

Black History Month 2022

Black masculinity and sexuality

Contributors name:

Anita Naoko Pilgrim

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OLA FADOJU: Good morning, everyone. I am here to introduce one of my most favorite esteemed colleagues. Yes, she's laughing and she's paid me a fiver for that.

ANITA NAKO PILGRIM: Text It's in the post. [LAUGHTER]

OLA FADOJU: Oh, peachy. No, on a serious note, I'm really, really happy to come here to present and actually introduce Anita to the rest of our staff today on the presentation she's going to deliver. Which is of personal interest to me. And I will explain that furthermore. But as you can see on the title there, and that's the introductory slide to Anita. OK.

So I am not going to read that through for you. OK. It's there for you to see. But I'm going to give a bit more nuance into the reason, my personal or I kind of would say, some link into the subject, and in terms actually of the personality himself, Justin Fashanu. So I came or I say, Justin Fashanu came into my recon, you know, my inkling of him in 1980 when I was just 11. And by that time, we had just moved, as in my family and as in my parents, and I and my brother and sisters had just moved from England to Nigeria. And if you've ever lived in a developing country in the '80s, you would remember that if you wanted to watch anything from the BBC, you had to wait two weeks. So literally, much of the day that we used to watch in Nigeria was two weeks after.

And Justin Fashanu came into my stratosphere so to speak with his wonderful goal of the season against Liverpool, which was the team I was supporting. So it was great to see, and that was the first time I ever heard of Justin. That was one of the greatest goals. I tried to practice it and practice it, never got it.

My coach kept on telling me, Ola you're going to kill the birds in the sky the way you're whacking the ball up and down. So I kept on going. I never got it, but anyway, there we go. So that's my first introduction to Justin Fashanu. And then in 1983, he came back with his younger brother, John, to Nigeria.

Now at the time, the whole aspect was that he was coming actually to play for Nigeria, for the Nigerian national team. But at the same time, it was his first visit, but also to reunite himself with his dad who had abandoned him and his brother as younger kids in the early '60s. And it was big, big news. It was on the national news, and it was facilitated by a philanthropist called chief M.K.O. Abiola, who was from the same town as Justin Fashanu's dad, Abeokuta. Again, the link there is that actually later in my life in Nigeria I actually lived in Abeokuta for about four years. So I actually know the family house of the Fashanu's, of where the family house originates from.

So that's another personal link. Now on a sad link, in 1998 when he actually passed away, when he committed suicide. Me and who is now my wife, well, at the time was my girlfriend, we walked past the Shoreditch garage lock-up and we saw the police actually outside.

And in curiosity, we actually asked the police, we said, what's going on? And they said, well, somebody has died and we can't allow the public to see what's going on. So we actually had his body was covered up at the time, but we didn't know it was him. So we got home and about 10 to 30 minutes later, the news came on.

And then when they started to show the scene it was like, actually, that was that's where we just walk by. So that's the sad part of it. So that's my connections to Justin Fashanu. I did meet his brother John in 1994 when Nigeria came to play England at Wembley Stadium. And John was involved in the marketing of the match. So that's my connection with the Fashanus to a certain extent. I'm now going to pass this on now on to Anita who's going to take you through the rest of her wonderful presentation. Thank you.

ANITA NAKO PILGRIM: Yeah. I asked Ola, Ola I said, how shall I introduce you? And I said, I would do a swap. You do my presentation, and I'll do my introduction. [CHUCKLES] But well, not quite exactly that, but I hope you'll understand when I talk about introducing myself. So coming to do a presentation in Black History month, I felt very conscious of being mixed heritage but not being specifically Black myself.

And Black History Month, we really want it to be a celebration of Black history and also to give opportunity to Black colleagues to present work which doesn't always get a . At the same time, I know that nobody else has done this kind of research, and that I felt that it is really important that this kind of work which is an account of intersectional identity does get represented and put forward.

So I did this piece of work originally, I'll explain a bit about the kinds of social circumstances around the time I was doing my PhD. But I wanted to present this work now at this moment in time as an ally. To me in some senses, because at the time that I wrote up this material I was very much part of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer communities.

