26

INCLUSIVE MASCULINITY THEORY

Eric Anderson

Overview

In the summers of 2011–14, I returned to visit a Southern California high-school cross-country team I had coached in 1990. Composed of forty-three members, the team has Korean, Chinese, Caucasian, Mexican, Egyptian and African-American athletes; alongside atheists, and those of the Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, Mormon and Muslim faith, and a coach who is a Jehovah’s Witness. One team member wears black every day and sports half a dozen piercings, while another wears preppy clothes and does ballet. Two have been voted the school’s homecoming King in the last few years, several play musical instruments to a high standard or are in bands, and some of the athletes maintain high grade point averages while others maintain grades just sufficient to compete. One was arrested for breaking into a school and stealing computers and a few are Eagle Scouts. Some have special social, educational or physical needs, and others maintain high social, athletic, or sexual capital. Perhaps most significantly, there are two openly gay male athletes, and another publicly declares that he will just fall in love with whomever he falls in love.

Despite this diversity, social groupings on the team are diverse and fluid. Race, intelligence, religion and sexuality are not important variables in establishing friendship patterns. No athlete on the team reports being bullied, on or off the team. Yet, when I taught at this school twenty-three years earlier, matters were different.

Back then the school was ruled by football players and this negatively impacted the school’s general population. The runners, for example, feared the football team (Anderson, 2000). Football players hated gays, femininity and all ‘lesser masculine’ sports. Thus, when students started a Gay–Straight Alliance in 1993, football players started a heterosexual club, even picketing the gay club with homophobic signs.

But now as the runners on the team run past the football players (lined up to do drills), they sometimes stop to have short conversations, discussing homework or forthcoming shared social engagements. Or, as the football players walk to get water, they stop to talk to the stretching runners. It is evident that their friendship networks overlap. The two gay male athletes on the cross-country team are no exception. They have friends on the football team. The openly gay freshman football player has friends on the cross-country team.

As the team runs on the far side of the field, they pass the school’s marching band, whose members possess less athletic capital than the runners. This is a group that, in 1990, the runners...
themselves marginalised. Yet today’s runners do not mock band members. Just as with the football players, the runners stop to chat with them, too.

Highlighting this, a fully-gearied freshman football team walks by the runners on the way to their first football match. Walking side-by-side, holding hands with the player adjacent, I ask one of them why they are holding hands, he responds that it is tradition (it wasn’t a tradition in 1993). Another says, ‘It shows brotherhood’. None of the runners on the cross-country team comment about the hand-holding. From my perspective, this homosocial tactility is amazing; from their perspective, it is uneventful.

At a pre-race spaghetti dinner the following night, two of the straight male runners stood chatting to other runners. From behind, one rested his head on the other’s shoulder, wrapping his arms around the other’s waist – a standing cuddle. I timed it from another table: it lasted for eleven minutes and thirty-seven seconds. Furthermore, eight of the runners on this team made what can only be described as a highly provocative Harlem Shake video, which included nudity and featured one of the gay members mock-humping one of the straight team members. At one of the runner’s birthday parties, five of the athletes took a photo in which they stood behind each other, each with their hand in the front pocket of the guy in front of them. The boy in the middle is openly gay and each team member in the picture is of a different racial ethnic group. These are examples of bountiful similar occurrences for the boys on this team.

When I made my final goodbye to the team this summer, a number of the boys called out, ‘We love you’, as I drove away. They gave me shirts for my one-year-old twins as a going away gift. In rainbow colours the shirts had printed on them, ‘Two dads are better than one’. These youth celebrated the fact they had an openly gay coach who is married to his husband and the proud father of two baby boys. ‘When you return next summer I will be the first to give a big hug’, one straight runner messaged me on Facebook.

