

OPEN LETTER

May 19, 2017

Dear Kevin Pillar,

I felt compelled to address you directly, because the word that you shouted in a packed stadium that has now been aired over and over on TV, should be called out for what it is, hate speech.

As a member of the LGBTQI2S community and the Executive Director of Egale Canada, I write to you to express how hurtful a derogatory slur like the one you used is; to myself, to our community and how especially detrimental it is to the gender and sexually diverse youth of Canada. As the “superman” of baseball, I am especially disheartened by how you chose to handle your mistake. Superheroes are not just strong, they save lives. The word you used is violent. Words don’t break bones, but they do break spirits. They keep youth off the field, in the closet and perpetuate the culture of rejection. These are all contributors to the rate of LGBTQI2S youth suicide.

**33% of LGB youth have attempted suicide in
comparison to 7% of youth in general.**
(Saewyc 2007)

As you may not know, May 17th is the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia. A day that represents an annual landmark to draw the attention of decision-makers, the media, the public, opinion leaders and local authorities to the alarming situation faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people and all those who do not conform to majority sexual and gender norms. May 17 is now celebrated in more than 130 countries, including 37 where same-sex acts are illegal. With your homophobic outburst, you reminded us, again sadly, of why organizations like Egale must continue to work 365 days a year to improve the lives of LGBTQI2S people. It is supposed to be a day for our organizations and communities to celebrate our achievements and bring light to the work that still needs to be done. Instead, we had to listen to you publicly declare that homophobic hate speech “is part of the game.” A slap in the face to the organizations who have fought for a platform to dismantle this ideology, that you, as an idolized professional athlete with an international reach, have reinforced.

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An apology is a humbling and necessary first step. However, words without clear action, are an empty gesture. We have some suggestions on how you can make meaningful amends and take action:

- Use your 2 game suspension to learn about the LGBTQI2S community, the challenges we face and the organizations that are working to create safer spaces for us all.
- Personally complete LGBTQI2S Diversity and Inclusion training
- Advocate for LGBTQI2S Diversity and Inclusion training for the Blue Jays organization and the Major League Baseball Association. Can you accept this challenge Superman?

We are not able to invite you to our LGBTQI2S youth drop-in centre because it is a safe space and we would be putting our youth at risk.

Through your actions, you have drawn attention to homophobia in sports. This incident can be a catalyst for growth for not only yourself, but for sports organizations on a global scale.

Homophobia in sports organizations, from little league to the majors, is a systemic issue that needs to be addressed through policy, education and community engagement.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Helen Kennedy". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Helen Kennedy
Executive Director
Egale Canada Human Rights Trust