

**The limited development of English women's recreational cricket : a critique of the liberal "absorption" approach to gender equality**

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# **The limited development of English women's recreational cricket: A critique of the liberal 'absorption' approach to gender equality**

## **Abstract**

In 1998 the Women's Cricket Association (WCA) merged with the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), a move influenced by financial difficulties but also informed by a liberal, equal opportunities approach to gender equality. This article examines the early impact of this merger on the development of women's recreational cricket in England. It draws upon data collected from six semi-structured interviews with key personnel involved in women's cricket at two County Cricket Boards. Findings suggest that since the merger the development of the women's game has been limited because it has been left to 'compete' for resources with the existing well-established and male dominated clubs. Access to facilities, club infrastructure, workforce and decision making positions remain protected by male participants and clubs. Adopting a critical feminist position, we argue that this liberal 'absorption' approach to gender equality has done little to challenge the structural arrangements of recreational cricket that continue to protect and prioritise male interests.

## **Keywords**

Cricket; gender; critical feminism male power; organisational merger

## **Introduction**

Sport organisations in the UK and beyond have increasingly sought to find ways to challenge persistent gender inequalities that exist within sport organisations themselves, the services they offer, their 'customer' base and more broadly in the wider communities that they serve. In Britain, gender equality initiatives have tended to focus on increasing female *participants*.

This has usually been initiated by ‘top-down’ (O’Gorman, 2011) participation targets set by funding bodies such as Sport England designed to meet government agendas related to public health and social inclusion (Coalter, 2007). Despite this investment, large scale participation figures show little increase in female formal sport participation over recent years. British sport organisations have historically been the domain of (predominantly white) men, with structures and cultures of sport reflecting the prioritisation of masculinity and male sport (Williams, 2014). Such social conditions have remained remarkably stubborn to change, with the masculine dominance continuing to impact upon opportunities for females in sport, be it as participants or in non-playing roles such as coaching and administration, where progress in gender equality has been even slower (Allen and Shaw, 2013; Fielding-Lloyd and Meân, 2008; 2011; Norman, 2010; Soler et al. 2016). This is the case even in sports where there has been a long history of female involvement. In cricket, for example, the Women’s Cricket Association was first formed in 1926, with women noted to have played the game from as early as 1745 (Duncan, 2013).

Given the relatively modest outcomes of gender equality activities over the last 20 years, it is perhaps surprising that relatively little critical academic scrutiny has been paid to interrogating the nature of these types of initiatives over this period of time. Previous research has characterised efforts to improve the participation and progression of women in sport as being based on liberal approaches to social equality – one that aims to provide equality of opportunity. Here, the focus is on changing the behaviour of under-represented groups rather than reforming existing structures and cultures of sport (Burke, 2010; Greenhill et al. 2009; Hardin and Whiteside, 2009; Shaw, 2013; Spracklen, 2006); This reflects the dominant interpretation of social equality across neo-liberal societies, is evidenced in policy

content in areas such as education, health, employment law, and forms the basis of equality legislation (Burton, 2014).

Prompted by these liberal ideas of equality, in the 1990s a number of sport governing bodies were encouraged to merge previously single-gender organisations into one national body (White, 2003). In 1998, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and the Women's Cricket Association (WCA) amalgamated in a move that it was assumed would protect the financial future of English women's cricket and enhance its development. The merger was presented by the WCA as a positive opportunity that could not be missed (Velija et al. 2014), although many members were concerned that the move would lead to a loss of decision-making power. The final WCA vote was 97 to 1 in favour, although a significant number (30) abstained, indicating their discomfort with the plan (BBC News, 1998, Rumford and Wagg, 2017). Indeed, White (2003) cautions that the outcomes of such mergers for females are likely to be mixed as while financial investment may have increased for female sport, this has often been accompanied by a loss of autonomy and control for female decision makers. Evidence from Australian and English cricket suggests governing bodies for women's sport have been 'absorbed' into the existing structures of the larger (male) parent bodies rather than equitably incorporated (Stronach and Adair, 2009, Velija et al. 2014). This has been recognised elsewhere as a potential consequence of the liberal approach to equality (see Shaw, 2013).

Since the 'absorption' of the WCA into the ECB, *elite* women's cricket in England appears to have benefitted from a significant growth in investment targeted at the England women's team (Velija et al. 2014). In 2014, to support full time professionals in the women's game, 18 female cricketers were given professional 'central' contracts from the ECB (Brenkley, 2014),

reflecting its rising profile in England. In 2016 the inaugural Women's Cricket Super League took place, with 6 multi-national teams of 15 squad members drawn from the best female talent across the cricket world, in some of the best grounds in the UK. Such growth is also evident in other countries, with a similar T20 tournament for women's cricket held in Australia for several years before being re-branded the 'Women's Big Bash League' in 2015 to align to its male equivalent tournament. Internationally, the Women's World T20 competition run by the International Cricket Council (ICC) has been held biannually since 2010 and the ICC recently announced a significant increase in prize money (to £2.9m from 2016 to 2023) which reflects its increasing 'value' as a sporting brand (BBC Sport, 2015). This still lags behind prize money for the male version of the tournament, however, which was calculated as 16 times the value of the women's competition in 2016 (Horne, 2016).