And I came at it a bit from that angle. But I was very conscious that there's another side to Justin Fashanu's story. And that side doesn't get told as much as we remember Justin as being the first professional footballer in Britain who came out as gay. But particularly during Black History Month, I really wanted to celebrate that amazing goal he scored. The many achievements that he had.

And I'm so grateful to Ola who has that personal connection to give a small piece of that side of the story. So I give a little bit of my background here. I felt that was important to explain some of who I am and my connections with this body of research that I began to do in 1995 as a PhD.

For a few years I'd been living in London. I'd been part of very mixed groups across the gay communities. I'd been part of a East Asian lesbian, gay, bisexual group. I had a lot of friends in the Black lesbian circles. We were talking about these kinds of issues of identity politics. I started to write in the Gay Press, and I was doing reviews of Black and Asian lesbian and gay artists who otherwise didn't really because the Gay Press were quite anxious about reviewing their work. They were worried that if it was written up, it would be done in a racist way and with some justification because some of the reviews that were done around then, people were highly critical of them, they were really problematic.

So I was able to do a little bit of write-up of this work. And I began to think, well, I wanted to develop it further. [CHUCKLES] You can imagine what the prospects of funding were like. 0. So I thought of doing it as a PhD and I did actually get funding to do a PhD exploring identity politics for British, what was then called Black. You know, it was an umbrella term, Black. So British Black gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer communities. So I started to write some of this material up. I'm very grateful to OpenLearn who supported my previously writing up a kind of account of mainly lesbian, Black and Asian history in Britain. And this is another piece of work that I hope to add to that, and perhaps build up a little bit of a little set of material.

OK. So I'm not using... oh, I didn't really mention this photo that I've got here, I wanted to use it. A couple of weeks ago, I actually went to Walton Hall, she's quite unusual for an associate

lecturer like myself. You know, we're normally just working from our homes. But I went to Walton Hall, and when I got there, I always feel a little bit like I belong here, this is my University.

But at the same time, I'm not sure I do belong here because there usually isn't anybody I recognize because it's a big University and I live quite a long way away in Cardiff. But when I walked into the hub, I saw this poster of Rehana Rehana Awan. And I was like, oh, it's Rehana. And at the same time, Rehana's Asian, I'm mixed heritage, Japanese white, but we're together in the BME staff network.

And there was kind of a moment of recognition. And that was really important to me, to arrive at the University and see somebody like me. And I just wanted to highlight that to start off this discussion, which is about ways in which people are represented in the media, or misrepresented.

So that kind of real importance of seeing some reflection of yourself in these kinds of places, that really chimed for me in that moment. So other than that picture, there is no other kind of photos or I would have loved to have put the video Thank you, Sudesh, for putting in the chat the video of the goal.

And there's a reason behind that, it was quite difficult for me to write this up for my PhD. I was doing the work in the 1990s, which was a general time of homophobia. I mean, really, when I reflect on it, I can't believe some of the achievements for LGBTQ rights that I've seen in my lifetime. I never would have expected to be able to marry somebody of the same sex. To be able to foster, I saw an advert, a public advert, the local council were saying, are you a same sex couple? That's fine, that's great. We just want to know your good parents. And when I remember the terrible homophobic rows about this kind of issue that I saw as a young adult, I'm absolutely. It's so great to see that things have changed so much.

So the time that I was writing this up was a time of widespread homophobia. And this material about Justin Fashanu was mostly in tabloid newspapers. So I would be going to the British Library repository of newspapers in Collingwood. And I would get the tube up there, tube train, and go round and look at these copies of The Sun newspaper.

And so I could do that. I could do that without people necessarily knowing or having a salacious interest in what I was doing. But one of the newspapers, the particularly the first newspaper in which Justin Fashanu's story came out. There were two editions. There was an earlier edition that was a little bit more standard, and then the later edition was the one that they'd splashed Fashanu's story.

And I really needed to see that later edition but the library at Collingwood only had the earlier edition because obviously all the newspapers, they collect a version together and they send it. And they don't always necessarily think somebody is going to be interested in both editions of the same day's paper.

And I was in a real kind of place, you know, it was very difficult for me. I didn't want to write to The Sun and say, Hi, I'm doing my PhD on British Black lesbian, gay, bisexual communities. Could you let me have a copy of this newspaper? Because I was like, oh, my God, if they find out that I'm doing this government funded study on this topic, then, I could just see the really kind of problematic articles from that.

