Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Sport and Leisure

Edited by Thomas Fletcher and Katherine Dashper

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Despite the mythology of sport bringing people together and encouraging everyone to work collectively to succeed, modern sport remains a site of exclusionary practices that operate on a number of levels. Although sports participation is, in some cases at least, becoming more open and meritocratic, at the management level it remains very homogenous; dominated by western, white, middle-aged, able-bodied men. This has implications both for how sport develops and how it is experienced by different participant groups, across all levels. Critical studies of sport have revealed that, rather than being a passive mechanism and merely reflecting inequality, sport, via social agents' interactions with sporting spaces, is actively involved in producing, reproducing, sustaining and indeed, resisting, various manifestations of inequality. The experiences of marginalised groups can act as a resource for explaining contemporary political struggles over what sport means, how it should be played (and by whom), and its place within wider society. Central to this collection is the argument that the dynamics of cultural identities are contextually contingent; influenced heavily by time and place and the extent to which they are embedded in the culture of their geographic location. They also come to function differently within certain sites and institutions, be it in one's everyday routine or leisure pursuits, such as sport. Among the themes and issues explored by the contributors to this volume are: social inclusion and exclusion in relation to class, 'race' and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, social identities and authenticity, social policy, deviance and fandom.

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Introduction: diversity, equity and inclusion in sport and leisure

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When even an Old Etonian Conservative Prime Minister makes public statements condemning racism in British football, as David Cameron did in February 2012, the most sceptical of us can see both the importance of sport in everyday lives and the inequity of modern sport itself.[1] Despite the mythology of sport bringing people together and encouraging everyone to work together to success, modern sport remains a site of exclusionary practices that operate on a number of levels. Although sports participation is, in some cases at least, becoming more open and meritocratic, at the management level it remains very homogenous; dominated by western, white, middle-aged, able-bodied men. This has implications for both how sport develops and how it is experienced by different participant groups, across all levels.

Within sociology and sports studies, the concept of inequality has been widely defined and has been applied to various political ideologies. Inequality, as defined from the right, is inevitable, or is necessary for society to function well. In contrast, from the left, inequality is a social ill and should be eradicated by democratic or revolutionary means. According to Donnelly, 'Sport, by its very nature, produces and reveals inequalities'.[2] Early studies suggested that sport reflected existing inequalities – i.e. it acted as a microcosm of society. However, more critical studies of sport have since revealed that, rather than being a passive mechanism and merely reflecting inequality, sport, via social agents' interactions with sporting spaces, is actively involved in producing, reproducing, sustaining and indeed, acts as a site for resistance.

'In social terms however, sport has often been considered the great social *leveller*' (see Van Slobbe et al., this volume).[3] In fact, sport continues to be cited as an exemplar par excellence of an agent of personal and social change (see Chamberlain, Dacombe, this volume).[4] Numerous studies articulate the possibility of sport acting as a legitimate space for political struggle, resistance and change, and as a modality for 'self-actualization and the reaffirmation of previously abject identities'.[5] Thus, the experiences of marginalized groups can act as a resource for explaining contemporary political struggles over what sport means, how it should be played (and by whom), and its place within wider society. However, most people do not engage in sport to achieve certain societal ends. Instead, their participation is more leisure-focused, for enjoyment, health or to spend time with friends and family.[6]

Sport's structural, cultural and institutional inequalities have been well rehearsed.[7] In our own research exploring gender, sexuality and class in equestrian sport, and 'race' and ethnicity in cricket for example, we argue that sport is heavily implicated in the (re)production of inequalities, but it may also offer opportunities for challenge, and possibly transformation (see Watson et al., this volume).[8] However, although that potential is there, the reality of achieving this is limited. As a number of the contributions to this volume illustrate, the role of sport cannot be considered in isolation from wider

social structures and discourses: sport is a representation of these social relations. The challenge facing academics, policy-makers and practitioners in sport is leveraging sport's potential for positive action. In other words, we find ourselves revisiting 'old' ground in conceptualizing the relationship between democratization through sport and democratization of sport. The problem with this is the lack of evidence pertaining to sport, and 'the absence of an understanding of processes and mechanisms which either produce, or are assumed to produce, particular impacts and outcomes'.[9]

Central to the theoretical framework of this volume is the argument that the dynamics of cultural identities are contextually contingent; influenced heavily by time and place and the extent to which they are embedded in the culture of their geographic location. They also come to function differently within certain sites and institutions; be it in one's everyday routine or leisure pursuits, such as sport. As Bauman observes, in late modernity identity is fluid, continually negotiated and (re)constructed in the interactions of everyday life.[10] Such identity work is, however, subject to fractures and dissonances, where fluid notions of identity only go so far – choices about sport participation and leisure more generally, for instance, become conflated with hegemonic struggles over what sporting activities are everyday, what are normal, and what are acceptable.[11] Individuals have some agency to make sense of their own place in the wider networks of society, but all the while they are negotiating their identities and legitimacy within sporting spaces.