At the recreational level, however, we know much less about the impact that this liberal 'absorption' of the women's game has had. There is little evidence to consider how women's recreational cricket changed since the WCA was absorbed into the ECB, and to what extent the merger has altered the structures, cultures, practices and organisational values of the ECB to include females. While cricket is the third most popular team sport for men in England (Sport England, 2016) the sport has remained a minority sport for women in England and has historically received little dedicated support from County Cricket Boards (CCBs). CCBs are the regional governing bodies of cricket that control and administer the affiliated cricket that takes place in their locality. Figures from the Sport England Active People Survey (APS) show women's cricket participation peaking at 0.23% of the female population in 2008, with the latest figures suggesting a decline to almost its lowest level since 2006 (0.13%) (Sport England, 2016). These figures suggest the merger has not prompted a growth in participation in women's cricket, and yet at youth level the picture appears more promising for girls, with

a reported 600 clubs in 2015 offering cricket to girls compared with 100 in 2000, and an estimated 1 million girls participating in cricket via the Chance to Shine project (Morris, 2015). There appears to be some disjuncture between the growth in girls participation not being reflected in the women's game.

This article seeks to address this gap by critically assessing the ways in which the organisational merger between the ECB and WCA - that we consider an 'absorption' informed by liberal approaches to equality – has limited the development of women's recreational cricket. This task is informed by a critical feminist standpoint that seeks to expose the underlying gendered arrangements that prioritise male power and hegemonic control of sporting structures and cultures (Scraton and Flintoff, 2013). We draw specifically on Shaw's (2007) notion of the 'deep structure' of sport organisations, an idea derived from Rao's analysis of institutional power (Rao et al. 2009, Rao and Kelleher, 2005). The values and cultural practices that make up the deep structural assumptions of two CCBs are scrutinized to establish the ways in which the merger has resulted in prevailing male power within the sport being reinforced rather than challenged. Testimonies of personnel directly tasked with enacting gender equality within existing structures of sport organisations – a sample often considered to be under-researched (Sibson, 2010; Shaw and Frisby, 2006; Shaw, 2006) – are used to identify the key issues that are hindering the development of women's recreational cricket. It is argued that this liberal approach appears to have reinforced rather than challenge institutionalised male power in this setting, and consolidates the **critical** feminist arguments that suggest liberal approaches to gender equality are ill-equipped to transform the deep structure of sport organisations like CCBs.

### **The 'liberal' approach to gender equality in sport**

Attempts to promote social equality in any setting can take a variety of guises, often drawn upon very different basic assumptions about what ‘equality’ might consist of and how it might be reached. Gender equality can be interpreted and understood in quite different ways in both sport (Greenhill et al. 2009) and further afield (Verloo and Lombardo (2007). While the concept is regularly used in sport policy, it is rarely explicitly defined or its meaning clearly articulated and this lack of clarity often characterises research on gender equality activities in sport (see Shaw, 2013, Norman, 2016 for discussions of this). Kantola and Squires (2010) argue that liberal ideas of social equality continue to dominate in contemporary societies, so it is no surprise that such approaches are reflected in sport in such social contexts (Greenhill et al. 2009; Hovden, 2006). It has also been suggested that research related to gender in sport management has often been based on a liberal feminist interpretation which “does not encourage a full examination of the assumptions, values and beliefs about men and women that are deeply entrenched in organisations” (Greenhill et al. 2009: 230).

The liberal approach to equality has been the subject of sustained critique by critical feminist scholars, who have sought to identify the limitations of this stance in advancing the rights of females (see Aitchison, 2005). Lusted (2017) highlights the distinction between liberal approaches to equality which focus on equality of *opportunities* and more radical approaches which focus on equality of *conditions* and *outcomes*. He argues that liberal approaches are particularly common in sport because they fit well with the ‘equality consensus’ - a broadly agreed ideological view that sport is inherently meritocratic and fair (St. Louis, 2004). The liberal approach can be viewed as one that ‘manages inequalities’ rather than eliminating them (Baker et al. 2016). Provided opportunities are broadly equal between people, the meritocratic ‘market’ determines fairly the allocation of reward and advantage. At an

institutional level, the equality consensus can often be drawn upon by key organizational actors to deflect calls for structural or cultural changes in governance (see Shaw, 2013; Lusted, 2017) that would disrupt the status quo and challenge those in positions of power. Such assumptions do not, however, take into account the ways in which men's central position in sport organisations, and their everyday practices, is privileged and naturalised. As Hovden (2012 p. 291) argues, the 'discourses and strategies by which women's inclusion is based on men's norms and standards most often lead to the rebuilding of gendered hierarchies within organisations'. Therefore, if mergers of previously single-gender sport organisations such as the WBC and ECB are predominately based on existing practices that benefit men, they are likely to have limited impact on the sport's gendered imbalance.