I didn't know how real that was, they might not have been interested, but I didn't really want to take the risk. And in fact a senior colleague wrote for me, and I managed to get a copy of the paper in that way. But that's some of the reason why I still haven't really got images necessarily, even at this stage.

I mean, partly, it was lack of time because I got my more than full-time teaching role here at the University But also it was kind of, still a little bit of anxiety around going and asking openly for this kind of material and trying to get the copyright to some of this material.

Hopefully, between now and next February, I can start to think that through and sort it out in a way that I safe for me and safe for any kind of participants who might be affected. So I just wanted to explain that, and to offer that to you as some understanding of some of the issues that you can be faced with when you're undertaking research into a very sensitive topic like this one.

So I want to also give a little bit of context to what it was like in the 1990s. So we're like I'm saying, times are very different today. People feel able to be open about sexuality. I mean, not all aspects, we're still getting there in some areas. However, it is, believe me, this is a far more accepting environment than the one that I was living in when I was writing this PhD. So this was a time when we went on gay pride marches. And they were kind of they were marches. They were about trying to ask for our rights. It was just in that era that they started to become more festivals rather than political marches. But a lot of people that I was marching with, there was a decision you had to make. Do I show my face? Do I actually allow myself to be photographed?

People were worried that if their photograph was shown as having been on gay pride, and they were a teacher in a school, they might lose that job because the kind of environment was so anti lesbian and gay. So you know, I don't know if, you know, I sometimes wonder if people realize that within living memory, how difficult it was.

I remember I belonged to this gay walking group, and there was a young couple that recently joined, and they were quite openly affectionate with each other. And older couples in the group, it honestly took me about five meetings before I realized that the two people that were clearly quite involved in organizing the group were actually a couple and lived together. Because they never ever schooled themselves, never ever to look at each other, to kind of even, never mind holding hands, they never even kind of touched in public because it was so dangerous. It was just that dangerous. And these are white men who otherwise were in pretty influential and powerful positions.

But that was the kind of homophobic environment in the 1980s and the 1990s. That people like me, we just tended to go to London because we could find a community there to be with. I know Christina, it's just nowadays, thank goodness, people can be a lot more open. And it's so grateful to see that change in society.

So in that environment, within the broader lesbian, well, predominantly the gay community, but also to some extent lesbian community, there was this very strong push that you should be out. You should declare your sexuality in order that other people would be encouraged. So that people would recognize, that people would not think that gay people were something strange and that they didn't know anybody who was gay.

And also that other gay people, lesbian and gay, people would be heartened by that and say, Oh, gosh, I too will stand up. And then that would allow for a much, that was a political act in itself, just to state, this is who I am. To put a picture of your girlfriend on your desk, that was a political statement.

But within the Black, Asian global majority communities, it was kind of a very different environment. You're already in a minority and people were quite reluctant to come out within those communities. Because if you lost the support of your family and your community having come out as gay, then you were really so isolated. It's not like you had another you know, for white lesbian, gay, bisexual people, there were bars, there were clubs. But for us, the support was really, really minimal. And if we came out and lost our families, I mean, of course, for anybody to come out and lose your family is terrible.

But for us, there was a whole cultural loss if that happened. I mean, and subsequently, I did some research working with lesbian, gay, bisexual Muslim people. And for them too they often express the concern that if they came out as this being gay, then their siblings, and even their Cousins, their marriage chances would be affected, the whole family would be affected.

So there were these kinds of issues that we were kind of trying to discuss within our community groups, and think through, and try to explain to some of the white community groups that it's not the same for us, it's just not a straightforward, straight ha ha ha forward for us to come out.

And at the same time, in the 1990, some of these politically active groups were talking about people that were absolutely known to be gay. But at the same time, were in positions of power and influence, and were masquerading.

They weren't saying, you know, in some cases, they did kind of marry and [CHUCKLES] present a facade. And we felt a little bit kind of betrayed by that kind of thing because if you're a politician and you're there in parliament voting on laws about sexuality, like section 28, which forbade schools and educational establishments to quote, "Promote homosexuality" or that kind of legislation.

