

**Examining Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Among Young, Athletic BME Men in the UK**

*Sport in Society*

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## **Abstract**

This article examines the influence of ethnicity on sporting men's attitudes towards homosexuality. We employed Herek's *Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men, Revised Version* (ATLG-R) scale to collect data with British undergraduate sports students, as well as interview data with the players of an English Premier League (EPL) football academy, to show that black and minority ethnic (BME) men espouse more conservative attitudes toward homosexuality than their White counterparts. This, we theorize, is attributable to multiple factors, such as socialization into a fundamentalist version of Christianity by family, and the influence of immigration from countries where attitudes toward homosexuality remain more conservative in comparison to the UK. In documenting these findings, this research is consistent with other studies which document higher rates of intolerance among groups of BME men.

**Keywords:** *ATLG; higher education; homophobia; homosexuality; race; religion; sport*

## Introduction

Previous research in the United States (US) and United Kingdom (UK) has typically found that heterosexual undergraduate students have espoused high levels of homophobia (D'Augelli and Rose 1990; Epstein, O'Flynn and Telford 2004; Herek 1988; Kurdek 1988). This has been especially true in male university sporting culture, where gay athletes have been shunned, excluded from participation, and marginalized by jocks attempting to assert their own heteromascularity (Curry 1991; Pronger 1990). Since the turn of the millennium, however, scholars have documented a considerable improvement in cultural attitudes toward homosexuality (Taulke-Johnson 2008; see also Watt and Elliot 2019). Despite frequent claims to the contrary, men's teamsports have reflected this broader social change, and the acceptance of homosexuality in sport is now seemingly commonplace (Anderson, 2011a; Anderson, Magrath and Bullingham, 2016; Magrath, 2017a).

Yet, most of the research in this area has been undertaken qualitatively, with very few quantitative studies assessing the undergraduate athletic climate for gay and bisexual male sports students in the UK (see Southall et al. (2009) for the US context). The notable exception in the UK, Bush, Anderson and Carr (2012), used longitudinal research conducted at an elite British university to show that undergraduate sports students espoused positive attitudes toward having an 'out' gay teammate or coach. Using students from a British university renowned for its ongoing commitment to 'widening participation'<sup>1</sup> (see Burke 2013), we recently updated these findings in a forthcoming publication—documenting even more positive attitudes toward homosexuality than those in the previous study.

The present research builds upon these studies, centralizing the results of black and minority ethnic (BME hereafter) students. By employing Herek's (1988) *Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men, Revised Version* (ATLG-R) scale, we show that BME participants espoused more conservative attitudes toward homosexuality than their white peers (e.g.

Baunach, Burgess and Muse 2010; Magrath, 2017b; Southall et al., 2011). This quantitative data was supplemented with semi-structured interviews with eight BME footballers who currently compete in the academy of an English Premier League (EPL) football club. Similar attitudes were also apparent in this setting.

Accordingly, this research contributes to and advances existing literature showing that BME communities are more likely to adopt conservative attitudes toward homosexuality. Using Anderson's Inclusive Masculinity Theory (IMT), we argue that these attitudes are likely attributable to a multitude of factors, including the effect of immigration, socialization, into a fundamentalist religious belief system—and the subsequent rejection of UK culture's increasing acceptance of same-sex rights—all of which may influence greater levels of homophobia.

### **The Rise and Fall of (Sporting) Homophobia**

The antecedents of most 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, competitive teamsports were thought to provide a mechanism to reverse an apparent 'crisis' of masculinity; one characterized by a moral panic of the softening of boys' virility (Filene 1975). Sport provided the opportunity for boys and men to align their 'gendered behaviors with an idealized and narrow definition of masculinity' (McCormack and Anderson 2014, 114). Indeed, sport provided boys with a 'clear hierarchical structure, autocratic tendencies, traditional notions of masculinity and the need for discipline' (Carter 2006, 5).

