

Five-Year Cohort Study of White British Male Student-Athletes' Attitudes Toward Gay Men

Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education

Rory Magrath
Solent University, Southampton

John Batten
University of Winchester

Eric Anderson
University of Winchester

Adam J. White
Oxford Brookes University

Abstract

While sport has traditionally been a hostile environment for gay men, attitudes toward homosexuality among youth in the West have changed significantly in recent years. This research uses Herek's *Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale, Revised Version* (ATLG-R) to investigate attitudes toward homosexuality among 243 undergraduate male students in the UK. Overall, results revealed no significant differences in student attitudes toward gay men in the first three years of data collection, but significantly more positive attitudes onward from the fourth. Overall, incoming attitudinal dispositions of homophobia among young male student-athletes were minimal. Anderson's notion of inclusive masculinities is used to explain these findings, with the results supporting existing literature concerning positive attitudes toward homosexuality among young, sporting men in the UK.

Keywords: homosexuality; homophobia; higher education; inclusive masculinity, sport, ALTG

Introduction

To date, there is only one quantitative study investigating British heterosexual male student-athletes' attitudes toward homosexuality in sport. That research – conducted by Bush, Anderson and Carr (2012) at a prestigious British university – examined student attitudes about having a gay teammate, gay coach, as well as sharing the locker-room space with gay men. Questionnaires were distributed to 216 heterosexual male students from a range of sports when they began their studies, with results indicating that there was very little homophobia upon entering the university and upon graduation. This led the authors to write that “it is no longer sociologically responsible to generalize all sports, and all men who play them as homophobic. Increasingly, it appears to be the opposite” (2012, p. 116). The present article serves as a compendium to the work of Bush, Anderson and Carr (2012) in that it extends the study in four ways.

First, the focus of the questions was revised. Specifically, rather than asking an athlete how they would feel about having a gay teammate – knowing that qualitative research shows that, in sport, athletic capital trumps sexual orientation (see Anderson, 2009) – it was determined that a more appropriate method of assessing athletes' levels of homophobia would be to question them about gay men in general. This approach is in line with other survey research that has examined for changes in attitudes toward homosexuality in general (e.g., Watt & Elliot, 2019). Second, the determination to measure athletes' attitudes toward homosexuality more broadly – and not just in sport – provided the opportunity to use a previous instrument measured for reliability and validity. Accordingly, this research – unlike Bush, Anderson and Carr (2012) – used Herek's (1988) *Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale, Revised Version* (ATLG-R).

Third, this research was conducted with athletes from a British university renowned for its on-going commitment to ‘widening participation’ⁱ—representing a different socio-economic background compared to the athletes examined by Bush, Anderson and Carr (2012). Finally, by

examining attitudes toward gay men with quantitative data, this study adds to a plethora of recent qualitative research that highlights a significant decline in cultural homophobia in a range of sport settings (Anderson, 2011a; Anderson, Magrath & Bullingham, 2016; Cashmore & Cleland, 2012; Magrath, 2017, 2021). The use of a quantitative research methodology also helps with the collection of data from a larger sample, at multiple points in time, in order to describe and examine social attitudes that might be generalizable to a larger population.

Accordingly, this longitudinal research – conducted over a five-year period – should provide a foundation from which future researchers can investigate other aspects of teamsport culture in the UK. Results also have the potential to improve research methodologies designed to investigate sexual orientation attitudes, initiate policy discussions related to athletes’ sexual orientations, as well as aiding in the development of educational programs to encourage the acceptance of diverse athletic populations.

Homophobia in Sport: From Hostility to Inclusivity

The antecedents of today’s sporting culture can be traced to the years of the second Industrial Revolution—the mid-1800s through early-1900s. At this time, men’s competitive teamsports were thought to reverse an apparent ‘crisis’ of masculinity; one characterized by a moral panic of the softening of boys’ virility (Filene, 1975). Participation in sport provided boys and men with the opportunity to align their “gendered behaviors with an idealized and narrow definition of masculinity” (McCormack & Anderson, 2014, p. 114). This was generally characterized by behaviors such as muscularity, symbolic and actualized violence, as well as emotional stoicism (Anderson, 2009). Indeed, sport provided boys with a “clear hierarchical structure, autocratic tendencies, traditional notions of masculinity and the need for discipline” (Carter, 2006, p. 5). The reinforcement of masculinity also led to near-compulsory heterosexuality through the

creation of a homophobic sporting culture, thus largely excluding gay men (and other members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender – LGBT – community) (Pronger, 1990).