The gendered behaviours of these young men on this high school team are radically different from 1990. Seeing the change in one city is powerful, but it is also what I see in my dozens of studies in both the US, and even more so in the UK – studies that I detail in my (2014) book 21st century jocks: Sporting men and contemporary heterosexuality. Their attitudes towards diversity, homosexuality, femininity, same-sex touch and the expression of love for another male are that of inclusion and plurality. In 1990, their attitude was one of exclusion of anything different from the jock-norm. But this school is no longer run by jocks. Friendship patterns today are fluid and the gendered behaviours of the boys in the school are highly feminized, at least by 1990 standards.

Inclusive masculinity

The type of masculinity exhibited by the youth I report upon here is starkly different from what the dominant paradigm of the previous generations suggested about young men, which maintained that they are homophobic, sexist, violent, emotionally repressed and afraid of physical contact with other males. The most important theoretical tool for understanding this social stratification of men and their masculinities has come through Connell’s (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity, which also embedded in it the archetypical man as being homophobic, stoic, violent and macho.

Developed from a social constructionist perspective in the mid 1980s, hegemonic masculinity theory articulated two social processes. The first concerned how all men benefit from patriarchy; however, it is the second social process that has been heavily adopted by the masculinities literature. Here, Connell’s theoretical contribution was particularly adopted for its
In conceptualising intra-masculine domination, Connell argued that one hegemonic archetype of masculinity is esteemed above all other masculinity types, so that boys and men who most closely embody this one standard are accorded the most social capital, relative to other boys and men. Some of the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity concern variables that are earned, such as attitudinal depositions (including the disposition of homophobia), while other variables concern static traits (e.g., Whiteness, heterosexuality and youth). Connell argued, however, that regardless of body mass, age, or even sporting accomplishments, gay men are at the bottom of this hierarchy. Furthermore, Connell maintained that straight men who behave in ways that conflict with the dominant form of masculinity are also marginalised. It was for these reasons that I have argued homophobia has traditionally been an effective weapon to stratify men in deference to a hegemonic mode of heteromasculine dominance (Anderson, 2005). Connell theorized (1995) that the power of a hegemonic form of masculinity was that those subjugated by it nonetheless believed in the right. Instead of disputing their marginalised position, they revered those at the top. Accordingly, researchers found that team sport players generally controlled youth spaces (Plummer, 1999).

I argue that hegemonic masculinity theory was precise in its ability to predict masculine configurations in the 1980s, and it likely continued to be useful throughout the 1990s. However, the level of homophobia among youth peaked in 1988 (Anderson, 2009), mainly because of decreasing hysteria around HIV’s association with gay men. The high level of homophobia and hypermasculinity of the mid 1980s had, however, serious implications for not only attitudes towards gay men, but also for how straight men performed their gender (Peterson and Anderson, 2012). Thus, hegemonic masculinity theory is historically contextualised within its own temporal moment. Specifically, it existed in a culture that I call ‘homohysteric’ (Anderson, 2009).

Using data from both the US and the UK, I developed the concept *homohysteria* (Anderson, 2009; McCormack and Anderson, 2014a) to explain the power dynamics of changing homophobia on the masculinities of heterosexual men. Theorizing the inter-relations between homosociality, masculinity and homophobia, I adopted earlier scholarship that demonstrated that high levels of cultural homophobia influence individuals to distance themselves from social suspicion of homosexuality through the avoidance of gender atypical behaviours (Floyd, 2000; Ibson, 2002). I augmented this by situating this scholarship within specific social and historical conditions, arguing that homophobia only operates this way in homohysteric settings. In other words, homophobia does not necessarily influence males’ gendered behaviours; it only does so when specific cultural conditions are met. Homohysteria thus adds a historical analysis to the existing theorizing of the influence of homophobia on males’ behaviours and attitudes.

There are three social conditions that must be met for a homohysteric culture to exist: (a) widespread awareness that male homosexuality exists as an immutable sexual orientation within a significant portion of a culture’s population; (b) high levels of homophobia in that culture; and (c) an association of gender atypicality with homosexuality. These varying levels of social conditions help explain various social trends concerning masculinities, including: improving attitudes towards homosexuality among heterosexual men (Adams, 2011); the changing cultural experiences of gay men (Anderson, 2011c); and the various meanings of discourse related to sexualities (McCormack, 2011).