Almost a century later, in the 1980s, sport once again took on renewed cultural significance. Largely influenced by the HIV/AIDS crisis, which had devastating and deadly consequences for the gay community (Weeks 1991), cultural homophobia reached an apex in Western societies toward the end of the decade (Clements and Field 2014; Twenge, Sherman

and Wells 2016; Watt and Elliot 2019). Indeed, the British Social Attitude Survey showed that, in 1983, 62% of the population believed that same-sex sex between two consenting adults was ‘always wrong’ or ‘mostly wrong’; by 1987, this figure had increased to 75% (Clements and Field, 2014).

Given this hostile environment, gay and bisexual men tended to either avoid participation in sport, hide their sexual identities (e.g. Pronger 1990), or restrict themselves to gay-only leagues (Elling, De Knop and Knoppers 2003). Research at this time also documented how heterosexual athletes were ‘unwilling to confront and accept homosexuality in sport’ (Wolf-Wendel, Toma and Morphey 2001, 470). Similarly, Hekma (1998, 2) wrote that gay and effeminate men are ‘granted no space whatsoever in what is generally considered to be a masculine preserve and a macho enterprise’. And Curry (1991, 130) found that ‘being homosexual [is] forbidden...[and] 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—or hegemonic (Connell 1987)—form of masculinity was celebrated.

Other social institutions at the time reflected the conservative nature of sport. For instance, discussing the American College system, D’Augelli and Rose (1990) showed that almost half of their sample of college students considered gay men ‘disgusting’ and believed same-sex activity was wrong. Moreover, 30% of their sample claimed to prefer a college environment with only heterosexuals. Herek’s (1988) research with heterosexual undergraduate students at six US universities recorded comparable levels of dislike of gay students. In the UK, Epstein, O’Flynn and Telford (2004, 138) described British University campuses as ‘threateningly straight’ environments, where ‘other’ sexual orientations were treated as abnormal and deviant.

More recently, however, Western societies have witnessed a liberalisation of attitudes toward sexual minorities. Watt and Elliot's (2019, 1113) analysis of social attitude surveys in the UK led them to conclude that 'homonegativity amongst Britons has fallen dramatically over recent decades'. Indeed, the 2019 British Social Attitudes Survey showed that only 16% of those sampled believed same-sex sex to be 'always wrong' or 'mostly wrong'. Similar trends are also evident in the US: Keleher and Smith (2012), for instance, describe 'a sweeping change in attitudes towards lesbians and gay men'. Similarly, Twenge, Sherman and Wells' (2016) analysis of US social survey data show an increase of same-sex sexual experiences—largely due to the fading of stigma around these behaviors. Anderson (2009) attributes these changes to multiple influences, including the Internet, the media, decreasing radical politics, declining cultural religiosity, and the success of gay and lesbian politics.

Social attitude surveys document that improved cultural attitudes began as early as 1993 (Watt and Elliot 2019). In the university context, Taulke-Johnson (2008) showed improvements in cultural attitudes when compared to older research. He wrote that 'victimisation, homophobia and anti-gay harassment are not the dominant discourses' in UK universities. In North America, Morrison, Morrison and Franklin (2009) show Canadian students' attitudes to be more positive than US students'—but an overall improvement among both, nonetheless.

Sport, however, has traditionally been far slower at embracing social change. Evidencing this, Anderson's (2002) research on gay men in sport showed only conditional tolerance of gay athletes: heterosexual athletes accepted them only if they were deemed to possess the necessary sporting talent (see also Wolf-Wendel, Toma and Morpew 2001). Since this initial research, however, a decade-and-a-half later, there has been overwhelming evidence documenting changing attitudes towards sexual minorities in sport (Anderson

2011a; Anderson, Magrath and Bullingham 2016; Lawless and Magrath 2020; Magrath 2017a, 2019, 2020).

Gay male athletes' experiences are, indeed, increasingly positive. Anderson's (2011a) follow-up study from his initial research showed that only one of his sample of 26 reported any negativity after coming out to teammates. These athletes also came out earlier than the previous cohort, and also witnessed the nullification of athletic capital. In other words, unlike the gay athletes in the initial research, these athletes' acceptance was not conditional on athletic ability. Adams and Anderson's (2012) research with a Catholic university in the US observed the first-ever first-hand account of an athlete's coming out process with researchers in the field. Again, despite the religious traditions of the university, the athlete was unanimously accepted and supported. In addition, the impact of this athlete's coming out also facilitated a decrease in heteronormativity and increase in social cohesion among team members.