Almost a century later, in the 1980s, sport once again took on renewed cultural significance. At this time, conservative political responses to the AIDS crisis – especially in the UK and the US – demonized the gay community (Weeks, 1991), who were blamed for the spread of the virus and pathologized as ‘viral assassins’ (Peterson, 2011). This elevated deleterious attitudes toward homosexuality in the West to an all-time high by the end of the decade. In the UK, the British Social Attitude Survey (BSAS) showed that, in 1983, 62% of the population believed same-sex sex between two consenting adults was ‘always wrong’ or ‘mostly wrong’; four years later, in 1987, this combined figure had increased to 75% (Clements & Field, 2014). Similar trends were also evident in the US (Twenge, Sherman & Wells, 2016).

Given this hostile environment, gay men at this time tended to avoid mainstream sport, hide their sexual orientation (e.g. Pronger, 1990), or restrict themselves to participation in gay-only sports leagues (Elling, De Knop & Knoppers, 2003). Unsurprisingly, researchers who examined the relationship between gay men and sport throughout the 1980s and 1990s largely agreed that sport existed as a hostile environment. For instance, Pronger (1990, p. 26) wrote that, “Many of the [gay] men I interviewed said they were uncomfortable with team-sports.” Similarly, Hekma (1998, p. 2) wrote that, “Gay men who are seen as queer and effeminate are granted no space whatsoever in what is generally considered to be a masculine preserve and macho enterprise.” And Curry (1991, p. 130) found that, “Not only is being homosexual forbidden, but tolerance of homosexuality is theoretically off limits as well.” Accordingly, men’s team sports in the Western world represented an institution through which a dominant – hegemonic – form of masculinity was both established and celebrated (Connell, 1987).

Other social institutions outside of sport were equally as intolerant of homosexuality. For example, in their analysis of over 200 US university freshmen, D’Augelli and Rose (1990) showed that almost half believed gay men were ‘disgusting’ and that same-sex sexual activity was wrong. Almost a third of their sample also claimed to prefer a college environment with only straight men. Herek’s (1988) large-scale quantitative research with heterosexual undergraduate students across US universities documented comparable levels of hostility. This climate was also evident in the UK; indeed, Epstein, O’Flynn and Telford (2004) described the British university campus as “threateningly straight,” and a space where ‘other’ sexual orientations were treated as abnormal and deviant. Other research of the time also shows the prevalence of homophobia across university campuses (e.g., Kurdek, 1988; Love, 1998).

But, more recently, Western societies have witnessed a liberalization of attitudes toward sexual minorities. Watt and Elliot’s (2019) recent analysis of British Social Attitude Surveys led them to conclude that “homonegativity amongst Britons has fallen dramatically over recent decades” (p. 1113). Evidencing this, the most recent British Social Attitude Survey – in 2019 – showed that only 16% of those sampled believed same-sex sex to be ‘always wrong’ or ‘mostly wrong’—down almost 60% from three decades previous. Attitudes toward homosexuality have also improved in the US, so much so that Keleher and Smith (2012, p. 1324) describe “a sweeping change in attitudes towards lesbians and gay men.” Twenge, Sherman and Wells’ (2016) analysis of US social survey data also shows an increase of same-sex sexual experiences due to the removal of stigma attached to these behaviors.

Despite frequent – and ongoing – claims to the contrary (e.g., Storr, 2020), there is also a considerable body of evidence that shows a decline of homophobia in sport. This first began to emerge almost two decades ago, when Anderson (2002) conducted the first-ever research with ‘out’ gay athletes in mainstream sport. Prior to disclosing their sexuality to teammates, these

athletes reported that they were anxious about social exclusion and verbal and/or physical abuse. Post-coming out, however, these concerns were not realized for the majority of the sample; many regretted not coming out sooner. When this research was replicated almost a decade later, Anderson (2011a) found even greater social inclusion of gay athletes. This included a reduction of the “don’t ask, don’t tell” culture, inclusion of gay athletes in the team’s social activities, and the acceptance of same-sex partners. Since pioneering research on the inclusion of gay male athletes, a number of studies have documented similar levels of inclusion (Anderson, Magrath & Bullingham, 2016; Letts, 2020; Magrath, 2020).

Support from heterosexual peers toward the presence of homosexuality in sport has also improved considerably (e.g., Gaston & Dixon, 2020; Lawless & Magrath, 2021). Anderson’s (2011b) research with a university football team in the US showed that these men were supportive of gay rights, eschewed violence, and enjoyed open and intimate friendships with one another. Similarly, Adams’ (2011) ethnographic research among a US college football team found inclusive attitudes toward sexual minorities, with athletes challenging orthodox notions of masculinity. In England, Magrath’s (2017) research with elite young footballers in Premier League Academies documented more positive attitudes compared with older research emanating from this level of play (e.g., Parker, 1996): whereby players were broadly supportive of homosexuality and the introduction of same-sex marriage. Thus, Magrath, Anderson and Roberts (2015, p. 819) contended that, without direct contact with a gay teammate, this research “serves as a roadmap for when one of their teammates actually does come out.” Even research on sports fandom – a demographic which has traditionally been stigmatized as homophobic – shows that tolerant attitudes toward homosexuality have become commonplace (Cashmore & Cleland, 2012; Cleland, 2015; Cleland, Magrath & Kian, 2018; Magrath, 2018).

