti-Gay Abuse:

http://www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/leagues_behind.pdf

We're against homophobia and transphobia in sport - are you?

Source: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/media-centre/news/fair-play>

Government launches action plan to tackle homophobia and trans-phobia - sign up to the Facebook page today!

Some of the UK's biggest sports bodies are backing a new government campaign to stamp out homophobia and trans-phobia in sport.

The Football Association, the England and Wales Cricket Board, the Rugby Football League, the Rugby Football Union and the Lawn Tennis Association, joined the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) in becoming the first signatories of the 'Charter for Action'.

The charter has four main statements of intent:

- everyone should be able to participate in and enjoy sport.
- sport is about fairness and equality, respect and dignity
- we will work together to rid sport of homophobia and transphobia
- we will make sport a welcome place for everyone

Equalities minister Lynne Featherstone said: 'Homophobia and transphobia has no place in sport and I'm delighted that so many sporting bodies are backing our campaign to stamp it out.'

'Sport should be about what you can do, not who you are. But too many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people feel that the sports field is not somewhere they can be themselves, and that prejudice and discrimination will mean their sexuality is always talked about more than their ability with a ball, bat or racket.'

It's not just governing bodies that are welcome to sign up to the Charter. It's also open to leagues, teams, and individual participants and spectators

Gay Football Supporters Network:

<http://www.gfsn.org.uk/>

GFSN Welcomes Premier League Clubs Signing Anti-homophobia Charter

The Gay Football Supporters' Network welcomes the Premier League Clubs signing the Government's Charter Against Homophobia & Transphobia In Sport today. Whilst many amateur and Football League teams have already signed and supported the Charter, we are encouraged to see participation from the members of the world's most popular football league. As representatives of many [...]

Kick It Out LGBT Blog

A blog from Kick It Out celebrating LGBT History Month 2011

The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) has a vision to use the power of the Games to inspire lasting change.

Visible at every level of our organisation, from reception to our board, the LGBT community is playing a big part in our work. There are many openly gay women and men leading teams and working to help stage the UK's biggest peacetime event ever.

Our Strategy Director Sue Hunt is the Games' LGBT Champion, and her LGBT working group is leading our Games-time LGBT inclusion project, designed to increase LGBT visibility and inclusion. We intend to bring together LGBT sports groups and National Governing Bodies to challenge homophobia in sport.

The three main ways in which we are contributing to LGBT inclusion are through leadership in sport, leadership in the workplace and leadership in business.

We have developed a London 2012 LGBT Pride Pin Badge and we are the first organisation in the UK to achieve the Advanced Level of the Equality Standard for Sport.

Why Steven Davies' coming out won't cure homophobia



Journalist Adrian Tippetts has written extensively on gay rights issues and homophobia within football. He discusses the possible impact of cricketer Steven Davies' coming out earlier this week.

Note: underlined sentences not in original article, but included for emphasis because of relevance to non-sport related costs of discrimination too.

Is football ready for an openly gay player? That is Fleet Street's burning question after Steven Davies' decision to come out this week.

Of one thing we can be sure: we can't use Justin Fashanu's experience as a guide. The timing, manner of and reaction to Davies' declaration shows society's attitudes have improved lots in 20 years.

For a high profile star to feel empowered to come out at the peak, rather than the twilight, of his career is a first in itself; but that his story should be told with compassion, sensitivity and maturity in the Sun, the very newspaper that for years ridiculed and demonised gay people, must astonish even the most ardent activist.

Davies will bring hope and inspiration to many young gay people, desperate for a positive role model at a critical time in their lives. I hate to spoil the party, but one out celebrity will do little to make sport a welcoming place for gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender people, which is what we should be focusing on.

We are far from that goal. For all the talk of diversity and equality, football in particular seems locked in the 1950's when it comes to social attitudes.

The only people who can change this are the Football Association administrators and the clubs. To appreciate what needs to be done, we have to understand a few truths about human nature.

First, homosexuality is a natural, innate, harmless trait that has been around longer than the birth of our species, and there will always be a small percentage of the population attracted to the same sex.

Statistics tell us there will be gay players at most major clubs across the country. Secondly, the notion that someone's sexual orientation is 'their own business and no-one else's' is false, and cruel.

Studies show that people who are not open about their sexuality will underperform and will be more prone to emotional problems such as depression. Our sexuality is an essential part of our lives.

It determines the most important relationships we will ever have. For our own well-being, we need those who matter most to us to give us support and encouragement and approval in our relationships.

Imagine living through a whole career, unable even to talk about who you went to the cinema with at the weekend, never mind having no soulmate to talk a problem over with. We'd go bonkers if we lived like that.

There's a more pressing reason though. Those who are unable to be open are most likely to seek help when they need it most. Homophobic bullying is not just the preserve of schools.

Only 15 years ago, Graeme le Saux's life was made a misery by Premier League teammates, egged on by the manager, on account of his intellectual and artistic interests. And Chelsea went out of their way to hire Luiz Felipe Scolari, on record as declaring he'd root out gays in the game.

Silence on this issue ruins careers and team morale. Change has to start at the top, and percolate down to the local leagues. There needs to be a determination to root out homophobia in every club.

No player should expect to be exposed to derogatory name-calling. Staff must make it clear to players, at all levels, that there's always someone to offer support, especially for youth team members who are most likely to have insecurities about their sexuality.

Clubs should actively encourage players to be open and have a disciplinary policy against homophobia that is spelt out to everybody, including training staff and referees.

And fans who routinely incite hatred on the pitch or on the website forum should be expelled from the game, if not prosecuted, just as we would do to racists and hooligans.