Quantitative analyses have yielded similar findings. In the US, Southall et al. (2009) showed that over two-thirds of college athletes espoused positive attitudes towards homosexuality. This, they argued, is 'evidence that the male intercollegiate culture may no longer be a uniform bastion of cultural and institutional homophobia' (2009, 74). In the UK, Bush, Anderson and Carr (2012) provided the first-ever quantitative account of undergraduate sports students' attitudes towards having a gay teammate. These findings indicated that the attitudinal dispositions of homophobia decreased from minimal, upon entrance to the university, to virtually non-existent upon graduating three years later. They wrote that 'it is no longer sociologically acceptable to generalize all sports, and all who play them as homophobic. Increasingly, it appears to be the opposite' (2012, 116).

While there has been significant improvement in society's attitudes towards homosexuality, social progress is an uneven social process (Anderson, 2009). Research

outside the UK and the US, for example, shows that gay male athletes report homophobic bullying, negative comments, and, consequently, higher rates of dropout compared to straight men (see Baiocco et al. 2018; Piedra, Garcia-Perez and Channon 2017; Tseng and Kim-Wai Sum 2020). Both qualitative and quantitative research has also shown that higher levels of prejudice is evident among BME men: Watt and Elliot (2019) show that, in the UK, even though attitudes toward homosexuality in BME communities had changed, they remained less progressive than White communities. Keleher and Smith (2012) document similar findings in the US. We now examine the impact of ‘race’ and ethnicity on attitudes toward homosexuality.

### **Understanding Black (and Minority Ethnic) Homophobia**

As we have already examined, most studies examining for tolerance toward sexual minorities have reported that BME communities maintain elevated rates of homophobia compared to White communities (Baunach et al. 2010; Magrath 2017b; Southall et al. 2011; Ward 2005). Part of this may stem from the denial of homosexuality in some BME communities (Anderson and McCormack 2010). Other research shows that some BME communities are more likely to view homosexuality as a ‘problem’ than White communities (Froyum 2007). In US sport, Southall et al. (2011) found that BME university athletes maintained elevated rates of homophobia compared to their White teammates. Accordingly, they wrote that, ‘US Black male college sport culture is significantly different in its degree of expressed sexual prejudice compared to the White male college sport culture’. There are multiple reasons why there remains a disparity in attitudes between BME communities and White communities.

In the US, the influence of social class must be acknowledged, particularly given that Black Americans are disproportionately represented in lower socio-economic backgrounds (Ferguson 2000). Thus, as Froyum (2007) notes, implying that ‘at least I’m not gay’ is a



means of raising social and masculine capital. BME gay athletes, then—particularly those from lower social classes—might feel compelled to remain closeted, meaning that heterosexual BME communities rarely interact with gay men. This is something that has been shown to improve attitudes toward gays and lesbians through the lens of Allport's (1954) Contact Theory (see also Smith, Axelton and Saucier 2009). This hypothesis is best illustrated by Baunach et al. (2010, 56), who wrote that, 'White students had more contact with gays and held fewer prejudicial attitudes than Black students; moreover...contact [had] stronger effects on Whites' prejudice'.

Attitudes towards homosexuality among BME communities are also considerably influenced by religion—and Christianity, in particular (Sherkat, De Vries and Creek 2010). Ward's (2005, 497) analysis of the US Black Church, for example, leads him to argue that: 'Black churches vary widely in their approach to homosexuality. However, the responses of the majority of Black churches range from verbalized hostility towards homosexuals to, at best, silence on the issue'. Ward further argues that very few US Black churches embrace sexual minorities. In the UK, while the church is becoming increasingly disentangled from the state—social attitude surveys show that church attendance continues to fall (Park et al. 2013)—it continues to play a significant role in British culture. Opposition to the legalization of same-sex marriage was, for example, most vociferous from religious institutions such as the Church of England (Magrath, 2017b). The church in the UK also remains central to many BME communities.

