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To cite this article: Bradley Spurdens & Daniel Bloyce (2022): Beyond the rainbow: a discourse analysis of English sports organisations LGBT+ equality diversity and inclusion policies, International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics, DOI: [10.1080/19406940.2022.2080245](https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2022.2080245)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2022.2080245>



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Published online: 31 May 2022.



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Beyond the rainbow: a discourse analysis of English sports organisations LGBT+ equality diversity and inclusion policies

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ABSTRACT

LGBT+ issues and advocacy are becoming more considered in various policies throughout society. However, sport is often described as a resistive space to such policies. This paper examines the effectiveness of current LGBT+ equality policies within English sports organisations. Specifically, 188 National Governing Body (NGB) policies were reviewed as well as 67 policies from other relevant organisations. We utilised a Foucauldian discourse analysis to identify the dominant narratives within the policies. From our analysis, we suggest that what is explicit throughout the policies is a partial stasis. This stasis takes the form of organisations gesturing towards change but failing to implement it concretely in their policies. We describe this process using the concept of 'equality-proofing' where just enough is done by organisations to gesture towards change or equality. Finally, recommendations for future policy praxis are considered.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 5 August 2021
Accepted 16 May 2022

KEYWORDS

LGBT+; sport; policy; equality; discourse; NGB

Introduction

Many organisations, academics and individual advocates suggest that inequality persists between the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Plus (LGBT+) community and their heterosexual or cisgender counterparts (Griffin 2012). Sport is one milieu in which this inequality is suggested to exist and persist, in terms of participation and acceptance (Griffin 2012, Shaw and Cunningham 2021). Lawrence and Taylor (2019) suggest that what accompanies many changes in LGBT+ policy in general is a 'partial stasis': a stall or incomplete action towards inclusion. This study examines a partial stasis in the specific construction of sports organisations' equality, diversity and LGBT+ policy.

To date, the only previous review of United Kingdom (UK) sports organisations LGBT+ policies was conducted by Brackenridge *et al.* (2008) in association with Sport England. A second study of note by Jones *et al.* (2017) conducted a systematic review of trans participation and competition policies. Both considered several national governing body (NGB) inclusion policies that explicitly focused on members of the LGBT+ community. Brackenridge *et al.* (2008) highlighted numerous limitations in the policies they reviewed and argued that the policies were mainly hampered by social attitudes and lack of information. They suggested that social attitudes within sport meant that there was resilience to implementing the required changes and that insufficient information resulted in issues being ignored or remaining hidden (Brackenridge *et al.* 2008). Over 10 years later, it is conceivable that the cultural context and the information acquired on these issues have developed. Since 2008, much research has been conducted on sexuality and LGBT+ groups within sport, yet no significant

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review of policy change has accompanied it. Thus, this study aims to analyse the dominant discourses within equality policies of English National Governing Bodies (NGBs) by implementing a Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis.

English NGBs were selected on the basis that they represent a single coherent national example of governing LGBT+ inclusion in sport that might be contextually different from other nations. Therefore, this study presents data in the context of English NGBs, but many of the findings may be comparable to other contexts.

Foucault's experimentations to understand the operation of knowledge and power in society are relevant to this study. By adopting his methodological and theoretical approach, we were able to understand how LGBT+ policy was shaped through the influence of different organisations' interactions. Understanding such interactions provided vital insight into how NGBs structured their policies. Before examining the policies, it would be pertinent to contextualise the current body of research relating to LGBT+ policy in international and English sports institutions.

Literature review

Previous research has examined inclusion policies that NGBs have constructed to incorporate a range of groups. Studies have examined sports policies promoting equality, diversity or inclusion for gender (Shaw and Penney 2003), race (Carrington and McDonald 2008), disability (Nixon 2007), sexual orientation (Brackenridge *et al.* 2008, Griffin 2012, Magrath and Stott 2019) and transgender groups (Jones *et al.* 2017).

Global research has previously addressed a range of LGBT+ policy issues within sport. Studies in Australia (Storr *et al.* 2021), New Zealand (Shaw 2019), the United States (Buzuvis 2012, MacCharles and Hindman 2019, July) and in other international settings (see Shaw and Cunningham 2021) have examined the organisational activity and the adoption of equality diversity and inclusion policy, aimed at increasing the representation of LGBT+ people in sport.

Buzuvis (2012) provides a detailed account of transgender policy in the United States from which they conclude that a series of laws, when patchworked together, restrict or condition transgender athletes' participation. Furthermore, Buzuvis (2012) found that transgender policy adopted a 'one size fits all' inclusion policy at most levels of participation. Such an approach, they argued, often fails to address the complexities of equality in publicly funded organisations because it does not consider the different forms competitions can take, the various intensities of competition or the individual physiology of the trans person (Buzuvis 2012). Devolution of responsibility has been a consistent finding when examining LGBT+ and particularly transgender policies for sport participation, with many international and national sports organisations uncritically adopting policies from the top down (Mitra 2014, Love 2016, 2017). Indeed, there are similar cases of this in the UK, with NGBs regularly reviewing and altering their decisions on transgender policies (Jones *et al.* 2017). A recent example of patchwork transgender policy in the UK is the Rugby Football Union (RFU) having to consider the recommendations of World Rugby that have recently changed (see BBC 2020).

In Western cultures, namely the US, recent research has problematised the sport marketing aspects of LGBT+ inclusion cultures (Melton and MacCharles 2021). Indeed, there is notable viability in the LGBT+ market for sports organisations, particularly large events like the Gay Games or pride fan nights (Pitts and Ayers 2000, Pitts 2004, Melton and MacCharles 2021). Marketing research has drawn upon 'signalling theory' where organisations and consumers send signals to one another to reduce ambiguity, in this case, on their position towards LGBT+ advocacy (Melton and MacCharles 2021). Thus, sports organisations might signal their level of acceptance towards different minority groups through often commodified actions. However, there are occasions where false signalling can occur, in these scenarios, a consumer must evaluate the reliability of such signals (Melton and MacCharles 2021). Ultimately, from a marketing perspective, Melton and MacCharles (2021) pose the pertinent question of what signals are perceived as more authentic and why? Such literature is focused on the business case for signalling LGBT+ inclusion and trying to make connections between

organisation and consumer authentic. The present study calls this approach into question from a social justice perspective, and while recognising signalling between organisations is a factor that can contribute significantly to inclusion, we argue that market values such as 'signalling' in sports governing bodies might have adverse effects on the quality of the policies that they produce.

Referring to LGBT+ policy in Australia, Storr *et al.* (2021) suggest that more targeted approaches are needed, and a first step for many sports organisations would be to create specific LGBT+ policy for their sport. This finding built on the ideas of Shaw (2019), who, when studying sports organisations' attempts to construct an anti-homophobia framework in New Zealand, suggested that such a project becomes chaotic when there is limited expertise, resourcing, or clarity. Thus, recent studies from international scholars indicate that there is a need for targeted approaches to LGBT+ issues in sports organisations, yet these can be insufficient if not carried out in a meticulous way. Indeed, Spaaij *et al.* (2020) found that in Australian community sport organisations who claimed to adopt inclusive culture and practice, actions of exclusion and discrimination continued to persist. One could question if this persistence might also stem into larger governing sports organisations, which is something this study seeks to address in a UK context. Having recently analysed the international literature on LGBT+ advocacy in sports organisations, Shaw and Cunningham (2021) emphasise the need to 'drive new and diverse academic thought, encourage practitioners to include LGBTQ+ diversity and inclusion as a matter of course, and contribute to the diversification and strengthening of the theory and practice of sport management' (p. 9). The present study is one of the many that will drive, encourage and contribute to such objectives.

