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Inclusive Masculinities in Contemporary Football

Men in the Beautiful Game

Rory Magrath

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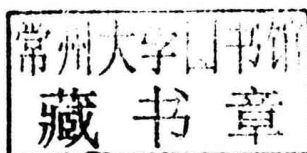
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Inclusive Masculinities in Contemporary Football

Football has traditionally been an institution hostile toward sexual minorities. Boys and men in the sport have deployed high levels of homophobia for multiple reasons. However, the ground-breaking research within this book shows that intolerant attitudes toward gay men are increasingly being challenged. Based on unprecedented access to Premier League academies, *Inclusive Masculinities in Contemporary Football: Men in the Beautiful Game* explores these changing attitudes toward homophobia in football today.

Revealing a range of masculine identities never before empirically measured at this level of football, this book discusses the implications for the complex and enclosed structures of professional sport, and extends our understanding of contemporary masculinity. It also offers fresh insights to the importance of “banter” in the development of relationships and identities. This culture of banter often plays a paradoxical role, both facilitating and disrupting friendships formed between male footballers.

As the first title in the Routledge Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities Series, this book is fascinating reading for all students and scholars interested in football and the study of gender, sexuality and the sociology of sport.

Rory Magrath is a Lecturer in the School of Sport, Health and Social Sciences at Southampton Solent University, UK. His research focuses on the effects of declining homophobia in British sport, and how this impacts on the expression of contemporary masculinity. He has conducted research with footballers from Premier League academies and universities, as well as British football fans. His research has received media attention from the *Guardian*, BBC Radio 5 Live and *London Evening Standard*.

Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities

Rapid transitions related to men and masculinities are occurring across the Western world: Men are living and working within post-industrial capitalist societies; the decline of homophobia in some cultural contexts has led to profound changes in the social dynamics of men; and the internet is transforming social lives, particularly for young people. Ways to understand the dynamics of men are diversifying even as social issues related to men and masculinities persist in a range of spheres at an international level. New theoretical developments have also occurred as empirical studies shed new light on familiar topics.

The **Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities** series will be an important hub for innovative and theoretically rich empirical research that develops a critical understanding of men and masculinities within contemporary societies. This series welcomes research monographs examining important social issues related to boys, men and masculinities, including issues related to class, sexuality, age, "race," individualization and gender relations in a range of social contexts (e.g. education, society, work, family, sport and media). Books advancing new or innovative theories to understand masculinities will be particularly welcomed, and the series will be a venue for cutting-edge empirical research. Edited books will be accepted if they address a key gap in knowledge and provide a compelling rationale for their inclusion. We welcome relevant scholarship from any country.

Mark McCormack is Senior Lecturer in Sociology in the School of Applied Social Sciences at Durham University.

Eric Anderson is Professor of Sport, Masculinities and Sexualities at the University of Winchester.

Nick Rumens is Professor of Human Resource Management at the University of Portsmouth.

Books:

Inclusive Masculinities in Contemporary Football

Men in the Beautiful Game

Rory Magrath

To Mark, Anne, Theresa and Jess

Foreword

*Eric Anderson, Mark McCormack and
Nick Rumens*

Research on men and masculinities is at an important juncture. Men are negotiating the challenges associated with living and working in a post-industrial capitalist society; the decline of homophobia in many cultural contexts has led to profound changes in the dynamics of men and masculinities; the internet is transforming social lives; and men's responses to new forms of feminism and post-feminism have conditioned complex contemporary understandings of gender inequality. Consequently, masculinities are changing in important and diverse ways. It is for this reason that sophisticated empirical research is of vital importance to help us understand the shifting and historically patterned dynamics between men and masculinities.

The critical study of men and masculinities emerged from feminist concerns related to the role men played in the reproduction of gender inequality, as well as concerns about the persistence of men's power and the unequal distribution of male privilege and power between men. To date, a great deal of research has converged around "hegemonic masculinity" as a conceptual tool to theorize these issues. Yet the marked social changes of the past 30 years have seen a diversification of theories and perspectives on how to understand men and masculinities in the contemporary world. Hearn et al. (2012) frame this as a "third phase" of masculinities research, characterized by "diversity and critique, which includes work by a new generation of scholars not embedded in the frameworks of the 1980s" (p. 37).

It is in this vein that we developed this book series. New social understandings of men, gender, sexuality, work and family life require new ways of examining and theorizing contemporary masculinities. We are thus delighted to be editing this series which will serve as a catalyst for the production of high-quality, empirical social science.