In the UK and the US, elevated rates of homophobia can perhaps also be explained by the effect of migration—particularly from a plethora of African countries (Adepoju 2004). The religious doctrine originating from countries such as Nigeria and Sudan—where homosexuality is governed by archaic laws and brutal punishments—is something which likely continues after migrants' settlement into another culture. Essentially, many Western

values—including the acceptance of homosexuality—are rejected. Magrath (2017b) documented this in research among BME elite footballers in the UK. But even as leading BME sportswriters draw parallels between homosexuality and BME communities' involvement in sport (see Anderson and McCormack 2010), many of these communities fail to recognize the damage caused by homophobia. Nor do they see the commonalities of gay and Black oppression. As such, articulating the similarities between these two groups may help both in their pursuit of emancipation.

### **Theorizing Contemporary Masculinities**

The most prominent theoretical framework underpinning the social stratification of masculinity in the Western world has been Connell's (1995) Hegemonic Masculinity Theory (HMT). From a social constructionist perspective, HMT articulates two social processes: (1) that all men benefit from patriarchy, and (2) the recognition of multiple masculinities existing in an intra-masculine hierarchy. Over the past three decades, HMT has been widely cited in research on sport, masculinities, and sexualities (e.g. Messerschmidt 2018). But improvements in attitudes toward homosexuality over the past two decades have facilitated a theoretical paradigm shift in recent years. Anderson's (2009) IMT has since emerged as the most effective way through which to understand the changing dynamics of peer group cultures across the Western world (Anderson and McCormack 2018).

A plethora of contemporary research has documented that millennial men—particularly those who participate in competitive team sports—espouse more positive attitudes toward homosexuality (Anderson, Magrath and Bullingham 2016). This shift, which Gaston, Magrath and Anderson (2018) described as 'the shift from hostility to inclusivity', is also characterized by a redefinition of gendered behaviors and activities. Millennial men in the West, for example, are now more physically tactile (Anderson and McCormack 2015;

Magrath and Scoats 2019), enjoy more open and intimate friendships (Robinson, Anderson and White 2018), and generally embrace a variety of activities and styles once coded as strictly feminine (Anderson 2014; see also Williams 1985).

Central to IMT is the concept of ‘homohysteria’. Recognizing that homophobia alone is incapable of explaining men’s attitudes and behaviours, it is best defined as a ‘homosexually-panicked culture in which suspicion [of homosexuality] permeates’ (Anderson 2011b, 83). It is argued that, in order for a culture of homohysteria to exist, three social factors must align: (1) the mass awareness and acceptance of homosexuality as a static sexual orientation; (2) an overwhelming cultural negativity towards homosexuality; and (3) demonisation of men’s femininity (and women’s masculinity) due to its close association with homosexuality. Importantly, unlike other concepts, homohysteria recognizes that attitudes and behaviors are historically situated and vary across time (and space).

There are also important intersecting factors which extend this debate further. As we outlined earlier in this paper, migration, ethnicity and/or religion have been identified in literature as the most significant factors impeding more progressive attitudes toward homosexuality (Keleher and Smith 2012; Watt and Elliot 2019). Other factors, such as social class (e.g. Blanchard, McCormack and Peterson 2017) and level of education (e.g. Kozloski 2010) can also influence attitudes toward homosexuality, and the dynamics of contemporary masculinities. Given the overwhelming body of research documenting positive attitudes toward sexual minorities, IMT has evolved into the most prolific theoretical framework to underpin the shift in contemporary masculinities among men in the West (Anderson and McCormack 2018).

## **Methods**

This article draws together data from two research projects specifically designed to critically investigate the contemporary relationship between ‘race’, ethnicity, sport, and homophobia. The first of these projects focuses on data collected with the students of a university renowned for its commitment to widening participation, situated in the South of England; the second project focuses on data collected with players from the academy of an EPL football club. Although both sets of data were collected as part of larger studies, this article focuses specifically on the results of BME participants. Information on each of the research settings is articulated in the sections below.

### ***Study 1***

Over 250 heterosexual male undergraduate students were recruited for this study. This article focuses on the results of eight BME students. Of these eight students, four were Black African and four were Black-Caribbean. At the time of data collection, they were aged between 18 and 21 years, and all self-identified as ‘exclusively heterosexual’ (see Savin-Williams 2017).

