

Character and . . .

Discomfort

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ANNALEE R. WARD

Introduction: Character and Discomfort

Articles

BETH LINDQUIST MCCAW

The Oxymoron of “My Comfort Zone”

ADAM BENJAMIN SMITH

Discomfort, Attention, and Character

SEAN BENSON

The Persecution of Jaelene Hinkle

Response

ROGER P. EBERTZ

Learning to Live Comfortably in an Uncomfortable World: A Response to McCaw, Smith, and Benson



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The Persecution of Jaelene Hinkle

Sean Benson

Abstract

This essay argues that Jaelene Hinkle, a professional soccer player, was discriminated against by the United States Women's National Team when it required players to wear team jerseys in support of Gay Pride month in June of 2017. Adding insult to injury, numerous sports journalists now routinely describe Hinkle as a homophobe despite the fact that her principled decision not to wear the jersey was based on historic Christian teachings concerning human sexuality. Ms. Hinkle's public statements express both respect and love for all persons irrespective of their sexual orientation, and thus depictions of her character have been manifestly unjust.

"If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry: be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny. Get thee to a nunnery."

Hamlet, 3.1.134-36

Perhaps Hamlet is right. No matter what you do, even if you are as pure as driven snow, you will still have those who calumniate, or slander, you. Such appears to be an ugly side of human nature, and thus Hamlet's beloved Ophelia, he suggests, would be better cutting herself off from the world. But if I could insert a few lines into the play, I would tell her,

Whoa there, young lady! The nunnery is a great place to pray, but perhaps you should stand up for yourself as well.

OPHELIA Maybe (whoever you are), but why would I do that?

ME Because if you don't, won't your detractors win?

OPHELIA Yeah . . . I guess.

HAMLET Don't listen to this fool, 'Phe!

Draws sword. I exit stage right pronto.

In his fear of human evil, Hamlet asks Ophelia to close herself off from the very possibility of calumny, and—absent the voice of a better angel—she takes his advice in the only way she knows, shutting out everyone and eventually taking her own life. By means of his repeated exhortation—“To a nunnery go, and quickly too” (line 139)—Hamlet would have her withdraw into a convent. But mere retreat from the false accusations of others often solves nothing.

As Hamlet suspected, the “malicious misrepresentation” of calumny¹ is an enduring problem, and it has recently been used to silence and disenfranchise an American soccer player, Jaelene Hinkle, who holds a politically incorrect view on homosexuality. Political correctness—“the attempt to reform thought by making certain things unsayable” (Dalrymple 39; Scruton 127)—is being employed against Hinkle to malign her, to prevent open-minded discussion of homosexuality, and to intimidate her from dissenting to LGBT *orthodoxy*—their community's standard of right or correct belief. That orthodoxy comprises a host of issues (nondiscrimination in access to health care and housing, for instance) which are as unobjectionable as they are just. Yet the argument that the expression of homosexual desire leads to human flourishing is both the lone facet of LGBT orthodoxy at issue in this essay, and one that *can* reasonably be contested by persons of goodwill. The LGBT community and its supporters in the national sports media implicitly deny this possibility, and for this reason they label Jaelene Hinkle as a *homophobe* in order to defame her. Unlike Ophelia,

however, and to her credit, Hinkle has shown the moral courage to stand by her equally orthodox convictions.

Go Courage!

An African-American, Hinkle currently plays professionally in the National Women's Soccer League for the North Carolina Courage. In 2017, she received the coveted distinction of a call-up to play for the United States Women's National Team (USWNT), but she eventually turned down the invitation. As she publicly disclosed only months later on the evangelical *700 Club* television program, Hinkle objected to wearing rainbow-colored numbers that the USWNT placed on team jerseys in support of gay rights. She explained her decision not to accept that chance to play for the U.S. team:



Jaelene Hinkle, left back for the North Carolina Courage

I just felt so convicted in my spirit that it wasn't my job to wear this jersey. . . . I gave myself three days to just seek and pray and determine what He was asking me to do in this situation . . . I knew in my spirit I was doing the right thing. I knew I was being obedient. (qtd. in Buzinski)