To us to see somebody that we knew perfectly well was gay, or mostly gay, sometimes lesbian, but was pretending not to be, that to us was a little bit of a problem. So there was talk about outing them. Exposing people like that as hypocrites. But this really wasn't... Although some of the groups talked about it, there was a lot of dissension. People were like, no, people have made these decisions, you have no right to intervene in people's private lives in that way. It's a major thing to come out, people need to make their own decision whether they can come out.

So that kind of issue was actually not really a strategy of the gay community, the activist groups like Outrage and Peter Tatchell, who's still very active to this day in support of LGBTQ rights. People like that were not talking about it, but I would say not really using that as a strategy.

However, it was something that was happening in the what they called the gutter press, the tabloids, like The Sun, The Mirror, The Mail, those kinds of newspapers. So I'm so grateful to Ola for talking about how much Justin Fashanu as a footballer means. I wanted very much to remember and celebrate the skills, the inspiration that Justin Fashanu, as well as his brother, John. But I think in a way, especially, Justin because he was the older brother and he forged a path and things like being signed for 1,000,000 pounds to Nottingham Forest by Clough. So this kind of inspirational figure, I very much wanted to remember and celebrate Justin Fashanu's life on this occasion. So that was Justin Fashanu in his late teens, early 20s.

Really seemed to be set on a glorious path, but his career just kind of stalled. He was capped for England under 21s, but he was never capped for the senior team. And Ola's spoken about how he and his brother maybe thought about playing for Nigeria. So these kinds of intersectional issues where people are looking to have opportunity to represent. And would maybe choose one group, but get pushed out of that because of prejudice, looking elsewhere. Those kinds of things.

But mainly, I just think it's wonderful to remember how inspiring he was to people like Ola and others who's spoken a bit here and still remember that incredible goal that he scored. And please do go and have a look at the video because it's just such a phenomenal goal. Even after all these years, it's just amazing score. One of those brilliant examples of the beautiful game. So then in 1990, there's this seismic event which shifted Justin as an icon in a way. Still remembered and celebrated in the Black communities. But in public awareness, he became somebody that we think of as an icon of gay history.

And although I want to talk about that, I think I really want to try and maintain the balance and remember Justin Fashanu as this cause for celebration. A Black sportsman, an amazing Black footballer. So basically, in October 1990, this big splash, exclusive story came out in The Sun. Justin Fashanu telling his own story in The Sun newspaper, of all papers to do it in, and coming out and revealing, yes, I am gay. However, in retrospect, we realized, I mean, obviously, for very many people this was a great shock. And also, people were like, why have you done that in The Sun.

But in retrospect, we can see reasons why that was chosen, and why it was done like that. And it's clear that the football agent and celebrity agent Eric Hall was there to support and guide Justin through this. And that this was a choice. This was an outing. This wasn't a freely chosen decision of Justin Fashanu's, OK, yes, I'm going to come out.

However much he might have really wanted to at various points, at this point, he was being forced to do that because if he didn't come out as gay himself and tell his story in his own words, then somebody was going to do that for him. And but, you know, Eric Hall did say, interviewed in *The Voice*, just towards the end of that period, where this story was being splashed, Eric Hall said, I believe that he wanted to use the words "come clean." He was tired of hiding the fact that he was gay.

So we know that Justin Fashanu had wanted to have been thinking about coming out. At this point, somebody was saying they were going to splash the story, and he decided that he would come out in *The Sun*. So obviously, there are kind of various things about that. And one is that although Justin Fashanu was coming out himself in *The Sun*, and I think I said he's telling his story in his own words.

Obviously, he wasn't really free to tell the story quite the way he might ideally have liked to do it because his story is being told in *The Sun*. And what I'm going to talk about in my presentation here is the way that a newspaper, a media outlet, like *The Sun* can take words and present them in certain ways. And then I'm going to finish on a little bit more of a celebratory note to talk about how a group of Black gay activists reclaimed that story in a small local context.

So that's my aim in the rest of this presentation. So there were a series of articles across the week. And I've mentioned how there was an early edition of *The Sun* and it had some, I can't even remember now what was on the front page. But then in the later edition, they got this story and they really splashed on it.

And I had a little bit of trouble trying to get hold of that first edition where Justin Fashanu was talking about the first part of his story was being published. And we can see here how keen he was to create a positive representation of Black gay identity. He wanted to stand as a role model to young people thinking about coming out.