Sports organisations promote equality, diversity and inclusion policy in different ways, reflecting varying political ideologies (Cunningham 2011). The prevailing political climate and social dynamics within society or a specific administration can influence sport's organisations in a variety of ways (Cunningham 2011, p. 2015). Analysing gender equality policy produced by several NGBs in the UK, Shaw and Penney (2003) found that organisations had to commit to equality policies to receive government funding. Cunningham (2011) reiterates their point, suggesting that funding for sports facilities may be dictated by organisations' ideologies and commitment to appropriate policy. Due to the reliance of NGBs and other sports organisations on funding, Shaw and Penney (2003) suggest there is a tendency for 'window-dressing'. They argue that rather than implementing practical and thought-out equality policy, NGBs produce a policy to give the impression, at least, that they are doing something to achieve funding requirements (Shaw and Penney 2003). While being a funding requirement ensures that NGBs produce gender equality policies, it might mean that funding concerns take priority over genuine attempts to engage in reflexive, critical philosophies of equality (Shaw and Penney 2003). Failure to address complexities is often a negative consequence of funding overtly influencing equality policy requirements (Shaw and Penney 2003). However, it seems that organisations are less likely to engage with equality policy without financial or performance incentives (Houlihan and Lindsey 2013, Cunningham 2019). Thus, there appears something of a 'catch 22' situation for policymakers. Providing financial incentive may result in 'window-dressing' by NGBs, but lack of financial incentive could result in disengagement with equality policy entirely. Issues of funding and profit for NGBs tie into what Turconi and Shaw (2021) refer to as the business case for equality in sports organisations. Equality policies often must demonstrate their potential to stimulate the growth of the 'business' so that they can be considered worth implementing.

Bury (2015) and Magrath and Stott (2019) have analysed anti-homophobia policy produced by the Football Association (FA) in England. Trussell *et al.* (2018) has demonstrated the importance of creating open cultural climates on LGBT+ participants and their families. However, organisations have had varying success with the objectives outlined (see Cunningham 2011, 2015). Commonly this type of policy aims to ensure or at least try to make it so that all persons, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity: (1) can be physically active, (2) are free from institutionalised norms and values within sport restricting their sporting experience, (3) can participate on sports teams without embarrassment or fear of exclusion, (4) are treated by others within the organisation with respect and dignity, and (5) can progress into leadership positions, as player,

coach or administrator (Covey 2012). Covey's (2012) points all contribute towards what has been described as the social justice case for equality policies, where equality within organisations is pursued for its own sake and not that of profit or external recognition (Turconi and Shaw 2021). However, these policy aims are challenging to implement, as reviewing FA and the Equality Standard for Sport (ESS) policy has demonstrated (Bury 2015, Turconi and Shaw 2021). There are numerous shortcomings in the FA's attempt to implement change and reduce homophobia in football (Magrath and Stott 2019). Bury (2015) suggests that FA policy often constitutes a 'non-performative speech act' in which they make their actions visible but only create the perception of doing so. Within non-sporting organisations, Colgan *et al.* (2009) found there is a policy implementation gap between equality policy and practice on sexual orientation. Similarly, Magrath and Stott (2019) concluded that the FA paid only 'lip-service' to issues of homophobia. The FA has produced policy and visible action towards tackling homophobia, but, in reality, little has been achieved through policy (Bury 2015, Magrath and Stott 2019).

Brackenridge *et al.* (2008) argue that social justice messages of equality do not permeate through organisations and are instead recognised only through the connections with external equality promoting parties. There can often be issues with organisations that promote equality on behalf of NGBs (e.g. Stonewall). As Turconi and Shaw (2021) demonstrate in their review of the 'Equality Standard: A Framework for Sport', their main criticism was that it fails to provide sufficient integration between the business and the social justice case models of equality to elicit change. The Standard relies too heavily on the business case for equality, meaning insufficient policy can be produced from a social justice perspective. Having briefly explored relevant literature, we now outline the theoretical perspective that informs our research and present our research questions.

Foucauldian theory

Discourse underpins Foucauldian theoretical examinations (Markula-Denison and Pringle 2007). Foucault (2002) suggested that discourse is: 'sometimes ... the general domain of all statements, sometimes an individualisable group of statements, and sometimes a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements' (p. 8). Richardson (2006) argues that language is active, and discourse is, therefore, 'what people do'. Discourse consists of a group of related statements which cohere in some way to produce both meanings and effects in the real world: they effect, they are productive, they produce (Carabine 2001). What is consistent in these definitions is that discourse produces an expression of power through statements (Foucault 2002, Markula-Denison and Pringle 2007). Statements construct knowledges about practices which reinforce or reconstitute power relations (see Foucault 2012a). Discourses are types of knowledge that are constructed to express a set of values (Scharito *et al.* 2012). Thus, discourses are utilised by different groups or individuals to implant ideas and values; they construct a narrative though they can be challenged. A 'dominant discourse' is an idea, action or value which has become almost taken for granted and rarely questioned in a particular context (Foucault 2003, Markula-Denison and Pringle 2007). In opposition, 'counter-discourse' reflects an idea, action or value which is silenced in the dominant narratives of a time or place (Moussa and Scapp 1996).

Foucault is concerned with discourse because he wanted to more precisely examine the relationship between knowledge and power: discourse often operates as a 'set of rules' through which knowledge and power are informed by each other (Markula-Denison and Pringle 2007). A Foucauldian conception suggests that power is relational and occurs through everyday interactions (Foucault 2012a). The term micro-power expresses the notion that 'discourses shape the way bodies are understood or interact' (Scharito *et al.* 2012, p. xxiii). It is through discourse that meanings, subjects and subjectivities are formed (Wickman 2011). Foucault extrapolated this notion to understand governmentality: how society is governed. Lemke (2007) suggests that there are three

dimensions to governmentality: (1) the importance of knowledge and discourse in the construction of narratives, (2) the use of the concept of technology, including technologies of the self, and (3) the strategic use of power.

Technologies refer to the way subjects are pacified, dominated and regulated, making them subjectivities (Scharito *et al.* 2012). Bio-politics refers to regulatory power: 'technologies, forms of knowledge, discourses, politics and practices used to bring about the production and management of a state's human resources' (Scharito *et al.* 2012, p. xvii). It operates at the level of the state to regulate the population as opposed to disciplinary power which subjects individual bodies through institutions including, but not exclusive to, schools, prisons and hospitals (Taylor 2014a). NGBs essentially contribute to biopolitics and disciplinary power. Harris and Houlihan (2014) recognise NGBs as translators and implementors of policy. Thus, they exercise power with a series of aims and objectives influenced by other political institutions to develop their own strategies (Lynch 2014). NGBs are, therefore, subject to the exercise of power through relations with other institutions resulting in them acquiring subject-positions. Thus, power operates via interactions of influence between different subjectivities, coordinated through discursive practices: practices that perpetuate ideas or values (Foucault 1983, Taylor 2014a). This nexus (series of interactions) is the central element of Foucault's 'experiments' (Markula-Denison and Pringle 2007). Foucault explored how power determined the modes by which peoples, institutions, and objects assumed their 'subject-positions' (Foucault 2002, 2012a). A subject-position is acquired because of a process involving the 'reiteration of discourses, performances and narratives and the repeated confirmation of relations of value', thus making 'a subject' (Scharito *et al.* 2012, p. xxvii). Hence, power and knowledge form a nexus: a series of relations in which the subject is produced (Foucault 2003, Markula-Denison and Pringle 2007). From their subject-positions, organisations' policymakers operate power tactically and contingently through further discourse and produce knowledges which in turn actualise, modify, stabilise and redistribute power (Foucault 2012a). These operations are referred to as techniques of power and can reconstitute subject-positions (Markula-Denison and Pringle 2007).