A core argument of the critical feminist standpoint, therefore, is that liberal approaches pose little challenge to institutional logic that sees no obvious value in organisational change (Rao and Kelleher, 2005). Hoeber (2007) argues that whilst gender equality can be espoused in sport organisation policies and stated values, revenue generation quickly becomes the foremost priority and is subsequently used to rationalise the unequal allocation of resource and privileges. Such inequality has also been found to be rationalised, or at least accepted, by women within the game themselves as they are so naturalised in their network of unequal social relations (Velija and Malcolm, 2009). Indeed, women's cricket has historically not wanted to offend male cricketers or male cricket organisations for fear of losing their goodwill and cooperation (Velija, 2012). It should also be recognised that the origins of cricket were heavily shaped by social class, whereby the upper class gentleman amateur dominated, which also informed early attitudes to female involvement (Williams 1999). This has continued despite the merger which, as Velija and Malcolm (2009) found at the

grassroots level, is a result of the WCA and ECB coming together as unequal partners with women's cricket having significantly less financial and cultural resources.

In line with the critical feminist position, Shaw (2007) advocates an approach that both concerns itself 'with the identification, reflection upon, and deconstruction of structural and cultural organisational constraints' (p.421) within sport and acknowledges equality as intangible, shifting and therefore open to critique and change. As part of this approach, and of particular relevance to this study, is Shaw's proposed analysis of the 'deep structure' of sport organisations and the related assumptions that inform people's attitudes to equality. Such analysis would require scrutinizing the historical values and cultural practices of the organisation that have come to be known as the 'normal' ways of working (Shaw, 2007; Rao et al, 1999).

### **Challenges in implementing gender equality in sport**

The challenges in achieving gender equality in male dominated sport organisations are well documented in research that is broadly informed by critical feminist approaches (see Burke, 2010; Hoerber, 2007; Hardin and Whiteside, 2009; Fielding-Lloyd and Mean, 2016; Shaw, 2013). Senior managers are often ambivalent on issues of gender and there is a widespread acceptance of gendered divisions as common-sense (Hardin et al. 2014) and embedded in the deep structure of organisational cultures (Shaw, 2007). Women are blamed for their relative inability to succeed (Fielding-Lloyd and Mean, 2011) whilst gendered ideologies have been found to favour males in recruitment and promotion practices (Goldberg et al. 2013). Indeed, senior management roles in sport are often dominated by masculine discourses that favour men whilst the lesser valued and less credible 'backroom' roles are dominated by discourses of femininity and women (Shaw and Hoerber, 2003).

Sport organisations' development of gender equality policies and the bringing together of disparate organisations does not in itself guarantee inclusion as it is the nature of inclusion, and the underlying culture and structure of the organisation, that is all important (Claringbould and Knoppers, 2007; Fielding-Lloyd and Meân, 2008). For instance, Stronach and Adair (2009) argue that whilst the amalgamation of the men's and women's cricket organisations in Australia (the Australian Cricket Board and Women's Cricket Australia) has benefited youth development, financial support and scholarships in women's cricket, women themselves have little voice within the new organisation and routinely have inferior access to promotional opportunities. These types of mergers have happened in other sports with similar outcomes. For example, in collegiate ice hockey in Canada, the women's game has had far less decision-making power and receives substantially lower funding (Hoeber and Frisby, 2001). Whilst female football participation rates have increased in England since the Football Association took control of women's football from the Women's Football Association in 1993 the FA's governance structures are still overwhelmingly dominated by men (Griggs and Biscomb, 2010) with a generally conservative approach to gender equality and promotion of the women's game (Sequerra, 2014). There is also evidence of some resistance to the implementation of equality initiatives in regional governing bodies such as County Football Associations (Lusted, 2009; 2011).

Although the merger of the WCA and ECB appears to have achieved some financial sustainability for women's elite cricket in England, the allocation of funding at recreational level is not routinely monitored meaning that gendered inequalities in financial terms is often hidden (Velija et al. 2014). Such opacity of organisational structures and practices in male dominated sports can be seen as part of the process that allows organisational members to protect their power and limit the capacity to transparently enact change to increase the

presence of minorities within sporting cultures (Sequera, 2014). Indeed, historically male dominated sport organisations and cultures have been shown to be hostile and resistant to the integration of women in a myriad of ways (Fielding-Lloyd and Meân, 2008; Norman, 2010; 2014; Lusted, 2013). In particular, Shaw and Penney (2003) found that sport managers can be reluctant to 'give up' the resource and status that would no longer be privileged to them in a gender balanced organisation. This is exacerbated when that is imposed by external organisations making gender equality a condition of future funding, which is often the key driver for the amalgamation of single-gender sport organisations.