The series will focus on research monographs that examine important social issues related to boys and men and their masculinities, including issues related to class, sexuality, age, "race" and gender relations in a range of social contexts (e.g. sport, education, society, work, politics and

media). It is important that this series addresses these issues in international contexts, highlighting the global nature of masculinities and research on the subject. With this vision in mind, we are pleased to have Dr Rory Magrath's research on the intersection of football and masculinity as the first volume in this series.

In the United Kingdom (UK), football and rugby are the two sports that stand as markers of masculinity. The (in)famous saying that "Football is a gentleman's game played by hooligans, and rugby is a hooligan's game played by gentlemen," carries enormous cultural freight concerning the complexity of men, masculinity, class and violence associated with these sports in British culture. Historically, rugby has been integrated into public (i.e. private) schools in a similar way to how football has been traditionally played by working-class youth, with rugby coded as the more "middle-class sport." Yet attending elite football matches costs far more than equivalent rugby games, and there is no simplistic class divide between sports in either participation or spectating. While the academy and university players featured in Magrath's monograph are predominantly working class, football defies any easy class categorization. As a sport, leisure activity and social institution, football has evolved in relation to broader labor changes in British and international societies (Wagg, 1984).

The gender dynamics of British football are no less complex. Football was historically a violent and dangerous sport, and typical footballers in the 1980s and early 1990s were tough, muscular men, exemplified by the UK football player Vinnie Jones who proceeded to have a successful film career as a film star playing gangster roles. And yet it is heterosexual footballers like David Beckham that have pioneered the softening of masculinity as wider developments in male sexuality have occurred, such as the rise of "metrosexuality." Yet within the contemporary cultural football landscape, no footballer has come out as gay within the professional upper echelons since Justin Fashanu in 1990. As Dr Magrath discusses in this book, Fashanu's experience of coming out was one of extreme homophobia, racism, social isolation and abuse. It all resulted in his tragic suicide in 1998.

However, research on football and homophobia shows improving attitudes among fans, especially within the non-professional levels of sport (Cashmore & Cleland, 2012). Yet with no openly gay players in British football, and with reports of persistent homophobic chants in professional matches, British football is perceived as homophobic, and not least the footballers themselves.

The institutionalized nature of professional sport—and the great privacy of these sporting organizations—means that research on active, professional players is extremely difficult and challenging to undertake. One of the reasons Magrath's monograph is exceptional and important is precisely because it accesses the next generation of professional football players:

men who are on the doorstep of playing at the professional level. The sample of players is diverse: mostly British, but with a significant international group; a range of ethnicities; atheists, agnostics and those who identify as deeply religious; and most but not all are from working-class backgrounds.

In his qualitative interviews with these young men, Dr Magrath moves well beyond simply ascertaining levels of homophobia. His research investigates diverse aspects of homophobia—not just general attitudes—but how one might deal with a gay player, whether they would give a best man speech at a gay wedding, and other similar questions that speak to the privileging of straightness as well as homophobia. It is these types of questions, combined with detailed interviews about the gay male friends some players have, that make Magrath's study one of the most thorough empirical investigations into the attitudes of self-identified straight male professional players toward gay men in sport.

Fundamentally, Magrath's monograph is about masculinities and sport, not just attitudes toward gay people. The interview data from this book demonstrates the profound changes taking place between men and masculinities that have occurred in education, the media and amateur levels of sport are present among these elite players as well. Notably, Magrath's participants express strong emotional bonds with their male friends, have "bromances" characterized by emotional disclosure as well as physical intimacy.

Dr Magrath also highlights the enduring importance of competitiveness within the institution, with participants commenting on closer bonds with friends from home, rather than with their friends in the academy—who are competing for only a limited number of professional places. While this highlights the significance of organizational contexts conditioning competitive forms of masculinities, it also illuminates the intimacy and friendship between men who are in competition with each other.

The importance of competition is demonstrated in the interviews undertaken with 20 slightly older players on a university team, with participants entering this university through widening participation schemes. These players operate within a fundamentally different organizational setting. They are not seeking professional status, but rather a qualification to aid the chances of securing non-playing employment in professional football. This form of pressure appears to enable some men to enjoy greater emotional intimacy than those men positioned in academies, and are able to bond through university achievements.

We desire this book series to be an international endeavor. Masculinities are context-specific and related to broader cultural changes that have local and national resonance within a networked and globalized age. This book, an empirical study of contemporary elite footballing culture, speaks to these trends. While located in a sport that can be said to exemplify

British culture, the international diversity of participants in these settings and the social history of football, sport and masculinities that Dr Magrath provides makes this book an excellent first monograph for this series on men and masculinities.

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Part I