Quantitative analyses of sport and sexuality have also yielded similar levels of inclusivity. For example, in a survey of nearly 700 college athletes, Southall *et al.* (2009) showed that 72% of male participants espoused inclusive attitudes toward homosexuality. They argue that this is “evidence that the male intercollegiate culture may no longer be a uniform bastion of cultural and institutional homophobia” (2009, p. 74). And in the UK, Bush, Anderson and Carr’s (2012) research – discussed earlier in this article – indicated that the attitudinal dispositions of homophobia decreased from minimal (upon entrance to the university) to virtually non-existent upon graduating three years later. Accordingly, while sport in the 1980s was characterized by extreme homophobia, more recent evidence shows that young men in particular are rapidly losing their homophobia.

Theorizing Contemporary Masculinities

Hegemonic Masculinity Theory (HMT) has been the most prominent theoretical framework underpinning the social stratification of masculinity in the Western world (Connell, 1995). Articulating two social processes – (1) that all men benefit from patriarchy; and (2) the recognition of multiple masculinities which exist in an intra-masculine hierarchy – Connell’s theorizing has been widely cited in research on sport, masculinities, and sexualities (e.g., Bryson, 1987; Light & Kirk, 2000). Given the changing nature of contemporary masculinities, however, numerous scholars have critiqued HMT’s effectiveness in capturing the social dynamics of young men (Demetriou, 2001; Hearn, 2004; Howson, 2006). And despite attempts to reformulate and reconfigure HMT (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), Anderson’s (2009) Inclusive Masculinity Theory (IMT) has since emerged as a successful alternative to understand male peer group cultures across the Western world (Anderson & McCormack, 2015).

IMT initially emerged from research that examined attitudes toward homosexuality among heterosexual sporting men (Anderson, 2009). Departing from the findings of previous research with heterosexual sporting men (e.g., Curry, 1991; Pronger, 1990), men in these studies espoused positive attitudes toward homosexuality, as well as embracing gay athletes onto their teams as equals (Anderson, Magrath & Bullingham, 2016). This body of research also shows that young men reject homophobia (Adams, Anderson & McCormack, 2010); include gay peers in friendship networks (Anderson, 2011a), eschew violence and bullying (Anderson, 2011b), are physically tactile (Anderson & McCormack, 2015), and enjoy emotionally open and intimate friendships with other men (Robinson, Anderson & White, 2018).

Central to IMT is the concept of ‘homohysteria’, which seeks to explain the power dynamics of heterosexual masculinities within a historical frame. The concept is, perhaps, best defined as a “homosexually-panicked culture in which suspicion [of homosexuality] permeates” (Anderson, 2011b, p. 83). A culture is homohysterical if it meets three social conditions: (1) the culture maintains antipathy and hostility toward gay men; (2) there is mass awareness that gay people exist in significant numbers in that culture; and (3) the cultural belief that gender and sexuality are conflated. When such conditions are met, homophobia is used as a tool to police gender, as men fear the stigma of being socially perceived as gay. Homohysteria is central to understanding IMT because it is the concept that enables an explanation of social change (Anderson, 2009).

As social change with respect to attitudes toward sexual minorities continues to take hold on British (and other Western) culture(s), IMT has evolved into a theory that presents a useful means for conceptualizing contemporary masculinities (Magrath & Scoats, 2019). Since its publication at the end of the previous decade, it has been used in a broad range of settings, including athletes (Anderson, Magrath & Bullingham, 2016), sports fans (Cashmore & Cleland,

2012; Magrath, 2018, 2021), education (McCormack, 2012), and the workplace (Magrath, 2020; Roberts, 2013). It has also seen a significant take-up in contemporary masculinities research, with the fourth wave of masculinities research having been described as “Andersonian” (Borkowska, 2020). There is, therefore – according to Magrath and Scoats (2019) – sufficient evidence to argue that a new generation of masculinities scholars are finding IMT the most effective means of capturing the complex masculine dynamics between men.

Methods

Participants

Participants in this research consisted of 243 heterosexual male undergraduate sports students. All participants were studying at a British university located in the South of England. Each of the participants in the present research identified as White British; however, it is important to note that another research article, published in *Sport in Society*, focuses on the results of non-White students (Magrath, Batten, Anderson & White, 2020). The approach to present this data separately was adopted because of a significant variance in attitudes toward homosexuality among Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) student-athletes (e.g., Magrath, Batten, Anderson & White, 2020; Baunach, Burgess & Muse, 2009), which required a more comprehensive exploration.

