



*The FA women's super league : framing developments in elite women's football*

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**REFERENCE**

**The FA Women's Super League - Framing  
developments in elite women's football**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In 2009, the Football Association (FA), the national governing body of football in England, announced its plan to introduce the country's first semi-professional women's elite league. Launched in 2010 as the FA Women's Super League (FA WSL), its introduction provided both an opportunity to research whether this evidenced a change of position for the women's elite game within footballing narratives and also to examine the place of the FA within these. This study adopted a critical sociological feminist approach to deconstruct the assumptions, values and practices that frame the female game and the introduction of the FA WSL, while providing new insights into the role of the sport's governing organisation in defining elite women's football. Through observations at matches and interviews with people working within the women's game, an examination of the development and introduction of the FA WSL was undertaken, with valuable early insights provided into the first three years of the new League.

The study identified that the introduction of the FA WSL was impacted upon by the complex, closed and gendered nature of the FA's organisational structure. The new League adhered to traditional societal concepts of hegemonic masculinity, heteronormativity and liberal approaches to gender equality. The study also found that the new elite women's structures required the clubs who gained entry into the FA WSL to adhere to commercialised, spectacularised and commodified values which dominate the men's game and neo liberal societal narratives. The increased inclusion of females into elite football structures did not profoundly disrupt traditional discourses or provide evidence of a fundamental challenge to gender inequality in the game.



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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Elite women's football in England**

Participation in women's football has grown in recent years (Ratna 2010, Cox and Pringle 2012). The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), football's international governing body, identified that from 1971 to 2010 the number of national representative teams increased from 3 to 141, while the number of games played by them rose from 2 to 512 (Fahmy 2011). The organisation's last global survey, The Big Count in 2006, estimated that there were 26 million registered female players worldwide, an increase of 54% since 2000 (FIFA 2007a). In England, the Football Association (FA), English football's national governing body, identified in 2008 that in the 15 years it had been responsible for female football the number of affiliated players had increased from 10,400 to over 150,000 (FA 2008a). In the same report the FA also highlighted that the 2008 Sport England's Active People survey estimated that 260,000 women and 1.1 million girls played football in England.

The FA (2008b) issued a strategy document in 2008 entitled 'The FA's Vision 2008-12: A World Class Organisation with a Winning Mentality', in which the England women's coach, Hope Powell, declared:

in the past ten years women's football has become the number one female participation sport, with a structure to bring the best players through, from grassroots clubs to Centres of Excellence and national teams. The FA is devoting more and more resource into the women's game and now the challenge is to take it to the next level (p18)

The organisations vision for the development of the women's game 'Women and Girls Football Strategy 2008-12: Championing Growth and Excellence' (FA 2008a), however, highlighted problems within the game's elite structures. The strategy outlined that the current "FA Women's Premier League (FA WPL) lacks quality and competitiveness, which is detrimental to the development of the elite players" (p19). The FA warned that "without the intervention of a highly competitive domestic league, it will be difficult to take the profile of the game to a mainstream audience" (p37). The document proposed the creation of a new summer league, "structured to deliver high quality, competitive matches and to produce a more commercially attractive product" (p19). The elite competitive

level of the game was, therefore, central to the FA's plan to develop women's football further.

The first national women's league, comprising 24 clubs, was inaugurated in 1991 by the Women's Football Association (WFA), which administered the game at the time (FA 2014a). In 1994, the league was renamed to the FA WPL to reflect the fact it had come under the control of the FA. However, although developments have taken place since the 1990s, especially within grassroots and international women's football, concerns have been raised about the structure and progress of elite football in England (Woodhouse and Williams 1999, House of Commons 2006a). Consequently, in 2009 Ian Watmore, the Chief Executive of the FA, announced the launch of the new FA Women's Super League (FA WSL). He stated (FA 2009a, p7):

Participation levels are at an all-time high here in England, as are the number of opportunities for girls and women to play. However, the structure at the top of the domestic game simply is not right. It isn't sustainable or capable of significant growth ... This is a wonderful chance to do something new and different, and I believe a fantastic opportunity awaits women's football in England. The game stands on the threshold of a new era.

The FA proclaimed that the introduction of the FA WSL would allow the women's game to capitalise on the positive changes which had already taken place in other areas, including grassroots participation and the international structure.

## **1.2 Context and Aim of the Thesis**

The planned changes to the women's elite domestic structures provided an opportunity to place the female game more centrally within FA and societal debates about football. However, Fielding-Lloyd and Mean (2011) remind us that although women's inclusion in sport is often seen as demonstrating equality, it is the *nature* of the inclusion which is of central importance. Williams (2003) also suggests that to fully understand the position of women's football it is necessary to explore the complex societal phenomena it is placed within. This study, therefore, deconstructs the assumptions, values and practices that framed the introduction of the FA WSL, including a critical examination of the



way dominant ideas around the women's game allow it to be defined and structured in particular ways.

As research has identified women's football is often accorded little status or societal recognition (Bell and Blakey 2010), due in part to the gendered nature of the game (Adams, Anderson and McCormack 2010, Drury 2011). Football in England is recognised as a predominantly masculine pursuit; structurally, institutionally, culturally and socially (Giulianotti 1999, Williams 2003, Clayton and Humberstone 2006). Authors such as Pelak (2005) and Hjelm (2011) have also identified this relationship in the game internationally. Sport, in general, is recognised as a highly gendered institution, predominantly played and organised by men (Knoppers and Anthonissen 2005, Shaw 2006, Pope 2011). Gender relations are often constructed, legitimised, reproduced and reworked through sport (Aitchison 2005), which provides a powerful mechanism whereby identities and gendered assumptions are constructed and renegotiated (Caudwell 2006, Fink 2008).

As Hargreaves (2000, p5) identifies "most histories and sociologies of sport ... are written by men about male sports". Consequently, women's involvement in sport is often excluded or marginalised. This invisibility is apparent in the case of football as historically women are rarely included in the extensive literature on the game (Holt 1989, Birley 1995, Dunning 1999). Recently, though, there has been an increased focus on women's football within research, with authors including Magee et al. (2007) and Williams (2003, 2007, 2014) illuminating the long history of women and football. Other research has discussed the consequences of male dominance (Pfister et al. 2002, Engh 2011, Cox and Pringle 2012) and the relationships between women's football and sexuality (Caudwell 2006, Drury 2011).

However, only limited research has been undertaken into the way the FA governs women's football and the nature and consequences of the decisions made by them. A study by Welford (2011) analysed the opinions of female's involved in the administration of women's football clubs affiliated to the FA, while Fielding-Lloyd and Mean (2008, 2011) researched the influence of gender on coach education in a County Football Association (CFA), the organisation

responsible for managing the grassroots level of the game. It is evident, though, that minimal attention has been placed on the conditions under which the FA includes women's elite football into its governance structures. Few studies have explicitly asked whether women's presence within elite competitive league football provides an important challenge to dominant discourses or the way football is defined, legitimised and organised by the FA. It is this critical gap in research relating to organisations and women's football that this study addresses.

There has, though, been a wealth of studies that have identified the gendered nature of organisations and the consequences of not addressing issues of inequality (Alvesson and Deetz 2000, Broadbridge and Kerfoot 2010). There is, also, a growing amount of literature that identifies such issues in sports organisations (Shaw and Penney 2003, Hoeber 2007, Cunningham and Sagas 2008, Wicker, Breuer and von Hanau 2012). This original study, therefore, attempts to contribute to these insights with specific emphasis on the FA, while also providing further literature to counter the relative lack of research interest in women's elite football. The introduction of the FA WSL, the first ever semi-professional women's football league in England, provides a unique opportunity to situate and investigate contemporary ideas relating to football. The FA continues to play an influential role in defining football and controlling the women's game, therefore, an assessment of it as an organisation is central to this study. The introduction of the FA WSL cannot simply be taken as evidence that women are now accepted in to the football mainstream. Consequently this study provides an original critical examination of the following areas:

- the FA as an organisation and the influence its structures had on the new League
- the process by which the FA introduced semi-professionalism into elite women's football
- a theoretical examination of the ideas which underpinned its introduction
- the extent to which the introduction of the FA WSL addressed women's traditional under representation in the FA and wider societal sporting narratives.

### **1.3 Structure of the thesis**

In order to address these issues this thesis consists of nine chapters, which are summarised briefly below. A review of literature is undertaken in Chapters Two, Three and Four, while the research analysis is provided in Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine.

#### **1.3.1 Chapter Two: A brief history of women's football in England**

This chapter illuminates the long tradition of women's football in England. By providing details from the 1880s onwards, it reveals evidence of a more extensive history than is widely recognised in popular accounts (Williams 2014). Attention is placed on the ways in which the women's game was included in and excluded from mainstream football practices at different times in its history (Mean 2001, Pfister et al. 2002). This is coupled with an analysis of the reasons and consequences of these variations. The latter part of the chapter identifies the ways in which organisations became involved within women's football from the late 1960s onwards, initially the WFA and then the FA, while also highlighting some of the recent changes in the game (Woodhouse 2002, Williams 2004).

#### **1.3.2 Chapter Three: Football governance in England**

Chapter Three focuses on the way those in power in governing bodies are able to control and define how sport is understood (Palmer 2000), with particular reference to the FA. It provides a brief overview of the organisation's history, specifically focussing on the era since the introduction of the English Premier League (EPL) into the men's elite game in the 1990s (Hamil et al. 2003, Michie and Oughton 2005). The intensification of commercialisation, commodification and spectacularisation (Debord 1994, Clayton and Harris 2004) since this time, is analysed in terms of the consequences for the FA in terms of its position as English football's governing body. The second half of the chapter draws on liberal and radical approaches to gender inequality to investigate the way the FA views gender within its structures (Ely and Meyerson 2000, Hoeber 2008, Knoppers and McDonald 2010).

### **1.3.3 Chapter Four: Gender discourses in sport**

The FA does not operate in isolation, therefore, in Chapter Four its decisions are placed within wider societal debates. Initially research relating to sport and the centrality of masculine hegemony, femininity and heterosexuality are discussed (Krane et al. 2004, Anderson 2005, Connell 2009). Particular attention is placed on whether women's encroachment into traditionally male sports disrupts these relationships (Mennesson 2000, Velija, Mierzwinski and Fortune 2013). These ideas are then directly related to women's football through a review of the literature in this area (Williams 2006, Caudwell 2011a). The discussion then widens to identify other contemporary studies into the women's game (Ratna 2008, Ahmad 2011). It highlights the absence of research relating to the FA and elite women's football, thereby providing the rationale for this study. To contextualise this gap in research an overview of the extensive literature relating to gender and organisations is undertaken (Shaw and Penney 2003, Hoeber 2007).

### **1.3.4 Chapter Five: Methodology**

The approaches taken to research are fundamentally based within the researchers own views about the nature of knowledge and knowing (Harding 2002). This chapter, therefore, locates the study within ontological, epistemological and methodological debates (Fay 1996, Mason 2002, Blackshaw 2003), while substantiating the critical and feminist ethos which provides the theoretical underpinnings (Ramazanaglu and Holland 2000, Silk and Andrews 2011). It attempts to convey the challenging, ever changing nature of the research process encountered by the researcher. The chapter documents the practical issues involved in the qualitative method which was undertaken. It also emphasises the ethical and philosophical dilemmas encountered while undertaking research, relating these specifically to this studies focus on subjectivity, reflexivity and fluidity (Holliday 2000, Flick 2009, MacFarlane 2009).

### **1.3.5 Chapter Six: The FA WSL - FA structures and elite women's football in England**

The introduction of the FA WSL provided the FA with the opportunity to define and implement a new vision of women's football. This first analysis chapter draws on participants' interpretations, which are contextualised within existing literature, to addresses issues relating to the structures which were being altered, the FA as an organisation and its approaches to gender. The first area of discussion identifies the position of the existing FA WPL. This is then developed by analysing participant's insights into the organisational structures of the FA, coupled with their views on the way gender is positioned within it. These issues are framed in terms of literature relating to the exercise of power (Mills 1959, Foucault 1972 and Palmer 2000), theories relating to successful organisational governance (Michie and Oughton 2005, Shilbury, Ferkins and Smythe 2013) and ideas concerning gender inequality (Kanter 1977, 2008, Hovden 2012).

### **1.3.6 Chapter Seven: The FA WSL - A new way forward for elite women's football**

Having gained an understanding of the environment in which the FA WSL was developed, the second analysis chapter explores the consequences the FA's structures and concepts had for the decision making process which created the FA WSL. Of central importance to this discussion were respondents understanding of the FA's motivations for change and an examination of who was involved in developing and implementing the new vision. These are foregrounded within theoretical debates relating to enacting successful change in organisations (Amis, Slack, and Hinings 2004) and discussions about power and inclusion (Foucault 1972, 1980, Bauman 1987). Having gained an understanding of the processes which led to change to the elite women's football structures, participant's interpretations of the actual model chosen for the FA WSL are addressed and discussed by examining theories about the role of sport, individuals and organisations within a commercialised, neo liberal society (Davies 2005). This discussion is then furthered through an analysis of the implications these ideas have for gender equality (Meyerson and Kolb 2000).

### **1.3.7 Chapter Eight: The FA WSL - Developing a new identity for elite women's football**

The third analysis chapter draws on observations undertaken within the study and explores participants' views to analyse the way the League was conceptualised as a product, while also highlighting the practical implications the chosen identity had for the elite game. It expands these perceptions by drawing on theories relating to hegemonic masculinity, femininity and heteronormativity (Caudwell 2006, Engh 2011, Williams 2011). Interpretations of the FA WSL's identity and success criteria are gained and further contextualised using theories connected to spectacle (Debord 1994) and carnival (Bakhtin 1984). The chapter concludes by analysing participant's responses and reviewing their power to question dominant FA ideas (Harvey, Horne and Safari 2009, Burke 2010).

### **1.3.8 Chapter Nine: The FA WSL - Meeting the FA's aims**

The final analysis chapter assesses five of the key aims the FA set out for the FA WSL. The FA's ambition that the new League would transform the elite women's game was premised on it providing salaries for players, assisting clubs to grow and develop into financially viable entities, improving the standard of facilities, encouraging more media focus and strengthening the player pathway and grassroots level of the sport. The participants' interpretations of these factors and insights gained through observation are contextualised using theory relating to gender equality (Skjeie and Teigan 2005, Hovden 2006), the centrality of space, locality and representation to football experiences (Bale 2000, Malcolm 2000, Whannel 2008) and the experiences of those placed outside the main event (Baudrillard 1983). Further analysis is applied to evaluate factors such as the role of media in sport (Messner, Duncan and Cooky 2003) and the increased proliferation of social media (Baudrillard 1998, Hutchins and Rowe 2012).

### **1.3.9 Chapter Ten: Conclusion**

The concluding chapter provides a summary of the key themes relating to the FA WSL which were identified by participants and encountered during

observations, coupled with an analysis of their theoretical implications. This is combined with an analysis of the main strengths and limitations of the study. The chapter also considers future areas of study which have been identified though undertaking this thesis.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### A brief history of women's football in England

*Football is the sport for women, the pastime of all others ... let women therefore go in for this most excellent game and earn for themselves that improved physique which will not only improve their appearance but their health as well, and act as an incentive to the rising generation to go and do likewise ... I see arising on the golden hilltops of progress, above the mists of prejudice, football will be considered as natural a game for girls as for boys*

*Lady Florence Dixie Pall Mall Gazette 8<sup>th</sup> February 1895*

### 2.1 Introduction

It is frequently asserted that women's football is a recent phenomenon (Bourke 2003). For instance, in her article about the 2011 Women's World Cup Hallman (2012, p33) proclaims, "women's soccer, in contrast to men's soccer, has a relatively short history". However, there is evidence that women have played football for a much longer period than commonly acknowledged (Lee 2012). Women's football has a history; it is just a history which is not frequently documented. As Vinen (2002, p7) states "all history is political in that all history is about power". The history to which we have access is not a definite truth; it is merely a reflection of the ideas of powerful individuals and organisations in society (Foucault 1972). It is the nature and exercise of power that defines history. As Foucault (1977a, p194) identifies "power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth". A more detailed analysis of issues of power is undertaken in Chapter Six. This brief account of power, though, facilitates an understanding that the absence of women's football in historical accounts is not an unbiased reflection of the truth but is, in fact, a constructed reality.

Reference to women's sport and specifically women's football is often limited in the work of sport historians (Holt 1989, Birley 1995) and within sociological accounts (Dunning 1999). Dominant interpretations have been predominantly written by men who tend to focus on male sport (Hargreaves 2000) and football has traditionally been advanced as an unacceptable sport for women to play (Hjelm and Olofsson 2003, Pfister 2003). Women and the women's game



remained outside the remit of national football associations for many years (Cox and Pringle 2012), the very organisations who predominantly define football and its past. The position of women in football is, therefore, rooted in powerful historical, social and political structures, which are steeped in ideas of patriarchy. Bryson (2003, p247) identifies patriarchy as a:

concept which highlights the non-random nature of male privilege and female disadvantage and the way in which these recur and reinforce each other in different areas of public and private life. The concept also helps us to see the extent to which dominant assumptions and practices throughout society are based on the idea that men are the norm and women some kind of optional extra

Research has identified that ideas relating to patriarchy are particularly prevalent within English football. As Clayton and Harris (2004, p332) state, "twenty first century English football is a stringently male distraction, the games official and unofficial norms and values are sated in images of obsolete masculinity". Lopez (House of Commons 2006a) identifies that such patriarchal ideas continue as football is still a man's game which women can only access with the support and endorsement of a male dominated establishment. The nature of patriarchy has had distinct consequences for the development of narratives relating to the women's game. As Williams (2014, p72) concludes, "the supposed 'newness' factor of women's interest in football is an invented tradition aimed to preserve an exclusively manly image and organisational culture of football's past". Establishing the history of women's football can only ever be partial. Therefore the following account is not a definitive history. It is an attempt to place this research in the context of a more extensive history than is frequently acknowledged.

## **2.2 The 1800s**

Football in England is organised, regulated and to a large extent defined by the FA, which was formed in 1863. Representatives of a dozen London and suburban men's clubs, each playing their own versions of football, met "for the purpose of forming an Association with the object of establishing a definite code of rules for the regulation of the game" (FA 2013a). Women who played the game remained outside the remit of those who codified the game until the early 1990s. There is debate about when women started playing the game, with

evidence suggesting Aboriginal children of both sexes playing in the early 1800s, paintings depicting German women playing in the middle of the 1800s (Womens Soccer Scene 2014) and references to a female form of the game in the British colony of Hong Kong in 1840 (Williams 2007). However, it is in Scotland that the first matches were reported (MacBeth 2007). In 1881, unofficial international games between teams purporting to represent England and Scotland were held in Glasgow and Edinburgh, as well as Blackburn, Manchester and Liverpool which gained crowds of up to 5,000 (Tate 2014). Players, though, changed teams during the tour and records suggest the majority of the players came from Glasgow. Records also exist which state that a women's game in which two equal teams wore different colours, had fixed goals and was played for a limited time span took place in Inverness, Scotland in 1888 (Lee 2008). This was followed four years later by the first match played under Scottish FA guidelines in Glasgow (Lee 2007).

Interest in the game was furthered in 1894 with the establishment of the British Ladies Football Club (BLFC). Formed as a personal crusade by two women, Nettie Honeyball, a middle class football player and Lady Florence Dixie, a prominent women's rights advocate in Victorian Britain (Tranter 1998). They intended the new team to be a money making enterprise for the organisers. The players were predominantly drawn from the middle and upper classes with sufficient resources and support from parents or husbands, which meant they did not require earn an income from the game and therefore played as amateurs (Tate 2014). It was also seen as a potential forum to oppose the societal limitations placed on women and girls at the time. For instance, in terms of political rights it was another 24 years until women gained the right to vote, while male and female voting ages were only equalised 34 years later with the 1928 Equal Franchise Act. The BLFC recruited players, mostly from the London area, which were split into two teams, arbitrarily called North and South. Their first match was played at Crouch End Athletic Ground in Hornsey on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1895 in front of 10,000 spectators. The match convinced the founders that there was profit to be made from creating a professional league for women's football. The teams undertook a tour of the country, playing approximately twenty games

with attendances of around 8,000 in Newcastle and approximately 6,000 in Brighton and Edinburgh (Lee 2008).

### **2.3 Commercialism**

The financial narratives which underpinned the formation of the BLFC were apparent in men's football at the time (Dobson and Goddard 2011) and continue within the contemporary game (Kennedy and Kennedy 2012). In the early years after the formation of the FA football was played predominantly on an amateur basis. The introduction of the FA Cup in 1871 signalled an increased focus on competition. By 1888, with the formation of the Football League, professionalisation and commercialism became central organising principles (Buraimo, Simmons and Szymanski 2010). Tischler (1981, p1) identifies that the fact that "football playing was a highly skilled profession by the 1880s only underlines the degree to which the pastime had become a business. Competition among teams for gate revenues and profits was yet another commercial aspect of the new version of football". Financial narratives were also applied to women's sport when, in 1890, the Original English Lady Cricketers (OELC) was established (McCrone 1988). Set up by two male entrepreneurs it was an attempt to generate profits from the game (Odendaal 2011), an approach mirrored by the BLFA.

As McCrone (1991, p166) identifies, professionalism was central to OELC organisers and players as:

although lacking experience in cricket, [the players] were motivated by a desire to earn money in an unconventional way. After practising privately on grounds in the London area under the tutelage of two leading male professionals, the OELC toured the country playing exhibition matches against each other on major grounds before large crowds undoubtedly attracted by the novelty of the spectacle

The organisers of both the OELC and the BLFA acknowledged that creating a spectacle (Debord 1994) was central to the success of their sporting businesses. To attract crowds the matches had to be more than just a game, they had to be an event. Ideas relating to sport as spectacle continue and are intensified in current sporting narratives, a position which is analysed more generally in terms of literature in Chapter Three and will be specifically applied to the FA WSL as part of this study. These concepts had already gained authority in women's

football in the late 1800s and would return at different times throughout its history. In the case of both the BLFA and OELC the initial spectator interest diminished, women's sporting fixtures became less of a spectacle. With little likelihood of financial success, both organisations folded within a year of their formation (Lee 2008). As the women's game no longer had a spectacular form few records exist of its presence in the twenty years after the BLFA. It did though have enough profile to compel the FA, in 1902, to forbid its men's clubs from playing against 'lady's teams' (Williams 2002a).

## **2.4 World War One**

It was during World War One that the women's game started to grow, particularly in terms of increased participation and its establishment as a competitive spectacle. With men away fighting women were increasingly required to work in factories. With the support of factory owners, who were interested in having healthy, motivated workforces, the women workers started playing football informally as a meal break leisure activity (Melling 1998). With the competitive men's leagues suspended from 1914 to 1919 there was a vacuum to be filled in terms of football as entertainment (Jacobs 2004). Women's games soon became a competitive spectacle with gate receipts donated to charity. By 1917, the Munitionettes Cup Committee in the North East organised a major tournament for women's teams (Newsham 1997), while the most successful team of the era, the Dick, Kerr Ladies, played games at Deepdale, the home of Preston North End, one of the founding members of the men's Football League. On Christmas Eve 1917 10,000 people watched them play Arundel Coulthard Foundary from Lancashire (Pfister et al. 2002). As well as club matches women's team also played international games. For instance, in December 1917 an Irish XI played against an England representative side in front of approximately 20,000 in Belfast and in July 1918 the North of England challenged the West of Scotland at St James Park, Newcastle, raising funds for a local injured servicemen's charity (Brennan 2007).

Even after the end of the War fixtures continued and by 1920 the Dick, Kerr Ladies became the unofficial national representatives. As well as local fixtures they also played against French teams, including a match in December at

Deepdale in front of 12,000, which was the first ever football game played under floodlights (Tate 2014). In the autumn they travelled to France to play four games which averaged 13,000 spectators. On Boxing Day 1920 at Goodison Park, the home of Everton Football Club, 53,000 people watched Dick, Kerr play St. Helens, the match was a sell out with many more locked out of the ground (Giulianotti 1999). It was one of sixty seven matches the team played that season and by 1921 approximately 150 female teams existed (Newsham 1997). As Williamson (1991, p86) identifies "by the early 1920's it was no idle kick about on a ploughed field with a few curious onlookers on the touchlines; it was Stamford Bridge, White Hart Lane, Goodison Park ... clubs were springing up from a variety of backgrounds". The women's game had developed into a successful sporting spectacle, large audiences attended matches, Pathe News covered games and the players were included in the popular collectable football card series (Tate 2014). The game at Goodison Park became the highpoint of women's participation in competitive football at the time. However, it also contributed to its demise.

## **2.5 The 1921 Ban**

In October 1921, less than a year after the Boxing Day match at Goodison Park, the FA banned its members from allowing women's teams to play at their stadiums as "the game of football is quite unsuitable for females and ought not to be encouraged" (FA 2014a). Ostensibly the ban was due to worries about the misuse of the gate receipts intended for charitable purposes. However, it appears that the FA became worried the popularity of women's teams may divert attention from the men's game. As Williams (2003, p34) states:

as a parallel form of entertainment with male professionalism, women's football had established itself as a female sporting spectacle watched by a mainly male audience whose entrance fee was donated to charity. The expanding network of the women's game in England had not lead to a shabby amateurism, but adept entrepreneurial organisation in terms of raising large sums of money as a result of attracting large crowds

In a time after the War when men returned from the frontline there was the assumption that traditional gender roles would be restored. The FA was able to capitalise upon such prevailing ideas to stop women from participating in football (Pfister et al. 2002). Patriarchal power relations allowed men to

dominate and impose their views, while at the same time modernity brought an increased emphasis on science and rationality (Blackshaw and Crawford 2009). At the time women were seen as irrational and the prevailing ideas of eugenics and social Darwinism argued it was not natural for women to play sport. As Williams and Woodhouse (1991, p88) identify, established ideas at the time stated "strenuous games especially during puberty and menstrual periods drained energy from vital organs, damaged women's bodies and thus threatened the survival of the race". Such ideas were not limited to football as Clark and Paechter (2007, p262) state, "girls and women have long been excluded from sport and physical activity due to perceptions of their inherent weakness and fragility". Women's exclusion from the game was not limited to England. As Cox and Pringle (2012) identify two thirds of ruling national organisations banned women from playing football in the twentieth century. In the case of Brazil the ban on women's football came as late as the 1940s (Knijnik 2013).

The 1921 ban had devastating consequences for women's football in England. For a couple of years after there is evidence that the more established teams carried on playing competitive games. In 1922, the Dick, Kerr Ladies toured the east coast of America, playing nine matches against men's teams due to the lack of female opposition (Taylor 2013). They, along with Heyes Brewery Ladies hosted Olympique de Paris in early 1922, while Dick, Kerr toured France in 1923 and hosted the French champions Femina for a six game tour in 1925 (Prudhomme-Poncet 2007). In 1923, Stoke Ladies also travelled to Barcelona for a two game competition against Les Sportives of Paris. The lack of facilities after 1921, though, meant that in general women's football continued only in a limited sense, on an ad hoc, informal and non-competitive basis (Melling 1999). It was no longer seen as an organised competitive sport, which as Mean (2001, p791) states "eventually ensured the loss of knowledge about the ability, skills and success of women footballers ... [and] ensured that football skills and knowledge became the property of males". Although women may have continued playing football informally, without a spectacular form to garner media and public interest the women's game became virtually invisible.

The advent of World War Two did not bring any increase in the profile of the women's game. Unlike the situation in the previous war, men's football continued on a regional basis leaving no gap for the women's game to fill (Woodhouse 2002). In 1946, the FA also reaffirmed their opposition to the women's game by issuing a statement confirming the ban (Murray 1996), so by 1947 there were only an estimated 17 teams (Lopez 1997). Clubs continued, especially in the North East, but the lack of facilities and opposition meant by the 1960s Dick, Kerr, for so long the standard bearers for women's participation, folded (Woodhouse and Williams 1999). Informal football, though, did continue and by the late 1960s more women's teams began to form. Some believe the England men's victory at Wembley in the 1966 World Cup provided the impetus for a growth in the women's game (Lopez 1997, Owen 2005), while others believe the victory was not the sole catalyst as the popularity of the game increased in other countries at the same time (Williams 2003).