Our theoretical approach and the reviewed literature on sports equality policy gave rise to the following research questions that were central to our analysis:

Are the limitations in sports organisations' equality policy highlighted by previous academics still pertinent and, if so, are they applicable to LGBT+ policies?

How are the issues of LGBT+ inclusion discursively constructed in NGB policies?

Methods

The primary objective of this study was to examine sport organisations' LGBT+ policies in England. Reviewing sport organisations' policy documents was a valid method to achieve this as they presented an unobtrusive, nonreactive way to gather data (Bryman 2016). Discourse analysis was used to understand the dominant narratives and workings of power within the policies drawing on Foucault's (2002) archaeological and genealogical approaches. Carabine's (2001) methods will be referred to, however; she recognises there are no 'hard and fast' rules as to what constitutes a discourse analysis or how to conduct it.

Identifying the sources of data was a necessary first step, for which purposive and snowball sampling were used (Carabine 2001, Miller and Alvarado 2005). Initially, a purposive sampling method was applied when selecting and searching for documents (Patton 2002, Bryman 2016). NGB and government websites were searched for relevant policy relating to LGBT+ inclusion in sport. NGBs were selected based on being recognised by Sport England. Other governmental and organisational policies were also analysed, including policies from Sport England, the Department for Digital Culture Media and Sport (DDCMS), UK Sport and the Government Equalities Office. As policies were reviewed, it became clear that networks of organisations were involved in the production of policy and its implementation. By analysing the interrelated organisational networks that result in policy production and application, a more intricate understanding of the policy process was

generated (Bloyce and Smith 2010). The policy documents reviewed explicitly or implicitly cited other organisations, and from these citations, we widened our sample to include documents published by Stonewall, Pride Sports, the Sports Council Equality Group (SCEG) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

A systematic method was used to search organisations' websites for relevant policy. Initially, the home pages of websites were searched by clicking on the various links and pages. Common documents were found in sections titled 'governance' or 'inclusion'. Following this, if a website had a search bar, pre-decided search terms were used to find policies. The search terms were as follows: equality, diversity, inclusion, LGBT, gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, intersex, sex, pride, rainbow, Stonewall, queer, homo and hetero. Within the bounds of the project, it was impossible to review every document that was found in its entirety. Hence, the focus of the analysis is on policy that directly concerns the issues of LGBT+ people in sport.

255 policies were selected for the review as they were relevant to the research objective (Bryman 2016). All analysed policies were produced prior to the 1st of August 2021. 67 policies were from the government, charities such as Stonewall and organisations such as Sport England, while 188 of the documents were NGB policies. Of the 188 NGB policies: 116 were equality or diversity policies, 42 were LGBT+ policies and 30 were transgender inclusion policies. These included news sources, web pages, resource packages, board minutes and wider action plans relevant to the research objective. Other documents included in the research were published by Sport England (n = 9), UK Sport (n = 4), the DDCMS (n = 10), the Government Equalities Office (GEO) (n = 16), the IOC (n = 2), Stonewall (n = 16), Pride Sports (n = 3) and the SCEG (n = 7). Many of these policies were guidelines and templates for NGBs as well as speeches, webpages or programmes for LGBT+ advocacy.

Policies were examined to determine their main objectives, which were made clear through statements of intent (Bloyce and Smith 2010). Following this, identifying evidence of interrelationships between policies was vital to generate a comprehensive understanding of the operation of power between them (Carabine 2001, Richardson 2006). This stage related directly to the operation of power that genealogical analysis aims to understand (Carabine 2001, Foucault 2003). Examining the interdependencies and operations of power between organisations generated an understanding of how and why policies are constructed (Bloyce and Smith 2010). Who had authority based on their subject-position also became clearer (Foucault 2002).

Findings and discussion

We now discuss the key themes of our analysis outlining the approaches NGBs took to LGBT+ policy. Firstly, we discuss the constraints that NGBs faced when constructing LGBT+ policy. We then outline the distinct LGBT+ policy approaches of a large organisation such as the FA. Following this, we introduce the concept of 'equality-proofing' and provide examples of the various ways it occurred as a dominant discursive tactic in NGB policies. We identify five key themes, shown in Table 1.

Constraints on NGBs

The SCEG, comprised of all the different home nation sport councils in the UK, established the ESS, which provides guidance for NGBs when constructing equality diversity and inclusion policies. 'The Standard supports sports organisations to develop and implement equality-proofed policies and practices' (SCEG 2012b, p. 5). The SCEG assesses NGBs against equality standards and ranks them, hence most of the equality policies that were analysed had similarities in structure and content (Sports Council Equality Group (SCEG) 2012b). The SCEG (2012b) state that through the ESS they 'maintain comprehensive and up-to-date guidance documents, templates and good practice and ensure these are promoted and accessible to organisations working through the standards' (p. 8). Thus, the ESS influences the construction of policy discourse to constitute the structure and content of NGB policy documents. Such influence makes the Standard a 'powerful non-human actor' in the

Table 1. Key themes identified in the discourse analysis.

Theme	Description	Policy example
<i>Constraints on NGBs</i>	Many of the NGBs were limited in the policy they produced due to funding regulations.	Surf England (personal communication, 20 April 2019) stated they are limited in the equality policy they produced as they are 'a very small NGB with a full-time equivalent of just three staff and do not receive any core funding'.
<i>Take-offs not landings: limited quality in distinct approaches</i>	Those NGBs that did have significant LGBT+ policy often provided 'take-offs' but not landings (Weiss 1993). Those NGBs with the most LGBT+ policy failed to monitor or provide regular update on its effectiveness.	The FA have not publicly reported on their Opening Doors and Joining In policy since 2013, despite regular monitoring being an integral part of their action plan.
<i>'Equality-proofing'</i>	Those NGBs that included LGBT+ issues as part of their overall equality and diversity policies only ticked a box to say they were working on inclusion but did not express how.	Most NGBs ticked a box below the statement 'demonstrate a strong public commitment to progressing towards achieving greater diversity generally (including but not limited to BAME, disability, LGB &T and socioeconomic)' (Lacrosse England 2019, p. 5).
<i>Parading Anecdotal Approaches</i>	Some NGBs had links to anecdotal charters, reports and news articles that associated them with LGBT+ events and issues; however, these anecdotal engagements were not formulated into coherent policy.	The RFU posted about its 'first gay rugby club' and advertised its involvement with them (RFU 2019, RFU 2021).
<i>Interpassivity: Running into a Stonewall</i>	Many organisations outsourced responsibility for LGBT+ issues to Stonewall or relied heavily on the Rainbow Laces campaign.	The ECB (2018a, 2018b) used the Rainbow Laces campaign to 'show that cricket is everyone's game and that LGBT+ people are welcome and included at every level' (p.1).
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<i>Interpassivity: Running into a Stonewall</i>	Many organisations outsourced responsibility for LGBT+ issues to Stonewall or relied heavily on the Rainbow Laces campaign.	English Cricket Board (ECB) 2018b used the Rainbow Laces campaign to 'show that cricket is everyone's game and that LGBT+ people are welcome and included at every level' (p.1).

drive for equality (Turconi and Shaw 2021, p. 10). The policies we analysed demonstrated that most NGBs rigidly adhered to ESS templates for their diversity and inclusion policies. By looking at resource cards on the Equality in Sport (2015) website, different NGBs can gauge whether they are 'Foundation', 'Preliminary', 'Intermediate' or 'Advance' organisations and construct their policies accordingly. Indeed, in their guidance documents, the SCEG suggest: 'To achieve the relevant level of the Standard successfully, all essential evidence, as outlined in the "requirements and forms" document for that level must be covered' (SCEG 2012a, p. 12). The majority of NGB equality and

diversity policies were heavily determined by the guidance and templates provided by the SCEG (2012a). Thus, there was an identical approach, or at the very least overarching similarity, in most cases regarding LGBT+ equality.