So he wanted to emphasize the positive potential of gay relationships. My affairs were not wham-bang things, they were meaningful. He's saying, being gay is not about something casual, you are engaging in meaningful relationships. And he also, Ola also spoke about Justin's brother, John. A very famous footballer in his own right.

And John really struggled with Justin in making this decision to come out with this story. And I'll talk a little bit more about that in a minute. And it's clear that the brothers really differed very much about this. But Justin says he's made a decision, but John had a position of some security and well-being, and that Justin wanted to make a statement that would reach out to children that were in very difficult position, is what he was saying.

But although *The Sun* newspaper did allow Justin to make statements like that in the set of interviews. So in that sense, he probably was right to choose to come out himself rather than allow papers to splash the story. In which case, they would have controlled it entirely. The newspaper still put a real kind of tabloid spin on the story. So they would pick out bits of the story. So rather than pick out, I want to represent a good role model for the child on the street, they would pick out things like, in today's issue, how he bedded a Tory MP and romped with him in the House of Commons. I mean, honestly, it's not that exciting when you get into the article and read about the romping in the House of Commons. It's not quite as exciting as they make it sound.

And interestingly, they managed to find Justin Fashanu's ex-girlfriend, and they headlined her saying she still loves the soccer ace. So there's this kind of heterosexual kind of little spin on the Justin Fashanu story, his ex-girlfriend still loves him. But actually what she said was, yep, I still love Justin, he's a nice person.

So again, it's a little bit different when you get down into the detail. And she very clearly says, if he wants to talk about his private life, that's his business. So that's the kind of spin that the newspapers would be putting on a story of this kind. But I want to go a little bit deeper than that. It's not just about how they position words, it's about as you saw, I mean, when I talked earlier about this thing like he bedded a Tory MP, that is how they represent it.

The bedded has got capital letters. So they use a kind of visual means in order to represent or misrepresent people. So I mean, this famous goal, the whole week they were running articles about Justin Fashanu. And I'm sure they've got no problem getting copyright to images of that kind, unlike me.

And yet they never once showed an image of Justin scoring that goal, and they never mentioned that goal. And they in fact, they showed no pictures of him scoring a goal at all, and yet Justin Fashanu was a striker. He wasn't a defender, he wasn't a goalkeeper, he was a striker. And when they showed pictures of him, he'd be sort of sitting there smiling. It was kind of a feminization of Fashanu through the images which they use to accompany their text. In my PhD I talk about how there's only one image of him playing football. And he's clearly, he's just scored a goal, he's not scoring the goal, he's just scored it. So he's kind of relaxing back a bit. you know.

I mean, it would have been really weird if they'd shown no photos of him on the pitch at all. But the one that they picked, I was like, oh, OK. You know. So also they kind of cut up the language. And I mean, natural speech is in contractions, so we often are saying isn't, don't, won't.

And I'm always saying to my students, if you want to sound more academic then don't do that. Say do not, say is not. But in reporting back somebody in a tabloid newspaper of this kind, if you don't give them the contractions, then they start to sound a bit artificial, a bit cold, a bit removed. That's what you want you're writing an academic essay.

You want to be like, yes, I am the authority here. But it's not what you want when you're representing yourself as reaching out to the child on the street to kind of show that you are the same as everybody else. OK, you're gay, but that doesn't mean that you're really that different to other people. And I picked this quote partly to show you I mean, there is just the one contraction in it.

But I also picked it out to show how The Sun sort of played with these tropes of masculinity. I mentioned the kind of pictures and, oh, yeah, absolutely, I'll talk about John in a minute, Ola. And I just wanted to pick out this quote and point to as social scientists, we have this idea of power and visibility, invisibility.

If you have power, it's kind of normally invisible, people just assume you're good at what you do. You know that, oh, yes, you're good. But sometimes, that is about your invisible power. If you have to make yourself visible, if you have to constantly say, no, I'm really good at this, I'm really good. Pick me, pick me. That actually reduces your power and influence.