The inspiration for this volume of *Sport in Society* came from the 2012 launch of the 'Institute for Sport, Physical Activity and Leisure' (ISPAL) at Leeds Metropolitan University in the UK. One of the five research centres within ISPAL is the 'Centre for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion' (DEI) (see http://www.leedsmet.ac.uk/research/centre-for-diversity-equity-and-inclusion.htm). The DEI Research Centre brings together researchers with a shared concern for critical social research within the broad areas of sport, physical education, leisure and culture. Currently (Spring 2013), there are 22 researchers within the DEI. Collectively, their research practice is underpinned by principles of equity and social justice and reflects a commitment to examining inequities resulting from gender, 'race', sexuality, class, disability, age or religion and their intersections. Some of this work is showcased in contributions to this volume (see Norman, Watson et al.). The launch of ISPAL and the DEI provided us with the opportunity to (re)consider pertinent diversity, equity and inclusion issues within sport and leisure.

Overview of the volume

The 13 papers have been grouped into five broad sections: inclusionary politics and active recreation, sport, policy and inclusion, gender and sexuality, 'race' and ethnicity and watching and supporting sport. Assigning papers to these sections was a difficult task, and we acknowledge that there was scope for cross categorization. This is both a strength and weakness of the process and was done purely for clarity, but may underplay the interconnectedness of the issues expressed here. In this collection, there are two 'Research Insight' papers. The purpose of these was to offer an opportunity for early career researchers to showcase their work, and due to their shorter format (4000–5000 words) provide an accessible outlet for research dissemination.

Section 1: Inclusionary politics and active recreation

Section 1 begins with Rebecca Watson, Lee Tucker and Scarlett Drury's paper 'Can we make a difference? Examining the transformative potential of sport and active recreation'.

Watson, Tucker and Drury consider if and how sport can be transformative for those involved, both participants and coaches and managers. The authors draw upon three individual case studies of gay-and-lesbian-identified football clubs, grass roots football and young men and dance to argue that research into the transformative potential of sport and active recreation needs to be empirically driven, focusing on change and transformation on a variety of levels: at the macro, sport-wide level; at the meso level, within individual sports clubs and organizations and at the level of individual athletes and participants. Following this, in his paper 'The civilised skateboarder and the sports funding hegemony', Daniel Turner critically investigates public funding of the alternative and niche sport of skateboarding. He argues that sports funding and policy decisions are based on a hegemonic conceptualization of sport (and its benefits), which may be at odds with the ethos of participation in alternative sports. He problematizes the compromises that skateboarding has to make in order to fit within what he terms the 'sports funding hegemony' and questions the implications of this for the identities of skateboarders.

Section 2: Sport, policy and inclusion

Rod Dacombe opens section 2 with his paper 'Sports clubs and civic inclusion: Rethinking the poverty of association'. Dacombe argues that, despite the position of sports clubs acting as a 'community resource' – for example, a hub for social networks, generating information and promoting trust – has long been acknowledged, sports clubs have been largely neglected in scholarly discussion of civic participation and deprivation. He suggests that sport is marginalized from discussion of policy, and challenges the view of many political scientists who tend to treat the role of sport in the activities of government as an irrelevance. Some of the issues addressed by Dacombe are examined further, from a different perspective, by Martyn Chamberlain's paper 'Sports-based intervention and the problem of youth offending: a diverse enough tool for a diverse society?' Chamberlain questions the evidence-base supporting the efficacy of sports-based interventions for preventing youth crime and reoffending. He calls for more methodologically robust evidence to support the argument that participation in sporting activity can directly lead to a reduction in antisocial and offending behaviour and thus, to change the lives of some young people for the better.