Equality policies do not operate in a vacuum; the SCEG's relationship with NGBs is heavily determined by the NGBs' relationship with Sport England. Sport England can influence NGBs through the dominant discourse used in policy. If an NGB fails to meet the requirements set by Sport England, it is likely that their funding will be cut (Bloyce and Smith 2010). Financial incentive acts as a regulatory process through which equality policy is constructed and constrained (Shaw and Penney 2003). This is outlined in the (HM Government 2015) Sporting Future policy in which the government states that 'organisations which show that they can work collaboratively and tailor their work at the local level' will be best placed to access public funding (p. 16). Success in participation, talent generation, Olympic medal tally, financial stability and increased focus on social goals directly affect funding and policy-makers subject-positions and therefore indirectly affect their production of diversity policy (Turconi and Shaw 2021). Funding impacts the resources NGBs can commit to equality or diversity issues (Shaw and Penney 2003). However, NGBs that receive no funding tended to have no equality or diversity policies and certainly no LGBT+ specific policy. In searching for relevant policy documents, we approached numerous 'smaller' NGBs via email asking for any relevant policy documentation where none could be found based on our initial web-search. We received several emails from different NGBs explaining that because their organisation was so relatively small, they lacked the resources to produce such documentation. Those with little funding had relatively limited diversity policy as found in most organisations considered at 'foundation level' by the SCEG. Some of the smaller NGBs, such as British Aerobatics, whilst limited in their approach, did claim to work with the Sport and Recreation Alliance (SRA) and other organisations to foster inclusion. Indeed, the SRA (2021) does claim to provide tools to 'embed' and 'drive' the diversity agenda (p. 9). In smaller NGBs, there are clear limitations to what resources can be produced regarding equality policy. These NGBs lack the resources to generate any substantive discourse on LGBT+ issues in sport. Thus, much of their equality policy is merely to associate with other organisations. As such, the levels of advocacy within the organisation will tend to be slow moving and less heavily influenced by organisational advocacy (Griffin 2012).

The amount and quality of diversity policy increased with the ESS-level NGBs were awarded by the SCEG, and these levels correlated significantly with financial resources. For example, Great British Wheelchair Rugby (2019), who received £1.2 million in funding from Sport England between 2013 and 2017, were attempting to 'maintain the ESS preliminary level' (p. 7) and had a relatively detailed diversity policy, specifying actions such as 'unconscious bias training for all employees responsible for recruitment' (p. 8). The British Wrestling Association who received £0.9 million from Sport England provided similar details in their diversity policy but did not include steps like unconscious bias training. In comparison, the FA and the English and Welsh Cricket Board (ECB), who received £30 million and £20 million from Sport England, respectively, produced much more specific policy targeted at different groups; albeit the ECB's LGBT+ 'policy' was mainly associating with campaigns such as Rainbow Laces. Clearly, the standard of diversity policies correlates closely to NGB funding. Thus, Sport England are presented with a metaphorical 'double-edged sword' because specific financial incentive for diversity leads to engagement with diversity policy only to an end, whereas no financial incentive leaves diversity policy largely exposed to the influence of the NGB's overall financial situation. Bio-political considerations come to the fore here as these financial incentives relate to the management of the state's human resources (Foucault 2007). A pertinent question is who or which organisations benefit most from the funding regulations for equality and diversity policy in sport? The distribution of funding relates to truth claims about the significance of the funding's effect, yet some NGBs are in significantly advantaged positions to operate power and make truth claims to influence ESS funding decisions (Foucault 2003). Power relations are continually fought around the truths NGBs produce about their ability to implement equality (Markula-Denison and Pringle 2007). It is unsurprising, then, that the ECB and the FA have developed more policy for

LGBT+ advocacy because they have the funding to do so, while other NGBs struggle to influence the discourse on diversity issues. Policy discourse influences funding, which in turn reinforces or limits an NGB's ability to generate the necessary equality discourse to receive funding (Shaw and Penney 2003). This is because every instance of language production reproduces or transforms society and culture, but some NGBs do not have the capacity to produce this 'language' to the same extent as others (Richardson 2006). However, as we will discuss, expectations are higher for certain well-resourced NGBs to produce high-quality policy and 'lead the way' for other sports organisations.

Take-offs not landings: limited quality in distinct approaches

Overall, 25 NGBs had policy that specifically addressed LGBT+ inclusion issues but many of the policies focused on transgender athletes' competition restrictions rather than LGBT+ equality issues broadly. From the NGBs reviewed, we found five that had policy that specifically referred to the LGBT+ community as their policy target. These five NGBs were as follows: UK Athletics (UKA), England Golf, the Royal Yachting Association (RYA), The Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) and the FA. This indicates that the majority of the 188 NGBs reviewed had not developed a specific policy for LGBT+ equality and inclusion in their sport, instead their focus on such issues was either presented as part of their overall equality policies or was not mentioned at all. Even the policies of four out of these five NGBs, other than the FA, might not strictly be considered as policy, per se. For example, although we classify the RYA's (2017) policy as distinct because it has subsections on its website separate from its overall diversity policy, these subsections are mainly 'guidance on how the equality policy can be practically implemented at local level' for different groups. Interestingly, since the data collection, the RYA's website has been updated, and there is no longer, at the time of writing, any specific LGBT+ policy included on the site.

The FA, one of the largest NGBs reviewed in terms of participation and financial resources, had far more LGBT+ specific policies than all other NGBs. In total, we reviewed nine policies that were produced by the FA on the topic of LGBT+ inclusion. Notwithstanding the complexities in categorisation of LGBT+ specific policy, after Brackenridge *et al.*'s (2008) research, evidently the FA engaged in a much greater effort to produce policy aimed at addressing the issues faced by the LGBT+ community. Between the FA and the four other NGBs, we suggest to have, or had, specific LGBT+ policy, there is a distinct difference in the amount of detail in the action plans produced. For example, in the FA's most recent policy,¹ 'Opening Doors and Joining In' (2012), they present a range of action plans including (1) 'leading and owning' their campaign by 'using the power of football to encourage positive change' (p. 4), (2) Education to embed issues such as 'homophobia and transphobia in training courses' (p. 5), (3) applying sanctions for homophobic abuse, (4) encouraging reporting of discrimination, (5) working in partnership to construct policies, (6) lobbying and funding to 'change legislation' and 'invest in strategic developments' (p. 6), (7) promoting key messages, (8) conducting research on LGBT+ issues in their sport, and finally, (9) to 'monitor and evaluate' their key actions (p. 7). In comparison to the FA, the four policies of the other NGBs provide little detail on what the issues are or how they will be negotiated. Whilst the other four NGB plans are negligible in comparison to the FA's, they are significant enough to stand out from other NGBs who have limited to no LGBT+ policy in their own organisational documents (this is discussed later when we refer to equality-proofing and anecdotal approaches). The UKA, RYA, LTA and Golf England are distinct from others in that their policies went beyond being associated with their broader equality approach. For example, the UKA (2020) had developed the Athletics Pride Network, through which they aim 'to create a sport-wide community of LGBTQ+ people and allies from grassroots to elite level through effective communication, support and celebration' (p.1). The Pride Network appeared similar in structure to the Gay Footballer's Support Network (GFSN), which partnered with the FA (FA 2012). Meanwhile, the (old) RYA (2017) guidance suggested that 'Making quite minor adjustments can make a big difference and ensure that everyone feels welcome' within their sport (p.1). The RYA provided no extensive guidelines beyond this, but they did point out that Stonewall has developed