Her statement was calm, and her decision not to play those two international games in June of 2017 was equally measured. As one of the best left backs in the country, Hinkle received a second call-up a year later. Because she had explained on television her decision not to play a year earlier, the response of the national sports media was swift and negative. One reporter opined that Hinkle

appeared on "The 700 Club" this spring to reaffirm that her decision was motivated by homophobia. . . . Many people—myself included—assumed Hinkle would never be given another chance. What she did was a bad look not just for herself, but for U. S. Soccer. . . . For her to not just refuse the call-up on the grounds of her religiously motivated homophobia, but then go on television

and publicly discuss that decision, framing herself as brave for doing so, was embarrassing for the team. (Best)

Katelyn Best mischaracterizes Hinkle's decision as being "motivated by homophobia"; Hinkle affirmed no such thing, let alone "reaffirmed" it. For Best, as for other reporters, one either supports gay rights or one is a homophobe. Best appears unable to imagine that there could be principled reasons not to wear a jersey in support of a political position with which Hinkle disagrees. Such incapacity to imagine principled opposition to one's own beliefs constitutes in effect a triumph of political correctness: thought has been reformed so as to make certain things unsayable and, worse, unimaginable. In this case, Best fails to see that someone can disagree with LGBT orthodoxy on homosexuality and human flourishing and still love persons with deep-seated same-sex desires. Unless reporters are careful, they can be as much victims of politically correct thought as its proponents.

Best further misrepresents Hinkle as "framing herself as brave," when she merely said she thought and prayed about it for three days, and only then decided not to accept the call-up as a result of what she believed was obedience to God. Such talk of God makes some people in our culture uneasy (Rorty 171), but she's perfectly entitled to it even—perhaps especially—when it is unpopular. "Liberty is meaningless," as Frederick Douglass knew from experience, "where the right to utter one's thoughts and opinions has ceased to exist" (qtd. in Mac Donald 19).

The USWNT would no doubt claim that in asking players to wear the rainbow-colored numbers, they are merely supporting their LGBT fans and players such as Megan Rapinoe, the team's star midfielder. This is admirably well-intentioned. I imagine they would further stipulate that sexual orientation is such a basic human right that it is simply not up for discussion, just as slavery is no longer (in the civilized world, at least) an issue about which one need argue. Indeed, most people who have thought deeply about same-sex attraction now agree that it is involuntary, that "the number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible" (*Catechism* sec. 2358).

At the same time, the undeniable inclination or predisposition towards same-sex desire does not settle its propriety—the goodness or badness—any more than that of a host of other human desires, some of which lead to human flourishing, while others do not.² Let’s stipulate, however, for the sake of argument, not only to the naturalness of same-sex desire, but also to its expression as a human right (and good) that we ought to support. Now the free exercise of religious belief is also a basic human right, and is acknowledged as such in the First Amendment to our Constitution.



Hinkle refused a prestigious USWNT call-up based on her religious beliefs.

The question then is whether Jaelene Hinkle should be prevented from playing on the national team merely because she holds a dissenting view—one well within the bounds of historic Christian teaching—on the expression of same-sex attraction. It would be one thing if Hinkle were actually a homophobe who ranted about the LGBT community and expressed her utter contempt for it. She might then cause a rift within the team and deserve to be sent packing. But

she is not calling out her teammates, trying to embarrass them, or anything of the sort. She is instead asking not to be required to wear Pride jerseys as a symbolic expression of support for the LGBT community. One wonders why that community, which has encountered stifling dissent and persecution throughout history, would want for one moment to stifle the dissent of Jaelene Hinkle?


Hinkle is not suggesting that people with same-sex desires be denied access to health care or housing, but she is unwilling to support the team’s symbolic support of same-sex expression because, as is clear from her public comments, she does not believe it leads to human flourishing. Hinkle is not, in the media’s crudely reductive formula, “anti-gay,” nor do her beliefs in any way hinder her teammates from playing soccer. She may have hurt some feelings, but grown women who play professional soccer do not always agree with other teammates

on every issue under the sun, and yet are able to perform on the field. That's what professional athletes do.