Student attitudes towards homosexuality were measured using Herek’s (1988) ATLG-R (see Appendix 1). This scale is a measure of heterosexuals’ attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, consisting of 20 items that assess affective responses to homosexuality, gay men, and lesbians. Ten items reference lesbians (the ATL subscale) and 10 items reference gay men (the ATG subscale). For instance, ‘Sex between two men is just plain wrong’. Participants respond to each item on a nine-point Likert scale (1 = ‘strongly disagree’, 9 = ‘strongly agree’). Seven items of the ATLG-R are reverse-scored, so that a higher score indicates greater homonegativism. Thus, total scores can range from 20 to 180 for the full scale and 10 to 90 for the subscales.

For this research, some minor amendments to the ATLG-R were required. First, because of the country of data collection (and broadly reflecting legal equality in the UK), the ‘State laws regulating private, consenting lesbian behavior should be abolished’ item was removed. Second, ‘The growing number of lesbians indicates a decline in American morals’ was reworded from ‘American’ to ‘British’, again reflecting the country of data collection. Overall, 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.

In line with Herek’s (1988) recommendations, several variants of the ATL, ATG, and ATLG-R were also produced. Specifically, items on the ATG were revised to refer to lesbians; subsequently 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 ATL were revised to refer to gay men; creating ATG Part 1, ATG Part 2, and ATG Total variants. 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.

Herek (1998) documented that the ATLG and its subscales have shown high levels of internal consistency, with acceptable alpha levels for the subscales ( $>0.85$ ) and for the full scale ( $>0.90$ ) among samples of university students. He also reported acceptable full-scale test-retest reliability (0.90) after three weeks with a student sample. Moreover, Herek (1998) found that ATLG scores were not linked to socially desirable response sets—a critique which is often levelled at qualitative studies of sport and sexuality. Although Herek (1998) reworded five items from the original ATLG to clarify their meaning, there is no indication that these revisions have changed the psychometric properties of the scale (see Rosik 2007).

Correlations between all of the ALTG-R variants used in the present study further demonstrated the convergent validity (Marsh 2007) of the ATLG-R.

## *Study 2*

This study draws on data collected at the academy of an EPL football club. In English professional football, most clubs competing in the EPL and English Football League (EFL) have a pool of specially selected talented young players who are nurtured and developed with the club. Recruitment to these academies often takes place from as young as six years old, with clubs expected to nurture and develop these players, preparing them for participation in professional football when they reach 18 years of age. These players also undergo a rigorous retention process after every season, and those whose footballing ability has not progressed to the desired level are ‘released’ by the club. Thus, unsurprisingly, statistics show that around 85% of players at this level of football fail to achieve professional status in the game (Brown and Potrac 2009; Conn 2017; Williams 2009).

Access to this group of footballers was granted after contact was made with the EPL academy’s Operations Manager, who was informed by the first author that similar research had recently been undertaken within another EPL academy (see Magrath 2017a; see also Magrath, Anderson and Roberts 2015), and that there was scope for further investigation with other, young academy footballers in order to measure English football’s overall image with respect to equality and diversity issues. At the time of data collection, the majority of these men competed in the National Under-18 Premier League, and a small number in the Professional Development League.

In total, 18 players were interviewed, though this research focuses on the eight BME players included in the sample. These men were aged between 17 and 20 years, and consisted of three Black Caribbean, three Black African, and two Black British men. Again, all self-

identified as 'exclusively heterosexual'. Importantly, each of the eight men also self-identified as Christian: something that has been documented as influencing more conservative attitudes toward homosexuality (Sherkat, De Vries and Creek 2010; Ward, 2005). The first author conducted one-to-one, semi-structured interviews with each of the participants. All were conducted in person, and ranged from between 40 and 75 minutes, averaging approximately 50 minutes. After initially striking rapport through topical discussions of football, interviews focused on a range of issues, including general gay-friendliness, gay teammates, team relationships, and the development of friendships with teammates.