a toolkit to provide guidance on the issue. Golf England (2019) 'policy' was heavily associated with Stonewall's Rainbow Laces campaign which has an overall ethos of allowing people to demonstrate their support for LGBT+ groups (Stonewall 2018b). Stonewall's Rainbow Laces campaign embodies an equality-proofing approach. Launched by Stonewall and TeamPride in 2013, the campaign was adopted across a range of sports institutions and NGBs.

Building on this, Golf England (2019) suggest that they will implement several actions but do not elaborate on them. They state that they will (1) 'Conduct research to understand the current experiences of LGBT people in golf', (2) 'Understand the perceptions/barriers to participation in golf by LGBT people', (3) 'create guidance' for LGBT people and clubs, and (4) Review their 'guidance and policies around inclusion of LGBT people for competition within England' (p.1). Such steps, if implemented, might contribute to significant change for LGBT+ people within golf and are more clearly articulated than the majority of the other NGBs examined for this research. However, more attention needs to be paid to how Golf England (2019) targets are to be developed and achieved. There is little elaboration on what they are going to do to achieve these policy targets. Without monitoring or evaluation, they might be accused of providing a clear 'take-off' but no substantive focus on achievement or 'landing' in their policy (Weiss 1993). Similar criticism could be levelled against the UKA, RYA, LTA, or even the FA who have not publicly reported the progress of 'Opening Doors and Joining In' since 2013. These NGBs are noticeable in comparison to others because they construct their own clear take-offs and aims regarding LGBT+ participants. They articulate what they are going to do or what they recommend doing and therefore have policy objectives, but even they fail to demonstrate consistent monitoring or critical assessment of said objectives.

Failure by the FA and others to demonstrate critical evaluation of policies might be explained theoretically by understanding broader societal context (Carabine 2001). The increasing development of equality policy and social justice movements have challenged some traditional hegemonic norms (Turconi and Shaw 2021). This has been shown by an increase in 'sport for all' policies but also in LGBT+ inclusion, to a point. The policies that are 'leading the way' express a will to increase inclusion. Application of Foucault's historicism allows critique of the current dominant inclusion policies. These policies are contingent on the liberal capitalist episteme in which they have been conceived. Thus, all discursive manoeuvres that the FA, or other NGB equality policy producers, might make are in effect constrained by the particular historical-social context in which they are created (Foucault 2002). Many of the larger NGBs are business orientated, and their sports are cultural-commercial behemoths (Rowe 2020). Where radical changes could be made to increase equality in sports practices, this might detract from the capitalist ethics of economic accumulation and meritocracy. The market becomes the 'true' reference for social justice against which policy intervention and practices can be measured (Scharito *et al.* 2012). Thus, a more neoliberal, responsibilised, almost charitable approach is utilised in these policies, whereby producing policy is seen as an inherent good regardless of whether it achieves the realities it outlines. Therein, policies produced in this way, perhaps unintentionally, reinforce the hegemonic understanding of inclusion and often result in a commodified equality process. It has even been argued that business cases for diversity policies often 'tacitly prioritize' the benefits for the majority group rather than the minority groups themselves (Starck *et al.* 2021, p. 1). Signalling authentic engagement with consumers within or as a policy approach appears to be increasingly fetishised by sports institutions (see Melton and MacCharles 2021) but reflects a lack of scrutiny when placed in its social-political context. Indeed, in other business contexts, it has been noted that the often-transactional type of approach an organisation takes, their reasoning for the promotion of equality and diversity, influences their effectiveness and also the way that organisations are perceived by consumers (Starck *et al.* 2021, Turconi and Shaw 2021). According to Starck *et al.* (2021), organisations that promote inclusion for the moral social justice case rather than the instrumental business case tend to be reflected upon more positively by minorities. Thus, Starck *et al.* (2021) suggest organisations should look to the motivations for implementing their equality policies because doing so may influence the perceptions of consumers. If organisations are not clear about their motivations for producing equality

policies, one might question how successful they are ever going to be for achieving equality outcomes. Such arguments are relevant as it is unclear to what extent the motivations behind many of the LGBT+ policies examined are largely transactional. Building upon this study's findings, future research is warranted to understand the motivations of those implementing and creating LGBT+ equality policies in sports organisations as doing so will further inform if the policies are motivated by business instrumentality or for social justice reasons. Notwithstanding, it appears that the policies examined for this paper are reflective of the 'lip service' and 'partial stasis' found previously (Lawrence and Taylor 2019, Magrath and Stott 2019).

'Equality-proofing'

The majority of NGBs analysed have no clear policy objectives beyond their broader equality and diversity policies, anecdotal examples of LGBT+ engagement, or their links to external organisations such as Stonewall, which some were heavily reliant on when delivering LGBT+ inclusion. In being heavily reliant on external organisations, like Stonewall and other LGBT+ advocacy projects, most NGBs had very limited policy which could be described as their own.

There was a range of conflicting discourse from external organisations feeding into the overall approaches taken by NGBs which made it unclear what their main objectives towards LGBT+ equality were and how they were to achieve them. The foundation of most NGB approaches was a commitment to LGBT+ equality through what we describe as 'equality-proofing'. This is where NGBs make claims at being LGBT+ inclusive but provide little evidence through policy objectives. The SCEG seeks to align with the legal and moral precedent set by the 2010 Equality Act and therefore make NGB policies and practices 'Equality-proofed' (SCEG, 2012b, p. 4).