The USWNT's decision also contravenes a fundamental tenet of American sports: neither your color (witness Jackie Robinson), ethnicity, social background, nor creed matters. Sports are a meritocracy based on athletic prowess. Teams are free to penalize poor performance, but not belief. Imagine how Jaelene Hinkle, a superlative soccer player, feels because she does not hold the right creed?

What is at stake here, in essence, is a conflict between competing rights. Does one outweigh the other? People of goodwill will of course disagree on this issue, but do we even need to take a side? Common sense would indicate that we ought, insofar as possible, to accommodate the assertion of both rights. Even if one human right were more properly basic, if there's no compelling reason to quash the other, why would we do so? We certainly would not want to keep off the team, for instance, married gay players and coaches, several of whom are in fact on the team.

But here's the rub: in this case, the USWNT imposed a positive duty on Hinkle, if she wished to play on the team, to forgo her religious beliefs for the duration of the games and participate in the team's symbolic expression of solidarity with the LGBT community. That crosses a line.



The USWNT imposed a positive duty on Hinkle, if she wished to play on the team, to forgo her religious beliefs.

Why even put Jaelene Hinkle or any other player in such an untenable position? Wouldn't it be more inclusive (not to mention patriotic) to have the team wear jerseys saying in bold red, white, and blue *E Pluribus Unum*, even if only in translation so that the world could see that gay and straight players can play side by side in unity, as they do every day in WoSo, the popular abbreviation for women's soccer? Why, in other words, affirm one human right to the exclusion (or suppression) of another? There were surely less intrusive, noncoercive ways to express support for gay rights: put a message on the USWNT website, allow players to wear rainbow-colored warmup gear if they wish, or any

number of accommodations. But team jerseys all have to be identical so as not to confuse the other team, and thus the USWNT gave no alternative to Jaelene Hinkle.

That is not fair play.

Perhaps even more surprising is the USWNT's inability to imagine that any reasonable human being could possibly object to wearing Pride jerseys. LGBT orthodoxy holds that same-sex expression is a civil rights issue that trumps what they believe to be Hinkle's misguided religious beliefs. To be sure, religious beliefs that involve violence (e.g. child sacrifice) can be discriminated against, as can what I call pseudo-religious beliefs such as an interdiction on interracial marriage. A ban on miscegenation is more properly a race issue—it's just racist—and although people have alleged this as part of their religious beliefs, there is no compelling evidence in any of the three great monotheisms (as well as other religions) that this is a serious teaching of any sacred texts or traditions—quite the opposite, in fact.

The expression of same-sex attraction is distinguishable from interracial marriage because there is scriptural warrant for the latter in both testaments as well as longstanding theological opposition to same-sex acts in numerous (though by no means all) traditions. People can and do reasonably disagree on this issue, but Hinkle's views, it needs to be said, are well within the ambit of traditional Christian religious belief and teaching. A reasonable person can object to being forced—coerced, really—into supporting LGBT orthodoxy on this point. Because there was no compelling reason to require Jaelene Hinkle to adopt a position (even if only a symbolic one) on gay rights that had nothing to do with her soccer skills, the USWNT appears to have unfairly discriminated against her based on her religious beliefs.