## **2.6 The Women's Football Association**

Whatever the reason the game gained such increased prominence by 1969 the Women's Football Association (WFA) was founded, comprising forty four clubs (Lopez 1997). As with many sports organisations it was a conservative administrative body with limited interest in challenging or politicising the traditional gendered inequalities in sport and was predominately run by female volunteers with longstanding allegiances to the women's game under male leadership (Woodhouse 2002). This arrangement reoccurs throughout the history of women's football and has consequences for those involved in the game, a situation which is analysed further throughout this research. As Williams (2004, p119) states:

a recurring pattern from the 1920's to the current time is the lack of influence of women in decision making roles in positions of power at the top level of their own sport. From ... the 1920's to the leaderships of the Women's Football Association and the present English Football Association Women's Committee, men have dominated women's football administration. Women have lead teams, leagues and have volunteered as committee members but they tend to rely on male sponsorship to hold high office. This can lead to a conflict of interests as the concerns of professional administrators and the interests of female participants may not be entirely compatible.

In 1970 the WFA introduced an official women's cup, the Mitre Challenge Trophy, which attracted 71 entrants (BBC 2003). In 1971 the FA lifted its ban which meant women's teams were once again allowed to play on the grounds of affiliated men's teams while also giving them access to match officials registered with the CFAs. The FA did not, though, immediately become involved in the women's game or the operations of the WFA. The 50 year ban was, in fact, only lifted after intense pressure from the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), which had become increasingly worried about the rise of the women's game, especially in Italy where professional women's teams competed in leagues. There was particular concern that unofficial women's international football tournaments, being run by Italian entrepreneurs, would erode the official governing bodies control over the game (Williams 2003).

The FA's lack of enthusiasm for the women's game was further evidenced by its continued resistance to UEFA's insistence that it coordinate women's football competitions until as late as the early 1980s (Williams 2006). In 1983, FIFA joined UEFA in insisting national associations took responsibility for the women's game. Only then, in 1984, did the FA invite the WFA to become affiliated to its organisation, allowing it the same status as the relatively autonomous and financially independent CFAs (Ward and Williams 2010). The county based organisations generally governed their local football matters including team and club registration, increasing participation and adjudicating on fines and bans (Lusted 2009). The WFA were affiliated in line with structures controlling amateur football, which the FA had little involvement in. Consequently, the WFA continued to administer the women's game on a day to day basis while the FA had a supervisory role. National governing bodies (NGBs) in other European countries, especially the Scandinavian countries, welcomed their women's organisations more enthusiastically and by the 1980s had already assumed responsibility for organising official leagues and competitions (Knoppers and Anthonissen 2003, Pfister 2003, Skille 2008, Eliasson 2009). In England it was the WFA who launched the first women's league, in 1991, comprising 24 clubs (FA 2014a).



## **2.7 Women's football administered by the FA**

In wasn't until 1993 that the FA took control of women's football from the WFA, who at the time had 450 member clubs. The FA decision to take over the administration of women's football wasn't, though, completely voluntary. As well as pressure from FIFA and UEFA, in 1991, the Sports Council, who controlled the allocation of public resources to sport, made closer relationships between the FA and the WFA a criterion for future funding (Williams 2003). At the same time the WFA, which was predominantly run by volunteers, found it increasingly difficult to coordinate rising interest in the game (Woodhouse and Williams 1999). Having taken control for women's football the FA renamed the Mitre Challenge to the Women's FA Cup, with 137 teams entering the inaugural competition in 1993. A year later it assumed responsibility for the league system, renaming it the FA Women's Premier League (FA WPL). The FA embarked on a plan to install a pyramid structure, linking the grassroots participatory levels of the sport with the elite leagues.

This approach adhered to narratives which abound in sport about the symbiotic and circular relationship between elite and mass participation (Hanstad and Skille 2010), a concept Grix and Carmichael (2012, p76-77) refer to as the 'virtuous cycle of sport', whereby "elite sport contributes to a collective sense of identity; this, then, boosts a greater mass sport participation, leading to a healthier populace; this, in turn, provides a bigger 'pool' of talent from which to choose the elite stars of the future and which ensures elite success. The process then starts over again". The relevance of such ideas in the development of the FA WSL will be explored further within this study. By 1998 Centres of Excellence for girls were established to provide pathways between informal and elite competitive forms of the game, a system already customary in men's football, while CFAs were required to produce development plans for the grassroots women's game (Woodhouse 2002).

With mass participation being addressed at a regional level, Centre of Excellences providing opportunities for talented young players and, in 1998, the international structure becoming the responsibility of the national coach the FA decided to focus on its elite domestic arrangements. In 2000 it announced its

intention to introduce the first women's professional league in Europe (FA 2001). The Professional League Project Team, which included representatives from the FAs women's structures, the men's EPL, the players association and the governments Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), commissioned research to investigate possible formats (Woodhouse 2002). It concluded that any new league had to promote equity from the grassroots up, appeal to a family audience and be developed in consultation with the women's game. The possible negative effects which could result from the introduction of uncontrolled commercialism created unease within the FA. As Katherine Knight (Merritt 2001), the organisations women's football Press Officer outlined, any new league:

must be in the interests of the whole game. Unless all the teams can turn professional with the same support it won't work. What we don't want is a situation where two or three clubs have the money to spend on the best players and the others suffer. It's no good for anyone if teams like Fulham go through the season beating everyone else 12-0

The promise of a professional league by 2003 prompted Fulham Football Club's owner, Mohamed Al Fayed, to professionalise the clubs women's team in 2000 (Harris 2007). The professional league, though, never materialised and in 2006 Fulham Ladies folded after Al Fayed withdrew his financial support (Leighton 2006a). The FA's resistance to place women's football into a commercialised sporting environment contrasts directly with the vision set out for the FA WSL ten years later, a situation which will be explored further within this study.

## **2.8 Pressure for reform**

Fundamental changes had taken place within women's football since the FA took control but a number of issues endured. This prompted the DCMS to set up a committee to investigate the women's game. As the final 2006 report identified (House of Commons 2006a, p3):

If a random sample of 100 people were to be asked which competitive team sport was the most popular among women and girls, how many would supply the correct answer: football? Probably not many, despite the tremendous growth of the women's game in recent years. The expansion of the women's game, however, is being hindered by various barriers, many of which are rooted in cultural attitudes. The resulting mismatch between enthusiasm and opportunity provided the stimulus for our inquiry, which took place amid a wave of popular enthusiasm for

football generated by the FIFA World Cup taking place in Germany. We hope that this report will open a window onto the sport and give some impetus for change where needed.

In response the FA announced the creation of a senior working group to again look at establishing a professional league (House of Commons 2006b). The importance of a professional league to the FA's plans was reasserted in its four year strategy for women's football published in 2008 (FA 2008a). At the time twelve teams played in the top league, the FA WPL National Division, with the next tier consisting of two regional divisions, the Northern and Southern Division's, each with 12 teams. As identified in Chapter One, the strategy identified that the existing structure was inadequate. It was amateur, both in terms of the players and the structures in place, it lacked quality and there was limited competition. Although, in 2009, the FA gave 17 England players professional contracts of £16,000 a year, the amateur status of the domestic game meant these problems continued. The FA believed a new semi-professional league provided the solution.

In February 2009 the FA (FA 2009a, p7) announced plans for the new League to commence the following year:

Whether in business or sport, there's always a time when you have to really get behind an idea if it's going to fly. Now is that time for the elite level of women's football in England. The England women's international teams are performing superbly on the world stage, and it's our duty to ensure they continue to draw from the best home-grown players that we produce. Participation levels are at an all-time high here in England, as are the number of opportunities for girls and women to play. However, the structure at the top of the domestic game simply is not right. It isn't sustainable or capable of significant growth. These factors are among the driving forces behind the new FA Women's Super League, scheduled to launch in 2011

Three months later, though, the FA deferred the introduction of the Super League for a year due to 'financially turbulent times' (FA 2009b). Sue Tibballs (Leighton 2009), the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation's Chief Executive, identified the anger within the game when she stated, "if anybody wanted a clear indication of the FA's regard for women's football, this is it. They were looking at their budgets to see what they could cut and women's football was an easy option. You have to question their fitness to run the women's game".

Three months later the FA announced the FA WSL would commence from March 2011 (FA 2009c).

As this chapter identifies there is evidence that women's football has a longer history than conventionally acknowledged. The patriarchal nature of society has rendered the women's game virtually invisible within historical accounts. However, competitive, commercial and sport as spectacle narratives have been associated with the game for over 100 years. In its early history women's teams played in front of large crowds, had the ability to raise revenues and were invited to play internationally. Its challenge to the dominance of the men's game, though, led to it being banned which severely undermined its position. The game was left with a limited ability to access facilities and was placed outside the narratives which defined football in England. It was only pressure from funding agencies and international football associations which forced the FA to include the women's game within its remit. Although it gained responsibility for the women's game in 1993 it wasn't until 2009 that comprehensive plans were announced to introduce a semi-professional league. The FA's relationship with and acceptance of women's football has varied throughout its history. However, the organisation is now central to the development of the new League. Consequently, understanding the FA as an organisation is central to this studies and is addressed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Review of literature relating to football governance in England**

Sport governing bodies play a crucial role in defining how sport is perceived, therefore, this chapter provides an exploration of the FA as an organisation. It focuses specifically on the era since the formation of the EPL in the men's elite game in the 1990s, identifying the consequences increased commercialisation, commodification and spectacularisation had on the game and its governing body. These issues are analysed with reference to authors such as Clayton and Harris (2004) and Debord's (1994) 'The Society of the Spectacle'. The consequences of these sporting narratives on the structures of the FA are then explored. The chapter draws on official reports relating to its organisational arrangements (FA 2005, All Party Parliamentary Football Group 2009, House of Commons 2011a) coupled with references to academic research of the FA (Hamil et al. 2003, Michie and Oughton 2005). Studies of NGBs in France (Bayle and Robinson 2007) and of the Danish FA (Persson 2011) are discussed to highlight organisational debates in other countries. The second half of the chapter draws on liberal and radical approaches to gender inequality within organisations with reference to authors such as Ely and Meyerson (2000), Hoerber (2008) and Knoppers and McDonald (2010). The chapter then contextualises these debates in terms of women's football in England (Welford 2011) and the FA in particular (Fielding-Lloyd and Mean 2011).

#### **3.1 The FA**

Analysing the FA is central to understanding the new WSL as organisations are powerful conduits through which sporting experiences are defined and legitimised. Palmer's (2000) research into the Tour de France identified the way those in power in governing bodies are able to control and define how sport is understood. She concludes:

the Tour de France is a highly coordinated piece of cultural engineering or editing in that every aspect of its performance is dependent on the discretion of the Société du Tour de France ... Like the IOC in the case of the Olympic Games, La Société du Tour de France acts as a gatekeeper of cultural traffic, ensuring that only a select range of myths and narratives are fed into the popular consciousness (p366-367)

The FA WSL is not a neutral entity which is developed in an objective vacuum but like the Tour de France the narratives surrounding it are defined by the organisation which governs it. To understand the changes taking place in women's football in England it is, therefore, imperative to frame it within prevailing research around its central governing organisation.

Throughout its history the structure of the FA has attracted much scrutiny. In 1968 the Department of Education and Science commissioned the Chester Report (House of Commons 1968) to investigate the FA. It questioned whether the FA structures were too big to be an effective policy making body. As would become evident in future responses, the FA dismissed most of the report's recommendations and stated "it is not expected that a body of this kind [the Chester Committee] can fully understand the ramifications of the complex Football Association" (FA 2013a). In 1988 the FA Council itself commissioned a firm of management consultants to examine its structures. The resultant report identified that the FA Council was out of touch, too large and unyielding, yet its recommendations were also rejected as being too radical (FA 2013a).

The introduction of the EPL into men's football in 1992 had distinct consequences for the FA and football as a whole (Nauright and Ramfjord 2010). Although the elite league system was managed by the Football League since its formation in 1888 (Russell 1997), the FA saw themselves as the guardians of the game (Conn 2005). Their role was to govern for the greater good of football, protecting against interests which sought to exploit the game, especially for financial gain. By the late 1980s the more successful clubs realised financial benefits could be accrued if they broke away from the Football League, which was underpinned by the equal distribution of revenues. The Football League believed that, with the support of the FA, English football could unite to stop a breakaway league. However, in 1991, the FA issued its 'Blueprint for the Future of Football' which advocated the formation of a new EPL (Brentnall 2009). In doing so Conn (1997, p17) states the FA betrayed "its historic role as regulator, controller of commercialism for the wider good of the game". As identified in Chapter Two financial imperatives have played a role in football throughout its history. However, the introduction of the EPL saw the focus on money intensify.

Increasingly football became part of the commercial and global reorganisation of sport and society (Williams 1994).

Finance based narratives abound in contemporary society, while neo liberal ideas dominate economic, political and social decisions and relate to the primacy of markets, capitalism and consumerism (Horne 2006). As Harvey (2007, p3) identifies, neoliberalism "holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market". In an expanding amount of areas in contemporary society existing markets need to be strengthened, while new markets need to be established (Connell 2014). Silk and Andrews (2012) identify that such commercial, neoliberal ideas abound in organised, competitive sport. As Wenner (2013, p192) states, "all sport-referential narratives are influenced by the logic of consumption, whether or not their primary goal is to market, promote or advertise". Elite sport is now highly commercialised and success is increasingly measured in terms of income generation, financial viability and profit. To survive in the globalised world it has been universally recognised that football has had to adopt a commercial orientation and embrace market values (Nash 2000, Parry and Malcolm 2004). Football specifically is now heavily promoted, played and packaged as a product and has become commodified (Sugden and Tomlinson 1999). The increased focus on the commercial character of sport and football is especially prevalent in England (Moor 2007). As Clayton and Harris (2004, p332) identify, English football is "omnipresent under a thoroughly late modern umbrella of fame, celebrity hood and globalised consumption".

To ensure football continued as a financially viable commodity it was essential that it was perceived as an entertaining event. As Duke (2002, p17) identifies football is "a commodity to be bought and sold, reduced to the role of television entertainment". As stated in the previous chapter, within narratives related to football as a commodity, the role of spectacle is central. Debord's (1994, p28) theory asserts that "the spectacle corresponds to the historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life. It is not just that the relationship to commodities is now plain to see commodities are now all that there is to see; the world we see is the world of the commodity". Definitions of

football, particularly in its competitive forms, are centred on it being a spectacle, the primary focus being the consumption of it as a product (Giulianotti 2002, 2005). Within such discourses attracting and entertaining large crowds is paramount. As Manzenreiter and Spitaler (2010, p704) identify, in a spectacularised vision "success and failure is measured according to mass participation and public acclamation for being a great event can be obtained". It was within this environment that the FA sought to develop a way forward for elite women's football, a sport that had existed outside such commercialised, spectacularised and commodified narratives in recent years.

The increased importance of commercialisation had distinct consequences for football and also the organisations governing it (Hassan and Hamil 2010). Since the introduction of the EPL the FA's power within football has diminished and increasingly the inefficiency of its structures has been highlighted (Hamil et al. 2003). In response to criticism of its structure and calls to streamline decision making the FA introduced the FA Board in 1999, but the majority of the antiquated structures were unaltered. By 2005 the FA and its governance of football was under such intense criticism that the organisation itself commissioned Lord Burns to undertake a review of its structures. The resultant report identified a complex and bureaucratic organisation with blurred lines of responsibility, overlapping roles and complicated decision making which lacked clarity. An ineffective FA Board with equal numbers from the professional and national game lead to deadlock and delay, while there was an absence of communication and transparency (FA 2005).

The lack of change enacted in response to The Burns Report prompted politicians to become involved in the FA's governance issues. In 2009 the All Party Parliamentary Football Group published a report which again questioned the FA's structures and raised "doubts about the way the game is governed in England" (p12). Again, the response of the FA was minimal so in 2010 the House of Commons Culture, Media and Sport Committee launched an investigation into football governance in England. During submissions to the Committee the then Sports Minister, Hugh Robertson, observed "if you look across sport, it is very clear to me that football is the worst governed sport in this country, without a shadow of a doubt" (House of Commons 2011a, p15).



Having taken evidence from a wide range of people involved in the game the resultant report identified that the governance of the national game needed urgent reform. The FA structures were deemed to contain too many vested interests, including the EPL, which meant decisions about the game as a whole could be compromised by the financial imperatives of individual clubs. In general the FA was identified as out dated and unrepresentative (House of Commons 2011a).

The report highlighted one of the main areas of concern was the size, structure and composition of the FA's ruling Council. At the time it consisted of 118 members and met 5 times a year, meaning decisions were difficult to make and were often not taken promptly enough. Only two members were women, two were drawn from black and minority ethnic communities and two-thirds of the Council were over 64. Even though there is now an age limit of 75, when the age restriction was introduced an exception was introduced for the twenty four members who were on the Council in 1990, allowing them to serve on the Council interminably. Almost a quarter of its members were Vice-Presidents or Life Presidents, who had served 20 years on the Council and had reached the age of 72. The FA was deemed to be out of touch and unrepresentative of those who played and watched the game. The FA Council was identified as an example of the closed nature of the organisation which formed part of the process by which the FA was able to maintain and protect the archaic, bureaucratic and patriarchal structures that Michie and Oughton (2005) identify had defined football's governing body for many years; the same organisation which controlled attempts to address gender inequalities in English football through the introduction of the FA WSL.

The FA is not alone as a football governing body needing to consider and initiate change to its organisational structures. Persson (2011) identifies pressure on the Danish FA to change its inefficient and unrepresentative structures at the beginning of the twenty first century. The research highlights that the Danish FA's initial attempts, in 2006, to gain approval for change to its governance strategy had failed. Although they employed an outside company to involve the member clubs in conceptualising the organisation's future vision the final report failed to represent the member clubs' input. As Persson identifies

"the method of working comes across as mirroring the hierarchical model ... [clubs] at the lower end of the continuum ... are turned into 'pawns' on account of their position as passive recipients of policy, pawns being expendable and to be sacrificed for the greater good of the continuum" (p376-377). Consequently, the inclusion of the member clubs in defining and identifying the vision for change was merely superficial and ultimately led to the proposed changes being rejected. Drawing on lessons from this failure Perssons research highlights that changes instigated by the Danish FA since 2006, including the launch, in 2007, of an Ethical Board and the implementation, in 2009, of a good governance guidance, had taken a less dictatorial approach to change. As Persson (2011, p378) concludes "in terms of sport, Sport Governing Bodies need to develop the capacity to take into account and balance the varied interests of a number of internal as well as external actors and stakeholders".

The meaningful inclusion of stakeholders in the definition and development of future plans is central to the successful implementation of change (By 2005). Research has highlighted that the inclusion of a wide range of views is central to organisational success within sports governing bodies, for example Bayle and Robinson (2007) and Ferkins, Shilbury and McDonald (2009). Bayle and Robinson's (2007) case study of eleven French NGBs of sport involved 100 interviews with employees, directors, elected volunteers and key stakeholders of the NGBs. Two of the three main factors they identified as being central to facilitating positive organisational outcomes related to the inclusion of all stakeholders. They conclude that organisations managing sport require:

*a participatory culture* where all stakeholders are involved, or feel they are involved closely in the operation of the NGB ... [also beneficial is] adopting a *partnership approach*. The approach adopted by many NGBs to providing satisfaction to stakeholders is often reactive. In order to overcome this, and for there to be a greater positive impact on performance, NGBs often need to adopt a strategy of multiple partnerships which make it possible to establish a framework for achieving performance and favours the acquisition of knowledge (p263)

The process by which organisations, including sports NGBs, instigate change has a fundamental impact on the decisions they make and the resultant outcomes. In terms of the FA WSL the way the FA defined, developed and

implemented the new League are of central importance and are critically addressed within this study.

### **3.2 Approaches to addressing gender inequalities**

Instigating a change such as the introduction of the new League has the potential to partially address the gendered nature of English football. What must be taken into consideration, though, is that research has identified that the FA is a highly gendered organisation (White and Kay 2006, Lusted 2009). White and Kay (2006) identified that limited empirical research had been undertaken into the position of women in sports organisations since White and Brackenridge (1985, p105) concluded power and control was "firmly in the hands of men". Consequently, to establish whether changes had taken place they analysed employee data to identify the current gender situation in organisations. They established that, in general, female involvement and power within sport organisations had increased considerably. The only exception being the traditional male sports of football and rugby.

Indeed, White and Kay conclude that "while female staff members of the national [UK] Football Associations number around 40 percent, representation on the committees of the Scottish, English and Welsh Football Associations is still minimal (four, two and zero percent respectively)" (p69). This situation existed even in light of the increase in the number of females playing the game. Griggs and Biscoe (2010) highlighted that changes had taken place within the FA in recent years but identified that in terms of governance all forms of football in England continue to be governed predominantly by men. Extensive academic scrutiny has concluded these situations are allowed to prevail even in the face of considerable criticism. This is partly attributed to the fact that approaches to organisational inequalities and academic research in the area have remained within a liberal paradigm (Shaw 2006, Hoeber 2008, Greenhill et al. 2009).

Liberal feminist approaches are based on the belief that discrimination is a result of traditional societal, political and legal systems which prevent women from taking part and succeeding in sport. The main emphasis for activists and writers within the liberal paradigm is to transform and remove practices that enable and allow inequality to occur. As Cooky (2009, p259) identifies, liberal

approaches "posits that creating new structures of opportunities or expanding existing structures, such that they are inclusive of minorities, will increase the number of unrepresented groups in these structures". Such approaches to addressing inequalities have brought about many positive changes, including increasing the numbers of women participating in and organising sport. As Ratna (2011, p386) states many:

feminist scholars of sport have tended to adopt a liberal viewpoint to expose, dismantle and challenge the gender based inequalities evident in sport. Liberal interventions have undoubtedly spearheaded new policies and practices that have facilitated the sports participation of a large number of women

However many, including Ratna herself, believe such liberal approaches have not gone far enough as they leave many of the existing dominant ideologies, discourses and structures in place. As Clark (2011, p835) articulates, liberal feminists "in striving for equal participation do not address the ideological strongholds the structures and policies are based on". Liberal policies have not encouraged a full examination of the assumptions, values and beliefs that underpin sport and its organisations so have done little to challenge or change dominant gendered discourses (Knoppers and McDonald 2010). Ubiquitous and deeply entrenched power imbalances based on gender have not been disrupted. As Ely and Meyerson (2000, p589) conclude, "interventions derived from liberal feminist theories though responsible for important and often necessary change are not sufficient to disrupt the pervasive and deeply entrenched imbalance of power in relations between men and women".

This situation has consequences for women's position in sport as they are still constrained by powerful gendered discourses which maintain the status quo (Sibson 2010). Hoeber (2008, p66) articulates that liberal approaches "have not addressed historical and systemic inequalities embedded in the masculine culture of sport organisations, such as the devaluing of female athletes and women's sports which made it difficult for men and women to be equal in the first place". As the existing structures remain in place the potential for liberal approaches to fundamentally change the position of female athletes is questionable. Laurendeau and Sharara (2008) investigated two action sports in Canada to explore the ways women negotiate participation into male-dominated

spheres. Through in depth interviews with sky divers and snowboarders of both sexes they identify that:

although women in snowboarding and skydiving have found strategies that resonate with them for negotiating their way in these male-dominated settings, they have not, for the most part, engaged in strategies that fundamentally challenge the institutional context that sometimes marginalizes and trivializes them, and may very well do the same to future generations of women in these sports (p43)

This situation mirrors liberal changes within sport which led the researchers to conclude "if women are making inroads into sport without challenging assumptions and structures that privilege men over women and particular men over others then the transformative potential of their entrance is limited at best" (p27). Without challenging the long standing discourses, practices and assumptions that predominate in traditional male dominated sports organisations, liberal approaches to gender equality can increase the numbers of women but may not change the way they are seen. The centrality of such issues are examined within this research which aims to examine whether the introduction of the FA WSL conforms to liberal approaches or whether it evidenced a change of position for the women's elite game within footballing narratives.

The particular nature and effect such approaches have had for women involved in football are articulated in Welford's (2011) study. In her interview based research into the experiences of women involved in football in England she identifies that, even at a time when numbers are increasing, women were still considerably underrepresented in the football hierarchy. Those entering into the football world as officials at grassroots teams found it difficult to express their needs, experiences and opinions within the current structure of the game. Their involvement was devalued and predominantly dependent on the support of their male colleagues. Welford identifies that in football "liberal policies have been problematic in this highly masculine context because they do not address gendered discourses underlying organisational definitions and practices ... Sport organisations are places that still reproduce traditional gender roles and discourses" (p366). The liberal gains witnessed within football in England gave the impression of increased gender equality, however, Welford concludes that they were merely superficial.

Fielding-Lloyd and Mean (2008) in their research into football coaching courses in England analysed the introduction of women into positions of authority in a traditionally male dominated sport. They interviewed staff at one CFA in England to explore the gendered negotiation and management of coaching. The FA was identified as an institution saturated with hegemonic masculinity in which senior positions were generally occupied by men. The authors conclude that although women's inclusion in sport can be seen as demonstrating equality, it is the *nature* of the inclusion which is centrally important. In their study the use of separatist coaching courses was espoused as a policy to address gender inequalities in English football coaching. In actuality they had a detrimental effect on the position of women as they did not acknowledge or challenge any of the powerful male dominated discourses within the coaching field.

The lack of fundamental change in the discourses and structures surrounding sport and its organisations has led many researchers to demand a rethink of approaches which address gender inequalities. Continuing to focus on liberal advances, both within organisational gender equality practices and researcher theorising, merely allows the status quo to continue and undermines attempts at promote significant change. In regards to women's football Liston (2006, p373) states "male dominated governing bodies ... have adapted their structures to a superficial level such that we have seen 'pseudo' inclusion of women's football within existing male orientated structures". To counter this in recent years there has been an effort by researchers to adopt new ways of viewing, understanding and critiquing the way women have been included in traditionally male dominated organisations.

Meyerson and Kolb (2000) demand a shift from a liberal to a post structural feminist approach. This allows for a fundamental questioning of taken for granted practices and values which are maintained and used by certain groups of men to ensure their continuing power. Shaw and Frisby (2006, p490) envision a move towards poststructuralist approaches would mean the "discourses and assumptions that make gendered hierarchies and practices appear normal are disputed with the aim of creating space for the development of new meanings and understandings to guide the implementation of alternative policies and practices". As Fullagar and Toohey (2009, p199) conclude, what is

needed in research into sports organisations is a new approach, one that make's "gender issues thinkable in different ways." The consequence of not taking such a critical stance to research is the continued dominance of prevailing gendered discourses. In particular reference to women's football Williams (2006, p160-161) asserts:

it seems that we are asking the wrong questions if we make the focus of enquiry the means by which we might increase the number of girls and women playing football and the mechanisms by which we get the media to cover female matches more extensively and the market for and desirability of a more prestigious women's professional league in Europe. These are cosmetic features ... we need to ask more robust questions about the values and ideas that have become common sense in this demarcation of football and women's football which marks the national and international image of the sport

Researchers using more critical paradigms advocate that only by adopting such approaches can fundamental changes to the current unequal gender relations within organisations, sport and football be achieved. What is required is a critical questioning of the ways in which women are included in the category of sport. One that looks beyond viewing increased participation as the primary evidence of more inclusive policies and questions the underlying structures, practices and assumptions of the organisations negotiating change. This approach would identify the deeply entrenched policies and beliefs that have helped frame changes. Only then can progress be made in addressing the fundamental inequalities found in sport. This research relates these issues directly to elite women's football in England. Increased inclusion is vital when attempting to address inequalities in sport. However, as Fielding-Lloyd and Mean (2011, p346) espouse, "the nature of inclusion (i.e. female participation) is highly significant since mere presence often used to demonstrate equality and inclusivity is not (necessarily) equivalent to acceptance, inclusion and equity". Women's football is deeply rooted in long standing societal narratives, consequently, in order to study the development of the FA WSL it would be injudicious not to frame it within contemporary discourses. As a result the next chapter will provide a review of current literature, research and theories relating to sport, organisations and gender.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Review of literature relating to gendered discourses in sport**

The following chapter places this research within existing literature, identifying prevailing themes and specifying gaps in knowledge which it addresses. It locates the FA WSL within wider theories and discourses relating to football, sport and society. The role of masculine hegemony is explored (Connell 2009), with particular emphasis placed on its position within sport (Clayton and Humberstone 2006). The discussion then draws on research into female participation in traditional male sports to identify whether gender inequalities have been disrupted as a consequence (Mennesson 2000, Elling and Knoppers 2005, Velija, Mierzewski and Fortune 2013). The chapter also provides an overview of research specifically relating to women's football in England using authors such as Williams (2006), Ahmad (2011) and Caudwell (2011a), while the themes identified are illuminated further through studies from other countries (Pelak 2005, Cox and Pringle 2012, Knijnik and Horton 2013). The FA WSL is born out of the ethos, aims and priorities of the FA. As a result, another fundamental tenet of the chapter is to orientate this study within existing literature relating to organisational theory, especially in relation to gender and sport (Shaw and Penney 2003, Hoeber 2007).