Section 3: Gender and sexuality

The third section of this collection shifts focus to questions of everyday manifestations of gender and sexuality in sport. Alex Channon begins by considering the transformative potential of sex integration within martial arts in his paper 'Enter the discourse: exploring the discursive roots of inclusivity in mixed-sex martial arts'. He contends that the discursive framing of martial arts in contemporary Western culture is significant in the generation and normalization of mixed-sex inclusivity in these settings. Through an exploration of everyday training practices he explores how sex integration becomes normalized and accepted within this milieu. Deborah Butler continues these themes in her paper 'Not a job for "girly girls": horseracing, gender and work identities' where she analyzes the experiences of female 'lads' in the male-dominated working environment of horse racing. Butler argues that female 'lads' are in a contradictory position: forced to embody masculinity in their everyday working lives, yet denied the status and opportunity to race ride, due to their female bodies. Leanne Norman also centralizes female voices in her paper 'The concepts underpinning everyday gendered homophobia based upon the

experiences of lesbian coaches', and in so doing, further advances discussion of everyday inequalities. Her concept of 'everyday gendered homophobia' highlights how gender and sexuality intersect in the experiences of lesbian coaches. In distinguishing this from other forms of homophobia she argues that everyday gendered homophobia is the integration of gendered homophobia into daily situations through practices that initiate and sustain unequal power relationships between lesbians and dominant social groups.

Section 4: 'Race' and ethnicity

In the fourth section of this collection we provide three diverse case studies. Marcelo Almeida, Janelle Joseph, Alexandre Palma and Antonio Jorge Soares' paper 'Marketing strategies within an African-Brazilian martial art' centralizes the African Brazilian martial art of capoeira and examines the ways in which contemporary marketing of capoeira has arguably diluted its cultural authenticity. They contend that the symbols of capoeira, and African Brazilian culture more generally, that are marketed worldwide are based on the legends of the physical activity's history and origins. These symbols are promoted as 'authentically Brazilian', increasing the value of the capoeira 'product' by demonstrating proximity to a history of struggles for equality and celebrations of multiculturalism in Brazil, when in reality the 'product' is relatively new, relying heavily on invented traditions. Michel van Slobbe, Jeroen Vermeulen and Martijn Koster's paper 'The making of an ethnically diverse management: contested cultural meanings in a Dutch amateur football club' examines pertinent issues of 'race' and ethnicity within the context of the management of a recreational football club in the Netherlands. They trace the evolution of the club's ethnic composition from predominantly white Dutch to becoming more ethnically diverse. They document how changes in the organizational structure and culture of the club led to racially and culturally motivated antagonisms resulting in the inveterate and institutionalized 'us' and 'them' dynamic which came to characterize the organizational culture of the club. Next, Souvik Naha provides the first of two 'Research Insights'. In 'Sport controversy, the media and Anglo-Indian cricket relations: the 1977 "Vaseline incident" in retrospect' he problematizes postcolonial Anglo-Indian relationships through an interpretation of British and Indian media coverage of the 'Vaseline incident'. He suggests that the incident had two overarching consequences. First, that it called into question the moral virtue of the England players and managers, specifically John Lever, the England bowler accused of applying Vaseline to the ball and second, that the English cricketing establishment then embarked on an unfounded witch hunt against India captain, Bishan Singh Bedi, who had been a staunch critic of the England team and management throughout the process. Bedi's negativity, he argues, stirred anti-English sentiment amongst the Indian public and media commentators.

Section 5: Supporting and watching sport

In his paper 'Social inclusion through football fandom: opportunities for learning-disabled people' Kris Southby centralizes the voices of learning-disabled football fans which have previously been silent within sociological studies of fandom. In so doing, he problematizes romanticized views of social inclusion as a simple matter of 'creating routes back into society and giving people a chance to integrate' into their communities. His ethnographic study of learning-disabled football fans suggests that football fandom provides learning-disabled people with an identity and sense of community and belonging beyond being 'disabled', but that the transformative potential of such experiences fall short of the social

inclusion characterized by governments. Andy Harvey and Piotrowska Agnieszka also centralize the complexity of football fandom in their paper 'Intolerance and joy, violence and love among male football fans: towards a psychosocial explanation of "excessive" behaviours'. In their provocative Research Insight, Harvey and Agnieszka suggest that psychoanalytic theory may provide useful tools for understanding the predilection of some football fans for excessive behaviour, ranging from aggression and the use of intolerant language to acts of spontaneous and unrestrained joy and love, including same-sex hugging and kissing, and which make up an important, if under-researched, aspect of fandom. Finally, Matthew Kobach and Robert Potter's paper 'The role of mediated sports programming on implicit racial stereotypes' provides an innovative methodological approach for understanding how racial stereotypes of athletes become internalized by consumers of sport-related images and media commentaries. They apply a version of the Implicit Association Test (IAT). The IAT asks participants to rapidly pair various stimuli objects and traits and demonstrates how participants rely on associations that have been learned and reinforced through repetitive exposure to media commentaries. Kobach and Potter draw upon cultivation theory and social reality theory to argue that there is a relationship between overall time spent with mediated sports and the participants' notions of athletic ability, as defined by one's 'race'.