Jaelene Hinkle's religious views on homosexuality may be politically incorrect, but their incorrectness is largely unargued and merely assumed by the LGBT community and its supporters. They assume that because same-sex desires are natural, their expression is also good; most people would agree to the former; a reasonable person can disagree with the latter. People have any number of natural desires; expressing every single one of them helps neither them nor others

flourish as human beings. One can certainly disagree with this position, but these are issues that deserve open discussion and the expression of goodwill on both sides. We need the civility to talk with one another so that we can cultivate intellectual tolerance of those with whom we disagree on the question of same-sex expression. Such tolerance—not to be confused with indifference or apathy—is the intellectual virtue of open-mindedness, a willingness to engage ideas with which one might disagree and even find uncomfortable to talk about, and yet find a way to do so respectfully as a way of becoming a person of thoughtful and caring reflection.³

Homophobic Rating—PG-13: Strong Language

Harmful language on a subject as sensitive as homosexuality can damage people to the core. Consider the notorious Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas, whose “outreach” routinely involves protesting any group they believe is doing something sinful. They even occasionally show up at military funerals to proclaim God’s judgment on service members who have died in action because they consider America to be an ungodly country. Westboro, which is not affiliated with any Baptist denomination (let’s face it, no one would have them),



We need the civility to talk to one another so that we can cultivate intellectual tolerance of those with whom we disagree.

would rather condemn others than extend God’s love to them. Westboro also reserves an especial vitriol for homosexual persons and the entire LGBT community, which is evident in the malice of their URL: godhatesfags.com.

The Christian community has had to become more open-minded as to the naturalness of homosexual desire, and sympathetic to persons with such deep-seated attraction. The LGBT community, for its part, has to learn to be more open-minded to those who assert that the naturalness of a desire does not mean its expression is necessarily good or healthy. Unfortunately, what we see happening in America is the antithesis of a civil exchange of ideas: *homophobia* in current usage now has the same pejorative effect as the use of *fag*.

The *Urban Dictionary*, a crowd-sourced site, offers one definition of *homophobia* as “a severe condition, usually prominent in Republicans and most of American culture, leading one to . . . inaccurately use bible quotations (sic) for the justification of killing homosexuals . . .” (def. 6). What is one to say of such a definition, popular not despite but because of its lack of charity towards those who disagree with the expression of same-sex attraction? Such ridicule has the effect of silencing dissent by characterizing it as malice. Political correctness is the attempt to shame those who hold “incorrect” views, to render dissenters such as Jaelene Hinkle voiceless and powerless.

We need to step back for a moment to understand the evolution of the word *homophobia* because its denotation is often misunderstood. Originally it meant, “fear or hatred of men or the male sex,” and the *OED* cites as an example the *Des Moines Daily News* from June 1904: “Young women of America have homophobia, you know, just as children have measles.” That innocent usage, as much from a different mental universe as from a different era, is now obsolete.⁴ *Homophobia* came about in its original sense following the 19th-century craze for identifying various phobias—hydrophobia, arachnophobia, claustrophobia, gynophobia (fear of women)—and is probably used today because of its quasi-scientific aura of classification. To be a homophobe in contemporary usage is *as if* to suffer from (without actually experiencing) a psychological malady, complete with the implicit idea that one could seek counselling to lessen one’s irrational aversion to homosexuality in the same way another might her aversion to spiders. But make no mistake: *homophobia* is used for political rather than clinical ends.

The Westboro Baptists are homophobes and fairly described as such. But it is unfair to label as a homophobe one who neither hates nor fears homosexual persons (and may in fact love them), but who nonetheless believes the expression of *opposite*-sex attraction best leads to human flourishing. The indiscriminate use of *homophobia* to apply to all persons who do not support LGBT orthodoxy is in some ways understandable: having been besieged and persecuted for millennia for their same-sex desire, it is no surprise that the LGBT community remains wary of those who oppose their beliefs. Yet two wrongs no more make a right than vengeance does. To slander Jaelene Hinkle, someone who is

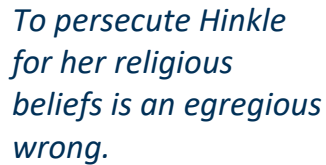
respectful of her teammates and also holds traditional understandings of human sexuality, is a moral evil. We need to call it that because to persecute her for her religious beliefs is an egregious wrong to her person, and people of goodwill on both sides of this issue need to stand in her defense.