Homohysteria itself is a concept that can apply to both men and women. Both Worthen (2014) and Anderson and Bullingham (in press) have used the theory on women, thus far. For men, with the basic understanding of homohysteria as a cultural force that implores men to
avoid certain behaviours in order to avoid social homosexualization, *inclusive masculinity theory* is simple: it maintains that as homohysteria decreases, men no longer need to position themselves as hypermasculine in order to be thought heterosexual. As homohysteria decreases, the vertical, hegemonic, stratification that Connell described is no longer accurate, as it shifts (horizontally) to permit multiple types of masculinities to exist without hegemony of any. Should cultural matters change, and homohysteria were to again rise in a culture, the ordering of men would likely return to the way Connell conceptualised.

**Specific constructs and propositions**

In research on White, middle class, former high school football players, I (Anderson, 2005) first used the term inclusive masculinity to theoretically describe the social process concerning the emergence of an archetype of masculinity that undermines the principles of orthodox (read hegemonic) masculine values – yet one that is also esteemed among male peers. Although this theory is formalised in my (2009) book, *Inclusive masculinity: The changing nature of masculinities*, its tenets, and the empirical motivation for a new theorizing of masculinity, are elucidated here.

Its genesis began in 2005, where I described how a reduction of cultural homophobia challenged the dominance that hegemonic masculinity maintained over heterosexual university athletes. I found two esteemed versions of masculinity: I labelled one orthodox masculinity (which includes extreme homophobia and misogyny) and the other inclusive masculinity (which does not). However, two oppositional masculinities, each with equal influence, co-existing within one setting is not consistent with Connell’s (1987, 1995) theorizing. Connell suggested that multiple masculinities do exist within any organisation, institution or culture; and she certainly argues that any one hegemonic archetype of masculinity will be challenged and perhaps replaced by another. However, she described hegemonic masculinity as a hegemonic process by which only one form of institutionalised masculinity is ‘culturally exalted’ above all others (Connell, 1995, p. 77). Then, according to Connell, men are compelled to associate with this one dominant form (i.e., men looking up the hierarchy).

One of the many forms of masculinity Connell described is protest masculinity. This form of masculinity, she argues, contests the current hegemonic form for dominance. However, the resolution of this struggle is simply that a new, singular, version of a (hegemonic) dominating masculinity emerges. I (Anderson, 2009) suggest that, in periods of high homophobia, Connell was correct: Only one dominating, hegemonic version of masculinity will exist (and it will have homophobia at its core). This is because homophobia is fundamental to the production and stratification of men as an ordered system of valued or subjugated individuals in a highly homophobic culture (Ibson, 2002).

However, inclusive masculinity theory suggests that something different emerges in a culture of diminishing homohysteria. Here, men are permitted increased social freedom in the expression of attitudes and behaviours that were once highly stigmatized. In a moment of decreasing cultural homohysteria, two archetypes will consume most men’s membership.

Inclusive masculinity theory next maintains that, as cultural homohysteria further diminishes, multiple forms of masculinity can exist in a horizontal (not stratified) alignment. Here, one or more forms of inclusive masculinity are shown to dominate numerically, but they are not hegemonically dominating (McCormack, 2011). In other words, when inclusive masculinity (as an archetype) proliferates, it does not seem to also dominate. This is something I found in a number of university settings in the previous few years (Anderson, 2005, 2008, 2009). Importantly, if there is no hegemony, there can also be no hegemonic masculinity. Thus, inclusive
masculinity theory serves as a social-constructionist theory that simultaneously incorporates and expands upon Connell’s (1987) theorizing.