To many critical scholars of sport and leisure the issues raised in this volume are nothing new, but the range of case studies and discussions presented here reaffirms the contemporary relevance of the concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion within the fields of sport and leisure. The content of this volume covers a lot of ground, theoretically, empirically and geographically, but inevitably possesses limitations in its scope and trajectory and therefore must, as with all scholarship, be seen as part of a broader discourse. We thank the authors for their contributions and hope their papers spark interest and provoke further discussion.

Notes

1. Sparrow, 'David Cameron Calls Football'.
2. Donnelly, 'Approaches to Social Inequality', 221.
3. Ibid.
4. Spaaij, 'Social Impact of Sport'.
5. Carrington, *Race, Sport and Politics*, 36.
6. Spaaij, 'Social Impact of Sport'.
7. Bourdieu, 'Sport and Social Class'; Jarvie, *Sport, Racism and Ethnicity*; Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*; Griffin, *Strong Women, Deep Closets*; Messner, *Taking the Field*; Thomas and Smith, *Disability Sport and Society* and Long and Spracklen, *Sport and Challenges to Racism*.
8. Fletcher, '"Aye, But It were Wasted on Thee"'; Dashper, 'Dressage is Full of Queens!'; Dashper, 'Together, Yet Still Not Equal?' and Fletcher and Spracklen, 'Cricket, Drinking and Exclusion?'.
9. Coalter, *Wider Social Role for Sport*, 2, 3.
10. Bauman, *Identity*.
11. Fletcher and Spracklen, 'Cricket, Drinking and Exclusion?'.

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Can we make a difference? Examining the transformative potential of sport and active recreation

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This paper focuses around the transformative potential of sport and active recreation and is premised on an assertion that sport in its broadest sense is a political project. It draws on three different empirical studies to critically assess ways in which involvement for participants can be (potentially) transformative, transformational and transforming. The first study focuses on gay sport and gay football, the second looks at a recreational football team where the manager is seeking to actualize participation as 'transformational' for players to challenge practices of discrimination including sexism and racism. The third study focuses on dance and masculinity and considers how 'transforming' practices are embodied and expressed in complex ways. We argue that attention needs to be paid to the nature and type of activities being assessed and emphasize the importance of context-specific empirical research to engage more fully with claims pertaining to transformative potential.

Introduction

Making a difference and/or effecting change are often implicit features of interest in diversity, equity and inclusion in sport and leisure. How change occurs is open to question and long-standing debates retain some significance: the potential of sport, for example, to resist and *challenge* social inequalities such as gender and a recognition that sport mirrors and *reproduces* persistent inequalities, such as those associated with social class and a capitalist economy. This paper focuses around the transformative potential of sport and active recreation and is premised on an assertion that sport in its broadest sense is a political project, that is, a site of dynamic interplay of asserting and generating loci for change. It draws on three different empirical studies to critically assess this assertion and considers the ways in which involvement for participants can be (potentially) transformative, transformational and transforming. The three studies offer an insight into the transformative potential of sport and active recreation at macro, meso and micro levels, respectively. The first study focuses on gay sport and gay football and explores how 'transformative' is manifest as a process of challenging hetero- and homonormativities. The second is a study of a recreational football team where the manager is seeking to actualize participation as 'transformational' for players in order to challenge practices of discrimination including sexism and racism. The third study focuses on dance and masculinity and considers how 'transforming' practices are embodied and expressed in often complex ways. All three studies question binary assumptions of exclusion to inclusion and challenge simplistic rhetoric of achieving diversity through participation in sport.