Less educated speakers who use *homophobia* today misunderstand its acceptance, or commonly accepted meaning: “Hostility towards, prejudice against, or (less commonly) fear of homosexual people or homosexuality.” *Time* first used *homophobia* in its current sense in October, 1969:

“Such homophobia . . . involves innumerable misconceptions and oversimplifications” (“Homophobia” [*Oxford English Dictionary*]). Note that even in this first recorded instance, the homophobe is already characterized pejoratively as one who has “misconceptions and oversimplifications” of homosexuality. Unfortunately, because *homophobia* is in wide use today, people who do not know its meaning pick it up almost unconsciously and apply it indiscriminately to anyone who does not agree with LGBT orthodoxy.

Moreover, as one reporter insisted to me, *homophobia* merely means *dislike* when she and her friends use it. The OED has not yet picked up on this secondary meaning of the word. Yet to use it in this emerging sense is to overlook the “phobic” root of the word. Claustrophobes, to take one example, don’t merely dislike enclosed spaces—they have emotional, irrational aversions to them. Such overlooking entails the linguistic metaphorization of *homophobia*, which frequently happens with technical words once they enter mainstream use. That process, however, still appears to be in its infancy with *homophobia*, and one should be careful not to assume that its secondary meaning has replaced its more hostile and primary meaning.

The online blogger Gaby Alejandro, for instance, has said of Hinkle’s decision not to wear the Pride jersey, “You can’t hide behind religion when it comes to something like homophobia. This isn’t just an opinion. This is hate . . .” (qtd. in Gruskoff). Alejandro is not attributing to Hinkle



To persecute Hinkle for her religious beliefs is an egregious wrong.

mere dislike. She assumes that Hinkle is a malign actor, even though her measured and initially non-public response to the team's decision to wear Pride jerseys suggests she is hardly malicious. The claim that *homophobia* only means "dislike" is a bit like Humpty Dumpty's declaring, "When I use a word . . . it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less." "The question," Alice coolly replied, "is whether you can make words mean so many different things" (Carroll 161, italics his).

Irrespective of a speaker's intention, *homophobia* is almost always received as a slur. No one wants to be called a homophobe. Thus, the effect of even unwitting use lumps together the Westboro Baptists with the overwhelming majority of Christians (and countless others) who affirm that men and women with "deep-seated homosexual tendencies . . . must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided" (*Catechism* sec. 2358; Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod 3).

An even more egregious problem exists: educated speakers who know the primary sense of *homophobia* and apply it to anyone who opposes LGBT orthodoxy. Surely *homophobia* applies to the two men who tortured and left 21-year-old University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepard to die on October 6, 1998 (Thernstrom), but are we to equate Pope Francis's loving response to persons with same-sex desires to that of the Westboro Baptists? It is crucially important to distinguish between those who persecute and actually hate homosexuals from those who support traditional beliefs on same-sex expression. *Homophobia* now conveniently suggests the psychological state—fear, hatred, misunderstanding—of those who oppose homosexual expression. It is brilliant shorthand for *hater*, as deft a rhetorical move as it is nefarious.

LGBT dissent as thoughtcrime

Particularly in the national sports media, *homophobia* is employed even when the evidence indicates that someone has no animus towards persons with same-sex desires. Too often, and regrettably, *homophobia* is used to stigmatize those who might disagree with LGBT orthodoxy on homosexuality. In his dystopian novel, *1984*, Orwell's character Syme

notes that his country's official language, Newspeak, is deliberately being controlled to reduce its vocabulary: "Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it" (52). That is the point, too, of the calculated use of *homophobia* by educated speakers in the media: to render unmentionable any traditional and principled opposition to same-sex expression, which is by politically correct fiat, to use the language of Newspeak, doubleplusgood. In other words, *homophobia* is invoked to limit thought on homosexuality, just as *fag* and other derogatory terms reduce people to crude caricatures.