The mean age of participants was 20 years old ($SD = 3$ years), with 93% of participants studying on single-honors degree programs ($n = 227$), while the remaining 7% of participants were enlisted on combined-honors degree programs ($n = 16$). All participants were studying for sports-related degrees. 98% of participants were full-time students ($n = 238$), with the remainder studying on a part-time basis ($n = 5$). All participants in this research self-identified as ‘exclusively heterosexual’ (see Savin-Williams, 2017) and were actively competing in a variety

of individual and/or team sports.

Measures

Students' attitudes toward homosexuality were measured using Herek's (1988) *Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale, Revised Version* (ATLG-R). This scale is a measure of heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay men and women, and consists of 20 items that assess affective responses to homosexuality, gay men, and lesbians. Ten items reference lesbians (ATL subscale) and 10 items reference gay men (ATG subscale). Participants respond to each item in the ATLG-R on a nine-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 9 = strongly agree). Seven items of the ATLG-R are reverse scored; thus, a higher score indicates greater homonegativism. Accordingly, overall scores can range from between 20 to 180 for the full scale and 10 to 90 for the subscales.

We note here that due to recent improvements in social and legal equality for sexual minorities in the UK (and other parts of the Western world, too), some items in the ATLG-R used in this research were either amended or removed. For instance, 'State laws regulating private, consenting lesbian behavior should be abolished' was entirely removed to reflect British law. Similarly, the question 'The growing number of lesbians indicates a decline in American morals' was reworded from 'American' to 'British' to reflect the country of data collection. Overall, then, this resulted in a total of nine items for the ATL subscale, 10 items for the ATG subscale, and 19 items for the ATLG-R.

To ensure that the ATL, ATG, and ATLG-R remained valid and reliable measures of students' attitudes toward homosexuality, further variants of these questionnaires were also produced (see <http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/rainbow/html/atlg.html>). These variants included parallel forms of each subscale that facilitated comparison between participants' attitudes toward

gay men and their attitudes toward lesbians. Scores on the original subscales were not directly comparable due to the use of differently worded items. Accordingly, items on the ATG were revised to refer to lesbians, creating ATL Part 1 and ATL Part 2 variants. Scores for these two subscales were then added to create the ATL Total variant. The same process was repeated for student attitudes toward gay men, whereby items on the ATG were revised to refer to gay men.

This created the ATG Part 1, ATG Part 2, and ATG Total variants used in this study. Student scores on the ATL Part 1 and ATG Part 1 were then added to create the ATLG Part 1 variant, and student scores on the ATL Part 2 and ATG Part 2 added to create the ATLG Part 2 variant. ATLG Total scores were calculated by adding student scores on the ATLG Part 1 and ATLG Part 2 variants. Total scores ranged from nine to 81, 10 to 90, 19 to 171, nine to 81, 10 to 90, 19 to 171, 18 to 162, 20 to 180, and 38 to 342, for the ATL Part 1, ATL Part 2, ATL Total, ATG Part 1, ATG Part 2, ATG Total, ATLG Part 1, ATLG Part 2, and ATLG Total variants, respectively.

In an analysis of the ATLG-R scale, Herek (1998) reported that, along with its subscales, the ATLG-R has high levels of internal consistency, with acceptable alpha levels for the subscales (> 0.85) and for the full scale (> 0.90) among samples of college students. Herek (1998) also reported acceptable full-scale test and re-test reliability (0.90) after three weeks with a student sample. Importantly for research on sport and sexuality, scores on the ATLG were not linked to socially desirable response sets. Although Herek (1998) reworded five items from the original ATLG to update their content or clarify their meaning, there is no indication that these have changed the psychometric properties of the ATLG-R (e.g., Rosik, 2007). Correlations between all of the variants used in the present study further demonstrated the convergent validity (Marsh, 2002) of the ATLG-R (all were > 0.70).

Procedures

On the first day of attendance at university in each Autumn over a five-year periodⁱⁱ, incoming students completed the ATLG-R, under normative university examination policies and procedures, sitting at least one space apart. This removed the risk of collusion in students' overall responses. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured for all participants. Ethical approval was provided by each authors' respective institutionsⁱⁱⁱ. All ethical guidelines of the British Sociological Association (BSA) were followed throughout the research process.

Analysis

Given that the aim of this study was to examine White British heterosexual male undergraduate sports students' attitudes toward gay men over a five-year period, only data from the ATG Part 1, ATG Part 2, and ATG Total variants were examined in this study. Data from the other ATL and ATLG-R variants will be examined in future research. Moreover, given that attitudes toward homosexuality were more conservative among non-White men, this research is examined elsewhere (Magrath, Batten, Anderson & White, 2020).