#### **4.1 Sport and gender**

The FA WSL exists within a society which is riven with gender divisions (Wharton 2012). Central to inequalities is the concept of hegemonic masculinity which defines a position where particular males are encouraged and allowed to dominate women and other men (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, Connell 2009). It is acknowledged that the ways masculinity and femininity are defined differs over time and within different countries (Bourdieu 2001). However, in its hegemonic form, masculinity is associated with strength, power, aggression, competition and dominance. In contrast femininity is associated with being passive, dependent, compassionate, and emotional, while it is encapsulated by an emphasis on physical appearance (Krane 2001, Krane et al. 2004). Masculine traits are assigned as the foremost qualities individuals should possess (Lorber 1994); consequently, masculinity and femininity are understood



to be in opposition (Dellinger 2004, Anderson 2005) and groups including women and gay men, are positioned less favourable within society (Monto and Supinski 2014).

Gender inequalities and masculine hegemony also play a central part in defining sporting experience. Clayton and Humberstone (2006, p303) undertook a study of a men's university football team in England and conclude that "sport remains the principal bastion of hegemonic masculinity in western culture where the legitimate differentiation is by way of strength, aggression (even violence) ... [and] competitiveness". The dominant image of sporting ability is often personified in images of successful, powerful, aggressive, male athletes (Tagg 2008) meaning that ideas relating to the supremacy of hegemonic forms of masculinity are often constructed, legitimised, reproduced and reworked through sport (Wheaton 2000). For instance, studies have identified that ideas relating to hegemonic masculinity enable the exclusion of gay men from sport (Anderson 2002). Elling and Janssens (2009) used questionnaires to investigate the sporting experiences of over 1000 self-identified homo/bisexual respondents. The study concludes that "though not absent, homo/bisexual men are underrepresented in mainstream (competitive) club sport and 'masculine' defined team and contact sports" (p82). Within contemporary societal structures sport is, therefore, a highly gendered institution predominantly played and organised by men (Knoppers and Anthonissen 2005); a situation which allows it to perpetuate and naturalise ideas relating to the role of men and women in society and provide a powerful mechanism whereby identities and gendered assumptions are constructed and renegotiated (Caudwell 2006).

Research has shown that the dominance of discourses relating to masculine hegemony continue to pervade sport, even as females are increasingly involved (Blinde, Taub and Han 1994, Caselnuovo and Guthrie 1998 Theberge 2003). Female engagement in sport, even those that are traditionally viewed as male, often accords with societal gender divisions that authenticate male dominance. Indeed, Velija, Mierzwinski and Fortune's (2013) study into martial arts identifies that women's involvement in the sport led to individual empowerment whereby female participants gain increased confidence and strength. However this does

not disturb masculine hegemonic discourses relating to the roles of men and women. They conclude:

despite acquiring physical strengths that challenge previous forms of gendered embodiment, their experiences remain predominantly at the level of individual embodiment. Thus the women do not problematise normative views of gendered embodiment which position women as weak and men as strong. Nor do the women in this study question the pressure on female bodies to be toned and feminine (p524)

Guérandel and Mennesson's (2007) research into young people's experiences of judo highlight that ideas relating to femininity and masculinity are learnt at a young age and are not fundamentally disrupted through participation in sport. Through observation of and interviews with male and female high level French judokas, aged between 5 and 17 years old, who engaged in mixed training sessions the authors identified gender differences in behaviour were apparent. For instance, the young female judokas acknowledged that they emphasised their femininity, through having long hair and wearing close-fitting clothing, to counteract the opinions of their peers about the masculine nature of their sport. They conclude that "first and foremost, these gender differences structure shared moments before and after practice and during breaks when boys and girls form two performance teams that collaborate with respect to the rules of conduct assigned to men and women in society" (p183).

Mennesson (2000) studied the experiences of twelve female French boxers participating in a sport predominantly defined, coached and undertaken by men. She found that participating in sports traditionally viewed as masculine can lead to some blurring of traditional definitions of femininity and masculinity, for example purely by participating in the sport the boxers were seen to disrupt the traditional gender order. At the same time, though, they continued to adopt conventional traits associated with femininity, such as "choosing appropriate attire for the ring ('something sexy'), wearing mini-skirts after a competition, and having long hair" (p28), which reinforced prevailing gender norms. Her research reminds us that "it is debatable how much impact ... 'encroachments' [by women] have actually had on the hegemonic gendered representations, identities and relations of sport" (p22).

Such debates were also analysed within Velija and Flynn's (2010) study of jockeys in the UK. They used interviews to access the experiences of female jockeys who had currently or previously held amateur and professional National Hunt and Flat racing licenses issued by the sport's governing body, the Jockey Club. The authors identified that the area of study was particularly significant as female and male jockeys compete in the same races and the Jockey Club had incorporated women into its official competitive structures considerably earlier than many other sports, in the mid-1970s. The research, though, discovered that gender still framed the experiences of female jockeys. For example, historical and biological narratives relating to the weakness of the female body making it more susceptible to injury than the male body continued to proliferate, an issue explored in relation to women's football in Chapter Two. The authors conclude that:

although female jockeys work, train, and compete closely with male jockeys in equestrian sports, they remain outsiders in the racing figuration. Gender integration does not appear to have enhanced their identity as a group nor has it provided female jockeys with more opportunities to develop organizational resources, access economic resources, or question uneven balances of power (p312)

Although female jockeys have been part of the Jockey Club for forty years their acceptance as athletes has been inhibited due to the continuation of traditional narratives within the organisation and the sport. Velija and Flynn identify that female jockeys were only included by the sport's governing body due to changes in the law with the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975, while the Jockey Club continues to be male dominated and deep seated attitudes related to masculinity dominate the upper echelons of the sport. The increased inclusion of female participants by sport governing bodies, therefore, does not automatically address gender inequalities in a fundamental way. A NGB's organisational structures and prevailing culture are central to the extent to which a women's presence within sport results in genuine equality, an issue which will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter.

Theberge (2003) related the continued predominance of gendered discourses to team sport in her research into another traditionally masculine arena, ice hockey. She interviewed 24 fourteen to eighteen year old girls who attended ice hockey camp in Canada and identified how the participants were able to move

beyond traditional ideas relating to masculinity and femininity as the sport allowed them to be powerful and fearless. However, this individual liberation did not completely disrupt societal norms. Their ability to express these traits was limited as they played a female form of the game, where body checking was banned. As she concludes:

the accounts of adolescent hockey players presented here suggest a powerful challenge to the historically gendered practice of sport in which men were empowered and women largely excluded. This challenge lies in the possibilities that hockey and other sports offer for attaining alternative forms of embodiment that are grounded in the experience of strength, competency, and agency. It remains to be seen, however, whether the full potential of this challenge will be realized. For this to occur, the empowerment of girls and women must move from an individual to a collective level (p514)

Such research concurs with Fink (2008, p149) who identifies "sport is still a powerful mechanism by which male hegemony is constructed and reconstructed". While women continue to make considerable inroads into the sporting world, gendered discourses continue (Hargreaves 2000, Pfister 2010), a position furthered by the fact that sports have mainly been created and controlled by men (Shaw 2006). It is acknowledged that the way that gender impacts on sport varies enormously depending on the sport in question. However, in general terms, sport perpetuates prevailing gendered ideologies (Engel 2011). As the United Nations (2007, p2-3) proclaim "women's participation in sport has a long history. It is a history marked by division and discrimination ... fuelled by continuing stereotypes of women's abilities and social roles".

The way sport is seen as an institution divided on the basis of gender continues and almost prospers in contemporary society (Anderson 2009). For instance, Elling and Knoppers (2005) surveyed over a thousand Dutch young people to identify whether sport participation preferences continue to be influenced by gender. To gauge attitudes participants were questioned about fifteen sports and asked to comment on their gender suitability. Only tennis and skateboarding were seen as gender neutral and ideas about 'girls sports' and 'boys sports' still abounded and meant young people distanced themselves from sports traditionally denoted as relating to the opposite sex. As the study concludes "confirming traditional notions of privileged femininity and hegemonic

masculinity individual, non-contact sports like swimming, gymnastics, volleyball, figure skating, were significantly more popular among girls and 'tough and fast' (contact) sports like soccer, boxing and car racing were more popular among boy" (p263). Gendered normative images, therefore, still structure sport involvement. A number of researchers have stated that sport, especially in its elite and competitive forms, is actually one of the most powerful societal settings in which gender inequalities continue (Skirstad 2009, Anderson 2009). Pfister (2010, p234) states "sport or at least as far as the greater majority of sport is concerned is also a system which in its competitive and elite forms is based on a universally valid gender segregation that is scarcely to be found any larger in other areas of western society". Sport is seen not only to perpetuate inequalities but does so in a way that is often accepted and legitimised. The way women's elite competitive football was framed by the FA must be located within these narratives and consequently they are placed at the heart of this research.

#### **4.2 Research into women's football**

Woodward (2007) and Drury (2011), argue that the power of gendered ideologies is particularly evident in English football. Woodward investigated football diversity practices in England through a document analysis of diversity policies within men's professional clubs and interviews with community workers within these organisations. She identifies that women's teams were often relegated to a 'worthy' charitable role which maintained their position as outsiders and surmises that "women are largely absent from dominant football culture" (p771). Other authors have also identified that football, especially in England, is recognised as a predominantly masculine pursuit; structurally, institutionally, culturally and socially (Giulianotti 1999, Clayton and Humberstone 2006, Bell and Blakey 2010). This continues even in the face of recent increases in the number of females playing the game. Adams, Anderson and McCormack (2010, p286) identify that football in England is situated "as a sport for men, despite the fact that women play the same game". This trend is also acknowledged internationally including studies from Europe (Marschik 2003, Hjelm 2011), Israel (Ben-Porat 2009), South Africa (Pelak 2005) and New

Zealand (Cox and Pringle 2012). It is against this background that the introduction of the FA WSL must be placed.

Recently, increased academic attention has focussed on women's football, with authors such as Williams (2003) charting the long history of the game. Research has also identified the continued dominance of masculine hegemony and its impact on sport in general and football specifically (Davis-Delano, Pollock and Vose 2009). Engh (2011) focussed on how dominant narratives relating to male superiority in society affected female footballers in South Africa. She interviewed players from recreational level to South African internationals and identified that football allowed players to contravene societal norms. However, this was experienced only fleetingly:

while being on the soccer field, women get an opportunity to act and behave in ways that do not 'fit' with heterosexual feminine ideals... this, however, does nothing to counter the general assumption that soccer is a sport for men. While women soccer players may experience moments of freedom from constraining discourses of femininity, these discourses and assumptions are not necessarily and automatically changed (p149)

Knijnik and Horton's (2013) study of an official Brazilian women's tournament identified the way football organisations reiterate the link between femininity and football. To participate in the competition women had to comply with strict 'beauty' requirements; short hair was banned and was preferably long and blonde while players had to be under 23 years old. Consequently, the competition was not solely related to footballing ability but also based on appearance.

Scruton et al. (1999) focussed on women's football in Europe, concentrating their analysis on Germany, Norway and England. They identified that increases in the number of women and girls participating in sport helped challenge *some* discourses around femininity. For instance, their engagement in physical contact and exhibitions of strength contradicted dominant ideas about acceptable female behaviour. However, in common with Engh, they question whether this has led to a fundamental shift in traditional gendered narratives. They identify that female players:

seem to be demonstrating a shift in what is deemed to be acceptable female behaviour ... However this does not present a major challenge

to the obdurate masculine/feminine dichotomy. Rather, these women have simply crossed gendered boundaries in order to access a sport associated with masculine traits. This act does not help to redefine hegemonic notions of femininity (p108)

The prevalence of such discourses has been explored with particular reference to the United Kingdom and Ireland, for example Scraton, Caudwell and Holland's (2005) study of women's football in England and Liston's (2006) analysis of the structures in Republic of Ireland. Caudwell (2011a) concludes that women and girls are involved at all levels of the game, coaching, managing, spectating and playing, however she cautions that:

it remains that their engagement with football is highly contingent on gender ... [it] is based on norms, values and traditions surrounding the game in the UK. These 'common-sense' beliefs and taken-for-granted assumptions, which influence the entitlement to football, present obdurate, and often impenetrable, barriers that women and girls continually negotiate in their quest to be actively involved (p323)

It can, therefore, be seen that authors from numerous countries state that social norms construct and valorise heterosexual femininity, which reinforces gendered discourses that affect the experiences of females who play the game. In researching the introduction and development of the FA WSL such narratives must be considered, in order to ascertain whether they influenced the form it took.

These narratives are also explored by researchers such as Caudwell (1999), Harris (2005) and Drury (2011) to offer valuable insights relating to gender, sexuality and football. Caudwell's (1999) study attempted to understand how gendered narratives merge with theories of sexuality to define women who play football. She used questionnaires and interviews to gain an understanding of the views of players at FA registered clubs. The research concludes "what is ... evident is that discourses of sexuality and/or desire become profoundly significant once gender frontiers are crossed ... the implications for women who play football are clear in the form of stereotyping, prejudice, harassment and abuse" (p401). Playing football was traditionally seen as a masculine activity, consequently, women who played the game were indiscriminately assigned as lesbian. This trend was further emphasised within Drury's (2011) study of a lesbian-identified football club. She identifies gender based discrimination in football is intrinsically related to traditional narratives about sexuality:

female athletes, particularly those competing in sports that have traditionally been defined as masculine, transgress the boundaries of 'acceptable femininity' ... Due to heteronormative assumptions that associate femininity in women with heterosexuality, this perceived gender transgression is compounded with the assumption that the sexuality of female athletes also deviates from the 'norm' of heterosexuality. Homophobic discourses, therefore, act to control the participation of women by creating pressure to conform to notions of 'emphasized femininity' (p424)

Recent studies have, also, attempted to capture further insights into the multiplicity of experiences female footballers encounter by adopting racialised approaches. Ratna's (2008) investigation of female British Asian's experience of race, gender and identity identified that players had to conform to dominant 'white' footballing standards. She concludes:

all interviewees use coping mechanisms in order to enable them to enter and stay involved in the women's game ... ranging from outright denial of racism, emphasising sexism over racism, de-prioritising the significance of 'race' and racist jokes, to reducing racism to the acts of ignorant individuals, and finally learning to rise above racist abuse ... the sad conclusion to this paper is that British-Asian football female players interviewed for this study are forced to 'sink or swim': if they do not learn to cope with racism their participation is hindered, and if they continue to participate their enjoyment is hampered by on-going discrimination (p84)

While Ahmad (2011) investigated how participants' identities were shaped and reinforced through playing for the British Muslim Women's Football Team. She identified their experiences were influenced through an interlocking relationship between ethnicity, gender, religion and societal expectations. Participation in football opened up life choices and religious freedoms but her research also highlighted the subtle inequalities and discrimination which were also encountered, for instance constantly having to negotiate their religious identities in debates such as whether to remove the hijab while playing.

This recent research emphasis on the impact of race on experiences of women's football is not mirrored in terms of social class, an area which is underdeveloped within literature, especially in relation to the situation in England (Scruton, Caudwell and Holland 2005). Although beyond the scope of this study incorporating class into discussions of gender inequality within football could provide valuable insights as Acker (2000) reminds us "'regimes of inequality' are constituted through ordinary organizing processes in which race,



class, gender, and other inequalities are mutually reproduced" (p192). Indeed, Caudwell (2004) makes reference to the influence of class within her study of gender, sexuality and power in terms of women footballers playing in English regional leagues. Although not the main focus of her research she identifies that "class is a social factor that emerges as significant in the ways in which women experience access to football" (p136). Henry and Comeaux's (1999) study of co-ed soccer in America suggests that class is central to the position of soccer in the country. They identify that the sport was embraced by "the middle class as opposition to [American] football and basketball dominated by blacks and the working class" (p 278). Soccer's middle class status contributed to it being seen as an acceptable sport for females which can partially explain the large number of participants in women's soccer in America. Knoppers and Anthonissen (2003) also place class as central to the experience of women's football in America and the Netherlands.

Research into women's football provides valuable insights into how individual experiences are influenced by race, hegemonic masculinity, notions of femininity and sexuality. Less research, though, has focussed on the organisations that control football and the conditions under which women are allowed into the sports elite structure. Few questions are asked about whether women's increased participation in football provides an important challenge to dominant organisational discourses or the way football is defined, legitimised and controlled. This gap in research focus is identified by a respondent in Caudwell's (2003, p373) study into women's football, the sexed body, gender, and sexuality, who states:

The FA are not interested and their investment in women's football is just for show. I also think that these kinds of problems are much more important for academic study than whether women football players live up to pathetic stereotypes of working class, lesbians who drink beer and smoke tabs. Who cares about those issues—the football is important, not our class or sexuality

Focus on the elite level of the game has been minimal, not aided by the fact that the highest level of the women's game has traditionally been amateur in nature and has had low visibility and status. The FA WSL has sought to address these factors and this study, therefore, provides an ideal opportunity to undertake research to address this gap.

### 4.3 Gender in sport organisations

Little theoretical consideration is given in research to the impact of organisations on the development of women's football. There has, though, been a wealth of studies that have investigated the role gender plays within the structure, ethos and decision making in organisations in general (Alvesson and Deetz 2000) and sports organisations in particular (Cunningham and Sagas 2008). Organisations are seen as central to the perpetuation of gender inequalities. As Acker (2006, p441-442) states:

all organizations have inequality regimes, defined as loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations. The ubiquity of inequality is obvious: Managers, executives, leaders, and department heads have much more power and higher pay than secretaries, production workers, students, or even professors. Even organizations that have explicit egalitarian goals develop inequality regimes over time

It is acknowledged that changes have taken place within organisations and their cultures since the influential work of Kanter (1977) and Acker (1992) which first highlighted gender inequalities in this area. For instance, paid employment has become a much more central feature of women's lives (Tinklin et al. 2005, Alvesson and Billing 2009). However, more recent research questions whether these changes have fundamentally altered the gender balance and power structures of organisations. As Benschop and Doorewaard's (2012, p228) review of research in the area since 1990 concludes "gender inequalities remain a persistent feature of organisations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century".

Kelan (2010) proposes that fundamental change has not been achieved because workplaces are still often constructed as gender neutral, even in the face of evidence to the contrary. This is often coupled with gender denial and stereotypical attitudes relating to the supposed natural basis of gender divisions. These factors suppress discussion and analysis of unequal structures in organisations (Ainsworth, Knox and O'Flynn 2010). Kelan (2009, p198-199) concludes that "gender inequalities continue to exist but were masked by a strong rhetoric of gender equality ... There is a feeling that gender has had its moment and that liberatory discourses and actions are no longer needed as gender equality has supposedly been achieved". Consequently, there is no

requirement to place any emphasis on the issue. In such an environment the under representation of women in organisations, especially in higher positions, is left unchallenged which ultimately may have consequences for the decisions organisations make, for example the ability for them to be representative and inclusive (Demaier and Adams 2009, Broadbridge and Kerfoot 2010).

There is a growing amount of literature that identifies this trend in sports organisations, including Cunningham and Sagas (2008) and Wicker, Breuer and von Hanau's (2012). The latter study surveyed over 13,000 voluntary sport associations in Germany to investigate gender equality and its impact on organisational performance, in terms of internal elements such as financial stability and the recruitment and retention of members, coaches and volunteers. The study also examined external performance criteria such as addressing demographic changes in society, including the provision of services to an ageing and increasingly ethnically diverse population. It identified that gender inequalities existed amongst both members of clubs and at board level which lead to negative effects on these performance measures and that "both the share of women on the board and among members was found to have a significant impact on the severity of organisational problems" (p112).

More qualitatively framed research by Shaw and Penney (2003) involved interviews with 35 men and women who worked within three NGBs in England. They investigated the organisations' development and implementation of gender equity policies and identified differences between 'policy' and 'practice', in that most participants believed that their organisation was already equitable and therefore gender equity policies were unnecessary. Additionally, an increased focus on gender equity within the three organisations was perceived as being related to funding promises, while often their implementation was identified as being a chore. Gender equity, therefore, received limited focus within the organisations being studied meaning "individuals within organisations are unlikely to critique the processes by which gender equity policies are created in order to develop more effective, critical policies" (p98).

Hoeber (2007) reiterated these dynamics in her study in which administrators, coaches and athletes within the basketball, ice hockey, rugby and swimming

programmes in a Canadian university athletic department were interviewed. The organisation was chosen as gender inequalities existed even though equity was an espoused departmental value. For example the universities men's ice hockey team had a full-time coach, a private locker room and co-ordinated uniforms, whereas the women's team had a part-time coach, mismatched uniforms and had to change in public locker rooms. Hoeber identified that gender inequality was usually rationalised or its existence denied and that prevailing narratives within the department positioned the existing gender situation as common sense meaning there was no requirement to address the issue in any fundamental way. In agreement with liberal approaches to equality, as discussed in Chapter Three, participants were able to argue that their programmes contained equal numbers of male and female athletes, therefore, equality was achieved. As Hoeber concludes:

By rationalizing inequities or denying that they existed, these arguments acted to protect the status quo in which gender equity was understood from a liberal feminist perspective. Individuals expected equal numbers of teams for men and women, which there were, but did not expect equality to extend to other organisational practices, like resource allocation ... This study illustrates that the creation of knowledge was powerful in that it created a hegemonic system in which certain ideas were positioned as common sense and other ideas were ignored" (p275)

In agreement with Foucault's (1972) ideas of power, truth and discourse, which were discussed in Chapter Two, those in power within the athletic department were able to decide how gender inequality was framed meaning that alternative views, for example those relating to gender equality being related to fairness, equal resources and a need to address historically gendered structures, were ignored. These issues of power and the definition of inequality within organisations are considered throughout this study in terms of the introduction of the FA WSL. Such ideas were further corroborated in Shaw and Allen's (2009) study of the experiences of gender within two Regional Sports Organisations (RSO's) in New Zealand. Through interviews with females who were employed as high performance coaches and their managers the research identified that gender neutrality was seen as a central organisational principle, which meant existing inequalities were allowed to continue. They conclude that the organisations involved in the research avoided "questions regarding gender by attempting to promote a gender neutral view ... [favouring] a discourse of

ostensible gender neutrality in which questions of gender relations within sport organisations are often dismissed or ignored" (p244).

These interpretations were specifically identified in Lusted's (2014) study into attempts by UK NGBs to address inequalities. In keeping with earlier research into race equality initiatives by Spracklen, Hylton, and Long (2006), he identifies problems relating to general equality approaches within UK sports organisations:

do we actually need equality policies in sport? This may appear as an obvious question: we know that sport continues to be socially stratified and reflects the social inequalities of its wider context and yet there is evidence to suggest that significant scepticism exists within sport about the need for these types of policies, even within the governing bodies often charged with designing and implementing them (p86)

His research more specifically addressed the FA's approach to equality and the implementation of its 'Ethics and Sports Equality Strategy' (FA 2002) into the local, grassroots game between 2004 and 2008. Lusted (2014) highlighted the contradictory position held by those within the organisation who stated they were committed to addressing equality, in terms of discrimination, while also voicing scepticism about the need for any new strategy to be introduced. He identifies that "in short, many felt that their sport, and their own organisation, was already equal, open, fair, non-discriminatory and accessible to all; a formal policy to promote equality was, therefore, unnecessary" (p86). Those within the FA were able to deny any problems within their organisation, inequalities in effect did not exist. The ability of organisations to underemphasise equality issues is furthered by recent trends whereby all forms of discrimination are discussed together and one size fits all approaches are adopted (Hovden 2012). Verloo's (2006, p223) study of European Union equality policy identified this trend and the resultant consequences:

a 'one size fits all' approach to multiple discrimination is based on an incorrect assumption of sameness or equivalence of the social categories connected to inequalities and of the mechanisms and processes that constitute them. Focusing on similarities ignores the differentiated character and dynamics of inequalities

The relevance of such all-embracing narratives to the FA and the FA WSL is addressed within this study.

Researchers have identified how sport's traditional and powerful discourses allow gendered inequalities to be seen as natural, allowing ideas to be taken for granted and be seen as beyond reproach (Markula and Pringle 2006). As Hovden (2012, p297) conclude:

even though most sport leaders today agree on gender equity as an important policy issue, we still face a policy making environment in which male dominance as a power structure mostly remains silenced. Feminist studies point out that gendered power is an essential component in all forms of organisational practice and needs to be framed and visualised when equality policies are discussed

Gendered power means specific ideas have become accepted as unquestionable truths and are allowed to continue free from challenge and analysis. In this sense gendered inequalities within organisations continue to exist even in the face of copious evidence of their prevalence and consequences. The process whereby specific ideas become accepted as unquestionable truths is all the more powerful in many sports organisations as they are dominated by men (Cunningham and Sagas 2008). This is also true within football as it is one of the foremost sites of male dominance in England (Caudwell 2007, 2009).

Research into sport in general and football in particular has provided significant insights into the role of gender, sexuality and hegemonic masculinity, while a range of authors have assisted an analysis of the numerous ways gender equality is denied, ignored or espoused as being complete. There has though been negligible research into elite English women's football or the FA as an organisation. As a result this study will provide an original critical qualitative examination that will address this gap in the literature. The introduction of the first semi-professional women's football league in England provides a unique opportunity to situate and investigate contemporary discourses relating to football. The introduction of the FA WSL cannot simply be taken as evidence that women are now accepted in to the football mainstream. Assuming the introduction of a new League automatically evidences an acceptance of the women's game into dominant football narratives would be adopting a liberal approach. As a result this research will involve a critical examination of the introduction of the FA WSL, including an analysis of the FA discourses which underpinned its introduction, coupled with an exploration of whether the new

League addressed the inequalities experienced by women's elite football. The way this was achieved will be articulated in the following methodology chapter.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **Methodology**

The approaches taken to research are fundamentally based within the researchers own views about the nature of knowledge and knowing. Central to such debates are ideas about how the social world can be conceived and interpreted. Ontology relates to theories about what exists, while epistemology refers to questions relating to how knowledge can become known. These debates are central to research, both in terms of the methodological approach taken and the claims that can be made as a result. It is imperative that a researcher is explicit about their personal approach, therefore, the following chapter articulates the ontological, epistemological and methodological standpoints which provide the basis for this study into elite women's football.

#### **5.1 Ontology and epistemology**

Sociological research is framed within philosophical debates about the nature of knowledge and the social world. Ontological, epistemological and methodological discussions are central to how studies are conceived, undertaken and the claims that can be made. As a result, it is imperative such issues are addressed and articulated however difficult they are to conceptualise.

Mason (2002, p14) states that ontological discussion about the nature of reality:

can seem like a difficult concept precisely because the nature and essence of social things seem so fundamental and obvious that it can be hard to see what there is to conceptualise ... It is only once it is recognised that alternative ontological perspectives might tell different stories that a researcher can begin to see their own ontological view of the social world as a position which should be established and understood rather than as an obvious and universal truth which can be taken for granted

This is prevalent within this study as football and the position of females playing the game are surrounded by ideas so fundamentally embedded in societal thinking they are often conceived as common sense. Previous research on football has produced very fixed and binary explanations of what football is, who should be involved, what it stands for and how it should be experienced (Dunning 1999, Giulianotti 2002). Football is often seen in terms of what Fay (1996, p200) identifies as a reality that "exists 'in itself' independently of the



mind and that this reality is knowable as such". Sweeping generalisations are produced by those who have vested interests in perpetuating myth's such as what football is or should be, what real, authentic supporters are (Giulianotti 2002) or that to a great extent it defines masculinity (Whannel 2008). This is contrary to the argument that the majority of people do not play or watch the game and those who do experience it in a variety of ways which changes over time (Caudwell 2012).

A researcher's position regarding whether there is an objective reality to observe or merely different interpretations and experiences fundamentally affects research (Harding 2002). Without acknowledging, reflecting and articulating the centrality of such philosophical considerations research projects may be misinformed and misguided. Before articulating the processes which underpinned this study a word of caution is offered. The process of identifying and aligning to a particular ontological and epistemological position was not trivial, simple nor static. Having acknowledged the centrality of such issues and the necessity to engage with the debate it proved a very challenging process which was on-going throughout this research. Ideas were contemplated, constructed and reconstructed at all stages and it soon became evident it was much easier to identify which paradigms did not appeal. Aligning to a specific philosophical concept proved much harder.

