

Institution: Staffordshire University
Unit of Assessment: 36 – Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management
Title of case study: Homophobia and Racism in Professional Football
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The impact is founded upon methodologically innovative research that was carried out into football fans' attitudes towards homosexuality (with a subsequent study concerning race taking up the same methods). The conclusions reached challenged a widely held set of assumptions. The research in turn prompted positive responses from the Government Equalities Office and the report of the House of Commons Committee on Racism in Football. The research was also extensively reported on in the press internationally, and has been used in several major radio and television documentary programmes. The research, then, has been an important and continuing influence in the debates concerning professional football culture.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The research was originally devised in the aftermath of two well-publicised stories concerning homosexuality in football. The research was thus a direct response to a cultural need. The first story was the withdrawal of a video designed to combat what was widely perceived as a rise in homophobia among football fans. The Professional Players' Union (PFA) had indicated it would cooperate with the Football Association in promoting the video, but later, for reasons which remain opaque, decided against this. In several stories reporting the incident, the PFA's Chief Executive suggested he did not feel the timing of the campaign was right. In a related media story, the publicist Max Clifford announced that some of his clients who were professional footballers had declared to him that they were gay. He advised them not to disclose their sexual preferences for fear of an adverse reaction. In a widely quoted remark, Clifford submitted his thoughts on football as "stuck in the dark ages," the implication being that the culture of the sport was not prepared for openly gay players. Clifford's detrimental assertions were not challenged; indeed there was tacit agreement with his contentions. In the event, the research exposed these kinds of assumption as erroneous, with serious implications for the lives and well-being of players.</p> <p>The difficulty of testing football fans' attitudes was forbidding. Conventional research methods would not yield reliable data. The researchers – Ellis Cashmore and Jamie Cleland [now working at Loughborough University] – decided to use an innovative method: setting up a web-based domain that incorporated a questionnaire, replete with hyperlinks to pertinent stories and space for narrative accounts. Hence the objective was to elicit qualitative data from an online research instrument, which bore the URL: www.topfan.co.uk. While online research had been conducted before, few if any had pursued qualitative material. Hence there was an experimental element to the research methods. To this end, the questionnaires contained embedded links that took users to sites where they could read, ponder and ruminate on issues related to the subject area. This was not interactive in the conventional sense, but had the effect of triangulating the process i.e. between subject/participant, researcher and free-standing narrative. Topfan elicited several thousand responses, ensuring an excellent sampling, and is still running.</p> <p>The research directly led to two publications, both in academic, peer-reviewed journals, one American, the other British. The peer reviewers' comments were obviously supportive of both the</p>

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finding and the methods employed.

Additionally, the same platform has been used for successive research projects. In particular, another sport-related project on attitudes towards race in football management – and thus an exploration of the reasons for the paucity of black managers in British football – elicited sufficient interesting material to warrant another article published in an academic journal, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. While black people are over-represented (by proportion of population) among players, they rarely make a successful transition to coaching and especially to management. It was this article that influenced findings of the House of Commons Report.

3. References to the research

Cashmore, Ellis and Cleland, Jamie (2011). 'Glasswing Butterflies: Gay Professional Football Players and Their Culture'. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues November 35(4)*. DOI: 10.1177/0193723511420163 J.

- JSSI is one of the ten top journals internationally concerning the study of sport. Impact factor 1.3.

Cashmore, Ellis and Cleland, Jamie (2011). 'Why aren't there more black football managers?'. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 34(9). DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2011.595556

- Impact factor: 1.0.

Cashmore, Ellis and Cleland, Jamie (2012). 'Fans, homophobia and masculinities in association football: evidence of a more inclusive environment.' *British Journal of Sociology*. 63(2). DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-4446.2012.01414.x.

- BJS is ranked 22nd out of 138 among academic journals of sociology internationally, with an impact factor of: 1.684.

www.topfan.co.uk

4. Details of the impact

The research has had impact in two ways: first, by influencing key figures in the debate about policies concerning homosexuality and race in professional sport. Second, by receiving extensive coverage nationally and internationally in the media and likewise informing important documentary work.

Copies of the research work were sent to policy-making bodies such as the Government Equalities Office, and football governing bodies. Evidence of the impact it had is (1) An official representative of the Government Equalities Office, wrote: "The study was one of the first of its kind and explored several issues, including tackling many of the myths on the views of fans and football culture. [...] Your study on gay footballers made a timely impact on the wider field of LGBT issues, as well as on the emerging debate in sport." Reference was also made in this testimonial to the racism study. (2) The research on racism and football management was cited in their report by The House of Commons Committee on Racism in Football - Culture, Media and Sport Committee.

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The media coverage has been extensive and international, reaching millions of readers. Importantly, some of the coverage has been in the sport pages of major media outlets (e.g. *The New York Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*), while other coverage has been in other non-sport sections (e.g. in the *Observer*), showing the breadth of the importance attached to these results. Moreover, the research had considerable impact directly on the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual communities, as evidenced by a lead review article in 2012 in lgbthistorymonth.org.uk.

In addition, the work has been influential on an important BBC documentary. Its producer wrote "This pioneering research into an otherwise under researched issue proved integral to the BBC's important documentary "Britain's gay footballers". Equally helpful was Ellis's [Ellis Cashmore's] willingness to discuss and explain his findings in extensive conversations on the phone. The production, which received much positive publicity and attention in the wider media, owes his work a considerable debt of gratitude." Professor Cashmore and Dr. Cleland have appeared in a number of television and radio documentaries, including on BBC5Live and BBC Radio Manchester. The producer of two of these programmes writes: "I have interviewed Ellis Cashmore as a main contributor to the debate on the lack of representation of black managers and coaches within football. His ability to inform the debate from an academic standpoint helped to increase the understanding and analysis of black representation at management levels within football. I know that this was well received by my sporting colleagues and also audiences as the statistics and research analysis were presented in a way that was clear to the listener."

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

The Parliamentary report mentioned above:

- <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmcomeds/89/8905.htm>

The international media coverage runs to the thousands of instances and includes:

- San Francisco Chronicle: <http://www.sfgate.com/sports/article/World-not-quite-ready-yet-for-openly-gay-players-3654190.php>
- The Guardian: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/aug/08/gay-footballers-survey> and <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2011/mar/28/black-football-managers-institutional-racism>
- New York Times: http://goal.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/07/05/would-top-clubs-and-their-fans-support-a-gay-player/?_r=0
- <http://lgbthistorymonth.org.uk/website/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/P2P2012.pdf>

Television and Radio documentaries include:

- http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2011/03_march/29/5doc.shtml
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01bnfcg>

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Personal references are available from:

- Head of LGB&T Equality, Gender and LGB&T Unit at the Government Equalities Office.
- Radio Presenter & Producer for BBC5Live and Radio Manchester.
- Director and producer of “Britain’s gay footballers” on BBC3.