Prior to the further exploration of this data set, the assumptions that underpin tests for difference were examined. Specifically, Shapiro-Wilk's tests revealed violations of normal distribution (as $p < 0.05$) for all variables, while Box-Whisker diagrams revealed there to be nine univariate outliers within the data. Although it has been suggested to remove univariate outliers to ensure data are normally distributed (e.g., Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001), Orr, Sackett and DuBois (1991) state that when an outlier is either a legitimate part of the data or the cause is unclear, data are more likely to be representative of the population as a whole if outliers are not removed. Additionally, while Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances was significant ($p < 0.05$) for ATG Part 1 scores, ATG Part 2, and ATG Total scores were not significant ($p > 0.05$) -

indicating homogeneity of variance across the five years. However, Field (2013) states that the use of non-parametric tests eliminates the effects of outliers. Thus, Kruskal-Wallis tests for difference were used to examine students' attitudes toward gay men. The dependent variables for this study were ATG Part 1, ATG Part 2, and ATG Total scores, while the independent variable for this study was year of data collection. In the event of a significant difference, follow-up post-hoc analyses were performed. All statistical analyses were computed using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results

Descriptive statistics for students' attitudes toward gay men for each year of data collection are depicted in Table 1. Kruskal-Wallis tests for difference revealed significant differences in students' attitudes toward gay men for ATG Part 1 scores ($H_{(4)} = 23.431, p < 0.0005$), ATG Part 2 scores ($H_{(4)} = 27.590, p < 0.0005$), as well as ATG Total scores ($H_{(4)} = 29.040, p < 0.0005$).

Follow-up post hoc analyses for ATG Part 1 scores revealed no significant differences in student attitudes toward gay men between the first and second year of data collection ($p = 0.194, p > 0.05$), but significant improvements from the second year to the third ($p = 0.032, p < 0.05$), and again from the third to the fourth year of data collection ($p = 0.047, p < 0.05$). No significant differences in student attitudes toward gay men were observed from between the fourth and fifth years of data collection ($p = 0.523, p > 0.05$).

Scores for the ATG Part 2 and ATG Total variants followed a similar pattern. Specifically, follow-up post hoc analyses revealed no significant differences in student attitudes toward gay men from between the first and second year of data collection for ATG Part 2 scores ($p = 0.093, p > 0.05$) and ATG Total scores ($p = 0.691, p > 0.05$); nor any significant differences from between the second and third years of data collection for ATG Part 2 scores ($p = 0.749, p >$

0.05) and ATG Total scores ($p = 0.305, p > 0.05$). In contrast, significant improvements in student attitudes toward gay men were observed from between the third and fourth year of data collection for both ATG Part 2 scores ($p = 0.008, p < 0.05$) and ATG Total scores ($p = 0.006, p < 0.05$). However, no significant differences were observed from between the fourth and fifth years of data collection for either ATG Part 2 scores ($p = 0.719, p > 0.05$) or ATG Total scores ($p = 0.922, p > 0.05$).

Overall, then, follow-up post-hoc analyses revealed few differences in student attitudes toward gay men over the first three years of data collection, but significantly more positive attitudes toward gay men onward from the fourth. In other words, there were little-to-no improvements in students' attitudes toward gay men in the first three years of data collection, but clear improvement from the fourth year. That said, however, incoming attitudinal dispositions of homophobia among these students were largely minimal across all five years of data collection.

Insert Table 1. here.

Discussion

While previous research has typically found hostile attitudes toward homosexuality in sport (Curry, 1991; Hekma, 1998; Pronger, 1990), more recent findings have indicated inclusive attitudes toward homosexuality (e.g., Anderson, Magrath & Bullingham, 2016; Cashmore & Cleland, 2012; Magrath, 2017). This has been primarily documented through qualitative analyses; however, recent quantitative research has also shown comparable levels of inclusivity—especially among younger generations of men (Bush, Anderson & Carr, 2012; Southall *et al.*, 2009). The present, longitudinal research measured attitudes toward homosexuality over a five-year period among British heterosexual male students located at a

university renowned for its commitment to widening participation in the South of England. In this article, we present the data collected with White participants. Given the variance of attitudes, a separate article focuses on BME students' acceptance of homosexuality (see Anonymous, 2020).