A number of authors have drawn on Rao et al's (1999) concept of exclusionary power (Velija et al. 2014; Hoerber, 2007a; Sibson, 2010) to illuminate how gender inequalities are perpetuated by routine organisational practices. Rao et al. explain that there are five ways of exercising power within organisations in order to shape its culture and structure in ways that can preserve the status quo. These include positional power, agenda-setting power, hidden power, the power of dialogue and the power of conflict. Velija et al. (2014) apply all of these in their analysis of interviews with women who were involved in cricket, in a variety of roles, during the time of the merger between WCA and ECB. They found that inequalities have continued despite the merger, in particular due to women's loss of positional power which led to a decrease in agenda-setting power to enact any meaningful progress for the women's game. For example, Velija et al (2014) describe how subsequent to the merger the majority of coaching and regulatory committee positions went to men, despite the women candidates having more qualifications in many cases..

## **Methods**

The data presented below was collected by the lead author as part of a larger project commissioned by the ECB. This focused on a range of equality and diversity issues in recreational cricket including workforce diversity, recruitment practices and the allocation of resources to male and female recreational cricket. The paper focuses only on data that was collected to investigate this last element of the project. A total of six semi-structured interviews were conducted with respondents associated with two County Cricket Boards (CCBs) in England. CCBs broader cover the traditional ‘county’ boundaries that separate the regions of England and historically follow local government boundaries. Unlike in other sports, these ‘county’ regions have remained important as they form the basis of professional (and semi-professional cricket teams) such as Essex, Lancashire and Somerset. These locations were selected in consultation with ECB personnel to ensure they represented regions that had a sustained history and critical mass of women’s cricket being played. This enabled the research team to access respondents with the necessary experience and knowledge of the women’s game to be able to comment on changes since the organisational merger. The CCBs were also chosen on the basis of their reputation as being good practice ‘models’ of gender equality. They reflect what Horne (1995) describes as ‘proactive’ organisations in that there is evidence to suggest both have attempted to implement strategies and policies to promote equality that go beyond tacit approval of equality issues. These include engagement with both ECB ‘top down’ policies but also evidence of voluntary County led activities related to the development of female cricket.

The nature and context of both CCBs contrasted considerably, although some of their characteristics have been withheld in order to ensure the anonymity of those involved in the research. The first CCB – referred to hereafter as ‘*large urban CCB*’ - covers a big urban population with a long history of cricket participation at all levels, including women,,

including a mature club, volunteer infrastructure and a high profile, successful professional County Cricket Club (CCC) with a stadium that regularly hosts England international fixtures. This CCB has also invested in staff with a specific remit to develop opportunities for female cricketers. The second CCB – referred to here as ‘*Small Rural CCB*’ covers a smaller geographical area, is largely rural and has no history of professional cricket, with a less developed grassroots club infrastructure but with a history of women’s participation of over 70 years. Their CCC is classed as a ‘minor county’ which operates under semi-professional terms. Such contrasting organisations were purposively selected to see whether the development of women’s cricket might be influenced by local, contextual factors.

The six interview respondents were all people with an interest and/or responsibility for women’s cricket in their county. The relatively low sample size reflected the small pool of staff involved in the development of women’s cricket. The interview schedule was designed to allow participants to share their experience of the challenges they face in developing women’s sport and given the relatively small sample size, a large number of probing and follow up questions were included to ensure detailed responses across a wide range of issues. The interviews were completed at the headquarters of both CCBs with three respondents selected from each organisation, chosen because of their direct involvement in the development of women’s recreational cricket in their region. Participants included both CCB Chief Executives, a Cricket Development Manager, a Development Officer with a specific remit to develop women’s cricket, a (voluntary) Council Member who officially represents the women’s game within the CCB committee structures, and a coach of a local women’s team<sup>1</sup>. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour, and were audio recorded. The

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<sup>1</sup> In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, and to satisfy the conditions of the funding agreement with the commissioning partner, we cannot disclose information related to gender, age, length of service and other characteristics while acknowledging the useful context this could provide. This is not an uncommon dilemma facing qualitative researchers,

interviews were later transcribed by a third party transcription service and then analysed by the lead author and a research assistant using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps of thematic data analysis. This process involved moving from initial familiarisation with the data, through to the generation of initial codes and finally to the defining, naming and reviewing of themes.