The powerful traditional natural science paradigm provided few pointers to help articulate my vision of society and research. The positivist epistemology inherent in the natural sciences accepts the realist ontological perspective of an independently existing reality. In this sense there is a truth about which researchers can gain knowledge. Facts actually exist so epistemologically, in order to identify reality, it is imperative to observe a phenomenon neutrally. The researcher must, consequently, take a detached, disinterested approach to the object under study. As Delanty and Strydom (2003, p14) identify, such ideas are based on "the separation of the subject and the object of knowledge, the purely theoretical attitude of the uninvolved observer is adopted so that the focus is exclusively on the object." As part of such a positivist ontological and epistemology approach knowledge about the introduction of the FA WSL could only be gained through detached observation.

However, such a realist ontological idea seemed outdated and flawed in relation to this study. Human behaviour is unpredictable, context specific and subjective rather than fixed, objective and stable. Individuals seek to understand and bring order to the world. They create different subjective realities and meanings which are influenced by social, political and cultural factors. The social world is not solely a collection of social laws waiting to be discovered. It is imperative, therefore, that researchers aim to understand these subjective positions. As McNeill and Chapman (2005, p184) indicated "the focus of sociological research should be the interpretations or meanings that people bring to the social interactions that make up society ... [which requires] an adoption of research methods that help reveal the meanings that lie behind every day social action." The FA WSL was introduced and developed in line with numerous social, economic and cultural factors which changed during the period of research. Its nature is constantly constructed and reconstructed by those involved. Consequently, basing this research on realist ontological ideas of reality seemed inappropriate.

Central to non-positivist epistemological approaches to research is the centrality of the subjective position of all those involved, including the researcher. Researchers are part of the process of creating multiple realities so it is not possible to maintain a distance in research (Creswell 2013). There is a responsibility on the researcher to reflect on their research and acknowledge the ways in which their interpretations influence the process. In traditional philosophical terms a broadly relativist ontological and non-positivist epistemological position seemed to provide the best underpinning to this study. It soon became obvious that these philosophical preferences created a vision of society and research that was much more fluid and harder to compartmentalise than traditional categories indicated.

Powerful research traditions and paradigms have laid down very distinct and opposing positions in terms of ontology, epistemology and methodology to which researchers are required to adhere. Fitting into these dichotomies is not always straightforward, possible or even desirable. The need to order the world and align ourselves with particular perspectives appeared to relate to a view of the world promoted by the natural sciences. The dominance of scientific

paradigms means it is virtually impossible to see the world in any other terms, even for a researcher committed to moving beyond such conceptions. The order we give to the world is just a reflection of certain discourses becoming so powerful that they become seen as the truth and other ways of seeing are automatically rejected (Foucault 1972). Indeed, as Blackshaw (2003, p24) states "our justification for questions surrounding the 'knowledge' about 'doing' research has to be couched in terms of a rational scientific argument that is, around issues of epistemology, ontology ... It would seem that 'good' researchers must justify their methodologies in terms of the strict rules of foundational philosophical reason".

It is undeniable that ontological and epistemological philosophical debates can help a researcher conceptualise their research. The implications of such discussions have consequences for the overall methodology, the actual methods used and the claims that result. Engaging with such philosophical discussions merely elucidated to me that there is no definitive way to study the world, no specific ontological or epistemological standpoint which leads to better understandings. As Natoli (1997, p181) states there is "no way to prove that what we say about the world or ourselves corresponds to what the world is or we are". All that exists is multiple discourses that tell different stories. Maybe what is important is the process of reflecting and articulating the debate to the reader and acknowledging the ambiguity inherent within it, as a result providing a basis on which people can judge the research.

This study does not aim to provide a definitive account of what the FA WSL is. In ontological terms the FA WSL is not a phenomenon waiting to be discovered, it has not come into being as a neutral entity. It has been created by people and through an organisational structure which are steeped in personal, political, social, cultural and historical norms, values and experiences. It was introduced for multiple reasons and means different things to different people. The same is true for women's football as a whole. Epistemologically, knowledge about it cannot simply be gained by looking in a detached manner at the form it takes. All that can be accessed are different stories, which the researcher will interpret and add to, within her own frame of reference. The resultant thesis will then be a reflective and subjective account of women's football in a specific time and

place. It makes no claim to be a definitive account and leaves itself open to critical analysis. However, research into and debate about elite women's football and the organisation that controls the game as a whole is currently minimal. This research will hopefully start to open up discussions and interest within the research community.

## **5.2 Theoretical underpinnings**

No particular theoretical paradigm had been identified at the start of the research. Engaging with philosophical debates led to a rejection of paradigms based on the natural sciences which would necessitate entering the study with a particular theory to test. Instead it clarified the need to base research on a view of society as contingent, subjective and fluid. Some more contemporary techniques, including post-modern approaches, demand that researchers move away from scientific notions and embrace the idea of multiple realities. Although this research is not a post-modern account it does draw on its rejection of meta narratives and universal reasoning (Clayton 2013). Indeed as Ritzer (2011, p72) identifies such theories "reject the kind of grand narratives that characterise much of classical sociological theory". In such approaches ways of knowing are only one of many and do not allow a more 'authentic' understanding of society, all accounts are equally relevant (Johnson and Duberley 2000). Following the practices, processes and procedures of many dominant discourses merely perpetuates the myth that they are more 'truthful'. What is needed are approaches which move away from studying the social as concrete to approaches that envision a more fragmented, uncertain and chaotic world that cannot simply be observed and described.

As a broad framework such contemporary thinking provided valuable insights to assist this research, it was, though, from critical social science and feminism that I obtained my theoretical research framework. As the study developed and the gendered nature of football and its organisation became apparent the research increasingly became rooted in a critical sociological paradigm. It became evident that in agreement with Silk and Andrews (2011, p11) the research was:

concerned with issues of power and injustice and the ways the economic, class, race, gender, ideologies, discourses ... and other

social institutions and cultural dynamics interact to create an unjust social system ... [aiming] to change the current configurations of power and the allocation of resources in society and to push for politically motivated research that has an explicit concern with ending inequality

As the research progressed a more questioning, political and partisan approach to the subject developed than was originally conceived and meant an apolitical, neutral research interest became untenable (Carrington 2007, Harvey, Horne and Safai 2009).

Taking a lead from Sugden and Tomlinson (2002, p11) the research increasingly embraced critical sociology which:

in its simplest sense to be critical is to be sceptical ... that is never to take things at face value. For instance seek out official statistics but expect them to be unreliable, in some cases even fraudulent, go in search of evidence that contradicts official wisdom. In other words question authority. It is the main task of the sociologist to get under the skin of daily life and to understand what passes as 'routine' in the context of broader issues of power, control and resistance to domination

The research increasingly aimed to reveal differences between the official version of the FA WSL and the reality for those within the game. As Bourdieu (1998, p145) reminds us "among the tasks of the politics of morality is to work incessantly towards unveiling hidden differences between official theory and actual progress, between the limelight and the backrooms of political life".

Researchers have identified that such a critical theoretical approach is crucial when studying sports organisations like the FA, for example Palmer's (2000) analysis of the Tour de France and Jennings' (2011) evaluation of the IOC and FIFA. Tomlinson's (2014a) study of FIFA highlights the power sport organisations have to control agendas and portray a public identity that is contrary to the reality. In terms of FIFA the research identified that the organisation was defined by its impenetrability, self-governing structures and closed voting systems. This allowed those individuals governing football at a global level to decide who was involved in decision making and as result dictate which narratives proliferated. This situation enabled them to govern in ways that lead to their own personal gain. As Tomlinson concludes "the gap between the stated goals of the organisation, and the practices of its leadership and core administration in particular, is so entrenched that ... [FIFAs] mission statement

is little more than puffed up rhetoric and hyperbole" (p11). Research has shown that the power of those involved in FIFA to control narratives and exclude alternative discourses has allowed the organisation to remain relatively unchanged over a long period (Yallop 1999, Sugden and Tomlinson 2005, Pielke 2013).

In addition, Pope's (2014) study of the 2012 London Olympics identified that the power of sports governing bodies extends further than merely controlling its own organisation and sport. Their ability to decide the destination of major sports events is compounded by other organisations vested interest in making them a success, for instance host nations national government and the media. This means the narratives propagated by sport governing bodies are perpetuated by other organisations allowing existing power dynamics to prevail. It is imperative then that research actively seeks out and exposes these subtleties and highlights any discrepancies between prevailing definitions and the actual sporting experiences of those involved. As Jennings (2011, p387-388) concludes "we find a gap between the polished face and the sordid reality of a commercial enterprise, a government institution, a global sports bodies ... [this research] urges sport academics to take a much more critical approach to the task of researching and investigating power relations in the world of sport".

In addition to such a critical approach, feminist theorising also became central in terms of this research into the FA WSL. Feminism had been completely absent from my academic career and it had not been envisioned that it would play such a great part in this thesis. It may seem anomalous to the reader that a woman undertaking a study on football played by women would not have considered feminist theorising from the outset. This, though, is more a reflection of my experiences, prejudices and preferences or as Bourdieu (1990) conceptualises, my 'habitus'. His theory identified we are all a product of socialised norms and tendencies that guide behaviour and thinking (McNay 1999, Swartz 2002). In undertaking the research I primarily envisioned it as a study of football, the fact it was played by women seemed secondary. I anticipated analysis to engage solely with theories relating to issues such as commercialisation, commodification and spectacularisation. Ideas which had been gleaned from

my interest in supporting the male game, coupled with my reading of literature predominantly written by men about male sport (Hargreaves 2000).

As I engaged with the literature and learned more about the FA WSL and women's football in general, it became obvious that a critical feminist perspective could provide valuable insights, one which was in keeping with my developing philosophical affinities. As Brooks and Hesser-Biber (2007, p7) identifies, feminist:

scholars and researchers' illuminations of women's experiences disrupted the positivist claim to universal knowledge, and the so-called objective methodologies that accompanied and justified that claim. Indeed, feminists exposed the dominance of the positivist paradigm as stemming not from its objectivity or its universality, but from its privileged location within a historical, material, and social set of patriarchal power relations. In short, despite all claims to the contrary, knowledge building was never value-free, social reality was not static and positivism or social scientific inquiry in general did not exist outside of the social world

To many feminists objectivity is unattainable, therefore, research should be honest and explicit about the claims that it can make. Using gender as an analytical tool may appear to be engaging with objectivity as in common conceptions it has a definite form and specific consequences. However, gender is not a static or easily definable category; it is socially and culturally constructed, holding different meanings for different people (Lorber 1994). This leads to different consequences in different social spheres and different significances at different times in people's lives (Butler 2004). Gender also interacts with other signifiers such as class, ethnicity and sexuality and cannot be seen in isolation.

Gender's multiple representations create complex issues when using it as an overarching research tool as it is impossible to isolate gendered understandings in people's experiences, all female and all male experiences and understandings of football are not the same. The FA WSL has different meanings for all those involved regardless of gender. As the research progressed, though, I became increasingly aware that within football gender is a central and powerful organising factor. It is apparent in its governance, organisation and character due to historical, political and social reasons. A feminist approach allowed the gendered reality of football in England to be

considered, a method adopted in an insightful way by Welford (2011), as discussed in the Chapter Four. In keeping with Ramazanaglu and Holland (2000, p207):

effective political strategies for social transformation of gender relations require knowledge of what is to be transformed. Despite current theoretical complexity and challenges to epistemology, feminists can still justify their theories of knowledge and so make claims for feminist knowledge of people's lives ... Feminists cannot know for sure what gender is, or what gendered lives are like, just because they see the social world through feminist theory. However political expediency demands that as feminists we go on investigating and accounting for people's gendered social existence

The complexity of using gender as an evaluation tool was acknowledged, as was the problem of viewing it in isolation and more central than other social stratifications. However, a critical study into the first attempts to introduce a women's semi-professional elite league into the gendered sport of football seemed to demand a feminist approach. I did not adopt a feminist critique because I felt as a woman I would have more insight to the FA WSL. Instead it allowed me to further explore insights which were developing during the research process. As Ramazanaglu and Holland (2002, p147) state "the point of doing feminist social research is not to score points for political correctness or to attain methodological purity, but to give insights into gendered social existence that otherwise would not exist".

Feminist research is a powerful tool in analysing the subjectivities inherent in gender and especially in sport. As Roth and Bascow (2004, p247) state "sports offer a unique venue for feminist theorising, as gender issues are both replicated and magnified in it ... [sport] continues to conform to and bolster male dominance." The use of gender as an analytical tool, though, is not straightforward. Feminism encompasses a multitude of strands with differing and overlapping philosophical underpinnings (Hargreaves 2004); liberal, radical, second wave, third wave, colonial and postfeminist to name but a few (McRobbie 2009, Caudwell 2011b). Identifying the most appropriate in terms of meeting philosophical tendencies and practical research issues proved challenging.



As a gendered activity the vision of women as subordinate in sporting activity can cause problems for feminists by assigning an inevitable powerlessness to women's position (Cox and Thompson 2000). This seemed counterproductive and not in keeping with visions for this research. However, further feminist reading provided solutions to such dilemmas. Many forms of feminism, including post-feminist theorists, identify the powerful place of agency in women's experiences of sport. As Hargreaves (2004, p194) identifies:

young women are forging new possibilities for themselves in sport ... different sporting femininities are being regularly and spontaneously produced, reproduced and changed. Different groups of women ... are redefining for themselves ways in which the female body is used and celebrated ... not in ways that are assimilated to the male dominated system or are in opposition to male defined practices, but on their own terms 'for themselves' ... a recognition of agency and the self

Heywood and Dworkin (2003, p45) also highlight that "women nationwide are participating in classes like kick boxing, spinning, rock climbing, surfing relegating to the dustbin mythologies of the weaker sex".

Further feminist research, including Birrell and Richter's (1994) study of softball and Cronan and Scott's (2008) study of the triathlon, identified how sport can provide positive illustrations of the ways women are defined, redefined and empowered through participation. This provided an encouraging vision of the uses of feminism and allowed me to further reconcile its use in my research. My on-going immersion into the field of elite women's football, though, provided less evidence of the applicability of such agency based theorising. The vision of women transcending dominant male definitions and being empowered through their interactions with sport held little resonance in the women's football I was encountering. It was not a case of denying that such feminist illustrations provide vital insights into the sports they were studying. They did, though, seem less fundamental to my attempts to articulate insights surrounding the FA WSL and its impact. Having identified a vibrant branch of feminism it was challenging not to be able to explore the ideas further in the field. However, deliberating on and recognising this disparity provided fundamental insights. It highlighted the multiple different positions that can exist for women, and people in general, when interacting with sport. It added to a developing conviction that it is impossible to research all fields in the same way or use grand narratives to

explain a flexible and fractured social world. Philosophically my belief in subjectivity and fluidity was further reinforced.

Another issue which arose was a tendency in some feminist theorising to individualise women's experiences (Kelan 2009). This inclination renders unnecessary any attempts to position the role of women in historical, political or structural terms. Some even state that equality has been achieved and feminism is now irrelevant (Lumby 2011). As Genz (2006, p336) identifies some, including post feminists, have moved away from collectively and political action, but "abandoning the structural analysis of patriarchal power ... masks larger factors that continue to oppress many women's lives and re-inscribes their marginality by undercutting the possible strategic weight of politicised feminist collectives." Located within these debates were indications as to why some feminist illustrations seem unconnected to women's football. By emphasising that women are now liberated agents, defining their own futures, a situation develops where there is no longer emphasis on those who may not fit into this analysis (Carter and McLaughlin 2011).

Pelak (2005, p67) identifies this trend within her football research when she states "current trends in feminist sport studies ... that focuses on individuals may de-emphasis critical structural differences and perpetuate the myth of an even playing field within the ... game of football". Any attempts to ignore the political, social and structural history that has allowed men to define, control and organise football would be injudicious. This research does not aim to imply all men involved in football have a vested interest in oppressing women and controlling their participation in the game. It would be incorrect to assert men or women act as a single category with a single voice. The research, though, would not silence any underlying structures, including gender, which played a part in the FA WSL's conception, development and any resulting consequences.

### **5.3 Locating myself within the research**

Such theoretical discussions had critical consequences for the overall research framework adopted. Frisby (2005, p2) states "the paradigms we operate from as researchers, whether it be positivism, pragmatism, interpretivism, critical social science, post modernism, or a combination of paradigms, shape the questions

that we ask, the methods that we use and the degree to which our findings will have an impact on society". Embracing the multiplicity inherent in the social world necessitated the adoption of a qualitative methodological approach. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011, p8) state this:

implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researcher's emphasise the value laden nature of inquiry. They seek questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning

The focus is on subjectivity rather than objectivity, the emphasis is on interpretation rather than quantification and the research is fluid. Ideas and theories develop within the process and are constantly reframed depending on understandings gained. Participants are seen not simply as units of data from which to extract vital pieces of information to obtain the truth but as people involved in making meaning of the society in which they live. The people working within women's football exist within and have to negotiate continuing gendered discourses in society and its controlling organisations. The multiple ways these are reconciled were addressed in this research.

The importance of interpretation and individual beliefs applies as much to the researcher as to others involved in the research process. As Kleinman (2007, p1) states researchers "are never blank slates, our views of the world are always shaped by our identities, group memberships and values, we have to know ourselves, including our expectations for and feelings about the people we're studying. We are the 'instruments' of research." This centrality could render the research as nothing more than the researchers own view. Consequently, it is vital that researchers, especially working within a feminist perspective, are honest and open about their personal position. The role of reflexivity is, therefore, vital to allow research to capture a version of reality that is as loyal as possible to the subjectivities of the individuals involved. As Holliday (2000, p506) identifies, reflexivity "aims to acknowledge the partiality of the researcher and thus the distance between representation and 'reality' in the researcher's work".

In order to research the FA WSL and its consequences for women's football it was essential for me to take an honest and reflexive approach. It required a commitment to reflect on my own personal experiences, feelings and prejudices at all points in the research. Before commencing the project I had limited experience of elite women's football. I had, though, from an early age been a passionate football fan and a devoted follower of my local men's team, Sheffield Wednesday Football Club. My father, an ardent Arsenal fan, was eager to introduce his children to the game. In 1975, at 4 years old, my dad took me and my oldest brother to run around the Tivoli end of Millmoor, the home of Rotherham United, the closest professional team to our home at the time. A move to Sheffield a year later and regular family trips to Hillsborough, the home of Sheffield Wednesday, was the start of the obsession. By 7 years old my pleading had worked and I was bought a season ticket to attend every home game. By my teenage years a missed home or away match was an unusual experience, replica kits were bought on the day of release and programmes were pored over carefully then filed away.

Football was quite honestly my life and match day my favourite time of the week. Football was exciting, therapeutic and cathartic, it gave me a sense of belonging, joy and identity (Ben-Porat 2000). As Whannel (2008, p19) states, as if speaking about my own football watching experiences, "there was a sense of spectacle, the sheer noise and density of the crowd, the quest for excitement, the experience of being in a world apart, the emotional intensity and the communality." I belonged, I could shout and sing and forget everything else going on in my non-football world. I had 20,000 other people to identify with, to share the disappointments and the joy. Football to me was about winning, rivalry, passion and partisan involvement (Armstrong and Young 2000).

Playing was never part of my football world. As I grew up in the 1970s and 1980s there were few opportunities for a girl to play organised football. There is no memory that this caused me any concern. I was stopped from playing the game I loved but I didn't mind, I could watch and that was enough for me. Football as a participation sport for women was, therefore, never part of my experience, all the football I watched involved men's teams. I had caught glimpses of women playing the game in the 1990s and early 2000s when

Channel 4 provided coverage. I was never really interested as in my opinion the standard was poor, the goalkeepers were dodgy and supporting Sheffield Wednesday Football Club took up enough of my time. It was only on returning to university, at 35 years old, that my interest in football for women was ignited. I was determined to join the football club, learn how to play and increase my social circle. A lot of my fellow members had played since they were young so the standard and commitment was higher than expected. Football was not the main focus for a large proportion of members and it acted more as a social club than a sports society. My football experiences, then, primarily revolved around watching Sheffield Wednesday Football Club, being dismissive of the standard of the elite women's game and only recently becoming personally involved in the women's game.

This study into women's football was conceived out of this biography. As May (2001, p33) identifies "interests have guided our decisions before the research itself is conducted. It cannot be maintained that research is a neutral recording instrument." My interest in football was a large part of the reason for undertaking this thesis. It meant I already had established ideas about what football represents. Reflection helped me become aware of the prejudices and preconceptions my experiences had engendered. As a female, football enthusiast committed to a truly reflexive approach to the field it seemed conceivable and achievable to undertake research that illuminated the experiences of those involved in women's football. From the onset there was a naïve belief that, as a female and a devotee of football, I was an insider, which would give me an advantage in the field (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). However, I soon found that as Fay (1996, p17) identifies "being one is neither sufficient nor a necessary condition of knowing one." Reflection identified a growing appreciation and interest in the field but also an unfamiliarity with what was being observed. Constant reflection and personal scrutiny identified this was due to the nature of my experience's in the field.

Football to me was about noise, atmosphere, communal experience and belonging (Armstrong and Young 2000). I am what Giulianotti (2002) identifies as a 'traditional hot spectator/supporter', with a long term personal emotional investment in one specific club. Football to me is partisan, noisy and intense

and involves a deep connection to the club that is followed. My experiences during observations were different, the game was the same but its organisation and form were not. I was an insider in the sense that my familiarity with the game meant I understood the rules, procedures and technicalities of the football world. My upbringing and past experience, though, meant I could make no claims to more fully access or understand the social world being studied. The reasons why I loved watching football and the organisation of the game I was familiar with were not replicated in the matches I attended. Increasingly I became aware that, unless reflected on, my previous experience and understanding may not be an advantage in accessing the field, on the contrary it may colour my interpretations and render the research less informative.

Research provided some resolution of such dilemmas by identifying that the insider and outsider dichotomy is often more complicated in reality (Griffith 1998). As Fay (1996, p26) states "being an insider or an outsider is not the key element here, but whether one has the requisite openness, sensitivity and acuity to grasp the significant activities, experiences and their expressions." My commitment and enthusiasm to undertake an honest and insightful study, both in terms of approaching the field and my own personal journey, were not in question. Philosophical and theoretical discussions had already identified that subjectivity was central to society; it could not and should not be avoided. Research should embrace and articulate researcher's partiality to enable the reader to more fully understand the interpretations being made. As Flick (2009, p16) identifies "the subjectivity of the researcher ... becomes part of the research process. Researcher's reflection on their actions and observations ... their impressions, irritations, feelings and so on, become data in their own right."

Articulating and reflecting on a researcher's partiality allows qualitative methodologies to move beyond traditional debates about how research can be judged. As no objective reality exists established criteria used to ascertain the relevance of research are of little importance to such studies (Wolcott 2005). Questions of validity, reliability and generalisability are borne out of realist and positivistic conceptions about the centrality of objectivity and the ability of research to provide true accounts of the phenomena being researched (Lewis 2009). A search for them in this research was fruitless as they are extraneous to

qualitative methodologies, couched in relativist beliefs which espouse the centrality of subjectivity and interpretation (Silk, Bush and Andrews 2010). In fact such evaluation criterion actually contradicts the philosophical underpinnings of such research. The aim of qualitative research paradigms is not to enact concrete criteria to evaluate research but to conceptualise and articulate the researcher's subjectivities which have framed and influenced the research. By communicating the factors which influenced the researcher's interpretations, it enables the reader to more fully understand the interpretations being made and allows and encourages discussions of the research's inferences.

## **5.4 Methods**

### **5.4.1 Observations**

The methodological approach to this study, coupled with practical and academic concerns, demanded that I became familiar with the field. The world of elite women's football is virtually invisible in the media, practically absent from academic literature and the newness of the FA WSL meant the area of study was virtually unknown. In such an unfamiliar field observation at games was crucial, especially in the initial stages. The research was founded on a commitment to experience and explore the FA WSL at first hand, thus avoiding the pitfall identified by Tagsold (2010, p868) whereby "too often social researchers on football leave themselves open to the accusation of armchair theorising". Observation of fixtures provided an understanding of the position, organisation and nature of the League. Over a three year period thirty nine games were attended (see Table 1).

The choice of matches ensured all the home grounds of the original eight FA WSL teams were visited. Some stadiums, though, were attended more frequently than others partly due to financial considerations. However, more limiting were issues around accessing grounds through public transport, especially with fixtures predominantly being on Sunday afternoons or mid-week evenings. The location of the grounds caused problems during the research process but also had implications for the FA WSL itself, which will be explored further later.

**Table 1 - Matches Attended**

Date	Home Team	Away Team	Competition	Venue
<b>2011</b>				
13/03/11	Sheffield Wednesday Women	Bristol Academy Women	FA Cup 5 <sup>th</sup> Round	Don Valley Stadium, Sheffield
17/03/11	Everton Ladies	FCR 2001 Duisburg (Gm)	Champions League (CL) ¼ Final	Stobart Stadium, Widnes
24/03/11	Barnet Ladies	Nottingham Forest Ladies	FA WPL Cup Final	Adams Park, Wycombe
13/04/11	Chelsea Ladies	Arsenal Ladies	FA WSL	Imperial Fields, Morden
16/04/11	Arsenal Ladies	Olympique Lyonnais (Fr)	CL ½ Final	Meadow Park, Borehamwood
20/04/11	Everton Ladies	Doncaster Rovers Belles	FA WSL	Arriva Stadium, Crosby
21/04/11	Arsenal Ladies	Bristol Academy Women	FA WSL	Meadow Park
24/04/11	Doncaster Rovers Belles	Chelsea Ladies	FA WSL	Keepmoat Stadium, Doncaster
28/04/11	Arsenal Ladies	Birmingham City Ladies	FA WSL	Meadow Park
30/04/11	Lincoln Ladies	Everton Ladies	FA WSL	Ashby Avenue, Lincoln
04/05/11	Lincoln Ladies	Arsenal Ladies	FA WSL	Ashby Avenue
08/05/11	Everton Ladies	Bristol Academy Women	FA WSL	Arriva Stadium
12/05/11	Doncaster Rovers Belles	Everton Ladies	FA WSL	Keepmoat Stadium,
21/05/11	Arsenal Ladies	Bristol Academy Women	FA Cup Final	Ricoh Arena, Coventry
22/07/11	Bristol Academy Women	Lincoln Ladies	FA WSL	Stoke Gifford Stadium, Bristol
23/07/11	Birmingham City Ladies	Doncaster Rovers Belles	FA WSL	DCS Stadium, Stratford
31/07/11	Everton Ladies	Arsenal Ladies	FA WSL	Arriva Stadium
03/08/11	Liverpool Ladies	Doncaster Rovers Belles	FA WSL	Skelmersdale Stadium
18/08/11	Doncaster Rovers Belles	Lincoln Ladies	FA WSL	Keepmoat Stadium
28/08/11	Liverpool Ladies	Arsenal Ladies	FA WSL	Skelmersdale Stadium
25/09/11	Arsenal Ladies	Birmingham City Ladies	Continental Cup Final	Pirelli Stadium, Burton
<b>2012</b>				
11/03/12	Lincoln Ladies	Arsenal Ladies	FA Cup 5 <sup>th</sup> Round	Ashby Avenue
14/03/12	Arsenal Ladies	Gothenburg (Sw)	CL ¼ Final	Meadow Park
08/04/12	Arsenal Ladies	Everton Ladies	FA WSL	Meadow Park
09/04/12	Chelsea Ladies	Doncaster Rovers Belles	FA WSL	Wheatsheaf Park, Staines
15/04/12	Birmingham City Ladies	Bristol Academy Women	FA Cup ½ Final	Lamb Ground, Tamworth
26/04/12	Arsenal Ladies	Chelsea Ladies	FA WSL	Emirates Stadium, London
23/06/12	Doncaster Rovers Belles	Liverpool Ladies	FA WSL	Keepmoat Stadium
23/09/12	Doncaster Rovers Belles	Birmingham City Ladies	FA WSL	Keepmoat Stadium
<b>2013</b>				
20/03/13	Arsenal	ASD Torres (It)	CL ¼ Final	Meadow Park
07/04/13	England Women	Canada Women	International Friendly	New York Stadium, Rotherham
14/04/13	Arsenal Ladies	VFL Wolfsburg Ladies (Gm)	CL ½ Final	Meadow Park
20/04/13	Doncaster Rovers Belles	Chelsea Ladies	FA WSL	Keepmoat Stadium
28/04/13	Doncaster Rovers Belles	Chelsea Ladies	Continental Cup	Keepmoat Stadium
15/05/13	Everton Ladies	Birmingham City Ladies	FA WSL	Arriva Stadium
26/05/13	Arsenal Ladies	Bristol Academy Women	FA Cup Final	Keepmoat Stadium
06/06/13	Arsenal Ladies	Chelsea Ladies	FA WSL	Meadow Park
15/09/13	Doncaster Ladies	Bristol Academy Women	FA WSL	Keepmoat Stadium
29/09/13	Liverpool Ladies	Bristol Academy Women	FA WSL	Stobart Stadium



While at matches Gold (1969) provides an insight into the position taken. He identifies four different roles field researchers adopt; the complete participant, the complete observer, the participant as observer and the observer as participant. The latter two proved most relevant to my observations at FA WSL matches. The dynamic nature between these two categories is influenced partly by my existing knowledge and experience of football and my developing relationships with some of those attending matches. This allowed me at times to interact with those present at games, indicating at times I performed a participant as observer role. However, the observer role was more central overall and for most of the time I was an observer as participant, in the stand with a pen and notepad. Walsh (2012) indicates qualitative researchers often move between Gold's categories when undertaking observations. His category of 'marginal native' possibly proved a more accurate description of my role. As Walsh identifies, "marginality is a poise between a strangeness that avoids over rapport and a familiarity that grasps the perspectives of people in the situation" (p254). Past experience of football spectating meant I was familiar with the general nature of attending matches. My inexperience in the field of women's football, though, meant I was personally encountering new perspectives throughout the study.

