

Report from the HFAG name panel

We have been asked by the leaders of the Heavy Flavour Averaging Group to serve on a panel to investigate the sensitivities in the community to the name of the group, and in particular the pronunciation of the acronym HFAG.

We have discussed the issue of the HFAG acronym with a few dozens of colleagues, and also with people who are not physicists. They include women and men from North and South America, Asia, different parts of Europe and the Middle East, of whom some but not all were members of the LGBTQ+ community. Members of the groups *LGBT CERN* and *LGBT+ Physicists* (in the US) have been consulted. Our aim was to understand if some people find the acronym to be offensive, and if so, to what extent. We sought to discuss whether colleagues were so disturbed by the acronym as to justify changing the name, knowing that doing so would mean changing the brand name, which has some implications.

Most opinions expressed by people from continental Europe, Asia, the Middle East and South America do not seem to indicate a great sensitivity to the acronym HFAG. Some of them did not know about the problematic connotation of the word “fag” in certain parts of the world, and others, who knew about these connotations, did not think that the acronym was offensive, given that there are not any ill intentions involved. People sometimes mentioned acronyms that are frequently used and that have parts with delicate connotations; in general, in these parts of the world, they are not perceived as derogatory. As an example, in France the word “pédé” is used as an insult towards gay men. However, acronyms like PDG (pronounced “pédé gé”, meaning CEO in French, in addition to the well known acronym “Particle Data Group”), or HPD (pronounced “aash pédé”, designating “Hybrid Photon Detector”, a component of the LHCb detector) do not provoke any reactions. Many people even never realised that these acronyms have “problematic” parts.

On the other hand, the picture is very different for people from the US and Canada (and some, though many fewer, from the UK). It is also the case for people from other parts of the world who have spent long periods of time in north America. People we have spoken to expressed very clearly the feeling of being offended by the acronym HFAG. This is especially true for those belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, but is also the case for others. Our impression is that this reflects a large majority, and not just the opinion of a loud minority. Many opinions expressed were strong; including those who believed the acronym HFAG was comparable to a racist insult. Some people suggested that the continued use of a term that is so offensive towards gays might be interpreted as a sign that sexual minorities and gender nonconforming people are not welcome in our scientific community. Many people, when asked, found that the use of this acronym would justify a refusal to host the HFAG website by an institution in the US. Several people said that when they saw the name HFAG for the first time they wondered why the group was called that. One person reported that when he was first introduced, by a senior physicist, to the name HFAG, it was accompanied by an apology (on behalf of the community) for the name. When we explained the implications of changing the brand name, most people found that this problem is minor compared to the offensive character of the present acronym. Adding points between the letters (H.F.A.G) does not seem to be satisfactory, as the letters F.A.G are still there.

Taking into consideration this information and all our impressions, the panel members unanimously recommend that the acronym be changed, in a way that will have minimal implications concerning the brand name. Even if not all the HEP physicists perceive the acronym HFAG as pejorative, we think that the fact that so many physicists do find it so offensive justifies a change.

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