Thematic analysis identified four key areas that appear to be limiting the growth of the women's game. These related to facility access, integration with men's clubs, workforce allocation and representation at decision making level. Although we present these below as separate themes, there are interconnections across all of the issues presented. In particular, the prioritisation of male cricket is present across all themes and is indicated as such in the discussion of findings. The separate themes might be better read as overlapping elements of a broad web of factors that highlight the limitations placed on the development of women's cricket following the liberal absorption of the WCA.

## **Discussion of Findings**

### *Gaining access to playing facilities for women's teams*

The facilities needed to play and practice cricket are invariably costly. Pitches must be of a certain quality to enable safe and fair contests (James et al. 2005), which requires regular and specific maintenance. Cricket 'nets' are needed for practice, and lots of specialist cricket kit/equipment (including protective padding) are required. This is above and beyond the usual facilities needed for sport like changing rooms. Our research found very little mention of any additional resource being provided by the ECB since the merger to help increase the capacity of cricket facilities to include access for women's teams. This inevitably led to difficulties in

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where sometimes the protection of anonymity must be weighed against a richer discussion of data by disclosing participant information (see Saunders et al. 2016).

accessing the existing facilities that have historically been the preserve of men's and boy's teams. Respondents indicated that regular and consistent *access* to pitches and the *quality* and *suitability* of the facilities provided for women's cricket is inadequate because the supply of facilities does not match the current local demand for cricket matches, even without considering any growth in women's teams and matches. This situation effectively asks women's teams to enter an already highly contested struggle for facilities:

“Getting a ground to play on...there's such a huge amount of cricket being played, that trying to get a ground to play on is difficult. Our women's side, my club, have 6 Sunday league fixtures, that's it, and that was a really hard job getting 6 home fixtures.” (Respondent 3, Small Rural CCB)

The lack of facility capacity explained above was evident at both CCB locations, regardless of their varied size and finances. Facility access appears to disproportionately impact on women who have no historical 'stake' in the current pitches and changing rooms. Women's teams appear to lack positional power (Rao et al. 2009) because they are seen as 'new' entrants to the game which makes them less entitled to access scarce resources. In this study, there was evidence at both CCBs that the current process of allocating facilities appears to place women's cricket as the very bottom priority, with men's and boy's cricket first in the queue:

“Our clubs are under pressure from a variety of different sources in terms of actually how much capacity they've got, and so what goes with that is that I think at times women are marginalised from that.” (Respondent 2, Small Rural CCB)

Under the ‘absorption’ model adopted by the ECB towards gender equality, the respondents above articulate how women’s teams must rely on existing cricket facilities and draw upon the established club infrastructures, which are almost universally controlled by male teams. This inevitably leads to female teams losing out to men, which has been noted as a consequence of the liberal approach elsewhere (Hardin and Whiteside, 2009).

Respondents also complained that when pitches are made available to them, they are invariably poor quality venues that are ill equipped to host female players:

“It’s not just a matter of ‘oh we’ll just go play over there’; it’s actually having decent facilities to play on, and decent changing rooms and things like that.” (Respondent 3, Small Rural CCB)

There is an obvious risk that the women’s game can lose its appeal if matches are continually played at unsuitable or poor quality venues – not only poor quality pitches but things like changing facilities designed for men such as communal showers and urinals. This is exacerbated when better quality pitches and training facilities do exist but are seemingly ‘out of bounds’ to women. The control of facilities acts as a very visual reminder of the everyday priorities and ‘normal’ ways of working (Shaw, 2007) - part of the deep structure of recreational cricket clubs which place an inherent priority on the male game. As Shaw and Frisby (2006) argue, such normative assumptions that sideline females need be challenged in order to meaningfully enact gender equality.

*Poor integration of women’s teams into existing men’s clubs*

Historically, women's cricket has never been as culturally significant as the male game and has regularly been viewed as a 'separate' sport to the male version (Velija and Malcolm, 2009). A number of responses suggested the merger had not increased opportunities for women's teams to be meaningfully integrated into existing (male) club structures. The women's game appears to be viewed by existing male-dominated clubs as a separate entity rather than an authentic form of the game to be provided for. As one comment suggested, "...the [women's] team is very much just playing cricket there rather than being a part of the club" (Respondent 2, Small Rural CCB). As the apparently 'minor' partner in the organisational merger, women's cricket is suffering from a lack of agenda setting power (Rao et al. 1999) leading to insufficient interest in genuinely incorporating women's teams into existing clubs. As exemplified below, respondents suggested that men's cricket has maintained its importance while the women's game is merely an added extra within clubs:

"I'm not convinced that of the 12 clubs that we have with women's teams, that the cricket club see all of their teams as one club, I think they see themselves as a men and junior section, with a women's cricket team that play at their ground. They don't resource anything together, they don't share facilities, they don't prioritise things in the same way."