Research has established the centrality of observation to qualitative research, for instance Mennesson (2000), Adams, Anderson and McCormack (2010) and Veal and Darcy (2014) and it proved indispensable in this study. The FA WSL matches provided a wealth of information which was impossible to capture in its entirety so what was recorded was largely dependent on my discretion. Marshall and Rossman (2006, p98-99) identify that:

observation entails a systematic noting and recording of events, behaviours and artefacts in the social setting chosen for study... field notes ... [should be] detailed, non-judgemental, concrete descriptions of what has been observed ... It is however a method that requires a great deal of the researcher ... the challenge of identifying the big picture while finely observing high amounts of fast moving and complex behaviour

As it was my decision what to include in field notes and what to omit, it was essential that I was aware at all times that behaviours and experiences were not merely being objectively recorded, decisions were constantly being made in the

field. In an environment where the senses are overwhelmed with information it allows more honesty in the research. Like all researchers I had to acknowledge that my constructions were fundamental to the process and affected what information was observed, noted and analysed. As Williams (2002b, p139) identifies "the interpretations one makes of any given situation have an ideographic character, a picture that has not only blurred edges, but also sharp features".

The observations provided vital insights especially into the inaugural season of the FA WSL. These helped to construct and reconstruct developing theoretical ideas. However, by the end of that first season few new salient points were being discovered. As Charmaz (2006, p113) identifies a point was reached where observation "no longer sparks theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of those theoretical categories". Observation had provided valuable insights it was, though, providing more questions than answers. The FA WSL had come into being at a certain point in time, for a multitude of reasons and had taken on a particular form which needed to be explored further. To elaborate on my developing ideas, experiences and reflections, it was necessary to interact more closely with those involved with women's football.

#### **5.4.2 Interviews**

In an attempt to access a range of personal views and interpretations interviews were identified as the predominant research method. As Fontana and Frey (1998, p47) identify interviews are "one of the most ... powerful ways we try and understand our fellow human beings". It was envisioned that the interviews would contribute by providing actively constructed interpretations of the experiences of those involved in the FA WSL and women's football. In doing so allowing me to more fully understand issues such as how those involved experienced the FA WSL, why it emerged, who was involved in its conception, what was its purpose, how its form related to football narratives as a whole and its impact. Interviewing would allow a comprehensive examination of individual experiences and ideas to gain further understandings of the FA WSL and its place within football. As Schostak (2006, p10) identifies interviews open up "the

possibility of gaining insight into the experiences, concerns, interests, beliefs, values, knowledge and ways of seeing, thinking and acting of the other".

While proclaiming the importance of interviews to the research it is also acknowledged that the information gained was complex and challenging. As highlighted throughout this chapter, the aim of this research was not to document the truth as the social world is unequivocally subjective. As such the interview process, which involves an interaction between people, is equally idiosyncratic and open to multiple interpretations. As Hammersley (2008, p98-99) cautions:

there has been a tendency to treat what people say in interviews as obvious in its meaning and its implication ... researchers must exercise caution in their use of interview material ... like other sources of data interviews are far from problematic ... we need to recognise how both informants accounts and researchers interpretations of those accounts always depend on assumptions, some of which turn out to be false

For example, both myself and those involved with the elite women's game are part of a society where gendered football narratives dominate and the FA controls resources and definitions, as discussed in Chapter Three and further developed within later analysis chapters. This could have distinct consequences on the views people expressed in interview and the interpretations I assigned. The way to deal with such a challenge was to embrace the ambiguity, acknowledge its existence and provide transparency for the reader.

The interview, therefore, is a dynamic process in which meanings are constructed, not a neutral controllable process in which knowledge is transferred from the interviewee to the interviewer. As Silverman (2011, p7) states, interviews "are active occasions in which meanings are produced. This means we ought to view the research 'subjects' not as stable entities but as actively constructed through their answers." Knowledge of subjective interpretations are gained through a dynamic process in which both those involved are bringing their own experiences, prejudices and versions of reality. Through the interview process a concrete picture of neither the FA WSL nor women's football was being gained but instead what was being enacted were representations of individual opinions on the processes and practices involved. Miller and Glassner (2011, p145) recognised that "all we have are stories ...

what matters is to understand how and where the stories are produced, which sort of stories they are, and how we can put them to honest and intellectual use in theorising about social life."

Such debates about what can be accessed within research are furthered by Foucault's (1980) idea of 'episteme'. He identifies this as the dominant ways of gaining and organising knowledge, often perpetuated by institutions, which informs the way people see the world. The influence of an episteme is so entrenched within society and people's experiences that they are often impossible to identify. Foucault (1977a) proclaims attempts to recognise and resist such knowledge are problematical as powerful narratives are often undetectable and insidious. As Murray et al. (2007, p516) identifies the stories people tell can at times merely speak "the silent language of an elite whose voice is now naturalised, realised and located in the things themselves. In this way the elite effectively indemnify themselves against critique because the truth of their position is displaced into the world of 'evidence' and as such becomes untouchably factic". As a result, the stories people tell within interviews are framed within dominant societal discourses and the role of the researcher is, as Sugden and Tomlinson (2002, p18) explain, "to identify, gain access to and share as many vantage points as possible. On this basis it is possible to construct an overall interpretation that may not be true to any single vantage point but which takes account of them all".

In negotiating and exploring the stories that are woven and accessed through interviews it was essential that I reflected on whose stories was being analysed and articulated. In such an environment it was crucial that I was aware of my role and ensured it was the experiences of the interviewee which came to the fore. As Charmaz (1995, p54) states, researchers should "start with the experiencing person and try to share his or her subjective view ... to represent the persons view fairly and to portray it as consistently with his or her meaning." As the researcher it was unavoidable that my interpretations were applied to the subjectivities being constructed. However, it was paramount that I was not merely using the subjectivities being constructed to articulate my own evolving story.

Interviews provided almost unparalleled access to the experiences and interpretations of some people key to the FA WSL and women's football. It was, though, also very demanding. Mason (2002, p83) demanded that researchers do not see interviewing as an easy option when she states that it "can be rewarding and fascinating, I have also wanted to make clear that quality interviewing is difficult intellectually, practically, socially and ethically ... it is greedy of resources, it is heavily consuming of skills, time and effort". It also depends to a large extent on the commitment, reflexivity and skills of the researcher. The success of the interview process in meeting the requirements of the study requires a great deal of personal responsibility, consideration and deliberation. As Kvale (2007, p34) states "the quality of the interview study to a large extent rests on the craftsmanship of the researcher. The openness of the interview, with its many on the spot decisions ... puts strong demands on advanced preparation and interviewer competence".

To allow the research to capture the varied nature of elite women's football the interviews were semi-structured in nature. General areas of interest were covered through open ended questioning to gain the greatest insight into the interviewee's experiences of the FA WSL. The initial interviews were guided by an interview schedule (see Appendix A) which facilitated discussion on issues such as why was the FA WSL set up at the time it was, who was involved in its development and what were the impacts. As qualitative research is an iterative and inductive process (Bisaillon and Rankin 2012), new ideas and theories developed from the experiences and issues identified through the process of interviewing (Bryman 2008). As Gobo (2008, p75) identifies "a research topic is defined with greater precision in the course of the research, the focus narrows, new aspects of the problem emerge". Consequently, the questions asked during interviews were refined as the project progressed.

#### **5.4.3 Participants**

The process of sampling was an on-going process throughout the research, ever changing in light of emerging and developing insights. As Mason (2002, p127) identifies, "it is useful to see qualitative sampling as an organic practice, in the sense that it is something which grows and develops throughout the

research process, in ways that are crucially related to the emerging shape of the research project". The aim of the study was to illuminate and theorise the neglected world of elite women's football, the research and its opinions were not intended to be generalisable but to provide a unique insight. The process undertaken to identify potential interviewees focussed on selecting those who could potentially facilitate a better understanding of the research aims (Creswell 2013). In broad terms, therefore, I initially undertook purposeful sampling, which Silverman (2013, p148) states "allows us to choose a case because it illustrates some feature or process in which we are interested." In this nuanced, complicated and situated qualitative research greater insight was gained from detailed interviewing of those closely involved in women's football.

In terms of sampling, the FA's paid officials involved in producing the FA WSL were hard to access. As well as the organisation being virtually impenetrable it became apparent that very few individuals were involved in coordinating the women's game. Along with the location of grounds, this was another example of issues which affected the research process and the nature of phenomena which was being researched. The implications of this impenetrability for the new League are examined further in later analysis chapters. In practical terms this led to a proposed interview with an FA official being curtailed at the last moment due to them unexpectedly being made responsible for a new women's football announcement. This lack of access to paid FA officials did not, though, hinder the research.

The FA vision for the FA WSL was evident through reading the official documentation which accompanied the new League. Although it is recognised that documents only provide partial information (Atkinson and Coffey 2004), Bryman (2008, p526) indicates they can provide valuable insights as they are "windows into social and organisation realities". As football's controlling body the FA has a virtual monopoly on defining the elite structures of the game. In keeping with critical methodologies, this research aimed to take a sceptical and questioning approach to the official narratives. It attempted to understand them in the context of broader issues of power, control and resistance to domination (Sugden and Tomlinson 2002). This could only be achieved by giving equal voice to the experiences of those affected by the FA's decisions, including those

involved in the elite clubs and those enacting FA policy at the grassroots. The research involved interviewing seventeen individuals involved in the women's game (see Table 2). Due to my lack of knowledge of women's football none of the interviewee's were known to me, except the academic whom I had met once. All were initially approached through email either by identifying individuals from official websites or sending speculative emails through generic contact details. Interviews were all carried out at a time and location convenient to the interviewee. Two of the participants requested telephone interviews due to time constraints (identified in Table 2 with an asterisk).

**Table 2 - Research Participants**

Date	Position
02/04/2012	Chair of FA WPL team
16/04/2012	Journalist
20/04/2012	Ex CFA Women's and Girls' Development Officer
23/04/2012	CFA Women's and Girls' Development Officer
18/07/2012	Assistant Manager of FA WSL club*
04/07/2012	Head of football at FA WSL club A Chair of FA WSL club A
20/09/2012	Head of football at FA WPL club
01/05/2013	Fan
06/05/2013	Chair of FA WSL club B
08/05/2013	Academic writer on women's football
13/05/2013	FA Council member
14/05/2013	Ex FA Council Member
20/05/2013	Chair of FA WPL team 2 <sup>nd</sup> interview
13/06/2013	CFA official previously involved in a FA WSL club
17/06/2013	Head of Football at FA WSL club C
05/07/2013	Head of Football at FA WSL club D*
22/08/2013	CFA Official and FA Council member

Nine of the participants were male and eight were female, while sixteen were white and one was from a black and minority ethnic community.

#### **5.4.4 Analysis**

Analysis in this research was an ongoing process and not a distinct phase after the observations and interviews had been conducted (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). To assist the process interviews were transcribed on the same day, aided by long return train journeys. Although time consuming the transcription process was central to the study as Elliot (2005, p50-51) states "the transcription process is more than a trivial mechanical task. It allows the researcher to familiarise herself with the data." The interview transcripts, along with the observation notes, were reviewed constantly to assist the inductive process and help develop emergent ideas (Weed 2006). To aid the study artefacts such as programmes and magazines were collated to provide additional information to widen understanding of the nature of elite women's football. Analysis was not a neat linear process but a complicated, recursive activity that remained at the heart of the research from the first encounter with literature, FA documentation and attendance at FA WSL matches until the thesis was completed.

In order to manage the varied and voluminous information collected throughout the research a broadly thematic approach was taken to analysis (Boyatzis 1998). Using this approach themes and patterns identified during the study were pieced together to identify shared experiences. Central to the process of inductive on-going thematic analysis was familiarity with the information obtained which necessitated constant reading and re-reading. As Green et al. (2007, p546) identify "having a thorough knowledge of the data enables researchers to capitalise on opportunities to broaden and diversify the sample. It allows follow-up on emerging ideas and enables building in new questions that arise during the course of research". The thematic approach adopted was concerned with identifying themes which encapsulated areas of importance to research (Spencer, Ritchie and O'Connor 2003). In practical terms once prevailing themes had been identified interview transcripts were further



reviewed, photocopied and physically cut up to assist thematic analysis. As Attride-Stirling (2001, p402-403) states:

by breaking up the text into clearly defined clusters of themes, the researcher is able to unravel the mass of textual data and make sense of others' sense-making, using more than intuition ... Indeed, one of the principal reasons for using this method is, precisely, to bring to light the meaning, richness and magnitude of the subjective experience of social life

The approach identified overarching themes rather than using codes to signify the number of times a particular word was referred to. This avoided some criticisms of more quantitative, objective and systematic approaches to data analysis which tend to merely identify surface meaning and are less able to capture the complexity of social phenomena (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas 2013). The use of quantification was further negated within this research as the inductive nature of the process meant that interviews were revisited, altered and refined to focus on emerging topics. This meant recording frequency was extraneous.

The nature of research means that the themes that are chosen are not neutral but are influenced by the information collected and the researcher's subjective decisions. As Boyatzis (1998, p1) identifies "thematic analysis is a way of seeing. Often what one see's through thematic analysis does not appear to others, even if they are observing the same information, events or situations". It would be anomalous to claim that the themes addressed weren't partly influenced by my developing view of the FA WSL and the position of women's football in England. As a result, I had to acknowledge that, as Clayton (2013, p206) states about his research into masculinity and university team sports, "I am beginning to see it as a misconception that academic text is somehow less manufactured, more 'real' than its literary equivalent". However, the themes identified through analysis and the resultant theorising was rooted in the information gathered as part of the research. These provided new insights into the organisation, development and nature of elite women's football in England. The complicated nature of analysis and the reconciliation of debates and uncertainties about the nature of the claims which can be made through research found some resolution through ethical considerations.

## 5.5 Ethics

Ethical quandaries proved a constant disquiet throughout the research, both in terms of those providing their views and also an acknowledgement of my own role. The ethical implications of research have led many to seek solutions by developing codes, conventions and frameworks for practice. Many like May (2001, p59) define ethics as an attempt "to formulate codes and principles of moral behaviour". Such codes provide important pointers to assist in developing ethical research, so before interviewing commenced ethical approval was gained from my University (see Appendix B). One of the fundamental principles of ethical frameworks concerned the need for informed consent from those involved in the research. Bulmer (2008, p150) identifies that "the lynchpin of ethical behaviour is informed consent ... persons who are invited to participate in ethical research activities should be free to choose to take part or refuse having been given the fullest information concerning the nature and purpose of the research".

During observations of matches it was not feasible to obtain consent from all those attending. Detail of the research was provided to all those I directly encountered and my role was made overt. Many of those in the field, though, were unaware of the research and the on-going observation, in which case the role was more covert. This is an increasingly common issue in qualitative research, as Murphy and Dingwall (2007, p342) state, "recent work has identified that the distinction between covert and overt research is less straightforward than sometimes imagined. In complex and mobile settings, it may simply be impractical to seek consent from everyone involved ... all research lies on a continuum between overtness and covertness". The observations provided fascinating and detailed insights into the FA WSL and the position of elite football for women. In building up the picture, I was encountering and documenting snippets of conversations overheard and the actions of individuals attending the matches. These very personal actions and interactions provided vital information but at times noting these details caused me great apprehension. It filled me with a sense of unease about using information I had gained without people knowing. As a result none of this information has been directly referenced within analysis.

In terms of those being interviewed, providing interviewees with information about the research and allowing them to make decisions about their participation was vital and rightly forms a core part of codes of practice. I therefore provided those interviewed with in-depth information about the study, their right to withdraw and assurances about anonymity. This was formalised through a participant information sheet (see Appendix C) and informed consent document provided to and agreed to by all of those interviewed (see Appendix D for blank copy). However, as the research developed a signed form as proof of ethical intent seemed to simplify a very complex field. In agreement with Murphy and Dingwall (2007) I began to see the consent form as only the start of ethical responsibility. They identify that "the rights of research subjects ... will not be respected simply because consent forms have been signed, indeed ... these forms may offer more protection to the researcher than to the subject in the event of litigation" (p342).

Indeed, in a qualitative study such as this it was not always possible to provide exhaustive information about the research. My ideas and views changed constantly throughout the study so any information provided to those involved was only ever partial. In agreement with Berg and Lune's (2012) notion of 'knowing consent' my participants were only ever agreeing to be involved in the research I described at the time of interviewing them. This was a position which changed numerous times before the end of the process. Another central feature described in ethical codes and consent procedures is that of confidentiality and anonymity. As the amount of people involved in elite women's football in England is so small even with the best intentions it was difficult to guarantee their anonymity. One ethical decision taken to try and limit the likely hood of participants being identified was to make the interview transcripts available to the examiners but omitting them from copies published after completion. Used in a non-reflexive way issues of consent and the processes of gaining it seemed slightly detached from the ethical dilemmas I was facing.

Ethics codes and conventions, which emphasise the centrality of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, were not rejected as they provided important insights by focusing on those involved in research. They appeared, though, to provide an uncomplicated view of the decisions that would occur

during the study, providing seemingly straightforward solutions. These did not resonate fully with the experiences I was encountering in my study of the very complex social world of women's football. The acknowledgement that these guidelines may form only part of the ethical picture required me to engage more thoughtfully with questions about the ethical basis of my research. As Clegg and Slife (2009, p36) identify, recent developments indicate a:

research tradition that is interpretive, particular, contextual, value laden and other focused ... that is thoroughly ethical in its character... is rife with values, assumptions and perspectives that need to be identified and incorporated explicitly in findings. There is no moment in the conceptualisation, design, execution or presentation of research that is not inescapably and fundamentally ethical

Ethical dilemmas impacted on every stage of my research in a multitude of different situations. The inductive fluid nature of the research merely added to the complexity. I undeniably became more critical as the research progressed especially regarding the continued centrality of traditional gendered discourses which surrounded the women's game and especially the FA. Questions arose such as how to obtain information from people who worked in organisations about which I may ultimately have to make a judgement, how to reconcile insights that could be viewed as negative with a personal belief about the need to have a thriving women's game and how to represent those people who have given their time to be interviewed, who in many cases have dedicated their lives to furthering the sport. It was understandable, having spent three years studying the FA WSL that I developed personal allegiances to the sport and those involved in it. As Olive and Thorpe (2011, p426) speculated in relation to their research into gender and action sports:

our past and current cultural participation and the personal and professional relationships we developed with individuals, groups and the places in which we conduct our research mean we are deeply passionate about surfing and snowboarding cultures... in so doing we feel accountable not only to our participants and peers but also to improve conditions for future generations

My passion for the area of study caused anxiety in terms of the critiques made not intending to be seen as personal. As Davies (2005, p2) identifies "to critique is risky ... it might alienate those who are deeply attracted to and personally implicated in the discourses to be placed under scrutiny". The critique at the heart of this research was not intended to be aimed at individuals required to

work within the system, it mainly focussed on the organisations and structures which allow gendered discourses to perpetuate. However, in agreement with Williams (2006, p163) this is a situation specifically pertinent to women's football as "unless we wish to see another generation of women and girls struggling for chances to play a sport at the highest level that their skills merit, we have to question the idea of the average man and women which seems to have passed into the way the sport is organised without sufficient critical evaluation".

Struggling with such debates and the uncertainty and ambiguity about the challenges that I faced caused me anxiety throughout the research. At times this made me want to withdraw from a true engagement with ethical dilemmas, simply adhering to the codes in a tick box fashion and assuring myself that this meant I had addressed ethics in my research. This, though, felt disingenuous and not in keeping with the research I wanted to carry out. As MacFarlane (2009, p166) reminds us:

research ethics is a complex subject that demands active and continuing struggle with personal conscience. Practice needs to evolve in order to respond flexibly to particular situations. It is a complexity that demands engagement rather than disengagement with moral decision making on the basis that we have obtained 'ethical approval' ... no code can capture the day-to-day tensions that are part and parcel of the research process or conflicts connected with a researchers personal stance. This includes deciding what stance to take in balancing a myriad of conflicting moral imperatives

Supervision was a central process which allowed me to articulate, deliberate and gain clarity on many of these issues. Research can be quite a solitary experience in which issues can seemingly become overwhelming. So, the ability to discuss them with others away from my fieldwork became imperative. As Elliot, Ryan and Hollway (2012, p440) surmise, "supervision space is somewhere the researcher can disentangle her own experience and concerns from that of the interviewees and gain perspective on data".

The nature of my research, therefore, implored me to wrestle with ethical quandaries, even though quite conceivably there were no actual solutions. As with all phenomena in a complex social world filled with subjective interpretations providing simple answers was not possible. As Ryen (2011, p432) reminded us "it would be immoral to underestimate the complexity of

research ethics ... and ethics itself is a field socially constituted and situated." Ethics defined in codes and conventions are negotiated and constructed by people trying to provide order, in a world that seeks straightforward solutions in order to validate the reality of things. This is in fundamental opposition to the approach underpinning this research. The absence of solutions does not provide an excuse to withdraw from ethical debates. It is by wrestling with and articulating such deliberations that ethics in my research was addressed. This also formed part of my epistemological and methodological commitment to undertake reflexive research that embraces the subjectivity of the social world. King and Horrocks (2010, p105) identify "being attentive and transparent regarding the personal, theoretical and epistemological assumptions that underpin and generally inform the research therefore has an ethical as well as reflexive dimension."

This chapter has articulated the ontological, epistemological and methodological quandaries which framed this study into the FA WSL. It has attempted to capture the complex, evolving and iterative nature of the process which was undertaken. It has identified the centrality of subjectivity, reflexivity and fluidity in influencing the qualitative nature of the study as a whole. This shaped the observational and semi-structured interview methods adopted to investigate the subject and the claims that are ultimately being made. Increasingly as the research developed critical sociology and feminism provided the theoretical underpinnings while ethical dilemmas were central throughout the whole process. The methodological issues contemplated and articulated within this chapter have been complex, confusing and challenging, however, they have impacted on the whole research. As a result, they were not tackled in isolation from the rest of the study but provide an overarching framework which influenced the research and the researcher continually throughout the process. It is within this framework that the following analysis should be viewed.

## CHAPTER SIX: ANALYSIS

### THE FA structures and elite women's football in England

The FA (2012a, p13) described their decision to create the FA WSL as a "seminal moment" for the women's game. The introduction of a semi-professional league aimed to produce a commercially viable and competitive product, partly via increased sponsorship, media attention and spectatorship. Salaried players would be able to focus more time on their game leading to improved playing standards and, ultimately, international success whilst, at the same time, the grassroots game would be boosted via the provision of inspirational elite role models. It provided the FA with the opportunity to define and implement a new vision of football for females, placing it at the heart of governance. The likelihood of progressing football for females via the League was, therefore, dependent upon the ideas, vision and discourses that underpin the FA. Consequently, this chapter provides an overview of the position of elite women's football in the years before the FA WSL was introduced and an analysis of the way the change was framed by the FA. Drawing on the ideas of Foucault (1972) and numerous organisational theorists, including Michie and Oughton (2005) and Shilbury, Ferkins and Smythe (2013), a critique of the FA's structure is undertaken. The chapter concludes with an analysis of how gender equality is addressed by the FA through the application of authors such as Kanter (1977, 2008) and Hovden (2000, 2006, 2012).

#### 6.1 The previous FA elite league system

In terms of shaping the problem that needed to be addressed, this research identified a consensus regarding the need for change. All participants were able to identify various impediments within the FA WPL structures which hindered attempts to increase the visibility and reputation of elite women's football. As one participant summarised, the FA WPL was:

*"a shambles, well maybe not a shambles but something had to change ... it did have to be changed, the league structure needed to be professionalised." (Journalist)*

The lack of competition within the FA WPL was cited as a problem that inhibited its ability to attract supporters and retain the best players. As one participant acknowledged:

*"I think it was a bit stagnant in the National Premiership, the competition wasn't very challenging for the top tier of the teams and I'm led to believe they weren't able to retain players as they were going worldwide especially to the US" (Head of football at FA WPL club)*

The outcome of the League had almost become a foregone conclusion. Since 2001 Arsenal had won all but one FA WPL title, with Everton runners up every year since 2006. This lack of competition contributed to poor attendances at games, which coupled with the absence of financial rewards contributed to many players moving to America to play (Leighton 2010).

Another concern was the frequent postponement of FA WPL matches due to the poor standard of playing surfaces, which combined with a lack of information caused problems especially for supporters. One long term fan identified their frustration:

*"if a game was cancelled we had no idea. I would turn up at the game and there would be no one there so I would think it must be cancelled. This happened many Sundays many many times for years and years"*

Problems such as these echo Woodhouse and Williams (1999, p17) who conclude "it is often difficult for the casual supporter to find out where games are being played, postponements are also maddeningly frequent, even at the highest level". This assertion appeared as relevant to the game in 2009, before the introduction of the FA WSL, as it was at the time it was written.

These concerns contributed to an overriding concern about the conditions elite female football was being played in. As one participant summarised:

*"[an England international would] rock up [to play a league match] and there was dog muck at the side of the pitch. It's ridiculous you have people like her, the best player in the world, and she is rocking up and playing on something like that. She would play in great stadiums for England and then come back to play on, like, a park" (CFA Women's and Girls' Development Officer)*

Before the introduction of the FA WSL elite women's football in England was seen as marginalised and under resourced, amateur in nature with the league infrastructure based solely on the commitment, enthusiasm and devotion of volunteers (Owen 2005). This position mirrored research in other European



countries (Brus and Trangbaek 2004, MacBeth 2007, Prudhomme-Poncet 2007) and was encapsulated in Knoppers and Anthonissen's (2003, p351) study of the situation in the Netherlands which concludes that "the story of women's soccer ... is one of struggle for resources, acceptance, visibility, and legitimisation with little result".

The numerous problems at the elite level of women's football identified in this study had already been articulated by the FA itself in its evidence to the 2006 DCMS Committee (House of Commons 2006a, Evidence 36):

The current Women's Premier League clubs suffer from either poor facilities or restricted access to facilities, low levels of sponsorship, low levels of media coverage and varying support from men's professional clubs. Recently clubs such as Birmingham and Fulham have considered pulling out the league due to the withdrawal of sponsorship and men's club support. Women's teams rent men's facilities and are often the third match of the weekend resulting in a high number of postponements. All this has resulted in a severe imbalance in the league, with Arsenal dominating, as the club (to their credit) has given the women's team their full backing.