Interviews were immediately transcribed following the conclusion of the data collection process. A thematic analysis was then employed to facilitate the identification of themes related to participants' general attitudes towards sexual minorities, and the factors that may have helped to shape such attitudes. This approach is widely regarded as the most effective method for 'identifying patterns (themes) in a dataset, and for describing and interpreting the meaning and importance of those' (Braun, Clarke and Weate 2016, 191). To ensure a consistent approach, Braun, Clarke and Weate's (2016) guidance list to thematic analysis was followed throughout the data analysis process. This included a thorough and comprehensive approach to coding, as well as detailed interpretation of analytic claims. This approach ensured a rigorous approach to analysis that keeps 'quality as a foregrounded concern' (2016, 202).

### ***Ethics***

Institutional ethical clearance was provided prior to data collection. All ethical guidelines of the British Sociological Association (BSA) were followed throughout the research process.

This includes participants' rights to view transcripts (none did), the right to withdrawal from

the respective research projects (none did), and assurance of confidentiality and anonymity of both themselves (i.e., through the use of pseudonyms in the interview data) and their organizations. Participants were also briefed as to the aims and objectives of the respective projects, and provided with the researchers' contact information (where appropriate). All signed a consent form prior to data collection.

## **Results**

The results of this study are divided into two sections. First, we outline the quantitative data collected using the ATLG-R scale—showing that the eight BME participants espoused more conservative attitudes than White participants. Second, we present interview data from eight BME footballers from the academy of an EPL club—again showing they are far less progressive in their acceptance of homosexuality than their White teammates.

### **Study 1: ATLG Data**

Given that the aim of this study was to examine BME male students' attitudes toward gay men, only data from the ATG Part 1, ATG Part 2, and ATG Total Variants were examined in this study, with descriptive statistics depicted in Table 1. Results indicated that while attitudinal dispositions of homophobia among young White students were minimal, scores for BME students were higher on every variable examined, indicating more conservative attitudes toward homosexuality.

*Insert Table 1 here.*



## Study 2: Interview Data

The young BME men interviewed from the EPL academy adopted mixed perspectives concerning homosexuality. Rationalizing this mixed response, many of these men are first, second, or even third generation immigrants whose families hail from countries where attitudes toward homosexuality are more conservative and intolerant compared to those in the UK (Clements and Field 2014; Watt and Elliot 2019). Thus, these men have been socialized into an environment which is intolerant of homosexuality due to its strong Christian beliefs. As a consequence, these young men are torn between their families' fundamentalist belief systems regarding homosexuality – and that of their peers, usually a more inclusive and acceptant perspective (Magrath 2017b). Unsurprisingly, therefore, results from the interview data offered a mixed response.

Two of the eight men interviewed for this research espoused what could be considered progressive attitudes toward homosexuality. Bill, for example, said that, 'Homosexuality isn't a problem for me, but then it doesn't really affect me in any way. I just see it as "so be it" so it doesn't really bother me'. Similarly, Pete simply indicated that he 'doesn't have a problem with it [homosexuality]'. However, he followed this up by commenting, I would feel uncomfortable, though, if there were two gay people kissing next to me'. However, this is more a matter of sexual desires, rather than one's attitude toward the rights of sexual minorities (see Magrath, Anderson and Roberts 2015). These same men were, again, the only ones in the sample who espoused favourable attitudes toward same-sex marriage, for which legislation had recently been passed in British Parliament<sup>2</sup> around the time of data collection.

While these two men espoused the most positive responses regarding homosexuality, there were also two men from the team who displayed a level of uncertainty. Evidencing this, Joel said that, 'From a religious point of view, I think it's [homosexuality] wrong—definitely

wrong. But then again, people drinking and smoking is wrong, too. Christianity says that all sins are the same'. Similarly, Samuel said that, 'I'm half and half. I have a problem but, also, I don't...If you're gay and you love them, who am I to stop this love between two people?' These assertions are clear evidence of young men who, despite their backgrounds, recognize that same-sex relationships are part of everyday life—and not something which can be controlled under religious dogma.