Data was collected on students' entry to university, before they could be educated and socialized into a pro-gay attitudinal disposition. Interestingly, however – and as Table 1 illustrates – students espoused generally positive attitudes upon arrival at university, anyway. These positive attitudes are likely attributable to students' socialization into a gay-friendly environment before arrival at university. Indeed, McCormack's (2012, p. 123) research in British sixth forms documents “positive, homophobia-free school experiences” for gay students (see also McCormack, 2014; White, Magrath & Thomas, 2018). Given this inclusive environment, Riley (2010) argues that 16-19 – the typical age British youth attend sixth form – is a common coming out age.

However, consistent with research by Bush, Anderson and Carr (2012), the final two years of data collection saw further improvements in attitudes toward gay men. This could be explained by a range of interrelated factors, including: (1) a continuation (and general softening) of positive attitudes from students' sixth form experiences; (2) prolonged socialization with other youth from an eclectic mixture of social backgrounds; and (3) greater exposure to and contact with LGB university staff and/or students (see Ripley, Anderson & McCormack, 2012).

Perhaps most importantly, however, these findings are consistent with a broad range of recent research documenting inclusive attitudes toward homosexuality (e.g., Adams, 2011; Anderson, 2011a, 2011b; Cashmore & Cleland, 2012; Magrath, 2017). It is also evidence that these findings are not restricted to qualitative research on sport and sexuality. And it is also encouraging when one considers that the men in this research effectively represent the next

generation of the sporting workforce (see also Magrath, 2020); an important factor given sport's on-going commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion. Nevertheless, this is not a linear process; attitudes toward homosexuality can vary significantly—as the results of the non-White participants evidence (Magrath, Batten, Anderson & White, 2020).

This research also supports the central premise of Anderson's (2009) IMT: that of improved attitudes toward homosexuality among young men. These findings are also broadly consistent with other recent IMT research that has shown inclusive attitudes among working-class men (e.g., Blanchard, McCormack & Peterson, 2017; Roberts, 2013). And it also supports Anderson's important theoretical contentions that: (1) the dominant – hegemonic – form of masculinity that dominated youth settings throughout the 1980s and early-1990s has been replaced by a softer, inclusive version; (2) that it is no longer appropriate to assume the presence of homophobia based on sporting locale; and (3) while sport was previously a bastion of orthodox masculinity, on at least one variable – homophobia – this assumption must be problematized.

While this research is a valuable addition to existing work in this area, there are also limitations that must be acknowledged. It is important to note, for example, that these findings may not be generalizable to all university students in the UK. Nor might they be generalizable to those students whose studies might sit outside sport. Indeed, there is a complex web of variables that help determine levels of homophobia. Indeed, the non-White participants involved in this research project – whose attitudes are explored in another publication (Magrath, Batten, Anderson & White, 2020) – espouse more conservative attitudes toward homosexuality. Additionally, the current research only examines attitudes toward gay men; more research is required to examine attitudes toward other sexual minorities, as well as trans communities, who typically encounter more negative experiences (e.g., Norton & Herek, 2013).

Nevertheless, the findings presented in this article should provide a foundation from which researchers can investigate other aspects of sporting culture in the UK. Results could also have the potential to improve research methodologies designed to investigate sexual orientation attitudes, initiate policy discussions (related to sexuality), as well as aid in the development of educational programs to encourage the acceptance of diverse athletic populations.

References

- Adams, A. (2011). "Josh wears pink cleats": Inclusive masculinity on the soccer field. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 58(5), 579-596. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2011.563654>
- Adams, A., Anderson, E., & McCormack, M. (2010). Establishing and challenging masculinity: The influence of gendered discourses in organized sport. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 29(3), 278-300. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X10368833>
- Anderson, E. (2002). Openly gay athletes: contesting hegemonic masculinity in a homophobic environment. *Gender & Society*, 16(6), 860-877.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/089124302237892>
- Anderson, E. (2009). *Inclusive masculinity: The changing nature of masculinities*. London: Routledge.
- Anderson, E. (2011a). Updating the outcome: Gay athletes, straight teams, and coming out in educationally based sports teams. *Gender & Society*, 25(2), 250-268.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243210396872>
- Anderson, E. (2011b). Inclusive masculinity of university soccer players in the American Midwest. *Gender and Education*, 23(6), 729-744.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2010.528377>
- Anderson, E. & Magrath, R. (2019). *Men and masculinities*. London: Routledge.
- Anderson, E. & McCormack, M. (2018). Inclusive masculinity theory: Overview, reflection and refinement. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 27(5), 547-561.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2016.1245605>
- Anderson, E., Magrath, R. & Bullingham, R. (2016). *Out in sport: The experiences of openly gay and lesbian athletes in competitive sport*. London: Routledge.