Furthermore, traditional gender ideologies and the normalisation of masculinity appear to have remained as core features of the deep structure of (male) cricket clubs and governance organisations since the merger. This is also evidenced in the longstanding stereotypical views that still appear to have credence locally about cricket being unsuitable for women.

“At club level, I don’t believe there has been a massive change in stereotypical views, prioritisation of women’s cricket; I don’t believe that that has changed an awful lot.”

(Respondent 1, Small Rural CCB)

There was recognition from the respondents that some of the underlying assumptions about female unsuitability to sport have remained since the merger.

There is little evidence of the ECB attempting to challenge the normative priority placed on the male game, or to encourage men’s clubs to meaningfully engage with gender equality. Shaw (2013) points to the weaknesses of adopting a liberal approach to equality in this respect as it can serve to reinforce these types of stereotypical assumptions about female suitability for sport rather than challenge them. Liberal policies tend to view the source of the ‘problem’ of gender inequalities as being female capabilities, judged directly in comparison with men. Since the merger, there appears to be little interest developed among male clubs to change or to actively promote the women’s game:

“I think clubs are a bit more aware of it now, and there’s a bit more pressure on them to do it [include females]. But I wouldn’t say that they are necessarily doing it because they feel they want to, it’s more about the boxes they have to tick these days.”

“I’ve questioned some clubs, urm...it goes back to why we’ve got women’s sections. I say to clubs, you’ve got a chance to run a scheme here; you’ve got hundreds of girls, why can you not get a side to play in a competition? Where are all these girls going?”

And it does come down to the fact that no-one in the club is that interested or bothered to run it.” (Both Respondent 3, Small Rural CCB)

Although some clubs in the CCBs in this study are now more attuned to the need to provide women’s cricket within their club, this appears to be prompted externally by the pressure being placed on clubs by CCB development staff to consider the women’s teams as part of their organisation. Therefore, gender equality becomes a top-down enforced policy akin to ‘ticking boxes’ rather than responding to enthusiasm within local clubs utilising the power of dialogue (Rao et al. 1999) to develop the women’s game; a common weakness of equality policy implementation in other sports (Lusted, 2013). The frustrations articulated by the respondents above exemplify what Bury (2015) identifies as *non-performing inclusion*, where organisations conform to equality rhetoric in the broadest sense but without the necessary commitment or specific action to directly challenge the ongoing prioritisation of male interests in the sport.

#### *Workforce allocation for women’s cricket*

Common to the recreational level of most sports, cricket remains overwhelmingly dominated by volunteers in the running of the game (Coleman, 2002). Even at CCBs, the numbers of paid staff remain relatively low, particularly those with a responsibility for cricket development. This voluntary human labour might be termed a ‘hidden’ workforce and thereby a hidden power (Rao et al. 1999). It can include umpires, officials, coaches, club secretaries, fixture secretaries and all those roles often invisible on balance sheets and in debates about funding and gender equality. Such labour is difficult to measure or easily evaluate in terms of understanding how a sport is ‘resourced’ through volunteers (Vos et al. 2012). Invariably a voluntary workforce is developed over many years, meaning the long-

standing men's game is able to draw more consistently on such resources than the historically much smaller women's game.

Some paid personnel at both CCBs have an official job role and responsibility to develop cricket in their County. Development Officer posts in cricket are relatively new and generic in nature dedicated to finding ways to develop cricket across all participants, including the women's game. However, the majority of a Development Officer's time is devoted to developing the male and youth forms of cricket meaning the women's game is often low down on the list of their work priorities:

"...you would probably be safe to say that probably only about 5-10%, probably 5% of their [development officer's] time would be dedicated to the women's game."

(Respondent 1, Small Rural CCB)

The respondent above has articulated what exemplifies the 'absorption' approach to equality that the ECB has embarked upon in that existing staff are required to find additional time to devote to women's cricket development activities. It is likely that this approach will do little to shift the work priorities of existing staff from the male game without further investment or fundamental reconsideration of the core aims of such paid positions. Such neglect reflects Rao et al's (1999) argument that a lack of positional power – in this case little staffing time given to the development of female cricket - inevitably leads to a lack of agenda-setting power to enact change. At the Large Urban CCB visited, a development post had been created aimed specifically at developing the women's and girl's side of the game. Funding such staffing has obvious benefits:

“...the fact that we now have a full time [women’s cricket development] person, it raises the profile of the game, out there in the community it raises the profile of the game within our structures as professional staff, and it raises the profile of the game within our board decision making i.e. the exec.” (Respondent 6, Large Urban CCB)