Inclusive masculinity thus supersedes hegemonic masculinity theory because it is a more flexible theory that can be used to explain the social dynamics of settings with both high and low levels of homohysteria. When Connell devised hegemonic masculinity theory in the mid 1980s, there was no such thing as a Western culture low in homohysteria. But the significant changes that have occurred since then means that Connell’s theory is no longer applicable in many organisational, institutional and geographical locales today.

**Boundary conditions**

Inclusive masculinity theory was founded upon Anglo-American research. It emerged from the data, instead of superimposing theory over data. This means that matters might vary cross-culturally. I make no pretense that homophobia has reduced globally; instead, it is rife in many parts of the world, and homosexuality is still illegal in eighty-one countries. Because homophobia varies, so will the product of that homohysteria.

More precisely, there are varying combinations of (a) the awareness of homosexuality; (b) antipathy or inclusion towards it; and (c) the culturally coding of certain behaviours as feminine, and thus gay, will vary. These three cultural traits will undoubtedly determine unique outcomes for men’s gendered behaviours. For example, in a highly religious theocracy, homosexuals are likely socially perceived extraordinarily rare or perhaps non-existent. While this culture would be considered highly homophobic it is not homohysteric because they don’t readily believe that others are gay. Accordingly, men in many Islamic countries are permitted to engage in physical and emotional intimacy (not sex) without threat to their publicly perceived heterosexual identities – if homosexuality does not exist, one cannot be thought gay for holding another’s hand.

Opposite to this, a homohysteric culture (like Jamaica) comes through a high measure of cultural homophobia alongside high awareness that homosexuality exists in significant numbers. This is in a culture that both loathes homosexuals but knows they lurk among us. Because homosexuality is mostly invisible, it means that in this culture, all men (of all sexual orientations) must distance themselves from anything coded as gay; otherwise, they will be homosexualized and treated accordingly. In a homohysteric culture, men therefore value the most extreme representations of masculinity, and they equally maintain highly homophobic attitudes, all in attempt to distance themselves from being thought gay. Essentially, in a homohysteric culture, men are attempting to escape social stigma by avoiding being perceived as gay.

The greater the homohysteria within a culture, the more effective homophobia is in limiting the gendered components of masculinity. This will likely influence the social organisation of masculinity types differently in differing cultures.

**Empirically validating the theory**

Although inclusive masculinity theory (IMT) was first explicated in 2009, scholars are rapidly adopting it as a theoretical framework. For example, in ethnography of a US soccer team, Adams (2011) used IMT to show high levels of homosocial bonding and pro-gay attitudes. He documented multiple examples of straight athletes adopting social behaviours once coded as feminine or gay, where they embrace the opportunity to openly value friendship and the expression of emotional intimacy. Peterson (2011) applied IMT to examine the changing gender dynamics of British university dance floor settings, documenting heterosexual men dancing
together in highly sexualized ways without concern as to how strangers perceive their sexual identity. Roberts (2013) shows that young, working-class men working in retail express inclusive masculinities. Cashmore and Cleland (2012) used IMT to document an erosion of homophobia among British soccer fans; Magrath, Anderson and Roberts (in press) used it to show pro-gay attitudes among academy-level British soccer players; Dashper (2012) adopted IMT to show that middle-aged British men enact inclusive masculinities in the sport of dressage; and Morris and Anderson (in press) use it to show how popular male YouTube vloggers display inclusive masculinity.