And this to me is what's happening in this quote here. I mean, when Justin is reported as saying, no one can say I'm not a man. I'm not effeminate, I am a man. Then in him having to say that, rather than people assume it as an invisible powerful identity, he loses. If you have to make your kind of powerful identity visible, then you actually lose the invisible power there. So that I also thought was kind of interesting. So John Fashanu, as soon as the week of revelations about Justin had finished, shoop! The newspapers switched to John.

And a month previously, they were reporting John in this very racist fashion. This was a September 1990 quote about John Fashanu. But once Justin had come out, they dropped any of these kinds of racist, oh my God, he's angry Black man kind of representation of John Fashanu. And he became this sort of like agonized straight hero. So they kind of switched to his well very obviously, The Daily Mirror, "STRAIGHT talking from STRAIGHT guy John." And also on the 29th of October The Sun was reporting John Fashanu playing a match having to

suffer these cruel gay jibes, but they never report what Justin Fashanu must have gone through at that time.

They kind of leave Justin Fashanu, he's come out, and they do report him saying how the embarrassment to his brother. They kind of focus on that. It's like, oh, you know. So it's very much this heterosexist kind of reporting style where they switch to. And I think, Jason, who was speaking yesterday, talking about misogynoir, recognize this kind of rather sophisticated way of appearing to represent someone sympathetically, but actually what you're doing is doing that in order to kind of undermine and push to the side somebody else.

So I'm going to just move now in this final bit of the presentation to talk about how the story was represented in The Voice Newspaper. Now, The Voice had been established in the 1980s as The Voice Of The British Black Community, the African Caribbean Community. And initially, on 30th of October, which is the issue in which they interviewed Eric Hall, they talked about how they took the line, following the kind of tabloid line. So they happened to have an article in the same issue that was talking about, oh, it's terrible, homophobia in Black communities, what a bad thing.

And yet, they, at the same time, had five articles that were condemning Justin Fashanu coming out. It was selfish, it was, we need positive Black male role models and now he's kind of thrown it all away by coming out as gay, which is a rather sly kind of homophobia in and of itself. So that was The Voice newspaper there on the 30th of October. But then the next week, they just went completely around. They suddenly had several positive articles about Black gay men. They didn't have any articles about Black lesbian women, but they had these interviews with a Black drag queen.

They had an interview with a more straight looking Black gay guy. And then they published about five letters that were saying this is disgraceful, how could you treat a brilliant sportsman like this? And their editorial line was completely different. Instead of condemning Justin Fashanu, it was saying, it was turning back on their own line and saying that this had been unsympathetic and problematic.

So what happened? What had happened was that a group of activists had come together and they were very concerned at the story in The Sun and the way it was trending. And also the way in which The Voice had picked it up and had made gay people, it seemed that gay people were absolutely unwelcome in the Black communities.

And they'd gone to local authorities, particularly in London at that time, had very strong equal opportunities, policies, in place. And they had said, are you going to carry on paying for job adverts in that? In these-- newspaper that takes this kind of homophobic line?

And the local authorities had gone back to The Voice and said, we can't do that. And that was the main source of funding for a lot of community newspapers like The Voice. Was local authorities or educational establishments reaching out to try to increase representation in their staff bodies by advertising in those kinds of community newspapers.

So by negotiating this possible withdrawing of funding this group had managed to turn their story around in The Voice. They'd managed to change The Voice. There was quite a lot of trouble over it, the sacking of an editor. This group, Black Lesbians and Gays Against Media Homophobia, continued to work together for quite a while. Although this, I think, was their major achievement. This was sort of the main thing that they managed to achieve.

But I wanted to celebrate. That in a moment like that, when it seems very difficult, and as community activists you kind of like, oh, what on Earth can we do in the face of these big papers coming out with this story and these lines? That they'd managed to find a way and achieve a change in editorial line in The Voice newspaper. So to me, you know, I just wanted to finish on that note of hope in a story that is really ridden with tragedy. And unnecessary tragedy when we look back. And just really very kind of tragic. But like I was saying earlier, I really want to remember Justin as this magnificent sportsman. A wonderful footballer.

And however The Sun twisted his story, and although he may be made that final decision under pressure, an act of great bravery to come out and tell his story. And in a Christian spirit, Justin Fashanu was Christian, to reach out to young people and try to be that positive role model for them.

And this was a hugely iconic moment for many different kind of communities which came together, intersected in that historic moment. Thanks very much. [CHUCKLES]