'Tick-boxing': Diversity Policies

The dominant approach to recognising a commitment to LGBT+ issues within the NGB diversity policies was a tick box under the statement 'demonstrate a strong public commitment to progressing towards achieving greater diversity generally (including but not limited to BAME, disability, LGB & T and socioeconomic)' (see Lacrosse England 2019, p. 5, Angling Trust 2017, p. 9). Most NGBs ticked this box indicating their belief that they achieved this target. Thus, by including the tick box in their template, the SCEG attempt to obligate a public commitment to diversity for the listed groups, including LGBT+ persons. However, there might be something of another 'catch 22' here as providing the tick box allows NGBs to expediently indicate that they are doing something, whilst at the same time many do not expand on or develop their approach to achieving this goal. In the rest of their diversity policy, almost all NGBs included in this research fail to mention LGBT+ people at all. Thus, for most, it becomes a tick box exercise and acts as equality-proofing with no discernible supporting action. What Lawrence and Taylor (2019) would refer to as 'partial stasis' is present in these policies because there is a clear mark of intent to drive for equality but limited expression of the actions that will be taken to achieve it (p.1). This partial stasis is masked by the equality-proofing of ticking the box, which can be used to disguise a lack of coherent policy objectives. The dominant discourse being perpetuated by NGBs here is clearly 'we are doing something'; 'we ticked the box'. The dominant discourse of the tick box statement appears to be met with the underlying conflicting discourse of little or no substantial policy objectives from NGBs. There is little evidence of what actions are going to be taken and how they will be implemented. It is appropriate to question what is enunciated in these policy documents: what discursive tactics are at play (Markula-Denison and Pringle 2007)? The silence presented in NGB policy documents hints at the secrecy through which they are to carry out their equality policies, this in turn becomes a 'shelter for power' (Foucault 1978, p. 101). If NGBs do not express how they are going to implement equality for LGBT+ persons, it is unlikely they will be able to operate power in a way that will achieve the apparently desired outcomes. 'A reverse discourse often uses the same vocabulary as a dominating discourse but produces an opposing

strategy or social effect' (Markula-Denison and Pringle 2007, p. 115). The tick-box approach is a reverse discourse as it utilises the vocabulary of the equality in sport message to shelter against expressing coherent equality policy. These policies indicate that NGBs will act on LGBT+ issues but not what they will do and are therefore shelters for silence.

Similar findings were present in the analysis of NGB equality policies. In their equality policies, NGBs, for example, alluded to protected characteristics:

This policy reinforces our commitment to providing equal opportunities ... [regardless of] age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, ... or sex and sexual orientation (together known as the protected characteristics). (Archery GB 2018)

Basketball England is fully committed to equality in terms of opportunity and open access. This includes commitment to protecting ... the protected characteristics of age, sex, race, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity. (Basketball England 2018)

It is clear from these equality policy extracts that there was little variation in the approach taken to equality in NGB policies. Instead, policies tended to list issues related to a range of social divisions and considerations. The statements that mention LGBT+ in the policies are problematic for two reasons: (1) the statements are not specific to individual groups, and (2) they fail to discern between demonstrating a commitment to equality and diversity, or being 'equality-proof', and being proactive in diversity change. What is most noticeable across the NGB equality policies reviewed is their uniform approach. For example, the basketball and archery extracts above resemble each other closely and this was the case in other policies for most NGBs. NGB equality policies have a relatively coherent structure. Often, they begin with a generic statement conveying a message of inclusion for all. For example, the Roller Sports Federation (2011) states that its clubs might include the following:

(Club Name) respects the rights, dignity and worth of every person and will treat everyone equally within the context of their sport, regardless of age, ability, gender, race, ethnicity, religious belief, sexuality or social/economic status. (p. 1)

This statement reflects the 2010 Equality Act, as do almost all the equality documents produced by the NGBs examined. There are striking similarities between all NGB equality policies and the wording of the Equality Act which states that: 'The relevant protected characteristics are- age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation'.

Most NGB equality policies examined broadly mirror the statements in the Equality Act. For example, Pentathlon (2021) state that:

Pentathlon GB is committed to the principle of equality of opportunity and aims to ensure that all ... are treated fairly and on an equal basis, irrespective of sex, age, disability, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, gender reassignment or social status. (p.1)

However, NGBs again do not mention any of these groups' specific equality needs throughout their equality policy, rather they discuss general equality topics such as the definitions of discrimination, harassment, bullying and victimisation. The Croquet Association (n.d.), for example, also describe direct and indirect discrimination as do multiple other NGBs:

Direct Discrimination – treating someone less favourably than you would treat others in the same circumstances;
Indirect Discrimination – *imposing requirements or conditions that appear to apply equally to all but which, in practice, disadvantage certain members or sections of the membership.* (p. 1)

Discrimination is an important equality issue for NGBs to deal with and therefore it would make sense to include them in the policies that they produce. However, the wording again strikingly resembles the 2010 Equality Act and could come across as bureaucratic replication to ensure legal defensibility (which

is necessary for any NGB) with very little else of substance to back up the notion of being serious about 'achieving equality'. Replication of equality was a finding that Long *et al.* (2005) emphasised in their earlier analysis of the promotion of racial equality in sports organisations. They found that:

Evidence to date suggests that many sports organizations are content to do what is required of them to reach the preliminary level (make a public commitment, adopt a policy, and undertake monitoring) but show little enthusiasm for doing more than they are obliged to do. (p. 53)

The pattern of equality-proofing found in our results is clearly similar. Respecting people's rights or providing equality of opportunity might happen without nuanced policy catered to these target groups, but it might not. NGBs regularly failed to mention how equality was to be critically and reflectively implemented specifically for the groups mentioned. Therefore, it appears at the very least that the SCEG simply goes through the motion of 'equality-proofing' NGBs and demanding the Equality Act is applied. This is not unique to sports organisations but has been a general criticism of many equality policies. Indeed, investigating Finnish organisations' equality policy, Ylöstalo (2016) found that equality and diversity are seen as an abstract value: something that is endorsable for companies but not something that needs to be actively promoted with, for example, equality plans or affirmative action.

Equality-proofing does not mean that NGB equality policies were not discussing equality issues. For example, the England Handball Association (EHA n.d.) state that the aim of their policy is to: 'ensure that everyone is treated fairly and with respect and that the EHA is equally accessible to them all' (p.1). Similarly, most NGB policy addresses equality issues for their generic or universal participant, discussing discrimination or victimisation broadly. However, equality for everyone or universal equality in the organisation fails if the particular equality needs of certain participants are not considered. Social justice fails if policymakers do not recognise the differing needs of people from different social groups and divisions.

Turconi and Shaw (2021) found that NGB equality leaders thought the ESS was a good framework because it helped NGBs 'focus on what the key requirements' for equality were (p. 10). The considerations 'particular' groups require to participate in sport go beyond legal stipulations concerning general harassment and discrimination and therefore cannot be incorporated into a universal equality policy, rather they require specific equality plans. The considerations we are referring to, when targeting 'the particular', are similar to those outlined in the FA's 'Opening Doors and Joining in Policy', such as how the issue of discrimination might affect some within the LGBT+ community in a different way to the general participant base. The FA (2012) seeks to address homophobic discrimination through a range of practices such as updating their Equality Education Programme to include LGBT+ engagement and incorporating the 'Kick Homophobia Out of Football' film into training for stewards. A distinction is needed between being 'equality-proof' and embracing an active equality approach as central to everything sports organisations do, which is a claim regularly made.

Having one policy for an organisation which is required to tackle inclusion issues across a range of social divisions will often mean that a sweeping approach is taken and therefore specific diversity issues are not considered in detail, if at all (Brakenridge *et al.* 2008). England Netball (2017) take a sweeping approach to their diversity action plan. In accordance with the statement of 'demonstrating a strong commitment to diversity', they are one of the few NGBs who expand on how they hope to achieve this. They state that they will develop 'partnerships with key areas of diversity ... to ensure England Netball is a key and influential organisation within these communities' and 'having a formal partnership with at least one key diversity or action group' whom they 'annually deliver an event in partnership with' (England Netball 2017, p. 7). These aims might be considered as distinct policy objectives because they provide brief statements on how they are going to achieve, demonstrating a strong public commitment for achieving greater diversity generally. However, because these aims are included as part of their overall diversity policy and target 'at least one key diversity group' (England Netball 2017, p. 7), it means that it is unclear which key diversity group(s) they will be targeting and how. In comparison to the FA's distinct approach, Netball's diversity policy has limited detail of their objectives.