The remainder of the BME players from this football team espoused vastly different attitudes to some of their teammates, and predominantly relied on Biblical rhetoric to rationalize their intolerance of homosexuality. Illustrating this, Ben said that, 'Being gay is a choice, and you're choosing to be and act in a certain way. I'm quite religious so I have my own views on it'. Similarly, when asked about social and legal rights for sexual minorities, Freddie firmly responded that, 'Homosexuality isn't in the Bible. It shouldn't be happening at all'. And Rich said that, 'It [homosexuality] isn't right. It's supposed to be a man with a woman and vice versa—not for each other'. Reflecting these general attitudes toward homosexuality, these men also objected to the passing of same-sex marriage in the UK. Once again, these participants attributed their objections to their strong Christian beliefs and outlined that marriage should be restricted to being between a man and a woman.

Previous research (e.g. Anderson 2002) has argued that prejudicial attitudes in sport might be muted by the athletic excellence of a gay teammate. However, there was little deviation in these BME athletes' attitudes toward having an openly gay teammate. Again, Bill and Pete were the only participants who espoused any explicit tolerance of a gay teammate. For example, Pete said that, 'I don't think it [a gay teammate] would change a lot, really. He's still the same guy and I'd still get on well with him'. Similarly, Bill said that, 'There might be jokes about it from others, so it wouldn't be great for him, but it certainly wouldn't bother me'. Two other participants—Samuel and Joel—were unsure of their

response. Similar to his earlier comments, for example, Samuel said that, ‘I think I’d be fine with it, and I’m not sure it would change anything. I’d just be a bit wary about it’. And Joel commented that, ‘I don’t know how I’d react. It depends who it was, maybe. I’d still be cautious’.

The remaining participants were, again, far less progressive in their attitudes toward having a gay teammate. Once again, this was something they attributed to their strong religious beliefs. Freddie, for example, said that, ‘No, I wouldn’t be happy about that. If it was a gay teammate, it might affect our friendship’. Similarly, Liam commented that, ‘I don’t think I could be supportive. It wouldn’t change anything on the pitch, but I’m a Christian and that comes first’. Rich echoed his earlier comments regarding his dislike for same-sex relationships, commenting that, ‘No, it [a gay teammate] would make me uncomfortable. It just wouldn’t feel right’. He also added that, ‘A gay teammate...[That] would probably make him a target [for other teams] as well, so there’s another reason to be uncomfortable’.

Both datasets presented here, then, indicate that some BME sporting men in the UK are more likely to adopt conservative attitudes toward homosexuality and social and legal equality than White sporting men. This, it can be argued, is attributable to a range of factors.

## **Discussion**

Research in the US and UK has typically documented unfavourable attitudes toward sexual minorities among heterosexual undergraduate students (D’Augelli and Rose 1990; Epstein, O’Flynn and Telford 2004; Herek 1988; Kurdek 1988). Since the turn of the millennium, however, research has indicated that gay students are now better accepted than ever before (Bush, Anderson and Carr 2012; Taulke-Johnson 2008). Inclusive attitudes toward homosexuality have especially been the case in the sporting setting (Anderson, Magrath and Bullingham 2016). While this has mostly been documented through a range of qualitative

analyses (e.g. Anderson 2011a; Magrath 2017a; Magrath, Anderson and Roberts 2015), recent quantitative research has also shown comparable levels of inclusivity (Bush, Anderson and Carr 2012; Watt and Elliot 2019).

The present research measures attitudes toward homosexuality among BME students at a British university in the South of England. Over 250 undergraduate students completed a modified version of Herek's (1988) ATLG-R scale upon their first attendance at university. Results indicated that BME students espoused more conservative attitudes toward homosexuality than their White peers (see Magrath 2017b; Southall et al. 2011). For example, BME students' results were higher on every variable of the ATLG-R presented.

These results were supplemented by semi-structured interviews with eight BME footballers from the academy of an EPL football club. Two of the men from this academy—Pete and Bill—espoused generally positive attitudes toward homosexuality and what could be considered as 'support' for same-sex marriage. Each of these men were also generally positive in hypothetical discussions about a gay teammate. The remaining participants, however, were less progressive, and drew on their religious beliefs to rationalize their intolerance of homosexuality. For the same reason, these men—predictably—also opposed the introduction of same-sex marriage and competing alongside a gay teammate.