The creation of such a position had not come without some local controversy however, and other CCBs face decisions to make in considering funding these types of roles specifically designed to support women’s cricket. Without a new funding source emerging specifically for women’s cricket, the business ‘case’ to redirect current resources towards the women’s game can be extremely difficult to make to key stakeholders (Lusted, 2013). And the existing privilege of those typically male stakeholders with the power to make such decisions will be discussed shortly. Nevertheless, the argument to redirect resources to the development of women’s cricket means that, inevitably, such resources must be taken from elsewhere (i.e. men’s cricket, youth cricket). This type of reaction to redirecting resources has been noted elsewhere, including in the US College system where calls to implement Title IX legislation through resource re-distribution has been resisted or paid lip service (Hardin et al. 2014). Thus, efforts to invest in women’s cricket are often at the ‘cost’ of male cricket, which is seen as being more ‘entitled’ to support because of its larger playing base and longer history. The following quotes highlight the extent of this problem:

“We’ll have a development officer and we’ll put women’s and girl’s professional time into them which solves that problem, but we’re taking it from somewhere else and somewhere else and....”

“It may very well be that in the future we look at resourcing women’s cricket in a better way. But if we do that, we have to address the other areas that we have, because in a large organisation, once you put something out of kilter you’ve got to balance it somewhere else, and that becomes quite a balancing act.” (Both Respondent 1, Small Rural CCB)

Elsewhere, the argument about lack of funding was identified as an excuse to avoid having to undertake activities or changes to develop the women’s game, particularly at club level:

“[Lack of funding] at times can give an excuse for those clubs that don’t or haven’t really got this to actually say ‘well we’d love to do this, but we can’t anyway’. So I think there’s some barriers with regard to that.” (Respondent 2, Small Rural CCB)

While the formation of paid development officers specifically devoted to female cricket had some initial and obvious benefits, the role and scope of their work appeared to be limited. They provide a strategic framework from which to develop the women’s game, but are hindered by the relatively small voluntary workforce needed to help deliver such objectives locally as this kind of voluntary commitment is in scarce supply in women’s cricket:

“a lot of it comes back to having a core number of people [volunteers] within the ... recreational game, [to] drive [the County Women’s and Girl’s Development Officer’s] plans forward in a certain part of the county ... you definitely need people out there that can be ambassadors for women’s cricket” (Respondent 6, Large Urban CCB)

“volunteers is a massive [issue]. People who are very dedicated to getting a team together, it’s not just a case of getting a team together on a Friday night ... you need someone who’s quite dedicated to the role.” (Respondent 5, Large Urban CCB)

The apparent low level of interest in supporting the women’s game leads to “...a very small pool of people who are really interested in girls” (Respondent 3, Small Rural CCB), making it difficult to deliver opportunities for women at the grassroots level. There was also a suggestion that while the traditionally male clubs had begun to start developing women’s teams and activities, this was not because of their commitment to female cricket, but to meet requirements for future funding or development resourcing:

“... if we could get more volunteers if you like, who are interested in, not just interest because they want a girls team to tick a box on their club, but interested in girl’s cricket.” (Respondent 3, Small Rural CCB)

#### *Poor representation of women’s cricket in decision making*

A separate research project led by the lead author and commissioned by the ECB (Author A and Author B, 2012) shows that 94.2% of CCB Board members are men – the vast majority of these being elected and selected to sit on Boards and committees specifically to represent the interests of men’s and boy’s cricket. Consequently, as some respondents in this study pointed out, there is a lack of female representation within powerful positions in cricket and the ‘lobby’ power of the women’s game to change the views of those currently in power is relatively weak:

“There are not very many women in administrative positions within cricket, it’s a very male dominated administrative setup. I think that is slightly changing, but until the balance is more level, I don’t think we’re going to see more women getting into that part of the game, and giving their views”

“You could take the ECB cricket board and take the cricket club and they would be exactly the same; all blokes, lot of retired people, some younger people having a role and having a say, there are not a lot of influential women in those positions”

(Both Respondent 1, Small Rural CCB)

As identified by the respondents above, there appears to be no ‘voice’ for female cricket at the higher levels of decision making thereby limiting the positional power of the women’s game. There was also a suggestion that such powerful positions are coveted and protected by those currently in such roles, and that any attempt to widen the representation and knowledge base can be resisted:

“They’re an old boys club, if I’m really honest! I think they are just set in their ways, and it’s a little club and they don’t like anyone getting into it and just don’t want to be part of it.” (Respondent 3, Small Rural CCB)

This situation has been identified in analyses of mergers between men’s and women’s cricket governing bodies in both England (Velija et al, 2014) and Australia (Stronach and Adair, 2009). For the latter, a key outcome from the merger was that “women now have little clout in all decision-making areas” (2009 p. 923). There seems to have been no obvious attempt to ensure women’s cricket was properly represented in decision making positions after the

ECB/WCB merger, with Velija et al (2014) noting that between 1998 and 2010 there were no female members on the ECB Board. This is a much wider issue across most sports in the UK and beyond, with key decision making personnel in sport governance organisations traditionally being involved for a substantial period of time and with a strong sense of personal identity and pride in their voluntary roles (see Lusted 2009 in relation to County Football Association volunteers). One respondent in this study suggested that there were a number of vested interests in maintaining the current system among key decision makers in the game that make it very hard to change attitudes and institutional practices that prioritise male interests:

“Within the higher levels of the game, there are still old school attitudes and ways of working, which need to be challenged, because things aren’t going to change unless they change much higher up.”