As the FA itself identified none of the FA WPL teams owned their own grounds. Even those who received high levels of support from their associated men's clubs were unable to play on their pitches. Most clubs played at small stadiums away from the area the team represented, which were hard to access through public transport. The facilities consequently contributed negatively to the ability of elite women's league football to attract spectators and expand. The government document which resulted from the 2006 review (House of Commons 2006a) acknowledged the on-going barriers that hindered the future development of the game. It identified "we hope that this report will open a window onto the sport and give some impetus for change where needed" (p3). The views of participants in this study, therefore, concurred with government, FA and academic concerns about the existing FA WPL's ability to showcase the highest level of women's domestic football in England.

Once the reasons for the inadequate existing position were identified a new way forward could be formulated. The way an organisation is able to frame gender policies and the choices available is the most fundamental phase in attempts to

address inequality, ultimately determining their impact (Hovden 2012). The FA were seen as central to the existing position, as one participant stated:

*"we are a little behind other countries ... you will know yourself the history of women's football goes back to the last century and [the FA] banned it because it was a threat to the men's game. Perhaps if they hadn't banned it then the game could be very very big" (Chair of FA WPL team)*

By banning the game the FA hindered its development and played a large part in its marginalised position. Consequently, how the organisation conceptualised the inadequacies of the FA WPL was crucial in determining the future development of elite women's football. As Mills (1959, p174) concludes "freedom is not merely the chance to do as one pleases, neither is it the opportunity to choose between a set of alternatives. Freedom is first of all the chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them and then, the opportunity to choose". As Foucault (1972) identifies those in influential positions in organisations are often able to decide which discourses become powerful and which options are presented for discussion. This is particularly relevant in sport where, as Palmer (2000, p367) highlights when discussing the Tour de France and the Olympics, certain "experiences are all but erased from the dominant narratives that are produced and elaborated by the power elites which exert control ... [these events] are wrapped in a rhetoric that conceals far more than it reveals".

Indeed, in none of the FA's documentation or declarations (FA 2008a, 2009a) about the need for change was there any identification, acceptance or critique of why this situation had occurred or the part they had played in the minority position of women's football. In fact, in the lengthy 'History of the FA' (FA 2013a) published by the organisation to coincide with the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its establishment there was little reference to the women's game at all, just a short paragraph near the end which stated:

the 'FA Women's Super League' was inaugurated in 2011 as a semi-professional league playing its matches during the summer months. It replaced the FA Women's Premier League as the highest level of women's football and started with eight clubs. The women's game received a further boost when Team GB, managed by England Women's National Coach Hope Powell, performed before huge crowds at the London 2012 Olympic Games.

In this short paragraph, the FA assert that the large crowds attending Team GB games during the 2012 London Olympics enhanced the domestic women's game. Narratives which connect international success with national improvement abound within sport (Veal, Toohey and Frawley 2012), an analysis of the prominence of such discourses is undertaken within Chapter Eight.

However, it needs to be identified here that the issues, solutions and discourses underpinning the introduction of the FA WSL were being determined by the FA which was able to decide how the situation was framed (Foucault 1972). They saw no requirement to question the underlying historical, social and economic issues that had contributed to the marginalisation of the game, abrogating the need to accept any responsibility for the current position. By using their dominant position in sport organisations, those in power, predominantly men, are able to influence how it is seen (Shaw and Hoeber 2003). In a sense one version of the truth is privileged which presents a picture of gender equity although there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary (Hoeber 2008). This concurs with Mean and Kassing (2008, p127) who state, the existing organisational practices and definitions "appear consensual, naturalised and ordinary". Consequently, traditional narratives are taken for granted and go unquestioned (Alvesson and Deetz 2000).

Research has outlined the FA's ability to ignore and render invisible its gendered traditions and practices (Anderson 2009). As Fielding-Lloyd and Mean's (2008) study of coaching education identified, the organisation's structures allowed male dominance to be hidden, permitting gendered discourses to continue unquestioned. As well as using its hegemonic position to omit any part it played in neglecting and undermining the women's game the FA also endeavoured to place responsibility for addressing its marginalisation on others. In submissions to the 2006 committee the FA requested the government financed any new League by providing £3 million for 5 years (House of Commons 2006a). The organisation did not feel it was necessary for it to provide the funds to assist the sport it had once banned and in more recent years under resourced. Although sports governing bodies receive funding from the government, through Non Departmental Public Bodies such as Sport England, this is against set criteria generally related to increasing levels of

participation and ensuring sporting opportunities are available in communities (Sport England 2014). The government's role is not to financially assist sport organisations to introduce commercialised elite structures.

## 6.2 The FA as an organisation

Research has identified that to survive in contemporary society it is vital for organisations to embrace change (Stacey 2007, Dunphy, Griffiths and Benn 2007). This requirement is highlighted by Hassan (2010) in relation to sports organisations which are operating increasingly in dynamic environments. Some organisations, though, resist change and become robust making them less able to operate successfully (Kanter 2008). As Van Oss and Van 't Hek (2011, p17) identify "robustness is the capacity of an organisation to retain its fundamental pattern and core characteristics under changing conditions ... once an organisation has existed for some time and robustness has become manifest in all of these aspects it becomes an inseparable characteristic of the organisation". The ability of the FA to frame debates about change were at the heart of decisions relating to the introduction and development of the FA WSL. How the issue of growing elite women's league football was posited was highly dependent on the organisation itself.

This research identified the committed, enthusiastic and dedicated nature of the staff who work within the small enclave of the FA that is responsible for overseeing the women's game. As one participant stated:

*"in fairness they all seem very approachable. I think the issue lies behind them. They are the front line I think the issues lie with the committees. They are made up of people who either have a common interest in women's football or just football in general or just people who want to have a day out somewhere" (Head of football at FA WPL club)*

Another respondent identified the challenging position of people working on women's football at the FA. When referring to a key person in the organisation they stated:

*"she has been very shrewd... she is more realistic than others and you get a sense of what she is dealing with and the politics of it. I realised, having been very critical of FA policy, I respect the fact she has such patience and she understands the politics of it. I think she is very astute at that, at times you must be pulling your hair out" (Academic writer on women's football)*

These views correspond with those of the ex-Chief Executive of The FA Ian Watmore (House of Commons 2011b, Evidence 274) who stated in his evidence to the 2011 DCMS Committee investigation into football governance, "however critical I think you must be about the governance of the FA this must not apply to the staff. In my experience the staff at the FA are talented, hardworking, modern in outlook, energetic and diverse, relatively low paid, passionate about what they do".

Respondents found it hard to identify the exact number and position of those personnel involved in women's football within the FA. However a picture emerged of a small number of people, perhaps 3, solely involved in the FA WSL who work closely with the approximately 6 people responsible for the game as a whole. A member of the FA Women's Committee provided the highest degree of clarity while at the same time offering some idea as to why the picture is unclear:

*"there is not [a women's football department] there are quite a few people working on women's football. There is the National Development Manager and obviously you have some full time staff within the International Department, Hope [Powell] was full time until Tuesday and there is a full time logistics person ... but they don't all operate as one department. The marketing people who do women's sit in the Marketing Department and the FA Women's Cup is run by the Competitions Department who run the FA Cup, the FA Trophy the FA Vase"*

The majority of the women's game is therefore overseen by individuals dispersed around the FA organisation, in different departments with other commitments. Beyond those dedicated individuals, questions were posed by all those in the study regarding the FA's role, commitment and judgment. The structures and decision making bodies within the organisation caused the most concern. A participant identified the cumbersome and complex nature of the FA structures:

*"the FA is basically a lot of committees. I just saw a list this morning of everything the FA does. There's about 300 FA committee members all on different committees ... I'm sure that is very frustrating for the people that work there" (Journalist)*

Within such complicated and diverse organisational structures the ability of the FA to be dynamic and consequently instigate change was negatively impacted. As one participant identified when discussing their experiences of interacting with the organisation:

*"it's very complicated dealing with the FA... they are slow, they are very slow this is just my personal opinion, things take for ever which shouldn't, they should be able to turn things round much quicker" (Chair of FA WSL club B)*

Indeed, as Scott (2007) identified the labyrinthine committee structure in place within the FA means many of its decision making processes are lengthy and cumbersome. Michie and Oughton (2005, p23) highlight in their report, 'The FA: Fit For Purpose?', that "there are currently too many committees with inadequate or inappropriate reporting structures, terms of reference, membership and work programmes. This structure needs to be rationalised." They concluded that the organisational structures in place in the FA were archaic, unyielding and confusing which inhibited it from governing football in a clear and objective way.

Participants were unsure about the exact nature of the FA's decision making structures, which proved difficult for them to describe. The impenetrability of an organisation is not a coincidence but can be seen as part of a process that allows certain members of an organisation to protect and retain power. As Foucault (1973, 1977b, 1980) identifies this compounds the ability of particular individuals and groups to define what is seen as the truth, which in turn furthers their own declared aims. In interpreting Foucault, Fillingham (1993, p8-9) summarised that "if [those in power] can get enough people to believe what they have decided then that may be more important than some unknowable truth ... those people who decide what is knowledge in the first place can easily claim to be the most knowledgeable". This means that impenetrability allows those within the organisation the ability to define how issues are understood, who is involved in decision making and who holds the power. Few people are, therefore, able to comprehend the processes involved, how to question established practices or provide alternative ideas, leading traditional views to endure.

The complicated nature of the FA's decision making processes was apparent throughout the research, especially when it is considered that the complex committee structure forms only part of the FA's governance structure. The lack of clarity and information provided by the participants about the FA structures meant identifying the exact nature of all the elements of the organisation proved

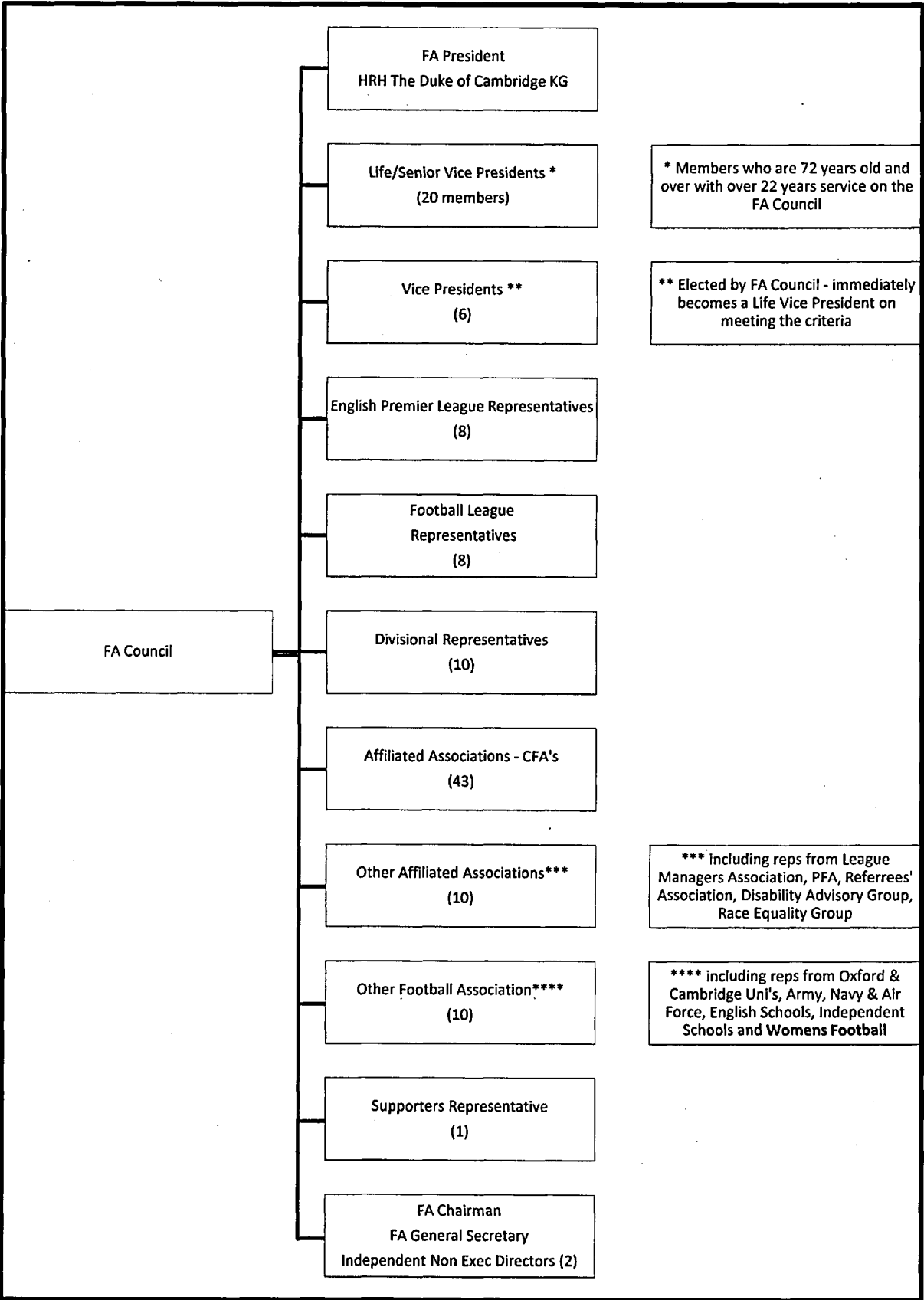
a time consuming and arduous part of the research. Having analysed numerous FA, government and academic documents (FA 2005, Michie and Oughton 2005, FA 2014b) the picture gathered was only partial. What could be gained was a broad overview of the structure with little detail about how the different parts interact, how decisions are made or who has ultimate responsibility. Such a lack of transparency is central to organisations' ability to change, an issue which will be explored later in the chapter.

Footballing matters at the FA are ostensibly governed by the FA Council which in 2012 was approximately a 120 person structure dominated by representatives of the 43 CFA's (FA 2012b. see Figure 1). The FA (2013b, p28) states that the "Council delegates areas of responsibility to numerous standing committees, sub-committees and working groups". It currently has nine standing committees although information was not available about the sub-committees or working parties (FA 2013b, 2014b. see Figure 2). One respondent who sits on the FA Council identified its intriguing nature:

*"one of the members of Council said to me, this is the best gentleman's club in the world... I always remember the first meeting I went to [about 6 years ago]... you felt like the new boy at grammar school because they have all got blazers on with FA badges ... one of the guys came up to me and introduced himself ... he said I will give you a bit of advice that I was given when I came on to Council 'don't say anything for 2 years'. In actual fact I lasted about 40 minutes ... they like to use the phrase parliament of football but it's not a very good place for detailed discussion ... usually [at Council meetings] by the time they have gone through all the committee minutes lunch calls. [The meeting] starts at 11 and if it goes on much after 1 people get a bit peckish." (FA Council member)*

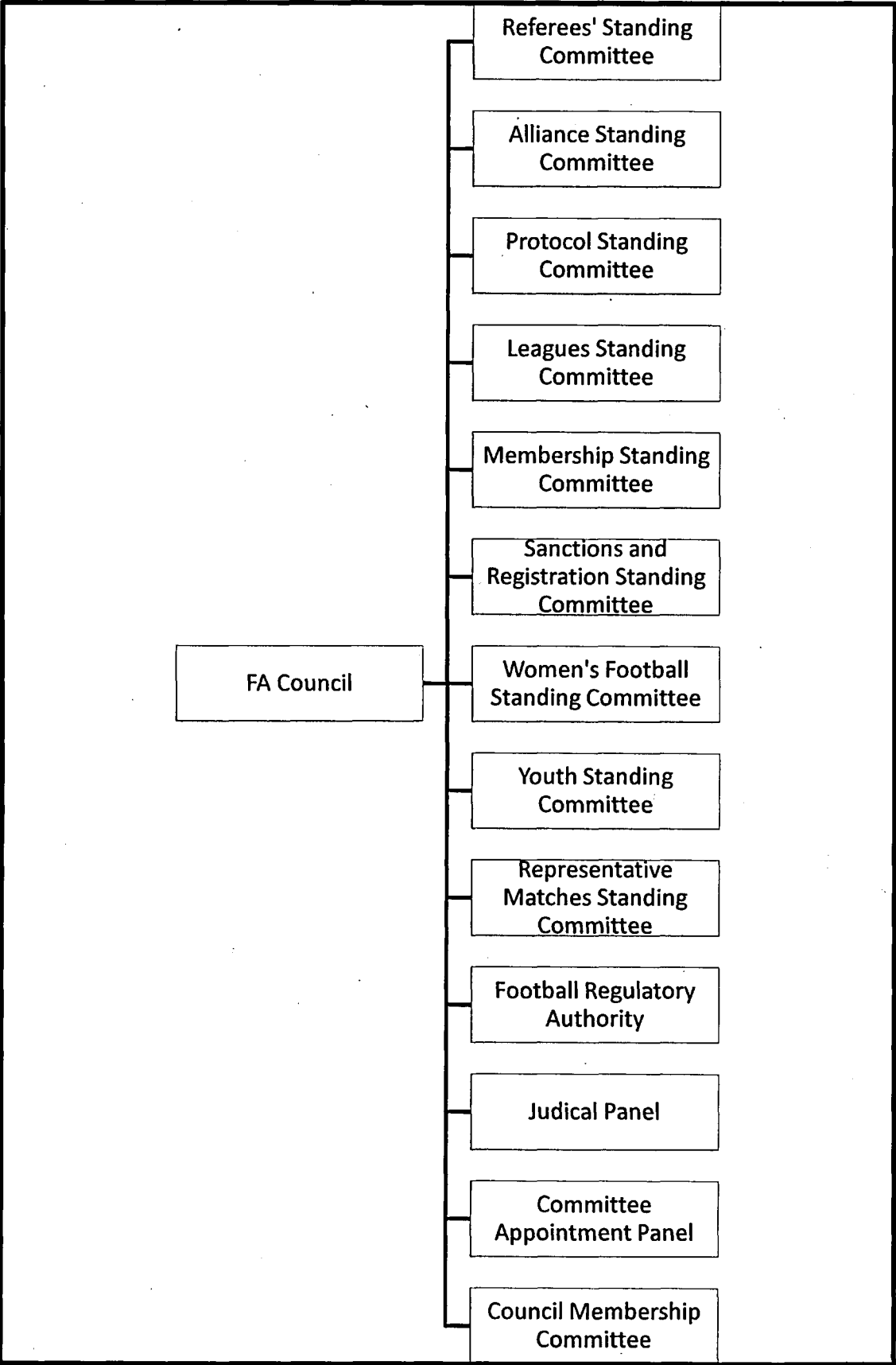
The FA Council was seen as an unsuitable forum for discussion, acting instead as an inclusive old boy network, which researchers have categorised as groups of white men predominantly in middle age (Gamba and Kleiner 2001). Old boy networks are still prevalent within society (Durbin 2011) and in sporting contexts (Hoffman 2011). Women are excluded from these networks, giving them limited access to high level jobs, social capital and resources (Wilson 2004, McDonald 2011), which contributes directly to the under representation of women on sports boards and governance positions (Acosta and Carpenter 2009, Claringbould and Knoppers 2012).

Figure 1 The FA Council Members 2012 -2013





**Figure 2** The FA Council Committees



This has direct consequences for the exercise of power, the control of the agenda and the perpetuation of established ideas. As Waldstrom and Madsen (2007, p138) emphasised, due to the dominance of old boy networks "the imbalances and structural differences inherent in the organisation will be maintained and even reinforced".

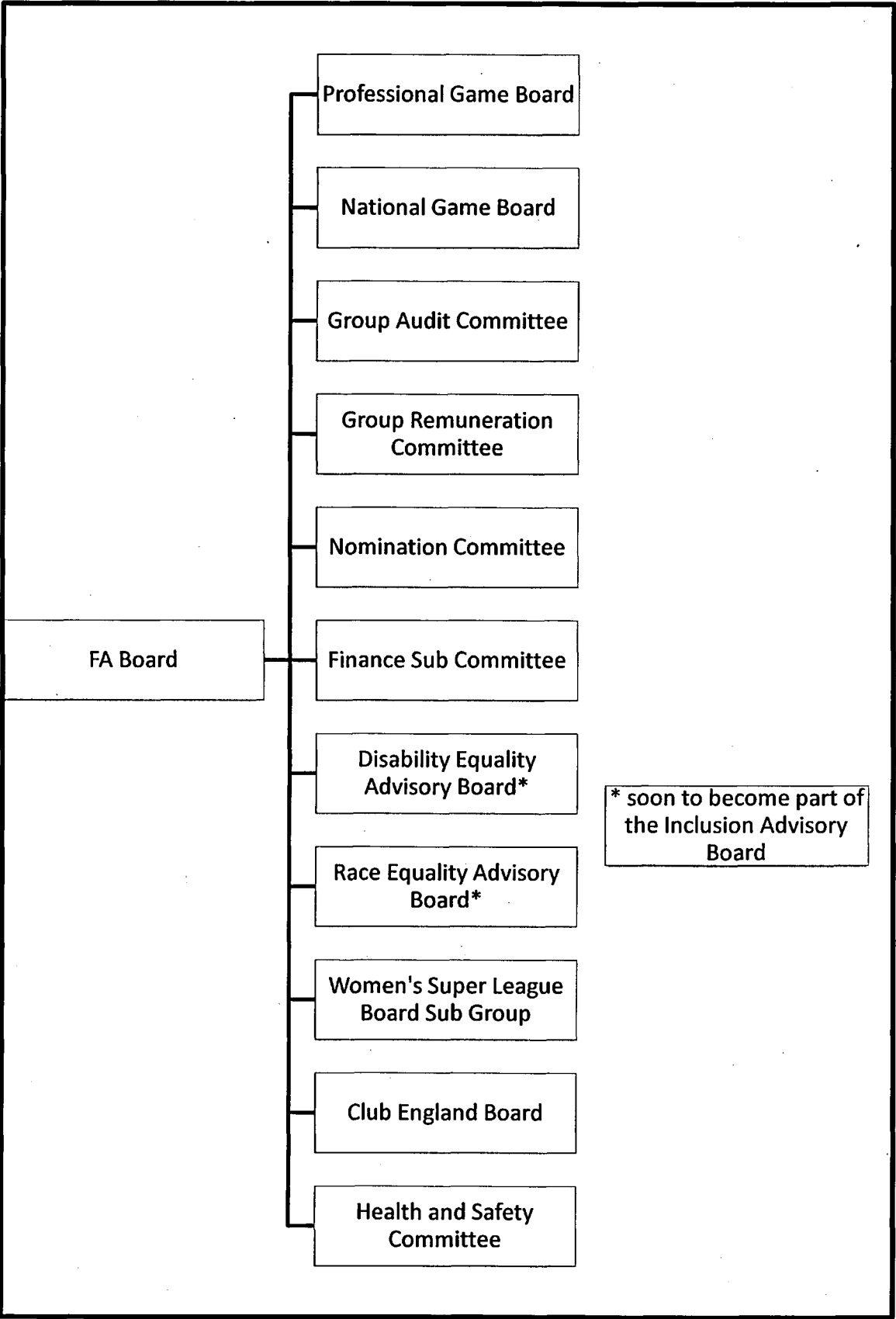
Despite these deficiencies those interviewed, who had experience of working on the FA Council, pointed out that its members were intrinsically rooted in grassroots football. Consequently, providing some counter balance to the increasing power of the professional side of the game:

*"I think some of the media image is a bunch of old blazers and to a certain extent they are ... one thing you can say is that none of them are in it for the money ... by and large they have given a lifetime to football and what you have to do is try and encourage them to translate that into actually standing up to the Premier League" (FA Council member)*

*"while it is seen as an organisation that is so big and so to some extent rooted in an old style of management, that it can be cumbersome and slow down the rate of change and even prevent change it has a value. That value comes from an experience from people who are the lifeblood of the game ... they are the people who stay up late at night doing the league tables, the disciplinary rules at the grassroots and allow the game to develop, so to see them as an aberration of the 21st century body you have to see football from a professional perspective which is about money and high profile" (Ex-FA Council member)*

The FA Board is one of the parts of the structure the FA Council aims to counter balance. It has eleven committees reporting to it, including the main National Game Board and the Professional Game Board (see Figure 3), which both have a sub-committee structure (FA 2013b, 2014b). These two Boards separately represent professional and amateur football, sections of the game which often have conflicting priorities, a position which has intensified since the introduction of the EPL (Nauright and Ramfjord 2010). Giulianotti and Robertson (2012) identified the problems encountered in English football as the EPL seeks to maintain and expand its national and international markets. They conclude that such aspirations, which are evident in national football associations in numerous countries, lead to "internal struggles ... In England, notable tensions

**Figure 3** The FA Board Committee's



arise between the national governing body (The FA) and the elite league system (Premier League) in a relationship described by the FA's ex-chairman as hugely conflicted and systematically flawed" (p223). The tension between the power of the professional and national game is exemplified in the FA Board composition. Both sections have four representatives on a twelve person Board, which can lead to an impasse in decision making (see Figure 4). The Board is directly related to the day to day running of the FA through the Chairman and General Secretary's management of the FA Group Management Board (see Figure 5).

