



## ***Sexuality in British Horseracing; an exploratory study into prevalence and attitudes.***

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### **SUMMARY**

This project investigates the prevalence of sexual minority individuals within the British horseracing industry and the associated attitudes which exist. As the second largest spectator sport in Great Britain, it is essential that the industry is aware of the existent diversity in this domain in order to formulate diversity and inclusion strategies for sexual minority participants.

The growth and development of the horseracing industry has resulted in vastly increased diversity within the sport; however, this is not distributed evenly and certain segments continue to be influenced by the dominant masculinities witnessed in the early parts of the sport's history. One profession that demonstrates these persistent linkages to the past is that of the jockey; this key role within the sport continues to show considerable bias towards male participants - accounting for around 86% of those currently licensed.

As such, the research primarily focusses on the population of professional licensed jockeys in the sport, with an exploration of the wider racing industry to provide context. This has been done as other sports' research in this area has focussed on professional athletes and it was felt that a more solid comparison could be undertaken in this way.

Although much speculation may have occurred, British horseracing has had only one jockey who has been openly gay, whilst riding, during the sport's extensive history. Given that the pool of licensed jockeys sits at around 400 individuals at any one time, this is a stark statistic – an anomalous figure mirrored widely across the sporting landscape. The evidence of perceived and realised prejudice towards gay, lesbian and bisexual jockeys is a very real consideration which requires attention in order to improve the environment for sexual minorities within the sport.

As the first study on this theme within the sport, data collection used a mixed methods approach through a combination of surveys and interviews. The capture of survey data regarding sexual minorities was important in understanding the population at hand and attitudes in existence, whilst interviews added personal perspectives to supplement the survey findings.

The results highlight significant percentages of individuals identifying as non-heterosexual across both survey sample populations – likely to be in line with national population estimates if extrapolated. Interestingly, 0.33% of the racing survey respondents did not wish to disclose their sexuality at all, however this figure rose to 5.37% amongst the jockey population sampled.

The attitudinal responses to sexual minority colleagues demonstrate the majority of those sampled do not hold homophobic views, with most indicating positive responses in this area;

- 88% of the racing survey and 77% of the jockey survey responded on the positive side of neutral when asked how their opinion would be impacted by having a gay, lesbian or bisexual colleague.
- 92% of the racing survey and 78% of the jockey survey responded on the positive side of neutral when asked how comfortable they would feel if a colleague 'came out' as gay, lesbian or bisexual.

One key finding surrounds the use of homophobic language in the sport and the potential impact on the environment and culture this creates, regardless of the intent behind its use; this was of particular prevalence amongst the population of male jockeys sampled, with 5% reporting using homophobic language as abuse and 50% reporting using homophobic language as humour.

In summary, the results presented in the report suggest the following in relation to the environment of the male weighing room;

- Jockeys are more likely to remain 'closeted' about their sexual orientation than the wider racing sample population
- Jockeys hold 'colleagues' response' and 'lack of riding opportunities' as the two most commonly cited reasons for remaining 'closeted'
- A largely positive attitude towards having a sexual minority colleague, however;
  - ⊖ Males hold more divided views than their female counterparts in relation to the opinion of having a gay, lesbian or bisexual colleague
  - ⊖ Males hold more negative views than their female counterparts in relation to the comfort level with having a gay, lesbian or bisexual colleague
  - ⊖ Younger jockeys demonstrated less positive responses, particularly in relation to the comfort level with having a gay, lesbian or bisexual colleague
- Males are more likely to use homophobic language as both abuse and as humour than their female counterparts

Given the exploration of these results in conjunction with the existing literature, it would appear as though the male weighing room in British horseracing is not inherently homophobic in nature, however it inadvertently encourages an atmosphere of heteronormativity which can have negative consequences for those located outside of those parameters.

Considering the existing well-recorded pressures on jockeys, including; weight, travel and financial concerns, the research highlights an additional aspect of their working environment which could be eliciting further strain. Comprehension of this issue can help to reduce an additional pressure on what is already a demanding profession; this could realistically improve the mental health of those involved with the introduction of diversity awareness training and the provision of specialised counselling services as examples.

Recommendations based on these findings are for the extension of research in this area to better understand the reasons behind the witnessed trends, including an examination of the culture of British horseracing and its potential impact on diversity and inclusion practice and policy.

In addition, a number of practical suggestions are made for increasing awareness of sexual minorities in the sport and highlighting the impact of homophobic language use, such as; poster campaigns, 'Rainbow Saddlecloths' and diversity education. It is also suggested that amendments be made to industry employment forms in order to permit data recording and tracking of sexual minority individuals within the sport.

*Please note: The full study has not yet been published. All of the studies from the Thoroughbred Horseracing Industries MBA will be published in due course.*