The incendiary verbiage of the Westboro Baptists notwithstanding, Christendom has worked hard to eliminate injurious language, and to distinguish people (all of whom the Church values as image bearers of God) from behavior that hinders their flourishing. Should not the LGBT community work to distinguish the true homophobes from those who love them yet disagree with their position on same-sex expression? If not, they will be equating disagreement with hatred, and that is a distinction with a real difference. Unfortunately, the use of *homophobia* elides the distinction—purposely so, in some cases—to make any



Hinkle has been called a "homophobe" for choosing not to wear the rainbow numbers.

disagreement unsayable and, as Orwell prophesies, eventually unthinkable. This has already come true for those who, as I've noted, can't even imagine that one could have principled opposition to LGBT orthodoxy. All opposition in such quarters is caricatured as homophobia and is thus, by definition, unprincipled.

Michael Hanby also notes the increasing use of homophobia as political rhetoric to silence opponents: "Dissenters are intimidated by the toxic charges of 'hate' and 'homophobia.'" As we have seen, not all people who employ homophobia intend it as a slur, but the effect of its use creates psychological discomfort in those against whom it is directed. I have said little about discomfort so far, even though it is the topic of this issue of the journal. In fact, however, my essay concerns the

discomfort—physical, psychological, emotional, even spiritual—visited upon those who dissent from the prevailing orthodoxy. Calling someone a *homophobe* is hardly meant to foster debate on same-sex expression; its use, whatever the speaker’s intention, intimidates the accused and forecloses discussion. Rest assured that that message has been conveyed not only to Jaelene Hinkle, but also to any other WoSo player who has dreams of playing for the United States.

Unfortunately, as Mary Eberstadt remarks, even “inside parts of the church, and ubiquitously outside it, *homophobe* has become an automatic smear deployed for partisan purposes. . . . *homophobe* is meant to shame, intimidate, and sideline” anyone who disagrees with the LGBT position (*italics hers*). On Instagram, Hinkle was forthright several years ago in her opposition to the Supreme Court’s legalization of same-sex marriage in the landmark *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision: “My heart is that as Christians we don’t begin to throw a tantrum over what has been brought into law today, but we become that much more loving” (qtd. in Cauterucci). In what sort of mental universe could Hinkle’s measured response and call to love others be considered an expression of hatred?

Reporters routinely use *homophobe* to describe Jaelene Hinkle. The effect, as Hamlet noted of Ophelia, is pure *calumny*: “false and malicious misrepresentation of the words or actions of others, calculated to injure their reputation; libelous detraction, slander” (“Calumny”). Writing in *Slate*, Christina Cauterucci described the USWNT’s decision to call Jaelene Hinkle up a second time as “nurturing outspoken homophobia.” “Hinkle’s addition to the team sends a tacit message to her teammates and the USWNT’s fans: Players with poisonous views are welcome here, so long as they help us win.” Perhaps fairness requires that we ask who is the one with venom here?


Cauterucci further chastises Hinkle for “bigotry,” and the piece’s title, “Kick Her Off,” sums up her opinion that such people cannot be debated and should be ostracized. This is hardly objective journalism even if one shares some of Cauterucci’s less extreme views. She got her wish, too, as Hinkle was later cut from the team despite the consensus view that she is “probably the best left back available to the United States women’s national team” (McCauley). Were it for her skill alone, Jaelene

Hinkle almost certainly would have been on the USWNT for the World Cup.

The national sports media, and perhaps the relatively circumspect USWNT itself, fails to imagine a reality—love and principled disagreement—different from the artificial one constructed by denigrating Hinkle’s motives. Their doing so is less a form of collusion than of groupthink, the political correctness that Theodore Dalrymple identifies as

the conspicuous, not to say intimidating, display of virtue (conceived of as the public espousal of the “correct,” which is to say “progressive,” views) by means of a purified vocabulary and abstract humane sentiment. To contradict such sentiment, or not to use such vocabulary, is to put yourself outside the pale of civilized men. . . . (39)

The use of *homophobia* is a shibboleth among much of the media and intelligentsia, the purified vocabulary that signals that her views are beyond the respectable pale, the contours of which they alone define.



It takes great moral courage to stand up to false charges.