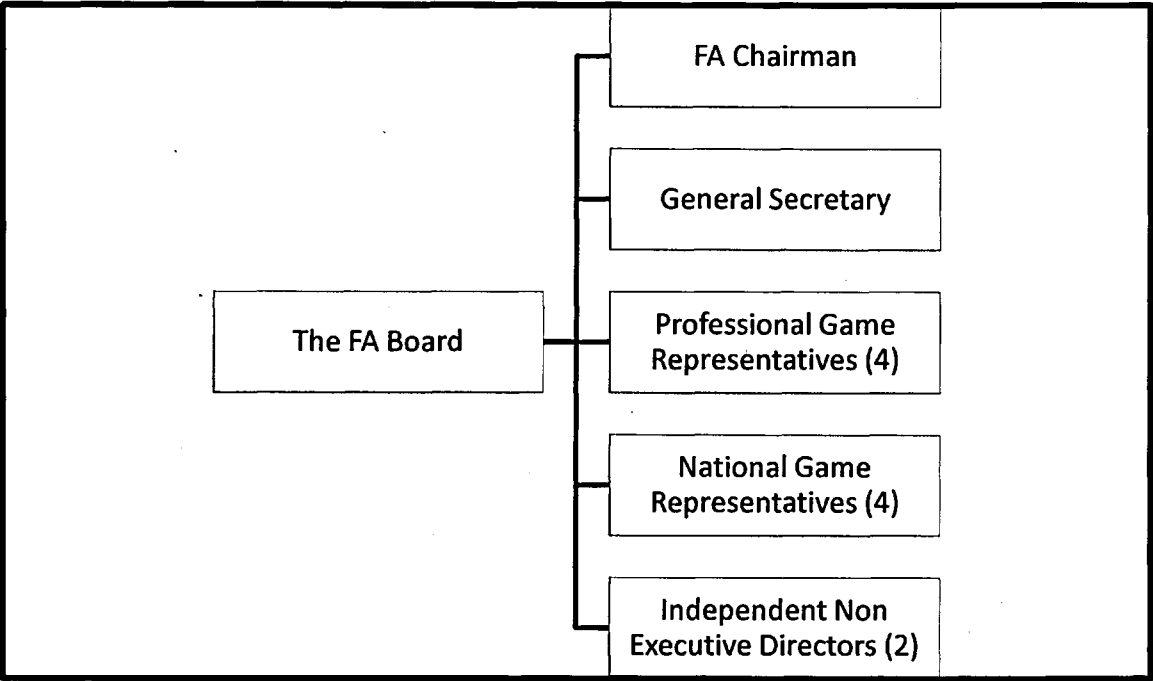
The link between the FA Board and the FA Council was identified by one participant as weak:

*"in theory you get the main Board minutes at Council the trouble is that they are often a long time afterwards ... the Board get on with things so you see the minutes but they don't wait for the next Council meeting to do things, they do it now ... the accountability is not very strong and there are two independent members now but otherwise the professional game people are appointed directly by the Premier League and the Football League and the national game members are voted directly from the national game. There are six [Council members who have no representation on the Board who represent] supporters, the Professional Footballer Association, the managers, the referees, the Disability Quality Advisory Group and a Race Equality Advisory Group"* (FA Council member)

The interaction between two of the main FA decision making structures is therefore sporadic and the division of responsibilities complex. This position is exemplified in terms of the how the women's game is managed. As a member of the FA Women's Committee attempted to explain:

*"[the Women's Committee] provide delegates for all Super League games, we travel with the England national teams, we have a Centre of Excellence Sub-committee and we put representatives on the WPL Sub-committee ... the Super League is a tricky one its sort of controlled by the Board's WSL Sub-committee because all the finances are from the Board, it doesn't come out of the Women's Committee budget but the Women's Committee have 2 seats on that [the Board's WSL Sub-committee] ... The Board have someone who sits on the Board's WSL Sub-committee and the Chair of the Board WSL Sub-committee sits on the Women's Committee ... [the Super League like] every league in the country has a League Management Committee which sits below the Board. It is quite unusual for the FA to run leagues so it is quite a unique situation. The WSL Management Committee is from the Board's*

**Figure 4** The FA Board Members

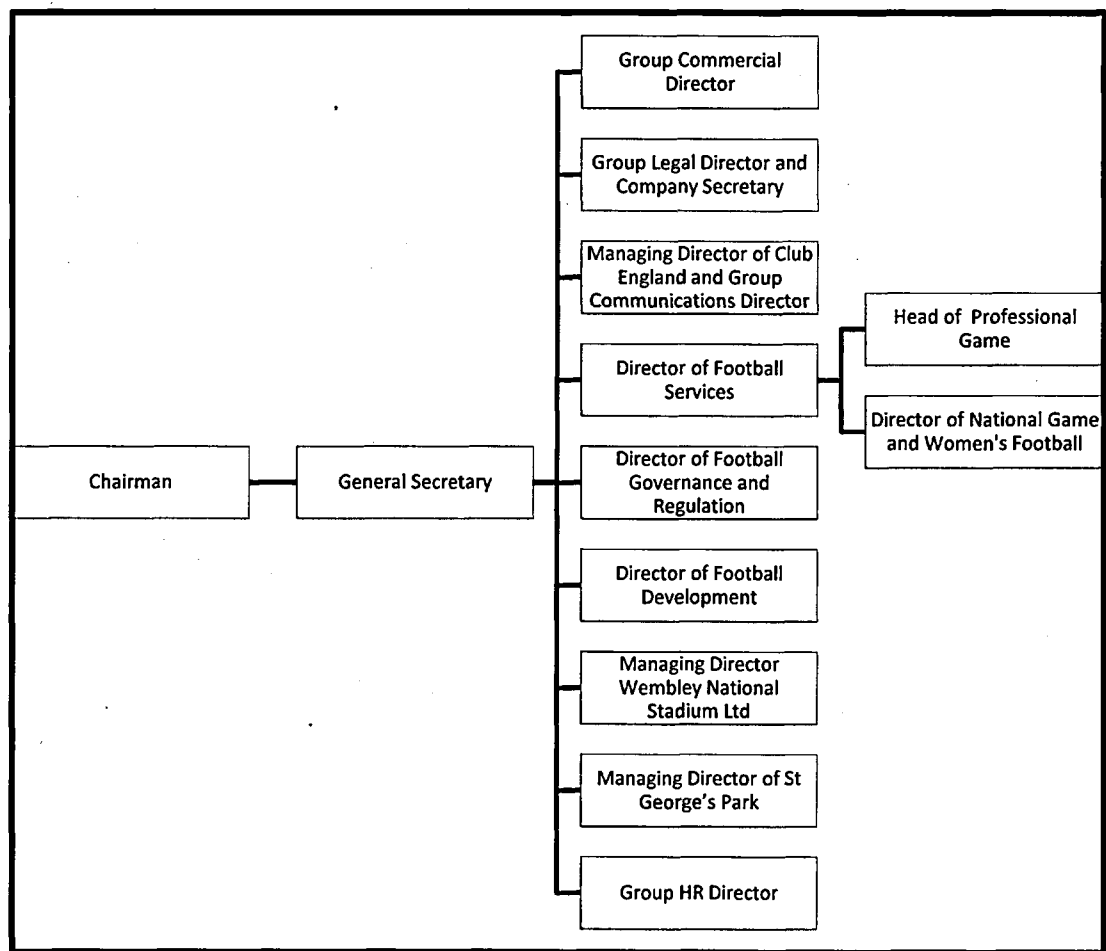


*WSL Sub-committee, there are club representatives and staff and we make operational decisions of the WSL ... There is a policy group the Board WSL Sub-committee, whereas the WSL Management Committee is operational"*

Women's football is controlled by two main committees, the Women's Super League Sub-Committee which reports to the FA Board and the Women's Football Committee which reports to the FA Council, each of which have sub-committees and share personnel. The day to day running of the women's game as a whole is placed with the FA Director of National Game and Women's Football, to whom the National Development Manager (Women's) reports. The FA Director of National Game and Women's Football being one of two direct reports to the Director of Football Services, who is part of the FA Group Management Board (see Figure 5).

The FA's governance and organisational structures are further complicated by an additional decision making body, the FA Shareholders, who are primarily responsible for the FA's Articles of the Association and meet annually in the summer for its Annual General Meeting. Shares are allocated to all FA Council members, each CFA depending on the amount of football clubs registered in their county, plus one share to each of the Full Member clubs of the FA, which

**Figure 5** The FA Group Management Board



are teams from the professional and semi-professional structure. The EPL and the Football League jointly own a £1 Special Share so each can veto changes to certain Articles of the Association (FA 2014b). It is within this environment that decisions about the FA WSL were conceptualised.

Structures at the top of sport organisations are central to their ability to provide inclusive sporting environments and respond flexibly to the challenges faced in contemporary society (Ferkins, Shilbury and McDonald 2005, Yeh and Taylor 2008). However, research concurs with this study's findings that the FA structures in place to govern football are hugely complex which fundamentally impacts on the decisions it makes. As Gibson (2013) identifies the FA's "dysfunctional structure and its inbuilt capacity for self-harm ... trapped in a Victorian structure is one of the reasons why it is unable to move quickly enough on major issues". The DCMS (House of Commons 2011c, Evidence 231) identified that for the FA to effectively govern football and implement

appropriate change its "decision making structures should be transparent, understandable and open to external challenge". However, as Boyle (House of Commons 2011d) identifies in his evidence to the committee "the closed governance of the structures of football leaves no avenue for change. It is impossible to attend, place terms onto the agenda or lobby at any of the governance fora of the authority". Such closed inward looking organisations allow the status quo to be preserved and out dated discourses to be perpetuated while forces of change are neutralised (Stebel 2009).

Concerns about governance are not limited to the FA as over the last twenty years increased focus has been placed on sports governing bodies in England in general (UK Sport 2004). Mansfield and Killick (2012), for instance, identified that issues of poor governance, the reliance on ineffective short term strategies and inconsistent funding arrangements persist within sport. Numerous sports organisations, including the FA, were created in a different era when sport and its governing bodies were amateur meaning its structures are inappropriate for decision making, governance and leadership in the contemporary environment where sport has become professionalised (Katwala 2000, Cuskelly et al. 2006).

As Shilbury, Ferkins and Smythe (2013, p356-7) identify:

commercial influences on sport began to gather pace in the 1980s and the pace increased rapidly in the second half of the 1990s ... these commercial pressures created the scope for the two worlds of sport (i.e. amateur and professional) to collide, largely because governance structures, cultures and personnel were not originally designed to accommodate sport in the commercial sense.

Walters, Trenberth and Tacon (2010) undertook a study including a wide variety of sport NGBs recognised by the UK governments Sports Councils; Sport England, Sport Northern Ireland, sportscotland and the Sports Council for Wales. They identified that changes had taken place in terms of governance. However, they conclude that "there are still particular aspects of governance in which many NGBs in the UK do not adequately address including board induction, board training, and the evaluation of board performance. These are important issues that NGBs need to consider in the context of modernisation" (p47). Sports decision making bodies often do not possess the required flexibility to address contemporary issues (Hassan 2010)

The FA's response to outside criticism demonstrates that the organisation is often unwilling to alter its composition to meet contemporary challenges. Numerous reports commissioned by the FA and government have attempted to address its governance of football (FA 2005, All Party Parliamentary Football Group 2009 and House of Commons 2011a, 2013a). Although they have all been critical, the FA's structures are fundamentally unchanged. Echoing previous dismissive responses to official reports regarding its structures the FA recently questioned the need for change or the ability of outside organisations to provide it with valuable and relevant advice. In its reply to the 2011 DCMS report the FA (2011a, p1) stated that it "recognises that it is important to learn from best practice governance arrangements both across football and wider across other sporting bodies. However it also notes that the unique nature of English football and its evolution make replication ... more difficult".

The organisation, therefore, argued that its unique nature means that recommendations made by government and internal reports based on organisational best practice do not apply to it (Higgs 2003, House of Commons 2011a). Consequently, the FA define themselves as special and distinctive which reinforces their ability to retain power over how football is governed and defined, as discussed earlier in relation to Foucault (1972). In the face of criticism the FA justify their complexity by marking themselves out as unique and, therefore, beyond outside interference. This further reinforces the viability of the established order and demonstrates the adoption of a discursive approach that is often used by organisations to resist change (Naslund and Perner 2012).

The 2011 DCMS Committee report concurred with previous concerns about the governance structures and recommended the FA Board decreased in size to ten members, that all committees to report to the FA Board and the FA Council to become more representative of football as a whole (House of Commons 2011a). It also criticised the power struggles within the FA between the professional and national game. Although the report was published in 2011 the FA has so far stalled on fundamentally addressing its structures. One respondent identified that restructuring the FA is more complicated than the government's proposals outline:



*"one of the issues the Parliamentary Select Committee has been looking into was that the committees should report to the Board not the Council. I think it is theoretically sensible in governance terms but in practice I wouldn't like to see it ... I think it would make the decision making even more [unrepresentative] ... if I was looking at it as a management consultant it is a good idea that the group should report to the main Board ... [but] I would want to see much more accountability for the main Board before that happens" (FA Council member)*

The FA's complicated nature, involving numerous often opposing decision making bodies, works against forces of change and the implementation of more modern flexible structures.

The changes in women's football are, therefore, being problematised, defined and addressed by an inflexible, virtually impenetrable and traditional organisation which is reluctant to embrace alternative discourses. The FA has, over 150 years, established complex resilient and powerful structures to govern football in England but as the sporting environment has changed its robustness impedes its ability to meet contemporary challenges. For the FA to address the previous neglect of women's football it would be beneficial for it to be an adaptable, open and progressive organisation. In undertaking the research it became clear that this is not the case. The lack of acceptance, enthusiasm or ability to embrace change allows the organisation to become entrenched in existing ways of operating. Inward looking and inflexible organisations such as the FA lack dynamism, become inert and feel able to resist external stimuli that advocates change (Robbins and Judge 2013). This is particularly evident in longstanding traditional organisations which have developed robust systems to avoid change forces (Van Oss and Van 't Hek 2011).

Indeed, this process ultimately allows those in power in the FA to retain control over the governance of football in England. This self-serving insular approach has led to suggestions that changes need to be forced on the organisation by government. A respondent identified some debate within the FA about the likelihood of government intervention with one side saying:

*"we shouldn't take any notice of politicians and the other side [saying] well if we don't respond they will legislate and we don't want a football regulator ... I went to [a meeting and] John Whittingdale the Chairman of the Select Committee was speaking and several of the MPs who were involved and I was quite surprised at how firm they were that they are going to sort this out ... there haven't been Select Committee level*

*reports before but Select Committees in government terms are quite powerful" (FA Council member)*

In written evidence to the 2011 DCMS Committee the former Chief Executive of the FA Ian Watmore (House of Commons 2011e) identified that the glacial progress and distorted change that had occurred since the 2005 Burns Report had added to the organisation's problems, not addressed them. The only option, he contended, was government intervention to force the FA to become more transparent, flexible and responsive. As his evidence stated:

Can an independent FA really be created without civil war? The Balkanised state of football governance today might suggest not and almost certainly not without external intervention from Parliament. But we tried other means and few believe that what we have ended up with is remotely fit for purpose

For organisations that strongly resist the need to become responsive and representative the only option may be government pressure to force change (Price 2009). The 2011 DCMS Committee (House of Commons 2011a) suggested that if the FA did not make changes within 12 months then legislation would be introduced as soon as practicably possible to force them into action. The FA, though, retaliated by reminding the committee that any direct government intervention would result in FIFA restricting the England's international teams from participating in competitions (FA 2011a).

However, the FA's argument must be placed within the context of FIFA's actual enactment of its government interference rule, which is only used to punish major intrusions into a country's football association. For example the Greek international team was banned, for less than two weeks, in 2006 when the government attempted to set up a new football league and become directly involved in the election of its football federation's officials (IBNlive 2006). Nigeria was excluded from international football for a matter of days in 2010 due to the country's president banning the national team after a disastrous World Cup campaign (Warshaw 2010). While in 2013 Cameroon were banned for 3 weeks when a new, controversially elected, president used government security forces to help gain access to the federation buildings (Bongben 2013). None of these examples of FIFA's enactment of the government interference rule are applicable to the potential case in England, where the government may be forced by the FA's inaction to compel the organisation to modernise. By using

FIFA's government interference rule to dissuade government from becoming involved in its activities the FA can be seen to trying to indicate another barrier to reformation of its inappropriate structures, a barrier which in reality is unlikely to materialise.

### 6.3 The FA and gender

The FA's ability to resist change has direct consequences for those in the women's game. This research identified that one of the major implications of the FA's structure is that its governance is unrepresentative of those who play football and of society in general. As one respondent surmised:

*"the Council itself is a very bizarre body ... Two years ago they did a distribution of the ages, at that time I was 64 and two thirds of the members of the council were older than me and the youngest member of council was 47 ... there has been a slight change [but] about a quarter have got these life presidencies which tends to be the problem as they tend to be older and can stay there for ever and they can be back filled so if you become one your CFA can put someone else on Council so it's a very strange structure. I think there are now three women ... and bizarrely one of the two members that represent women's football is a man which always slightly amuses me he is also only one of the two representatives of ethnic minority ... it does seem strange they can't get two women to represent women's football" (FA Council member)*

This picture is mirrored in the evidence given to the 2011 DCMS investigation, in which the FA was portrayed as a very traditional organisation dominated by white males, with two thirds of the FA Council being over 64 (House of Commons 2011a). As identified by the submission by the Inclusion and Diversity Caucus "the FA Council is overwhelmingly white and male, as is The FA Board and the senior management team" (House of Commons 2011a, p18).

In response to government criticisms of the organisation the FA sought to tackle issues relating to its structure by introducing two independent Non-Executive Directors to the FA Board, a process which is seen as central to making organisations more accountable and representative (Higgs 2003, Financial Reporting Council 2012). As one respondent identified the process of altering the composition of the Board was not an easy one due to its existing structures:

*"the trouble is what effectively has happened is there is an unspoken ... Machiavellian pact ... the Premier League and the National game ... have this agreement of 50 50 split on finances so they sort of [say] we'll*

*run our show and we wouldn't get involved in the other and what the Select Committee said quite rightly is people should take a view of the whole of football and that is what the independents should do I haven't seen any great evidence [either] have actually done this" (FA Council member)*

Within the FA, changing the Board's composition took a long process of negotiation, as one respondent noted:

*"it is a completely closed organisation in a sense because it is only in the last two or three years they have acquired independent Board members. The Chairman ... had to drive that, he had to work day and night to go out to the Counties, the Shareholders, because you have to get a two thirds majority, you have to sell it. They say well we have looked after our own interests all these years why do we want independents, we are football people we represent all aspects of the game you are our independent Chair" (Ex-FA Council member)*

Comprehensive structural alterations were recommended by the government. However, the nature of the organisation meant it was impossible to make wholesale changes as the composition of the Board is a highly political and contentious issue relating to the whole governance of football. The power of the new independent Non-Executive Directors was diminished by the continued dominance in numerical terms of the two diametrically opposed groupings, the professional and the national game (Holt et al. 2005).

When finally implementing the recommended change to the Board structure the FA attempted to make a step towards changing the masculine nature of the organisation. The FA acknowledged it was unacceptable that since its inception none of its Board members had been female. Consequently, when introducing two new independent Non-Executive Directors, in 2011, it was decided one would be a woman. When appointing the new position they chose Heather Rabbatts CBE, a qualified barrister with a background in local government. She had been the Chief Executive of a number of London borough councils before founding her own public sector consultancy in 2000 and since then she has also been Managing Director, Governor and Associate of numerous organisations including becoming Executive Deputy of Millwall FC and Executive Chairwoman of Millwall Holdings PLC. Having taken up her FA post she stated in the BBC documentary 'Sexism in Football' (2012) that football "is a man's game however in terms of what goes on in and around the support of those players on that pitch can be more diverse and inclusive". The first women to be appointed to

the FA Board in its history can therefore be seen to define football as masculine, conforming to traditional patriarchal views which historically dominate the FA.

In an attempt to address accusations of being unrepresentative the FA Board, therefore, appointed someone in their own image. The tendency for male dominated sport boards to appoint women who fit within existing structures, discourses and leadership styles has been identified by numerous authors (Hovden 2000, Pfister and Radtke 2006). Claringbould and Knoppers (2007) showed that by framing the processes of recruitment and selection men are able to maintain male dominated sport cultures. In terms of sport board members Pfister and Radke (2009, p234) conclude that male and females "show striking similarities with regard to the levels of education and occupation. Both men and women represent a group of highly qualified personnel ... [in] ... occupations at the upper end of the employment hierarchy". Turner (2009) concurs that "Rabbatts's CV is pure inner-track Establishment: barrister, Director of the Bank of England, BBC Governor, Head of Education at Channel 4, CBE, with a relish for seats on quangos".

Heather Rabbatts undoubtedly has knowledge and experience to make positive contributions to the FA, possessing skills that are seen as central to the added value Non-Executive Directors can bring to an organisation (Commission for the Future of Women's Sport 2009). However, by addressing criticisms that it is a gendered organisation by appointing a woman to their Board who conforms to traditional outdated gendered views about football, the FA provided a superficial solution to the issues of underrepresentation. The FA was able to proclaim to be taking steps to address gender inequalities at its highest levels, but ultimately left in place the existing organisation structures, discourses and beliefs that have for nearly 150 years excluded women, especially in its most senior positions. This is often the case in sports organisations, as Talbot (2002, p282-283) states:

structures, procedures and constitutions seem designed to prevent change or response to changing contexts. Inclusion of 'new blood' is effectively restricted, positions are frequently subject to long established and jealously guarded systems of largely male patronage ... the tendency of conservative organisations is to reproduce their own image (masculine as culture) which results in entrenched resistance to change ... sport organisations remain highly patriarchal

In late 2013, this issue was further evidenced with the formation of a Commission, by the newly appointed FA Chairman Greg Dyke, to improve English football's international standing. In response to its all white male composition Heather Rabbatts publically criticised the lack of black and ethnic minority representatives in an open letter to all her fellow FA Board members (Daily Mail 2013). It was the Sports Minister, Helen Grant, who raised concerns with the lack of females on the Commission (The Independent 2013). The need for a more representative composition was undeniable and both criticisms were compelling, however it illustrates how the appointment of a women to leadership roles does not necessarily result in or indicate an increased focus by an organisation on gender equality.

The FA's approach to addressing gender has to be put in context of the sport as a whole. Recent appointments to the decision making bodies of FIFA have also identified inconsistencies between the espoused rhetoric of organisations embracing gender inclusivity and the actuality of the views of the people who control the sport. When discussing Moya Dodd, one of the candidates to become the first woman on FIFA's ruling Executive Committee, its President Sepp Blatter commented she is "good and good looking" (Kessel 2013). Then in the first meeting after the elections he addressed the new women on the Committee by pronouncing "say something ladies, you are always speaking at home, now you can speak here" (Riach 2013). Although this does not necessarily mean all FIFA officials hold these views, the fact that its president expresses them publically provides an insight into the narratives espoused by a person in a very powerful position in the organisation.

Traditional patriarchal attitudes continue to dominate these football organisations, which are able to advocate increased gender equality in ways that avoid any requirement to address more fundamental underlying discourses (Meyerson and Kolb 2000). As a result, they encapsulate an approach to gender inequality which allows the organisation to understand and portray itself as gender neutral (Shaw and Allen 2009). The selection of Heather Rabbatts can be seen in the context of a gender neutral practice, the use of tokens. Tokenism pertains to the policy of appointing members of a minority group to address inequalities (Cook and Glass 2014). It is a practice which is common

place in unquestioning gender neutral approaches to underrepresentation and often has the consequence of masking gender inequalities as opposed to addressing them (Kanter 1977). In this sense appointing a high profile female in a predominantly masculine organisation may merely be a superficial move that promotes a façade of equality while allowing organisations to leave discriminatory structures in place (Zimmer 1988, Reynolds et al. 2000). As Danaher and Branscombe (2010, p344-345) identify such practices "maintain the status quo ... Tokenism although inherently unequal creates a context in which group boundaries appear to be open ... [and] maintain power differentials in part by buffering negative perceptions of the high status group".

The FA, underpinned by its complex traditional structures, can be seen to adopt policies that do not address gender inequality in a critical way. One example, referred to by a participant, which highlights the effects of the flawed, outdated and contradictory decision making at the FA, was the debate about and initial rejection of increasing the age at which young females can play football with boys:

*"there is the whole Shareholders thing. They tried to increase the age of mixed football and they rejected it and [one member of FA staff] nearly walked out and nearly quit ... they had done everything the right way, they had done research and everybody including the FA Board agreed and then the Shareholders ... kyboshed it. They probably hadn't even thought about it and thought it must have been a lot of hassle and work for the leagues ... there is an element of fuddy duddyness" (Journalist)*

The decision making processes in the FA were portrayed, in this research, to be removed from the actualities of the game at the grassroots. One participant who had spoken to a Council member and Shareholder who voted against increasing the age of mixed football stated:

*"they bumble their excuses that nobody wants it and they come back with silly arguments like it would be dangerous ... they do not need to state a reason, it is just so frustrating, they're not out there watching grassroots football ... there was a three year study even before to say the pros and cons and they still didn't let it through ... people at the higher level that really have no idea are causing more issues and problems" (CFA Women's and Girls' Development Officer)*

Since the 1990s young people in England played football together until under 11s after which players had to play in single sex teams. By the mid to late 2000s it became apparent that England was out of step with many other

countries and had one of the lowest ages for football separation in Europe. In the Netherlands, mixed football is allowed until the age of 19 while in Germany there is no age limit. In 2008 Brunel University was commissioned to undertake a yearlong study to evaluate mixed football trials at under 12 and under 13 level (FA 2010a), the resultant report recommended an increase in the age limit. Due to often cited perceived concerns about the potential for injury the FA commissioned a sports consultancy and event management company, Logistique, to carry out a risk assessment of mixed football (FA 2010a). The study found that concerns related to females being at risk of harm or injury by playing contact sport with boys were completely unfounded, no females had required treatment for injuries. It, therefore, concluded that there was no risk associated with an increase in the mixed football age limit (FA 2010a).

One participant, though, identified that narratives about the risk of harm were central to the FA's reluctance to increase the age for mixed football:

*"a lot of it was all about the advice [Council members] were getting about how you actually safeguard girls with regard to the strength of boys ... if someone gets badly smashed up all sorts of liabilities and responsibilities [come into play] ... it is not because you are trying to say girls can't play with boys past a certain age it's how you find a way of protecting them. There could be some very small looking 13 year old boys that the girls could really give a rough time to but there are some really thick brutal boys and it's all those things, you have to provide that level of protection" (Ex-FA Council member)*

Ideas around women being at risk due to them not being biologically disposed to playing the game is a long used narrative employed to exclude women, as discussed in Chapter Two. It played a central part in the FA banning women from playing the game in 1921 (Williams 2006) and such outdated narratives have continued within the FA. As one respondent identified when in the mid-1990s:

*"we wrote to the FA to see if [my daughter] could play boys football because she was 11 I got a letter from the FA quoting a rule from 1800 and something" (CFA official previously involved in a FA WSL club)*

Although such extreme ideas may seem obsolete today arguments about the biological differences between men and women can still be seen in sport and is in fact enshrined in law.



The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (Great Britain 1975) makes discrimination on the grounds of sex illegal, however, there is an exception in place for sport. Section 44 allows the banning of any "sport, game or other activity of a competitive nature where the physical strength, stamina or physique of the average woman puts her at a disadvantage to the average man". Not only is it enshrined in law it has also been used to preserve the masculine football identity. As Piotrowski (2000, p28) reminds us the exception:

was used by the Football Association (1978) to win an appeal in a court case Theresa Bennett v. the Football Association. This ruling continued to prevent girls from playing with boys in local FA leagues. It was not until 1990 that the FA eventually conceded to the pressure to allow mixed football for children under eleven years of age

Even though mixed football was introduced in the 1990s the fact that the FA believed in 2008 that it needed to commission a risk assessment to monitor the likelihood of injury highlights that biological risk theories are still prevalent within the FA's traditional patriarchal discourses.

The research commissioned by the FA (2010a) unanimously concluded that the age of mixed football should be increased to under 13, which convinced the FA Board and the FA Council to approve the law change and put it to the vote at the FA AGM in May 2010. However, the FA Shareholders rejected the proposal and the change was not sanctioned. After a long three year project to investigate the idea and address outdated fears about the ability of girls to play with boys the FA Shareholders rejected it without the need to provide any reason. In keeping with the lack of transparency in the FA, already identified in this chapter, this decision emphasised its inability to adopt procedures that would assist it becoming a flexible, responsive and modern organisation. As UK Sport (2004, p3) highlight good governance requires "transparency about the information on which decisions have been based, the decisions themselves and the way those decisions are implemented".

Attempts to challenge inequality in organisations are often undermined by those in power not needing to legitimise their policy making behaviour, which allows traditional discourses to prevail (Hovden 2006). This is evidenced by the CFA Women's and Girls' Development Officer quoted above who identified that the representative from their county, their appointed FA Shareholder, used

unfounded biological risk theories around the potential danger to young women as a reason for voting against the increase of age. It is perhaps not surprising such outdated notions are able to prevail given the unrepresentative, insular and traditional nature of the FA and the people who govern the game. The decision was eventually ratified by the FA Shareholders a year later at the 2011 AGM. However, the impact had been felt and questions about the position of women's football within the governance of the unwieldy FA remained unanswered. One respondent identified that even after the age was increased to under 14 the nature of the FA was still holding back further attempts to equalise youth football:

*"there is a proposal [at the next AGM in May 2013] for it to go to under 15 and there is a debate at the Committee because I have read the minutes, about whether to increase it to under 16 as there is no reason not to but some were saying we should and some were saying let's take it a year at a time given the history of the issue and the later proposal won so it's under 15 [this year]" (FA Council member)*

The mixed football example coupled with compelling concerns about the structure of the FA identify that the FA WSL was being introduced by an organisation whose complex composition is unrepresentative of society as a whole. Its actions and practices tend to espouse an understanding that underemphasises issues of gender and demonstrates signs of gender neutrality or denial. When forced to address issues of inequality it does so within the prevailing liberal paradigm. As discussed within Chapter Four, studies such as Laurendeau and Sharara's (2008) research into sky divers and snowboarders in Canada and Welford's (2011) analysis of football in England have identified that this is a common approach to gender within sports organisations. Liberal interventions like lifting the 50 year ban and appointing tokens that conform to the existing gendered discourse in the organisation fail to acknowledge or understand underlying issues of power. As many researchers have identified this approach does not profoundly address the gendered inequalities that have existed in sports organisations through history (Laurendeau and Sharara 2008, Burton, Borland and Mazeroole 2012, Hedenborg and Pfister 2012). Liberal approaches do not necessarily lead to increased acceptance of underrepresented groups but merely allow deeply entrenched power

differentials between men and women to continue (Ely and Meyerson 2000, Cooky 2009).

The ability to position organisations as gender neutral has in recent years been coupled with a tendency for some to see gender equality as achieved and no longer a problem (Kelan 2009). Writers such as Shaw and Penney (2003) have identified that gender equity is often seen as a chore by organisations only undertaken when required to do so by legislation or societal pressure. When framed in this way practices aimed at addressing gender inequalities are dispensed with at the earliest point possible. In 2008 Women's and Girls' Development Officers were placed at the heart of the FA's attempts to address disparities in grassroots participation. Employed in the CFA's but funded by the central FA they were "responsible for developing women's and girls' football. Their main focus was increasing participation, raising standards and, supporting the workforce and talent development" (FA 2008a, p26). However participants identified that in 2012:

*"the FA are going through a workforce development which means for example come next football season there won't be one officer looking after the Women and Girls Development Officer role they are being combined so it might be women and girls and disability and small sided"*  
(Ex-CFA Women's and Girls' Development officer)

The requirement to use FA funds to employ a Women and Girls Development Officer was removed. Resources can now be used to address a range of issues leaving individual counties to determine how they are distributed. In an organisation with limited emphasis on gender in many of its practices, the erosion of ring fenced funding for Women's and Girls' Development Officer's removed a central policy which put gender at the fore. Hovden (2012) identified a growing trend in recent years to replace an emphasis on gender equality policies with multi-faceted diversity management. She identifies such policies "see women as a minority category on equal terms with other minority categories such as ethnic and religious minorities, the disabled and so on ... equality policies are moving from predominately attending to gender inequality towards policies that address multiple inequalities" (p296). This is not to argue that other inequalities should not be addressed. However, in an environment of liberal policy change, which does not address the underlying basis of disparities,

placing different minorities against each other for funding allows organisations to continue gender neutral practices.