The main issue with including LGBT+ equality in broader approaches was the ambiguity which appeared mainly to make them tick the 'equality-proof' box, rather than substantiate policy objectives identifying specific issues for LGBT+ communities. Failing to go beyond the tick-box approach left many policies as silent 'shelters for power', which contribute to the opposite of the effects these policies seemingly set out to achieve (Foucault 1978, p. 101). Not enunciating intended actions and positions within these equality policies allows ambiguity, which might result in the development of ineffective strategies. If sports organisations are committed to a proactive approach, based on this review of their equality policy, the next step for NGBs' equality engagement could be to target the particular equality needs of specific groups within their policy goals, as well as maintaining their broader equality-proofing practices, as also recently recommended by Storr *et al.* (2021).

Parading anecdotal approaches

Having demonstrated that within their equality and diversity policies, NGBs take an equality-proofing approach which fails to capture the distinctions needed to progress the equality of LGBT+ individuals, we found that other advocacy actions were associated with NGBs but were not distinct NGB policies in themselves.

The government-led project, a 'Charter for Action Tackling Homophobia and Transphobia in Sport', perfectly demonstrates this. The initiative launched in 2011 aimed to unite people 'in a common cause to tackle homophobia and transphobia in sport' (DCMS 2011, p. 1). The Charter was widely publicised and signed by NGBs, some of whom still present the document on their websites. While this Charter demonstrates a commitment to advocacy and increased awareness for the inclusion of LGBT+ people in sport, there is again no substantive plan of action. The document states: 'We believe that everyone should be able to participate in and enjoy sport – whoever they are and whatever their background' and 'We are committed to making these values a reality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. We will work together, and individually, to rid sport of homophobia and transphobia' (Department of Digital Culture Media and Sport (DCMS) 2011, p. 1). Many NGBs agreed to these aims when signing the document (e.g., British Triathlon 2011, RFU 2011), yet there is little reflection of this in the policies of most NGBs examined. Thus, the Charter appears to play a similar role to ESS templates for diversity by ensuring there is a clear message of commitment with limited substantial policy action to support it. Most NGBs could be accused of paying lip-service to the issue of LGBT+ equality rather than producing a proactive policy addressing it. Brackenridge *et al.* (2008) identified a perceived risk that a few glossy and positive statements are made to increase visibility without addressing the underlying issues. Doing so is enough to appear equality conscious or equality-proof without having to consider equality or LGBT+ issues in their full complexity. Analysing such discursive statements from a Foucauldian theoretical standpoint, it again might suggest reverse discourses are taking effect. The use of the same vocabulary as the required dominant discourse is utilised to shelter from the responsibilities of critical reflexive equality work (Foucault 1978, 2002).

The only other mention of LGBT+ found on NGB websites was links to Stonewall or other charities and anecdotal examples of engagements with the LGBT+ community. For example, the RFU posted about its 'first gay rugby club', the Steelers, and advertised its involvement with them (RFU 2019, 2021). Interestingly, in one of these reports, the chairman of the Steelers states (RFU 2019):

Our players still encounter homophobic language both on the pitch and in their daily lives, so the work must continue to call this out. We cannot wait to march alongside the England Rugby representatives as they make it clear rugby is for all.

Going to a Pride event is deemed 'no small signal and is representative of the support' the RFU provide (RFU 2019, p. 1). However, there is no clear systematic policy to encourage this across the organisation. Indeed, it might be regarded as paying mere 'lip-service' to the complex issues surrounding greater equality for LGBT+ groups within rugby. Marching for Pride demonstrates association with the LGBT+ cause, but if this is not supported by policy that specifically targets the needs of the LGBT+ community in rugby, it is not sufficient to promote organisational equality or

tackle the homophobia the Steelers still encounter. By comparison, when the FA advertise their involvement in similar LGBT+ events, such as Pride (2019), this directly relates to the second point of their 10-point plan: visibility (Football association (FA) 2012). Whilst not overwhelming, in comparison to other NGBs, the FA provides clear policy objectives towards LGBT+ equality and inclusion. Having clearer policy objectives indicates that the FA has a more coordinated approach, while it appears the RFU, the ECB and others are attending Pride events to demonstrate commitment but failing to reinforce this with clear policy objectives. As Ahmed (2012) suggests, diversity in these situations is distilled and often little more than a public relations exercise. There is a discursive trap here in that the perpetuation of equality discourses seems to distil equality advocacy into simply making statements or being associated with other organisations and events that work for LGBT+ social justice rather than NGBs being at the forefront of innovative policy themselves.

Interpassivity: running into a Stonewall

Associations with external LGBT+ advocacy organisations came in the form of having web links between the NGBs' website and Stonewall or other advocacy charity sites. For example, Golf England (2019) has a page in support of the Rainbow Laces campaign which directly links to the Rainbow Laces webpage. However, other NGBs, such as Pentathlon GB, Swim England, Table Tennis England and the RYA, displayed the Stonewall logo or the Rainbow Laces campaign much more subtly at the bottom of their pages, in news sections, or in their equality action plans with little description about what role their organisation was playing in these partnerships. In their equality policy, Pentathlon GB (2014) list several prominent organisations associated with social justice and advocacy but fail to expand on how consultation will work: '• Sporting Equals • Stonewall • Pride Sports' (p. 5). The RYA (2017) had a page dedicated to sexual orientation which one might consider as their equality policy. After expanding a little on sexual orientation, it read: 'Stonewall has produced a Toolkit to support sports clubs, which can be downloaded from the link on the right' (p.1).

Similarly, Table Tennis England (n.d.) share this short description: 'Other organisations that can provide support; Stonewall; www.stonewall.org.uk LGBT Foundation; www.lgbt.foundation Pride Sports; @PrideSportsUK' (p. 1). They also produce a document that lists some of Stonewall's findings.

Another display of alliance was in 'news' or 'blog' sources that NGBs had on their websites, Swim England (2017), for example, described their approach to LGBT+ clubs as follows:

We support a number of different LGBT swimming clubs across the country. These include Out to Swim in London, Out to Swim South in Brighton, Northern Wave in Manchester, and Moseley Shoals in Birmingham. (para. 5)

A second page reveals they supported the Rainbow Laces week with a member of their team at the launch event in 2017 as well as having profiles on different swimmers' experiences of coming out (Swim England, n.d.). Rugby Union, UK Athletics and the FA had similar news or blog posts, but they were also exceptions from other NGBs because they had standalone LGBT+ policy documents. Notwithstanding, the examples provided demonstrate the main different approaches that the majority of NGBs engaged in to show LGBT+ advocacy through policy.