But their doing so is merely the projection of a wish fulfillment: the sentiment or feeling that their position is so self-evidently correct that it needs no proof. Hinkle’s brand of toxicity must not be tolerated; open-mindedness need not apply here.

To be sure, persons with deep-seated same-sex desires have been and still are oppressed—no reasonable person denies this. But in the West the pendulum also swings in the other direction, with the discomfort of calumny leveled against those who, like Hinkle, disagree with LGBT orthodoxy on the lone issue of same-sex expression. It is no exaggeration to say that in soccer as in other spheres of American culture today it takes great moral courage to stand up to false charges of *homophobia*. One hopes that the USWNT would be open-minded enough not to require a religious test for soccer players, and let Hinkle serve as a model for young women who are unafraid to stand on their convictions—just as many LGBT players admirably do. The USWNT

Character and . . . Discomfort

needs to put their eleven best players on the pitch, and leave personal beliefs and disagreements to be debated in a more appropriate venue, and on a level playing field.

Focusing on Hinkle's absence from the USWNT, sports journalist Travis Yoesting writes, almost as if he thinks he lives in the world of *The Handmaid's Tale*, "Hinkle belongs to a group of Christians who want to deny human rights to a large portion of society." He continues in the same vein: "If you stand for human rights or believe that words have consequences, you probably don't want Hinkle anywhere near a United States national team." Yet even Yoesting—like Best and others who condemn Hinkle's religious beliefs—concedes that "[f]rom an on-field perspective, Hinkle would undoubtedly make the USWNT better. . . . she's what you want in a left back, a position at which the USWNT has little depth. She's certainly among the top three at her position in this country." He even acknowledges the real issue: "Would it be fair to Hinkle to deny her the opportunity to play in the World Cup because of her religious views?" (Yoesting). I hope his question is rhetorical; I fear it is in earnest.

We can, of course, resort to name calling and denigration, but we know how well that works. We can choose to cause discomfort and pain to our fellow human beings, or we can "comfort all who mourn" and are in



Hinkle took a principled stand.

any affliction (Isaiah 61:2), gay and straight alike. We can and should disagree if we are to live in a vibrant culture, but disharmony is not the goal, just as Jaelene Hinkle's continuing ostracism from the USWNT is scarcely an optimal solution. Divisiveness reigns, and the charge of homophobia at the epicenter of WoSo is mere sign and symptom of a broader malaise in our civic discourse.

There are people of faith who disagree with Ms. Hinkle's principled stand, and non-Christians who do not accept the traditions and scriptures she finds compelling—nor should they be asked to. But they should be invited to accept reason as their guide so together we can recognize and affirm that no one should be required to endorse a

particular religious or political view in order to play on an athletic team. It is time for good people on both sides of the issue to have this uncomfortable discussion so that, together, we can forge a way forward.

Sean Benson is professor and chair of English, and director of Liberal Studies at the University of Dubuque. His essays include the forthcoming “[D]runk with those that have the fear of God’: Shakespeare on Social Drunkenness” (Renascence). His shortened essay herein is part of a book project on unreason in American culture. His most recent book is Heterodox Shakespeare. Sean and his wife, Jennifer, who is also a professor at UD, are the parents of two children. Together, they enjoy walking, and they are active in their local Lutheran congregation.

Photo credits pp. 48, 50, 57, and 60: IS Photos

Notes

¹ *OED*, s.v. *calumny*. I wish to thank for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay Annalee Ward, Beth McCaw, Adam Smith, Jon Barz, and Mary Bryant.

² For the record, I take no position in this essay on the propriety of same-sex expression. My subject is the widespread use of the term *homophobia*, which is a separate and distinct issue.

³ The intellectual virtue of open-mindedness is not one of the character virtues (*temperance, prudence, etc.*), but it lays the foundation for their development.

⁴ Remarkably, the *OED* lists that usage as merely being “rare,” when in fact no one uses it in such an antiquated sense, and would be wholly misunderstood were she to do so.

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