- Baunach, D.M., Burgess, E.O. & Muse, C.S. (2009). Southern dis(comfort): Sexual prejudice and contact with gay men and lesbians in the South. *Sociological Spectrum*, 30(1), 30-64.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02732170903340893>
- Blanchard, C., McCormack, M. & Peterson, G.T. (2017). Inclusive masculinities in a working-class sixth form in northeast England. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 46(3), 310-333. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X1615610381>
- Borkowska, K. (2020). Approaches to studying masculinity: A nonlinear perspective of theoretical paradigms. *Men and Masculinities*, 23(3-4), 409-424.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X18768376>
- Bush, A., Anderson, E. & Carr, S. (2012). The declining existence of men's homophobia in British sport. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*, 6(1), 107-120.
<https://doi.org/10.1179/ssa.2012.6.1.107>
- Carter, N. (2006). *The football manager: A history*. London: Routledge.
- Cashmore, E. & Cleland, J. (2012). Fans, homophobia and masculinities in association football: evidence of a more inclusive environment. *British Journal of Sociology*, 63(2), 370-387.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2012.01414>
- Cleland, J. (2015). Discussing homosexuality on association football fan message boards: a changing cultural context. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 50(2), 125-140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690213475437>.
- Cleland, J., Magrath, R. & Kian, E.M. (2018). The internet as a site of decreasing cultural homophobia in association football: An online response by fans to the coming out of Thomas Hitzlsperger. *Men and Masculinities*, 21(1), 91-111.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X16663261>
- Clements, B. & Field, C. (2014). Public opinion toward homosexuality and gay rights in Great

- Britain". *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 78(2), 523-547. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfu018>
- Connell, R.W. (1987). *Gender and power*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Connell, R.W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Curry, T.J. (1991). Fraternal bonding in the locker room: A profeminist analysis of talk about competition and women. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 8(2), 119-35.
<https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.8.2.119>
- De Boise, S. (2015). I'm not homophobic, "I've got gay friends": Evaluating the validity of inclusive masculinity. *Men and Masculinities*, 18(3), 318-339.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X14554951>
- Elling, A., De Knop, P. & Knoppers, A. (2003). "Gay/lesbian sport clubs and events: Places of homosocial bonding and cultural resistance?" *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 38 (4): 441-456.
- Epstein, D., O'Flynn, S. and Telford, D. (2003). *Silenced sexualities in schools and universities*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books.
- Filene, P.G. (1975). *Him/her/self: Sex roles in modern America*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Gaston, L. & Dixon, L. (2020). A want or a need? Exploring the role of grassroots gay rugby teams in the context of inclusive masculinity. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 29(5), 508-520.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2019.1621158>
- Hekma, G. (1998). 'As long as they don't make an issue of it...': Gay men and lesbians in organised sports in the Netherlands. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 35(1), 1-23.
https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v35n01_01

- Herek, G.M. (1988). "Heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men: Correlates and gender differences." *Journal of Sex Research*, 25(4), 451-477.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00224498809551476>
- Herek, G.M. (1998). Attitudes towards lesbians and gay men scale. In *Handbook of Sexuality-Related Measures*, edited by C.M. Davis, W.L. Yarber, R. Bauserman, G. Schreer and S.L. Davis, 392-394. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hudson, W. & Wendell. R. (1980). A strategy for the measurement of homophobia. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 5(4) 357-372. https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v05n04_02.
- Keleher, A. & Smith, E.R.A.N. (2012). Growing support for gay and lesbian equality since 1990. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 59(9), 1307-1326.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2012.720540>
- Kurdek, L.A. (1988). Correlates of negative attitudes toward homosexuals in heterosexual college students. *Sex Roles*, 18(11-12), 727-738. <https://doi.org/10.1007%2FBF00288057>
- Lawless, W. & Magrath, R. (2021). Inclusionary and exclusionary banter: English club cricket, inclusive attitudes and male camaraderie. *Sport in Society*, 24(8) 1493-1509.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2020.1819985>
- Letts, D. (2020). Sexual minority prevalence and attitudes within the British horseracing industry. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*.
- Light, R. & Kirk, D. (2000). High school rugby, the body and the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity. *Sport, Education and Society*, 5(2), 163-176.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/713696032>
- Love, P.G. (1998). Cultural barriers facing lesbian, gay, and bisexual students at a Catholic college. *Journal of Higher Education*, 69(3), 298-323.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.1998.11775136>