Transformative potential here is conceptualized within a sociological framework that acknowledges agency and the possibility to effect change as an ongoing negotiation of complex subject positions. The paper is not advancing a distinctly 'transformative

paradigm', though all three studies reference potential for enhanced social justice, albeit in different ways.[1] Sport activism can instigate social change through its transformative potential, and it is in the context of such activism that these studies are set.[2] Sport itself may be construed as value neutral in some ways yet as Sugden argues, the adoption of a sociological imagination and a progressive attitude to social change for society's most vulnerable groups can provide the basis for human development through the intervention of sport projects and research.[3] Maguire calls for a refocused philosophy that diverts attention and funding away from 'achievement sport' in the 'sports-industrial complex' and back to a humanist tradition that is concerned with 'issues such as morality, equity, participation'.[4] Hargreaves highlights the need for retaining a politics of sport, drawing on feminist praxis, to provide a necessary complement to theorizing centred upon deconstruction.[5] All three studies here engage in some way with these assertions and aim to contribute to a critical analysis of sport and active recreation that enhances our sociological understanding and considers action for change.

It is ambitious to incorporate three studies but we do so in order to argue the need for a multilayered analysis of sport and active recreation's transformative potential, particularly in relation to diversity, equity and inclusion. Our framework insists upon analyses of varying social relations and positions that inform and are interrelated with dynamic subjects, and the potential of social actors to create and transform individual circumstances and, at times, the wider rubric of intersecting social relations. Etymologically we draw loosely on meanings of transformative, transformational and transforming as associated with (potential) change rather making claims for assumed outcomes or distinct changes. Our argument here is generated from empirical data that inform our view that any analysis of transformative potential and actualization can only be gauged through lived experience. The first study refers to 'transformative' and highlights the macro heteronormative context of mainstream football within which gay- and lesbian-identified football teams are positioned. The second study on a 'transformational' context focuses on the process of aiming to bring about change in players' attitudes and behaviours in local, recreational (heterosexual) men's football. The third and final theme of 'transforming' emphasizes how embodiment is crucial to understanding how change might occur, in this instance through a focus on masculinity and dance.

Transformative potential of gay- and lesbian-identified football clubs

Gay- and lesbian-identified sports clubs are understood to be the potential sites of transformation with respect to many of the oppressive practices of mainstream sport.[6] The initial rise of 'gay sports culture' can be attributed to the socio-historic positioning of sport as masculine and the subsequent climate of homophobia and heteronormativity. As such, gay sports spaces offer an alternative, 'inclusive' sports environment in which lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) sportspeople are able to participate without fear of discrimination. The anti-discrimination ethos of many gay sports organizations, however, is not limited to issues of sexuality. In most, there is a concerted emphasis on tackling other exclusionary boundaries associated with, for instance, ethnicity, gender, physical ability, social class and health status.

Study 1

The rise in gay-identified football clubs has been particularly notable over the last decade.[7] This increase sits alongside a mainstream football culture that continues to be noted for its

hostility towards non-heterosexual identities, which is derived in part from the football's influential position as one of the most significant societal institutions involved in the reproduction of dominant forms of masculinity.[8] The limited amount of existing research into gay- or lesbian-identified football spaces points towards the notion of such spaces as an 'alternative' to mainstream football, a football environment that is built around a discourse of inclusion rather than competition.[9] The study referred to here extends analyses of gay football spaces to consider their transformative potential in relation to mainstream football culture. The findings are taken from ethnographic research into the experiences of footballers playing in gay- or lesbian-identified clubs. The project was informed by feminist, post-structural and queer theories of gender, sex and sexuality.

Analysis of the transformative potential of gay sport, as Pronger points out, is no straightforward process.[10] It would be all too easy to assume that gay sports clubs, by virtue of their very existence, transform homophobia and heteronormativity. Clearly, they do provide localized contexts in which such discourses are subverted; the presence and prevalence of homosexual identities coupled with the absence of homophobic shaming within these environments offers evidence of this. But as Pronger identifies, not all gay sports clubs operate in the same ways; some are more closely aligned with mainstream sport, whereas others remain more marginal, which means that the multiple discourses that operate within the broader context of gay sports culture are not without conflict.[11] This makes it difficult to establish the extent to which gay sport as a whole is able to influence, let alone transform, mainstream sports culture.

Yet what remains clear is that regardless of their affiliation with or dislocation from mainstream sport, the discourse of inclusion continues to be a pivotal influence in shaping the overall ethos of gay sports clubs.[12] This emphasis on inclusion means that competitiveness is decentred in favour of a more 'friendly' approach, which allows for the participation of all players regardless of skill or physical prowess. This can be interpreted as a positive transformation of some of the more exclusive practices that dictate the way in which mainstream football is commonly played. Existing research has identified various other processes of transformation existing within gay or lesbian sports spaces.[13] However, there is at present little indication of how this might translate into broader mainstream transformation.