“[There’s] a block, very old school mentality at the top, and hundreds of politics that I don’t understand and don’t care to understand, but hundreds of politics around funding and positions and you name it, and votes. I don’t think it’ll ever get away [from] that.” (Both Respondent 1, Small Rural CCB)

The data presented in this section illustrates the various ways in which male power and privilege is operationalised to continue to limit the development of the women’s game. Access to venues and good quality facilities, the availability of a dedicated workforce and representation at decision making level are all areas where males appear to have consolidated control since the WCA/ECB merger.

## **Conclusion**

This study has exposed the difficulties that women's recreational cricket is experiencing in developing the game subsequent to the organisational merger between the ECB and the WCA. Whilst the WCA may have struggled to financially operate at all without the merger, there is little evidence of a significant increase in resourcing of women's recreational cricket since the merger – both in terms of actual funding and in the provision of additional 'hidden' resources such as those we have outlined. It was found that women's cricket relies upon the long-standing male infrastructure to give up, or at least 'share', some of the resources that it has historically enjoyed autonomy over. There appears to be no obvious pressure being placed on these personnel or organisations to change which we suggest is the result of the liberal approach being adopted to gender equality at the ECB. Similarly, the historic prioritisation of the male game locally remains unchallenged, to the extent that exclusionary power enacted upon women in cricket is actively reproduced. The continued under-resourcing of women's recreational cricket within the CCBs studied can be seen to be the product of the organisational 'deep structure' (Shaw, 2007) which prioritises and protects masculine interests of recreational cricket. Thus, we have shown the explicit ways in which the ability of women's sport to exercise various forms of power (Rao et al. 1999) is significantly constrained when sport organisations take a liberal 'absorption' approach to gender equality.

Whilst the experiences of women cricket players in their sport have been articulated elsewhere (Velija et al. 2014), this study has focused on the rationalisations of those who are in the position of *enacting* gender equality within the structures of sport organisations (Chief Executives, Development Officers and coaches). This has enabled a better understanding of why, in a context of supposed progressive change for women's cricket following the merger,

there appears little positive impact at the recreational level. This analysis appears to concur with Shaw's (2007, p.424) call for sport organisations to 'encourage discussion of equality and organisational commitment' as the respondents in this study (those who *enact* the organisation's structure) reflected on the evident limitations of the approach taken to gender equality within their own CCBs.

Our interviews suggest that this merger has done little to develop a critical mass of female players and teams locally which is required to develop women's recreational cricket. Without this, the small number of participants are unable to engage in regular and suitably competitive fixtures. We have argued that the broadly liberal approach to gender equality adopted by sport organisations like the ECB necessarily limits the possibility to develop women's sport effectively. This concurs with a growing body of critical feminist literature that has evidenced the limitations of this liberal approach to equality in sport (Burke, 2010; Hoerber, 2007; Hardin and Whiteside, 2009; Fielding-Lloyd and Mean, 2016; Lusted, 2014; Shaw, 2013). Placing the emphasis of change on women themselves by asking women's teams to integrate into the existing local club structures – dominated by men and 'male' oriented cricket clubs – without additional resource is clearly problematic and is stifling opportunities for the women's game to develop.

Shaw and Frisby (2006) advocate three areas of sport organisational culture that need consideration, which could challenge the male dominance of cricket governance. The first is the informal practices which are so often embedded to the extent that they are hidden or taken for granted - giving priority to men's matches when scheduling fixtures, for example - meaning that male exclusionary power (Rao et al, 1999) is routinely reproduced. Secondly, the symbols of success that an organisation promotes show what is valued. Therefore, the

equal promotion of men and women's successes in the sport should be the norm. And thirdly, the public face of the organisation (i.e. the ECB) has a significant impact on presenting and dictating the organisational culture more widely (i.e. the CCBs), meaning that the gender balance of leadership positions within organisations is all the more important. Whilst the overwhelming male dominance of leadership positions in cricket has been revealed (Stronach and Adair, 2009; Velija et al. 2014), this area continues to be a challenge and indicates that the liberal 'absorption' approach has so far had little impact in developing the women's recreational game.

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