These findings are consistent with previous literature measuring attitudes toward homosexuality among BME men (e.g. Baunach, Burgess and Muse 2010; Magrath 2017b; Southall et al. 2011). This, we argue, is attributable to three inter-related factors: (1) BME men (especially in the US, but also in the UK, too) are disproportionately represented in lower social classes. Thus, they adopt less inclusive dispositions on sexual difference in an attempt to increase their own masculine capital (see Anderson 2009); (2) higher rates of fundamentalist religiosity are evident among BME communities, thus increasing rates of sexual hostility (Sherkat, De Vries and Creek 2010; Ward 2005); and (3) we recognize the

effect of migration, particularly from countries where attitudes toward homosexuality remain less progressive than those in the West. Thus, in this context, many migrants might reject Western norms, or are unable to disentangle the intolerant values of their homeland, and retain these perspectives.

Because of these inter-related factors, it has been argued that BME gay men might remain closeted in an attempt to avoid an extra level of stigma. This, in turn, results in BME communities interacting with fewer (if any) gay men—an essential component of improving or maintaining positive attitudes toward sexual minorities (e.g. Allport 1954; see also Baunach, Burgess and Muse 2010). Given that the men in this study are first, second, or third generation immigrants whose families' home countries might be governed by archaic laws to homosexuality, it is likely that they have been socialized into an environment which is hostile toward homosexuality.

Consistent with other recent research on attitudes toward homosexuality, this research also adopts Anderson's (2009) IMT. However, the findings of this research depart from IMT's central thesis of growing inclusion of homosexuality. Nevertheless, the data presented here still shows an improvement in attitudes compared to US data; Southall et al. (2011), for example, showed that over two-thirds of participants expressed objection to homosexuality, and dissatisfaction with a gay teammate—compared with only a quarter of White participants. Given the positive outlook of IMT scholars, the impact of factors such as 'race', ethnicity, religion, and migration—and how these may influence attitudes toward homosexuality—cannot be overlooked. In the UK, for instance, Watt and Elliot (2019, 1103) show that 'those from Black Minority ethnic groups tend to be more homonegative than Whites and this difference is widening'. Similarly, in the US, there is 'continued stigmatization of same-sex behavior in the Black community' (Twenge, Sherman and Wells 2016, 1727). Accordingly, while the present research is inconsistent with IMT's principal

argument, it broadly supports its caveat that declining homophobia is an uneven social process, and can differ according to a multitude of sociodemographic factors.

An important concluding point is that it is not the intention of this study to portray BME communities negatively. Rather, this research hypothesizes the complex reasons why these communities may continue to harbour more conservative attitudes than White communities (see Twenge, Sherman and Wells 2016; Watt and Elliot 2019). We also recognize that the generalizability of these findings may be limited. BME people are not a homogenous group and we certainly do not represent all of them in this study. Further research is therefore required to measure the extent of homophobia among these groups more broadly.

Finally, this research supports Southall et al.'s (2011, 308) concluding points that these findings may be 'of particular concern to athletic department administrators'—particularly in an era where sport is demonstrating a stronger commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion than ever before (Magrath 2020). While the attitudes espoused by the BME men in this research may not necessarily mean that homophobic behaviors will be actualized—although some data suggests this may be the case—these findings could be problematic when one considers that these men, both in the university setting or professional football setting, represent the next generation of the sporting workforce. Accordingly, the elevated rates of homophobia in this study support the recommendations of previous studies for greater proactivity in offering equality, diversity, and inclusivity training to *all* athletes.

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Table 1.

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

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	ATG Part 1	ATG Part 2	ATG Total
BME Students	28 (44)	38 (36)	65 (79)
White Students	17 (14)	26 (15)	43 (26)

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale, Revised Version (ATLG-R)**

*Insert here.*

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<sup>1</sup> 'Widening participation' refers to governmental attempts to increase the number of students entering higher education from under-represented groups (e.g. BME communities, working-class communities, and so on).

<sup>2</sup> Despite being passed in British Parliament, this legislation only affected England and Wales. Scottish and Northern Irish legislation permitting same-sex marriage was passed in 2014 2020 respectively.