The football clubs involved in the study could be considered transformative in a number of different ways. Many were exemplars of the type of inclusive practices that research has already identified as being prevalent within gay sports settings.[14] The absence of homophobia coupled with the subversion of heteronormativity is perhaps the most obvious factor that contributed to participants' experiences of gay football as an inclusive space. Although very few had turned to gay football as a result of direct experiences of homophobia in mainstream football, many commented that the normalization of homosexual identities within gay leagues allowed them to feel 'free' to compete without the pressures of hiding their sexuality or 'coming out' to team mates.

But the feelings of inclusion described by many participants were not isolated to issues of sexuality. The shared experiences of exclusion in other sports contexts felt by many of the participants resulted in concerted efforts to maintain a sense of inclusion across other boundaries. Emphasis was placed on ensuring the inclusion of players who might otherwise face discrimination on the basis of other axes of difference related to gender identity, age, ethnicity, (dis)ability and social class. This was evident in the apparent diversity of identities present within many of the teams, which was something that was noted by many of the participants as different from the dynamics of mainstream football teams. Emphasis on the inclusion of all participants regardless of physical ability or football prowess was another attribute that was common to the clubs involved. Most were

organized in such a way that the social rather than competitive aspects of participation were most emphasized. This meant that for individuals who had previously felt 'alienated' by the heteronormativity of football culture, and, as a result, never had the opportunity to develop an aptitude for the game, gay football provided their first opportunity to play and enjoy football in an environment in which they would not be judged on the basis of skill.

> Chris: We've got people like my friend, who couldn't play football when he was growing up because, well he was obviously gay, nobody would let him play, and he was disenfranchised and disillusioned with the sport, but he loved the game, but let his own lack of involvement in the game affect his physical fitness. And now in his 40s he came to us just to come and watch, and we said 'well you're more than welcome to do so, but there's no reason why you can't play', and now he plays in the league and he gets his 45 min as we all do . . .

The welcoming, friendly, and supportive environment fostered by gay football teams became a recurrent theme throughout interviews. This was one of the most notable of ways in which gay football was positioned as different from mainstream football. Some participants also spoke about the increasing number of straight players who opted to play for gay-identified teams as a result of their disdain for the over-competitive and hyper-masculine ethos of some mainstream leagues. This for many signified that the inclusive values associated with gay football might have something to offer mainstream sport.

Clearly, this signifies the capabilities of gay football spaces to transform some of the exclusionary boundaries associated with mainstream sport, at least within their own localized contexts. However, the influence that this might have over mainstream sports contexts is more difficult to determine. As other scholars have identified, the separate nature of many gay-identified clubs often provokes criticism surrounding their potential to offer any real challenge to the homophobia, heteronormativity and other oppressive discourses more broadly.[15] This was something that participants were more than aware of; many expressed concerns over the perceived segregation of the gay league, or of criticisms about gay clubs becoming 'enclaves'. Yet they were quick to reassert the need for 'gay space' in an otherwise heteronormative sports culture.

> Dan: It's like why do we have gay bars and why do we have gay clubs and all the rest of it? They don't generally turn straight people away, but it's somewhere where gay people can feel comfortable, and it's the same with the league, you know. We don't turn straight people away but it's somewhere where we can feel comfortable.

> Chris: One of the biggest criticisms of the GFSN [Gay Football Supporters' Network] league and the gay world cup is the perception of exclusivity and self segregation. I think that's a very fair observation, and something we had to watch, but I don't think it's legitimate in that we wouldn't exist if homophobia in football hadn't existed, and homophobia in society hadn't existed.

For these individuals, gay football exists as an inevitable backlash against mainstream hostility, but one that does not necessarily result in the perpetuation of further divisions between 'straight' and 'gay' players. The increased visibility of some of the clubs within mainstream football, through their involvement in competitions and friendlies with mainstream clubs, provided a means of sending out a positive message about LGBT involvement in the game. For the women involved, this was about being acknowledged as a visible and positive presence, and for the men, about challenging stereotypes and dispelling myths about gay men's apparent incompatibility with football.

However, as other research has uncovered, concerns over pushing to increase the visibility of LGBT identities as a means of tackling homophobia and heteronormativity in mainstream sports contexts can often create tensions with the inclusive ethos emphasized within gay sport.[16] This is often linked with the need to create a 'positive' image of LGBT individuals. In the context of gay football, this is manifested in the implicit desire to