English Cricket Board (ECB) 2018b used the Rainbow Laces campaign to 'show that cricket is everyone's game and that LGBT+ people are welcome and included at every level' (p.1). The Football association (FA) (2012), Golf England (2019) and a long list of others, which Stonewall (2018a) claim have grown exponentially, shared similar sentiments for taking up the campaign. Stonewall (2018a) make it clear that Rainbow Laces targets specific events, as opposed to working continuously with NGB policymakers, which might, based on this research, be a more fruitful direction to move towards. Regardless, the policy has relatively similar objectives to the 2011 government Charter, in that it aims to 'unite sport to make sure no lesbian, gay, bi or trans people feel excluded from taking part as a fan or teammate' (Stonewall 2018b, p. 3). Laudable though this aim is, in practical terms, the problem here is that it is not a realistic, measurable, or achievable target. It is more of an ideological statement that has the unintended consequence of setting the policy up to fail. One can plan actions towards achieving this

goal, but it is highly unlikely, if not impossible, to fully achieve their objective because there is no way to ensure that absolutely every LGBT+ person does not feel excluded. Even if they could achieve this, it is not clear how achievement would be measured, the feeling of exclusion is very difficult to accurately monitor, compared to more measurable data that could be the focus of policy such as participation rates, the number of homophobic incidences and so on. Regardless, it is unclear how wearing shoelaces contributes to achieving inclusion. Yet the Rainbow Laces campaign seems to be the part of Stonewall that NGBs most associate themselves with through links on their websites. Stonewall acknowledge this (2018a):

Off the pitch, many of the sports organisations and bodies are changing their social media profiles, as well as sending messages of support to their followers. (para. 35)

It appears that NGBs 'signal' (see Melton and McCharles 2021), to make themselves equality-proof, in this case by signing up to the Rainbow Laces campaign, but then have not critically engaged with the organisational issues that need to be tackled. There is limited evidence of the campaign substantially changing NGBs' overall policies and practices. As Ahmed (2012) suggests, institutional practices tend not to conform to institutional discourses on diversity issues. Thus, the Rainbow Laces allows the institution of sport to buy into the dominant discourse making for apparently very visual, albeit, commodified support, but largely this is superficial if not backed up with more substantive, sustained policy approaches. Being so 'visual' it almost perpetuates the lack of need to 'scrutinise' more substantial, sustained policy approaches. Again, the concept of the reverse discourse that uses that language of the dominant discourse on equality and inclusion is applicable here (Markula-Denison and Pringle 2007). The use of the visual vocabulary required to appear equitable masks the silence of the NGBs' own policies. Furthermore, the commodification and charity-based approach of Stonewall, one might argue, contributes to the current social 'quagmire' where charity, poverty and capitalism reinforce each other (Livingston 2013, p. 350). Charity, Livingston (2013) argues, perpetuates the need for charity in of itself. By engaging in charitable endeavour, the 'contradictions' of the capitalist system (i.e. environmental issues, poverty inducing inequality, racism and homophobia) are given an outlet of acceptability. NGBs may associate with external charity organisations, but relationships of this kind do not undermine the structural conditions of their own organisations which are developed within the capitalist neoliberalist system. Organisations can make equality decisions but not in conditions of their own choosing. It is therefore unsurprising that more radical actions towards LGBT+ equality have not been embraced in policy.

One should be cognisant of how a drive for equality in sport for one group might indirectly reinforce other social inequalities if conducted in a particular way. In associating with policy and buying shoelaces from Stonewall, NGBs and individuals displace their own struggles onto the charity. Livingstone (2013) describes this relation as one of both trust and interpassivity. 'Interpassivity' refers to inactivity when there is the potential for interaction (Pfaller 2017). Thus, these types of policies seem to result in marketised signalling or gesture politics but little direct action that will instigate structural organisational change. The relation of NGBs to Stonewall would perhaps not be so problematic for the generation of reflexive policy were it not so detached from NGBs themselves and commodified. Paradoxically, while the perpetuation of a message of inclusion has the potential to influence the inclusivity of sport as a contested space, it must be acknowledged that perpetuation of the same message can conceal the maintenance of the system which it seeks to disturb (Foucault 2002). There is consistency in the equality policy approach of the sports organisations reviewed in that while there are approaches that differentiate and others that are synonymous, most NGBs seem to have interpassivity at the heart of their engagement (Harpham 1991). Superficial action towards LGBT+ equality in sport only maintains the underlying structural and organisational practices of exclusion while at the same time painting it in rainbows and/or commodifying it. What is conveniently disguised by the perpetuated discourse of rainbow laces or other forms of 'equality-proofing' is a distinct lack of measurable, realistic and achievable policy from most NGBs.

Conclusion

The findings of this study align with and expand on many of the previous studies on sports equality diversity and inclusion policies (see Shaw and Penney 2003, Brackenridge *et al.* 2008, Bury 2015, Jones *et al.* 2017). As such, while NGBs present a dominant discourse of inclusion, it is mostly 'equality proofing' or 'lip-service' expediently associating them with diversity causes. There is a tendency for them not to propose structural or radical change to incorporate other identities into sport but to focus more on symbolic acts to perpetuate the dominant discourse of change. Underlying these symbolic acts is a 'partial stasis' (Lawrence and Taylor 2019, p. 3), NGBs do not seem to have much policy beyond protecting LGBT+ participants from discrimination or making visual political gestures. The different constraints, largely financial, placed on NGBs correlated heavily with the amount and quality of the policy they produced.

While there is often anecdotal evidence of active participation in LGBT+ causes, limited policy has been produced to sustain a structural change for the LGBT+ community from a social justice approach in most NGBs. Although there were a minority of cases where distinct LGBT+ equality policy was developed, often they resulted in clear take-offs but there was no continued monitoring focused on 'landings' (Weiss 1993). Although the FA were something of an outlier in this type of policy, the last time it officially reported progress on their main LGBT+ equality policy, Opening Doors and Joining In, was in 2013, just one year after the policy was published. Even here, then, there appears to be limited reflection on the effectiveness of the policies. There was little evidence of policy that went to 'somewhere beyond the rainbow' to address the fundamental mechanisms of sports institutions that maintain exclusive practices.

Limitations and recommendations

Although hundreds of NGB policies were reviewed, this study cannot account for how equality policies are specifically broken down and applied across different NGBs. Thus, further research could look to interview those who implement these policies within NGBs to examine the implementation process. While there is a clear partial stasis within policy documents, examining how they are implemented might reinforce or dispute the present findings. In alignment with Foucauldian ideas of resistance and the self, it is likely that some individual advocates or implementors go beyond policy recommendations to facilitate inclusion, while for others the opposite is true. Being responsible for equality in their sport is a difficult task for NGBs considering the number of other things they must do (Green 2006). Researchers could investigate how much these other influences affect organisations' equality policy construction and implementation.

The SCEG could take a leading role in ensuring that more NGBs consider the intricacies associated with different particular groups (e.g. LGBT+, BAME and disability) and provide further guidance about how NGBs can engage in creating policy for such communities. The SCEG currently provide policy for trans athletes but not for the LGBT+ community as a whole. Further guidance for NGBs might help promote a more active approach. As Storr *et al.* (2021) argue, there is a need to generate more specific policy and challenge organisations to commit to changing cultures hostile to LGBT+ communities. However, we acknowledge that for many NGBs, resources are extremely limited, and this can impact their ability to generate innovative equality policy. We are also cautious of the increasingly bureaucratic and marketised approach to LGBT+ advocacy in organisations and would question how far policy can go to changing these hostile environments. Notwithstanding, NGBs that do create LGBT+ policy should aim to make their actions specific, measurable, and realistic. By doing this they can monitor the progress of their policies and prevent ambiguity in what their actions are achieving.

Notes

1. The FA has discussed LGBT+ issues in recent equality diversity and inclusion policy such as the October 2021 'A Game For All Strategy' which surpassed the time cut off criteria for this review (August 2021). However, the said policy does not refer to 'Opening Doors and Joining In' at all which justifies our later claim that policies tend to focus on take-offs not landings.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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