- Magrath, R. (2017). *Inclusive masculinities in contemporary football: Men in the beautiful game*. London: Routledge.
- Magrath, R. (2018). ‘To try and gain an advantage for my team’: Homophobic and homosexually themed chanting among English football fans. *Sociology*, 52(4), 709-726.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038517702600>
- Magrath, R. (2020). “Progress...Slowly but surely”: The sports media workplace, gay sports journalists, and LGBT representation in sport. *Journalism Studies*, 21(2), 254-270.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2019.1639537>
- Magrath, R. (2021). Gay male football fans’ experiences: Authenticity, belonging and conditional acceptance. *Sociology* (Online First). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038521994012>
- Magrath, R., Anderson, E. & Roberts, S. (2015). On the door-step of equality: attitudes toward gay athletes among academy-level footballers. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 50(7) 804-821. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690213495747>
- Magrath, R. & Scoats, R. (2019). Young men’s friendships: Inclusive masculinities in a post-university setting. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 28(1), 45-56.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2017.1388220>
- Marsh, H. (2002). A multidimensional physical self-concept: a construct validity approach to theory, measurement and research. *Psychology: The Journal of the Hellenic Psychological Society*, 9(4), 459-493.
- McCormack, M. (2012). *The declining significance of homophobia: How teenage boys are redefining masculinity and heterosexuality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McCormack, M. (2014). The intersection of youth masculinities, decreasing homophobia and class: An ethnography. *British Journal of Sociology*, 65(1), 130-149.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12055>

- McCormack, M. & Anderson, E. (2014). The influence of declining homophobia on men's gender in the United States: An argument for the study of homophobia. *Sex Roles, 71*(3-4), 109-120. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-014-0358-8>.
- Norton, A.T. & Herek, G.M. (2012). Heterosexuals' attitudes toward transgender people: Findings from a national probability sample of US adults. *Sex Roles, 68*(11-12), 738-753. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-011-0110-6>
- O'Neill, R. (2015). Whither critical masculinity studies? Notes on inclusive masculinity, theory, postfeminism, and sexual politics. *Men and Masculinities, 18*(1), 100-120. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X14553056>
- Orr, J., Sackett, P. & Dubois, C. (1991). Outlier detection and treatment in I/O psychology: A survey of researcher beliefs and an empirical illustration. *Personnel Psychology, 44*(3) 473-486. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.1991.tb02401.x>
- Parker, A. (1996). *Chasing the "big time": Football apprenticeship in the 1990s* [Doctoral dissertation]. University of Warwick, Warwick, UK.
- Peterson, G.T. (2011). Clubbing masculinities: Gender shifts in gay men's dance floor choreographies. *Journal of Homosexuality, 58*(5), 608-625.
- Pronger, B. (1990). *The arena of masculinity: Sports, homosexuality, and the meaning of sex*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Riley, B.H. (2010). GLB adolescent's 'coming out'. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing, 23*(1), 3-10. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6171.2009.00210.x>
- Roberts, S. (2013). Boys will be boys...won't they? Change and continuities in contemporary young working-class masculinities. *Sociology, 47*(4), 671-686. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038512453791>

- Rosik, C. (2007). Ideological concerns in the operationalization of homophobia, Part II: The need for interpretive sensitivity with conservatively religious persons. *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 35(2), 145-152.
- Savin-Williams, R. (2017). *Mostly straight: Sexual fluidity among men*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- Southall, R.M., Nagel, M.S., Anderson, E., Polite, F.G. & Southall, C. (2009). An investigation of male college athletes' attitudes toward sexual orientation. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*, 2(1), 62-77.
- Storr, R. (2020). "The poor cousin of inclusion": Australian sporting organisations and LGBT+ diversity and inclusion. *Sport Management Review*.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2020.05.001>
- Tabachnick, B. & Fidell, L. (2001). *Using Multivariate Statistics*. New York: Allyn & Bacon.
- Twenge, J., Sherman, R. & Wells, B. (2016). Changes in American adults' reported same-sex sexual experiences and attitudes, 1973–2014. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 45(7) 1713-1730. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-016-0769-4>.
- Watt, L. & Elliot, M. (2019). Homonegativity in Britain: Changing attitudes towards same-sex relationships. *Journal of Sex Research*, 59(9), 1101-1114.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2019.1623160>
- Weeks, J. (1991). *Against nature*. London: Rivers Oram.
- Wright, L., Adams, H. & Bernat, J. (1999). Development and validation of the homophobia scale. *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioural Assessment*, 21(4), 337-347. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022172816258>.

Table 1. Median (inter-quartile range) values for students' attitudes toward gay men

Dependent Variable	Year of Data Collection				
	1	2	3	4	5
ATG Part 1	17 (14)	22 (9)	16 (16) *	12 (9) *	13 (12)
ATG Part 2	32 (18)	27 (14)	27 (17)	21 (21) *	20 (18)
ATG Total	49 (30)	47 (25)	44 (28)	36 (23) *	35 (23)

* $p < 0.05$

ⁱ Widening participation' refers to governmental attempts to increase the number of students entering higher education from under-represented groups (e.g., non-White communities, working-class communities, and so on).

ⁱⁱ This process began in 2012 and ran for five consecutive years.