The theory has been utilised in populations apart from White, British men as well. Cavalier (2011) used IMT to show the changing relationships in older men towards hegemonic masculinity in Canada; Anderson (2011b) uses it in American soccer players; and Southall et al. (2009) as well as Southall et al. (2011) show that some athletes of colour in the US exhibit inclusive masculinities. Here, they show that while White athletes in the US maintain more inclusive attitudes than African-American athletes, there is a significant decrease in homophobia among both these groups of men; a similar finding to Dean (2013) showing antihomophobia from Black and White American men. I have further evidenced this argument by examining the social dynamics of young men in the UK – where the change in masculine configurations of practice has been more pronounced. Here, pro-gay attitudes and the promotion of inclusive masculine behaviours are documented among British soccer players (Adams, Anderson and McCormack, 2010) and field-hockey teams (Anderson, McCormack and Lee, 2012). McGuire and I (Anderson and McGuire, 2010) use IMT to explain results of intra-masculine dynamics and homosocial bonding among British rugby players, and in other research (Anderson, Adams and Rivers, 2012), we use IMT to explain how it is that 89 per cent of heterosexual male undergraduates have kissed another male on the lips without being homosexualized by this activity; Drummond, Filiault, Anderson and Jeffries (in press) show this number to be 29 per cent in Australia. Anderson and McCormack (in press) show that cuddling in bed is common for straight male, undergraduate friends in Britain, too.

Inclusive changes are also reflected in the way sport media reports upon gay male athletes (Kian and Anderson, 2009; Kian, Anderson, Vincent and Murray, in press), heterosexual soccer players (Vincent, Kian and Pedersen, 2011), as well as how sport media reports upon the softening of masculinity in the National Football League (Anderson and Kian, 2012).

It is significant that scholars use the theory to explain inclusive findings within the institution of sport, as competitive, organised sports are traditionally associated with a socially conservative form of gendered expression. However, these changes are not limited to sport – they are also found in educational settings. I document similar behaviours among sixteen-year-old British working-class youth (Anderson, 2011a), American fraternity men (Anderson, 2008), and among British men who dance (Peterson and Anderson, 2012). Gottzén and Kremer-Sadlik (2012) even show inclusive masculinities developing among young fathers in America.

McCormack (2012; McCormack and Anderson, 2010) documents even more significant shifts in the masculine dynamics in British high schools. Using IMT, he demonstrates that there has been an erosion of homophobia and a softening of masculinity among sixteen to eighteen-year-old boys. In addition to documenting the inclusion of LGBT students, he finds that boys engage in a great deal of homosocial tactility, and that they esteem acts of social inclusion. He also develops a class analysis to show that while class does act as a dampener on progressive attitudes, it does not prevent them (McCormack, 2014). Thus, he supports IMT’s central argument that these changes are the result of a substantial decrease in homohysteria in the broader youth culture.
Processes

My first masculinities research (on gay male athletes) used hegemonic masculinity theory (Anderson, 2002). I did not desire to use this theory, because my data did not fit in with the theory. However, I was compelled to use hegemonic masculinity theory by the reviewers.

A few years later, in research on White, middle-class, former high school football players, I (Anderson, 2005) first used the term inclusive masculinity to theoretically describe the social process concerning the emergence of an archetype of masculinity that undermines the principles of orthodox (read hegemonic) masculine values – yet one that is also esteemed among male peers. I described how a reduction of cultural homophobia challenged the dominance that hegemonic masculinity maintained over heterosexual university athletes, showing two esteemed versions of masculinity: one I labelled as orthodox masculinity (which includes extreme homophobia and misogyny) and the other inclusive masculinity (which does not). However, because two oppositional masculinities, each with equal influence, co-existing within one setting is not consistent with Connell’s (1987, 1995) theorizing, it set me to theorize my findings by looking outside of hegemonic masculinity theory.

Over the next few years I conducted a great deal of research on young straight and gay male athletes, and formalised my theory in my (2009) book, Inclusive masculinity: The changing nature of masculinities. It was very late into the writing of that book in which I conceptualised the notion of homohysteria.

Extensions and applications

Theoretical alterations

My original formulation of both inclusive masculinity theory and homohysteria have not significantly altered since their 2009 conception. However, in 2014 I teamed up with Mark McCormack (McCormack and Anderson, 2014a, 2014b) to thoroughly explore the concept of homohysteria and its utility. We published a lengthy exploration of the concept in a Sex Roles forum. Here, four other authors critically examined the concept; one applying it to women (Worthen, 2014).

Crucially, in this reconfiguration we noted that independent operating levels of the two social variables of the awareness of homosexuality and attitudes towards it can create three different cultures. The first concerns high homophobia but low awareness of its existence within that given culture. In such a culture men can be tactile with each other because it’s not possible for them to be thought gay because homosexuality is not widely believed possible. We call this a culture of homoerasure. Next is homohysteria: where both a high awareness and antipathy towards homosexuality exist; and finally a culture of inclusivity. Here, awareness remains high, but homophobia low. Within this culture men can return to their homosocial tactile behaviours as they did in a culture of homoerasure. Thus, the model can serve as both a macro-theoretical tool for understanding a given culture within a given timeframe, as well as a tool for explaining cross-cultural comparison. For example, men can walk hand in hand in many Islamic cultures without homosexual suspicion. These ideas are illustrated in Figure 26.1.

While there has been a rapid and expansive uptake of inclusive masculinity theory, criticism also exists (see Roberts, 2014). The criticism around the theory, however, generally regards whether one believes that such a gay-friendly culture exists among young men. Some have tried to disprove the theory by showing that homophobia still exists. But this is accountable by
the theory, which specifically articulates that in locations of high homohysteria, hegemonic theory is correct; but in locations of low homohysteria, inclusive masculinities proliferate.

**Theoretical extensions**

Finally, I made inclusive masculinity theory simplistic by intention. It was my desire to avoid inaccessible, and oftentimes vague, theorizing by grand theorists. To me a social theory should be simple and have the ability to make a prediction. I shun academic-elitism. Thus, I have made an open invitation to other scholars to examine my theory and add to it (hoping they do so in accessible and practical ways).

McCormack (2011, 2012, 2014) is one scholar who has met this challenge. He recently contributed to inclusive masculinity theory by explicating how popularity is achieved in cultures where bullying and marginalisation are not present. McCormack shows that what makes boys popular is not regulating others, but instead being inclusive and having charisma. Unique to a homohysteria-free culture, he shows that males value the ability to socialise with boys from other groups, including gay youth. Thus, hegemony is replaced by heterogeneity.

**Praxis**

Inclusive masculinity theory is more of a heuristic tool for understanding the social organisation of masculinity types than it is a tool for making public policy or other practical changes. However, McCormack (2012) has used the concept to argue that our approach towards the attempted eradication of once-homophobic phrases, like ‘that’s so gay’ are ill-fated because they fail to account for the shift towards inclusion of gay youth; and they fail to account for intent of language

---

**Figure 26.1** Patterns of homohysteria

Source: © Eric Anderson, used with permission.
use. He argues, for example, that telling youth that they are being homophobic for using phrases which they contextualize as having nothing to do with homosexuality engenders homophobia.

Finally, in my book, *21st century jocks: Sporting men and contemporary heterosexualities*, I argue that the evidence of inclusive masculinities is so abundant that to now assume jocks as homophobic is to make a prejudicial statement. Without evidence, the accusation of homophobia is to ‘pre-judge’ a population; and that is the root of prejudice. This is another attempt to critique the theory. When presenting about my theory at conferences scholars routinely say, ‘Well, you collect your data on mostly White, middle class men and that’s a small segment of society.’ To this I respond that, first, this is not a small, but instead a large majority (in the UK) of society; but second, I ask them: ‘So you are saying that Black or lower class boys are more homophobic? Because without evidence to support your proposition that is both racist and classist.’ The point is: inclusive masculinity theory emerged from evidence and must therefore be critiqued through an evidence-based approach.

**Future directions**

While this chapter has provided an exposition of inclusive masculinity theory and its key concept of homohysteria, there are several areas where the theory and concept can be developed further:

1. Homohysteria developed as a concept from empirical research on White male youth, so further research is needed to examine for the influence of race on the relation between decreasing homophobia and heterosexual males’ gendered behaviours.

2. Homohysteria was developed on the influence that heterosexual males’ attitudes towards homosexual males has on their gendered behaviours. Research investigating the influence of heterosexual women’s attitudes and their impact on homohysteria among women would be timely and significant (c.f. Worthen, 2014).

3. While homohysteria conceptualises the links between homophobia and heterosexual men’s gendered behaviours, it does not examine the operations of heterosexism or heteronormativity in a culture of inclusivity. If heterosexism conceptualises the social and structural privileging of heterosexuality, and heteronormativity refers to the normalisation of a particular kind of (e.g., White, able-bodied) heterosexual, the intersection of homohysteria with these issues requires further research. It seems unlikely that homohysteria is independent of these mechanisms of heterosexual privilege; yet, further qualitative research is needed to understand these intersections.

4. The decline of homophobia in the West is not matched by other parts of the world (Kohut, 2013). Further examination of the simultaneity of these processes to provide a comprehensive theory about shifting homophobia in a global context would be a significant development. We may, for example, find that increasing gender regulation in countries that are aggressively criminalising homosexuality.

5. We know that (in the UK) young males show high degrees of inclusive masculinity (including kissing, cuddling and loving other men in a homosocial fashion) but the masculinities of younger boys have not been investigated. This calls for more research.

**Note**

1 This chapter is a reflection on the changing nature of heterosexual masculinities and how we theorize them, including an emphasis on Anderson (2009).
Eric Anderson

References


318
Inclusive masculinity theory

Applying inclusive masculinity theory

*Jamie Cleland*

While inclusive masculinity theory researchers have tended to focus on a fairly narrow age group of sixteen- to twenty-five-year-old young men, my research has sought to widen this scope to show that men of all ages are holding more liberal and inclusive views towards sexuality in professional football. To contextualise a shift in the culture of football from the 1980s to more contemporary times, the homohysteric environment that Anderson (2009) refers to in the 1980s was present within football when black British footballer, Justin Fashanu, became the first professional to come out in 1990. Not only did he receive racist abuse in a period of heightened racism, but he was also ostracised by fans, the media, teammates and even his own brother, John, who was also a professional footballer. This case illustrated how football was a homophobic (as well as racist) institution: a place where manhood seemed to be in constant need of revalidation.

I first became aware of inclusive masculinity theory in 2010 after analysing the findings of 3,500 football supporters and players towards the presence of gay footballers. This was in...
response to the English Football Association dropping a campaign focusing on homophobia as it was deemed that the game was not ready for one to take place. This decision provided an opportunity to analyse the perception that the authorities, fans, clubs, agents, media and the players were part of a homophobic environment that placed barriers on accepting gay footballers. Rather than demonstrate orthodox views towards sexuality, however, 93 per cent of the participants highlighted a decreasing culture of homophobia in football by expressing their support for a gay player who should only be judged on his performance on the field of play (Cashmore and Cleland, 2012). Since then, subsequent research on sexuality in professional football has found similar evidence of decreasing cultural homophobia in online football fan forums (Cleland, 2015) and within the print media that reflected on Anton Hysén (a lower league semi-professional player in Sweden) coming out in March 2011 (Cleland, 2014).

Inclusive masculinity theory has therefore provided a theoretical context to my findings that have outlined how boys and men hold more liberal views and behavioural attitudes than had previously been the case. A change in culture has also been illustrated by a small number of professional players following Hysén and coming out to widespread support. For example, Robbie Rogers initially retired aged twenty-five when he came out in January 2013 after being released by Leeds United (he has since reversed this decision and plays in Major League Soccer for LA Galaxy in the United States), while in January 2014, former German midfielder Thomas Hitzlsperger announced that he was gay. Despite notable progress since the 1990s, however, there continues to be examples of orthodox views remaining in the culture of football as the need to retain masculine capital continues to play a prominent role in the everyday practice for some individuals. When examples like this occur, it provides another opportunity where inclusive masculinity theory can be applied to further outline significant cultural changes that render these views obsolete in what many refer to as the people’s game.

**Note**

1 Jamie Cleland is with the Department of Social Sciences at Loughborough University.

**References**