The FA is a complex and inflexible organisation which is unrepresentative of contemporary English society. Its insular nature allows traditional and gendered discourses to prevail even when faced with criticism. Participants identified that the debate about raising the age of mixed football provides an example of the way those in power within the FA are able to frame discussions about gender in traditional ways while the organisations lack of transparency permits the status quo to prevail. The organisations archaic structures allow it to frame issues of gender within liberal terms, without any requirement to question its underlying discourses or fundamentally disrupt historical inequitable power balances. The organisation does not adopt radical changes based on fairness or justice which many believe are central to approaches that bring about real change (Hoerber 2007). It is within this context that the introduction of the FA WSL must be analysed.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN: ANALYSIS**

### **The FA WSL - A new way forward for elite women's football**

Having gained an understanding of the FA as an organisation and critiqued the ways it frames gender issues in liberal terms this chapter identifies what consequences the structures and concepts underpinning the FA had for the FA WSL decision making process. It explores the timing of and reasons for the decision to introduce the FA WSL as well as examining who was involved in developing and implementing the new vision. This discussion is foregrounded in theoretical debates about power and inclusion using authors such as Foucault (1972, 1980) and Bauman (1987). These issues are further contextualised using organisation theorists including Amis, Slack, and Hinings (2002, 2004) and focus on concepts relating to how successful change can be enacted. Once the process of change has been explored the outcomes of FA decision making are debated with particular emphasis on the ideas which framed the new league structure and the impact these had for those involved in the game. Authors such as Davis (2005) and Hutton (2002) are reviewed to place this discussion within theories about the role of sport, individuals and organisations within a commecrialised, neo liberal society. Also, by utilising researchers such as Meyerson and Kolb (2000) the specific consequences for gender relations are analysed. Only by addressing all these themes can the distinct character of the FA WSL be understood.

#### **7.1 Framing changes to the women's elite game**

The FA WSL provided the FA with the opportunity to exert more control over elite league football, something they were unable to do within the rest of the game. As Bell (2012, p360) identifies "the form and regulation of the new Super League far exceeded the FA's power to influence the men's professional game". The FA's expertise and knowledge of the game coupled with its links to other organisations involved in women's football, including its member clubs, provided the ideal environment to develop a new semi-professional league. When introducing new opportunities, decisions about who to involve in identifying alternative choices are fundamental to the process, themes which were explored using the ideas of Mills (1959) and Palmer (2000) in Chapter Five.

This is encapsulated within Bauman's (1987) distinction between legislators and interpreters. Legislators are the traditional experts in a field who hold the position of power and are able to protect their superiority through their position as gatekeepers. Interpreters may possess extensive knowledge and understand the field differently but as Ritzer (1997, p157) states "compared to legislators, interpreters have little power to impose their interpretations on other community members". In an attempt to limit the ability of interpreters to redefine the field, legislators maintain their position by defining who is able to take part in it. The FA's ability to assign the legislator and interpreter roles within changes to women's football's elite structures had distinct consequences.

Participants identified it was external organisations which were central to decision making:

*"that's the FA, as well as the committee thing they outsource everything, they outsource everything" (Journalist)*

*"the FA do impose things ... they paid [consultants] a lot for [the website design] they wouldn't talk to me about it as I've told them how rubbish it is a hundred times so I've stopped mentioning it" (Chair of FA WSL club B)*

The research identified that the decision to introduce semi-professionalism and the process of developing the new Super League involved the FA contracting external consultants to develop their new vision. Companies such as Iris PR and Corporate Edge, a leading branding agency responsible for creating brands including Travelodge, Aviva, Age UK and We Are England for Commonwealth Games England, were employed to develop the logo, marketing and public relations campaigns and make key decisions about how to move the FA plans forward.

The use of consultants is common practice in organisational change (Clark and Fincham 2002, McKenna 2006, Pellegrin-Boucher, 2006). As Johnson, Scholes and Whittington (2008, p565) identify "external consultants are often used in the development of strategy in organisations ... [they] analyse issues afresh and with an external eye". They can offer expert advice, change management information and industry knowledge (Oakland and Tanner 2007, Canato and Giangreco 2011). As identified, although the FA are the governing body of football in England they do not directly run men's elite professional leagues,

which are administered by the EPL and the Football League. The small number of employees managing women's football within the FA had little experience of launching new leagues. In such situations, where there is a lack of internal capacity to formulate options, external consultants are often used (Furusten 2009). Indeed, research shows consultants have played a central part in change initiatives instigated by other English organisations governing women's sports including cricket (Stronach and Adair 2009) and netball (Mansfield and Killick 2012).

The questions raised by research participants about the use of consultants, therefore, ignores the role they play in other organisations, including sports governing bodies and those involved in attempting to increase the profile of women's sport. It may indicate an insular approach by those within the game, a fact one participant reflected on when discussing the use of outside opinions:

*"the way I look at it and the way others look at it is rooted in what came before and I think sometimes we think we are forward thinking but I'm not sure we are ... something inside baulks at ... [new] ... ideas so I think people need to look at it afresh" (Journalist)*

Those involved in the game may, therefore, have entrenched ideas making them less able to identify and agree to new concepts. In such a situation the use of outside consultants with few preconceived ideas can be beneficial. Resistance to consultants may actually stem from personal factors, as in the context of organisational change those directly affected may oppose it due to a fear of the unknown, habit and anticipated negative outcomes (Dawson 2003). Foucault (1980, p142) identifies that resistance is central to power relationships as there "are no relations of power without resistances: the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised". Power and resistance are each a component of the complex process and practices within organisations (Thomas, Sargent and Hardy 2011). However, powerful organisations such as the FA have the ability to exclude those with alternative views from discussions. In these situations opposition is suppressed and historical discourses are further endorsed. Consequently, resistance to change can result in organisations restoring traditional insular, top down structures (Van Dam, Oreg and Schyns

2008), which merely furthers the process whereby hegemonic ideas are maintained.

Having acknowledged that consultants can play an important role within organisations and that their input may be unfairly questioned due to personal reservations, the research identified that one of the main concerns about their use was their lack of knowledge of the women's game. The use of external companies with limited expertise on women's football reinforces Foucault's (1972) concepts relating to power elites ability to frame discourses, which were explored in Chapter Five. Participants identified the related consequences in terms of the FA WSL:

*"[the people they brought in] don't really have footballing experience and these are the people saying about the salary cap ... when I asked what happens to other players in the squad as they are actually losing money ... how are you going to appease them. They didn't have an answer and I wasn't supposed to raise that kind of question, they were just given this brief to present as sweetly as [possible] ... it was unworkable " (Chair of FA WPL club)*

*"[we all want] to raise standards which is great but try and raise them realistically as opposed to dictating this is how it is going to be because that's when you find it is not viable ... I get you can only forecast and predict what they would like to happen but seeing these predictions and being part of the consultation they weren't really knowing, they weren't really realistic but they can't be told or wouldn't be told, it wasn't that we weren't prepared for change it's just that I didn't feel they were realistic targets they were setting" (Head of football at FA WPL club)*

The lack of expertise within external organisations about the position of women's football led to unworkable expectations which had huge consequences for clubs and the development of the new League. This, though, cannot solely be attributed to the consultants involved in the process. Increasingly the role of consultancy firms is not that of an independent outsider uninfluenced by the organisations they work for (Czarniawska and Mazza 2003). As Taminiau, Boussebaa and Berghman (2012, p1708) state "consultants have to be responsive to their client's wishes tastes and expectations, in many ways, they have to mirror their client's wishes and be 'pliable' to some degree". In agreement with other authors such as Sturdy et al. (2009) and Sturdy and Wright (2011) consultants can be seen to increasingly work in collaboration with their clients. In the case of the FA WSL, consultants took their lead from the FA



which, as identified in the previous chapter, is traditionally male dominated, inflexible and insular. The organisation had framed the issues within the women's game without reference to the underlying historical, social, economic issues that had led to the marginalisation of the game. In such a situation the solutions provided by consultants drawing on general expertise of the sports market may be inappropriate and unrealistic.

Another important theme evident in the participants responses relating to the use of consultants in the decision making process was the lack of acknowledgement or inclusion of those already involved in elite clubs in framing the problems and the solutions. Participants quoted above pointed out flaws with the solutions being provided while also indicating that, at times, their input, questions and critiques were ignored. A participant identified the lack of inclusion in the consultation process:

*"[there were] quite a few meetings and workshops ... [but] the consultation was really just to inform us this is what was going ahead as opposed to asking us what do you think" (Head of football at FA WPL club)*

As identified in Chapter Two the women's game had been undervalued by the FA throughout its history and the input and expertise of those in the game were not placed centrally when a new direction was sought. Grix (2009) highlighted similar trends in attempts to instigate change in UK Athletics. In response to criticism from UK Sport, one of its main funders, the organisation devised and implemented a modernisation plan. However, the process was not inclusive, as he identifies "volunteers, athletes and officials are being bypassed in the process of the governance of athletics in the UK; potential know-how and knowledge is not being drawn upon to assist in the successful governing of the sport" (p46).

The way the FA appear to have placed those involved in the women's game at the periphery of decision making brings into sharp focus Bauman's (1987) legislator and interpreter distinction. As Beedie (2007, p31) identifies in his work on mountaineers, interpreters "are essentially concerned with defining boundaries of expertise, distinguishing themselves and defending the territory they already control ... the threat to the legislator is that the interpreter will gain ground in territory they see as their own and therefore redefine what it means to

be a mountaineer". The FA, in its legislator role, was able to maintain control of who was involved in the process, who was able to decide which consultants to use and also who set the parameters of the assignment such organisations were contracted to meet. In this way the solutions provided were already constrained by the brief which had been set. Those in the game, the interpreters, who understand the practicalities of women's football and may have different ideas about how the elite structures should be developed, were peripheral to the process. The FA used its legislator position, as gatekeeper to the field, to restrict the ability of the interpreters to express their own knowledge and definitions, in so doing retaining their power and role as experts.

This peripheral position is problematic as participation by all stakeholders in organisational change is identified as central to its successful implementation (Bouckennooghe 2010, 2012). It is the clubs and the individuals within the clubs who would become responsible for implementing the vision identified for the women's game, therefore, including them in discussions about its future would seem imperative. As research has shown, the incorporation of all groups in all stages of the change process is key not only in providing appropriate solutions but also gaining the approval and commitment of those impacted upon (Maurer 2010). It is vital in sporting organisations, which are encountering an ever changing professionalised environment, that those involved in change are empowered (Amis, Slack and Hinings 2004, Cruickshank and Collins 2012). By not placing those within the women's game at the heart of the change process, the FA did not take the opportunity to foster an inclusive process that engenders a sense of community and commitment. A process which Persson's (2011) study of successful change in the Danish FA identified was central, as previously discussed in Chapter Three.

## **7.2 Reasons for the changes to the elite league structure**

The study identified that there was a lack of consensus between those interviewed as to the reason behind the FA's decision to increase focus on elite women's football. Participants identified numerous theories about why they believed the FA had acted when it did:

*"I don't know I think obviously it had been sorted out at the grassroots and the Centre of Excellence structure was in place so maybe it was the next step" (CFA Women's and Girls' Development Officer)*

*"there was a big swell in the grassroots, the grassroots was flying it was the biggest female sport bar none and then the top bit didn't really [fit] I'm sure if you took a girl to watch it would be freezing there would be no people there they would be knee deep in mud, pitches were rubbish as were the facilities that is what people were going to see" (Head of football at FA WSL club B)*

The decision was perceived by some as a logical step as the game at other levels had been developed, including the grassroots and the Centre of Excellences. The latter had been introduced in 1998 and were providing a coordinated talent pathway for young female players. Others though felt the decision may have been forced on the FA by governmental and financial pressure. It was less as a natural progression and more of reaction to competition from other sports, the changing face of sports participation and the resultant funding implications for the FA:

*"why did they set up the Super League? I think they were frightened cricket and rugby were going to overtake them because cricket and rugby had done so well getting themselves together and their act in order to get more girls to come and play" (Journalist)*

*"growth and retention is especially important ... as growth is falling off a bit for girls because the boom was huge" (CFA Women's and Girls' Development Officer)*

One participant even indicated that the issue of decreased funding may have forced the FA's hand and compelled them to suddenly bring forward developing ideas about the future for women's football:

*"I think the FA had this vision and they were letting it slowly roll along and build up ... they had talked about it [changes to the elite structure] for a while but they weren't really ready but the government suddenly tightened their belts a little bit and looked at all this money they had given out and said to the FA, right this is all the money women's football have had what's happening. All of a sudden there was a panic at the FA so something that was mooted for [the future] was brought forward" (Chair of FA WPL club)*

Based on Sport England's Active People Survey over the last 15 years there has been an increase in the participation rates of women's and girl's football. Since 2002 football had been able to officially say it is the most popular female team sport (Creighton 2011). It is, though, necessary to remain sceptical about

organisational statistics which proclaim increases in female participation in their sport (Liston 2006). Figures are often overestimated as Williams (2011, p2) states:

there are reasons to be cautious in the optimism that surrounds the growth of the women's game. The [FIFA Big Count Survey 2007 for example] claims only a total of 21 million registered European players, male and female, compared with an educated-guess of 62 million unregistered participants. It is not uncommon to include those who intend to participate in the next year, as well as those who actually do play, for example

Having taken this into account there does seem to have been a growth in girls and women's football. In the highly competitive environment of sport in England participation levels are key and evidencing success in meeting participation targets and staying ahead of other sports brings national organisation kudos, status and funding (Sport England 2004). However, by the mid-2000s it was becoming increasingly evident that the growth in female football participation had peaked and rates were beginning to fall.

Between 2007-8 and 2011-12 participation in football by females at least once a week decreased from 146,800 to 128,700 and at least once a month participation fell from 280,200 to 259,200 while football as a whole was missing its Sport England growth target (Sport England 2012a). Figures released at the same time showed that netball, the only sport close to challenging football as the most popular team sport for women, had grown by twice its Sport England target in the corresponding span (Sport England 2012b). Although these statistics provide no information about the actual experience of people playing sport and merely provide a measurement of participation rates they play a vital role for sport organisations and have significant funding implications. As Roan (2011) identifies, the consequences of falling participation rates can be very expensive for NGBs:

The truth is the FA is worried. It has already been warned by Sport England, the body responsible for investing £480m into grassroots sport ... that its current four-year, £25m funding stream could be cut if it cannot urgently reverse the downward trend in participation numbers. With both basketball and rugby docked millions of pounds worth of much needed funding recently for dwindling participation figures, the FA knows the threat is a real one

In 2012, this focus on quantitative measures and a sport's position in participation league tables was placed at the heart of the FA's 'Game Changer' strategy. The organisation's four year vision for women's football identified one of its central aims was to "become the second-largest team sport after men's football based on Sport England figures by 2018" (FA 2012c, p19). As one respondent identified, this focus on participation figures, especially at the grassroots level, must be placed within a wider context than just English football:

"[the FA] is connected into developments in world football ... As a national organisation it is interested in its membership, it's about the national association moving the game forward to meet changing regulations, it's about a European and international context" (Ex-FA Council member)

The FA does not operate in isolation as it has to meet requirements laid down by UEFA and FIFA. Both organisations have placed greater emphasis on increased participation, especially in women's football. FIFA (2013a) identifies that its mission is to promote and develop the game to all, regardless of gender, ethnic background, faith or culture, while being committed to developing women's football in all member associations (FIFA 2013b). FIFA (2007b) underlined the centrality of participation figures to sports organisation with its Big Count, which it states is:

by no means just for FIFA, it supports the view that football is the world's most popular sport ... The Big Count satisfies a continual demand for overall figures on associations, regions, categories, etc. Reliable statistics on world football are a source of interest to the media, fans, the advertising industry, sports equipment manufacturers, marketing companies and, last but not least, football associations themselves

The key findings of the last Big Count (FIFA 2007a, p1) in 2006 proclaimed "the growth in women's football is particularly striking. The number of registered players (at youth and senior level) has increased by 54% to 4.1 million. In the men's game, the number has increased by 21% to 34.2 million". Women's football provided an arena to grow new markets globally.

Indeed, participation figures are central to football governing bodies both nationally and internationally. Consequently, the decision to change the English elite female game may not have been solely based on the FA implementing the next phase of an overall on-going vision for the game. Instead it may have been

a reaction to other priorities outside the elite game itself, including the quest to remain ahead in participation league tables and the resultant funding advantages that brings. Even if these pressures did not wholly prompt the decision to make changes at the very least they contributed to bringing plans forward. In view of these ideas, the introduction of the FA WSL can be seen as less of a proactive decision, enthusiastically embraced by a progressive organisation determined to address the gender inequality inherent in the game but possibly a reactive response to outside economic and political drivers. If the FA did have a detailed, long term, overarching vision for the elite women's football, those involved in this study were not aware of it.

Not only is the participants' lack of insight about the reasons for change another example of them being at the periphery of decisions, it also has consequences on the potential outcome of the change. Research has identified that successful change initiatives are founded on a clear vision which allows all those involved to gain an insight into its rationale and objectives (Holt et al. 2007). This environment is only possible when organisations are open about the reasons for the change and these are communicated effectively to all those involved (Cameron and Green 2012). In situations where there is confusion about the motivations and purpose of change uncertainty can arise which can jeopardise outcomes and increase peoples uncertainty and fear (Fineman 2005). The way change is managed, the nature it takes and the resultant outcomes is also highly dependent on the extent to which the existing structures recognise its validity (Burnes 2004), which has particular implications for traditional, inward looking organisations like the FA. To substantially address the long standing neglect of women's football, the FA would need to acknowledge the need for reform. As Stebel (2009, p41) identifies "getting people to feel the external change force inside the company is most difficult when the change forces themselves are difficult to identify, when change forces are weak and have yet to affect performance".

Indeed, it has been identified within this study that the FA is not flexible enough to respond to the rapidly changing society it is part of, including addressing the gender balance in its elite league structures. Contemporary expectations relating to the need to address discrimination, though, provide socio-cultural

drivers for organisations to change (Price 2009). Amis, Slack, and Hining's (2002) study of 35 Canadian Olympic national sport bodies identified drivers for organisational change often emanate from outside organisations, such as government especially those that have an influence on their finances. Their 12 year longitudinal study assessed the national sport bodies' willingness and ability to adapt more professional structures to meet the demands of an increasingly commercialised society. They identified that coercive pressure, including threats to decrease funding from the countries governmental sport body, Sport Canada, played a central role in instigating change. This was specifically evident in those national governing bodies that resisted organisational transformation. In England the only current avenue for government to affect FA policy is through Sport England. The threat to significant funding streams such as the £30 million over 5 years it receives from this Non Departmental Public Body (Sport England 2013) may have forced a resistant organisation to be more malleable to change.

It can, therefore, be seen that organisations such as the FA take particular approaches to change due to the nature of their structures. Significant change will be thwarted if it leads to new ideas that challenge the existing values of the organisation (Burnes and Jackson 2011). As Kezer and Eckel (2002, p295-296) state consequential organisational modification entails altering "the culture of the institution by changing underlying assumptions and institutional behaviours, processes and products ... [it] is deep and pervasive, affecting the whole institution, is intentional and occurs over time". There is no evidence that the introduction of the FA WSL was accompanied by these processes. As Holt et al. (2004, p11) identify "fundamental change will be required to make the FA the modern, dynamic and crucially representative organisation it needs to be. Other initiatives need to be considered that do not tinker with the existing structures of the FA but constitute a real change in the way the FA is structured".

To fully address the marginalised position of women's football in England, the organisations and structures that govern it would require such transformational change. This necessitates an open, honest and critical discussion involving all stakeholders. Successful change is predicated on an organisation's ability to embrace frank discussions in which all alternatives and potential outcomes are

considered, including negative aspects (Kotter 2012). As McClellan (2011, p465) highlights "change fails because talk of change often suppresses, rather than celebrates, the emergence of conflicting organisational meanings ... Meaningful change is thus enabled by creating open discursive spaces for organisational participants to constitute new organising discourses". During this study there was limited evidence to conclude such a proactive attitude was adopted by the FA. However, the FA is not the only sporting body which is struggling to reconcile the demands of contemporary society with traditional organisational structures and values. As Zakus and Skinner (2008, p438-439) identify in their study of the International Olympic Committee (IOC):

the varied nature of change that is occurring within the IOC is a consequence of the changing environment, the embedded values and beliefs that have historically guided the traditional views of the IOC ... values and beliefs of the past still exist and are impeding the possible success of the change process ... cultural change must not be confined to pockets of the IOC

As in the IOC, the implementation of radical alternatives is unlikely to occur in the FA which has maintained its traditional insular structures founded on patriarchal ideas. Consequently, it is unlikely that alterations to women's football would involve transformational reform.

### **7.3 The chosen model**

The FA identified the introduction of the FA WSL as a seminal moment in the women's game therefore the ways it was defined, introduced and managed are central to understanding how the FA views the game and its vision for the future of its elite structures. As discussed in Chapter Three, contemporary elite men's football in England is undeniably seen as a commodified product, saturated in commercial narratives relating to income streams, increased profile and market share (Nash 2000, Parry and Malcolm 2004, Kennedy and Kennedy 2012). It was within this environment that changes to the elite women's game were being envisioned. The FA's key criterion for entry into the new League was evident throughout the FA WSL development and tendering process:

*"yes well you know money seems to have taken over, they just wanted to know where we were going to get the money from its always coming back to money" (Chair of FA WPL club)*



Commercial sustainability and financial viability were at the forefront of the tendering process which aimed to ensure the clubs accepted into the FA WSL were those with the best business model. Documentation from the initial tendering process identified that "the budgets and business plans the clubs and The FA are working to are modest and flexible ... the goal is to work closely with clubs so that ... they can become small, sustainable businesses in their own right" (FA 2010b, p1). The FA's (2009d) tendering guidance stated the first two of four criteria clubs had to meet were 'Financial and Business Management' followed by 'Commercial and Marketing', the other two being 'Facilities' coupled with 'Players and Support Staff'. The document detailed how as part of 'Financial and Business Management' clubs must provide "detailed financial forecasts for two years demonstrating solvency ... clear proof of income or comprehensive evidence of plans to generate income" (p5).

A respondent identified the approach taken was not original:

*"the point is WSL is not new in many respects, it is recycling things that are elsewhere ... I think the polite term is they poached the woman that put the Netball Super League together and where they couldn't actually poach they sent out research, well what they call research might not be the same as what we see as research, but anyhow they went out and researched ... although they never used the word franchise what we have got with the WSL they nicked the title from netball they nicked quite a few of the ideas from netball they have also nicked ideas from all over and I think they have been incredibly clever" (Academic writer on women's football)*

In fact Mansfield and Killick's (2012) research into the introduction of a UK Netball Super League (UK NSL) in 2005 noted the similarities between the two sports' elite development strategies. Although, the governing bodies adopted different terminology, officially termed empowered franchise model in the UK NSL and licensed club structure in the FA WSL, the introduction of semi-professionalism in football followed the central tenants of the netball League which preceded it. For example, the focus on improving elite performance and national team success, aims to enhance media visibility and the development of the commercial potential and viability of clubs. Bell (2012, p360) even uses the term franchise in summarising the FA WSL position, in which each club:

would receive significant FA funding and spending on players, facilities and services were tightly regulated within binding agreements therefore the FA could exert considerable control. Successful franchises were

expected to have considerable funds and other resources of their own, which meant many of the 2009 WPL felt unable to bid for a place in the inaugural league and several clubs withdrawing from the process even after submitting bids

The FA model was also similar to that adopted by other governing bodies forming franchised sports competitions such as the Rugby Super League (Rugby Football League 2013). Although the FA avoid referring to franchises when discussing the FA WSL one participant, involved in discussions about the new League from the start, identified that when formulating ideas the Rugby Super League was "*looked at a lot*" (CFA Official and FA Council member). As Denham (2004, p212) identifies those involved in changing Rugby League in the 1990s:

adopted a strategy of increasing the commodification of the sport ... [which] involved a market-based, capitalist approach which emphasized: a) the marketing of Rugby League as part of an entertainment package; b) changes in ownership and control so that clubs became privately owned, profit-generating enterprises; and c) the franchising of clubs based on criteria other than strict sporting merit

Themes which were mirrored in women's football with the introduction of the FA WSL.

The FA, therefore, in its efforts to promote women's elite football chose not to focus attention on assisting current clubs, who until now have represented and maintained the game, to become sustainable and push the game forward. Instead they concentrated on its commercial benefits as a spectator sport and giving places in the League to those who demonstrated via the tendering process that they could obtain the most resources. This was crystallised as part of the tender process for the expanded FA WSL in 2013 when the FA (2013c) confirmed the eight original members of the League would have to re-apply for a licence. Clubs applications would be considered on their own merits against the published criteria, with no consideration of past performance, in effect "the clock was effectively being set back to zero" (FA 2013d, p3). History, reputation and previous loyalty to and support of the women's game would play little role in deciding who would be part of the elite league. The process of licensing clubs for a stated number of years is evident in other sports. Dobson, Goddard and Wilson's (2001) study of Rugby League identified that since 1996 the sport has used periodic tendering processes rather than promotion and relegation to

determine the composition of elite leagues. They identified the aim of the changes had been to increase spectator levels and grow the financial viability of the sport, factors which were mirrored in the introduction of the FA WSL. Although it must be noted that from 2015 Rugby League is changing its structure by reintroducing promotion and relegation to make the sports professional competitions more exciting (Super League 2014a).

The focus on financial criteria in the FA's introduction of the FA WSL mirrors commercial narratives relating to consumption, profit and financial viability which abound within sport (Smith and Stewart 2010, Wenner 2013). As the Commission on the Future of Women's Sports (2010, Executive Summary) identifies "women's sport represents a persuasive commercial opportunity. It is in demand with an audience that's highly attractive to commercial sponsors and advertisers". Indeed, to have a future the FA required women's football to be part of the commercialised and commodified reality already identifiable within men's football. The financial opportunities of the men's game have been exploited however its huge profits are generally shared between the EPL and clubs. New markets needed to be explored and as the organisation responsible for women's game the FA had within its remit an area for development in the commercial and competitive sport market.

Indeed, as the FA Chairman David Bernstein (FA 2012c, p6) enthused "women's football is the area with the most potential for growth in the nation's favourite game." One of the five key objectives for women's football outlined by the FA in their 2013 document 'The FA Women's Super League 2014-18' was to "deliver a new commercial strategy, generating significant new revenues for women's football" (FA 2013c, p4). As Selmer and Sulzle (2010) showed the involvement of women in the football industry is often closely linked to commercial benefits. For the FA, women's football was identified as a potential growth area and an opportunity to reap financial benefits from the game. Commercial and profit motives were as important as a focus on participation and enjoyment or assisting existing clubs that had a pedigree in women's football.

The research identified that this focus on commercially based sporting cultures was a huge transition for some clubs:

*"what we are basically doing is going from a voluntary organisation to a small business ... it is a completely different world ... having to bring in revenue ... [we do that now] but on a small scale to cover transport costs and the girls pay their subs and bring in their own sponsors to help cover their costs but now you have got to add lots of zero's on the end of some of these numbers" (Chair of FA WPL club)*

Participants identified that before the introduction of the FA WSL, women's elite football clubs were far removed from the commercial based men's game. Seeking funding was often an unsuccessful process which left them dependent on players, their families and the small scale backing of committed individuals to survive. The move to a more finance based environment was a fundamental change and in recognition of this the FA committed to match any funding the clubs could generate independently up to a maximum of £70,000. In 2010 the head of the women's game, Kelly Simmons (Kessel 2010), envisioned that within 2 or 3 years, this level of investment from the FA would decrease and the elite structures would "stand on its own two feet with clubs no longer needing the same level of financial support from the governing body". A respondent, though, identified:

*"we knew the £70K from the FA we had to at least match it. When we started putting numbers on paper we knew that matching it wouldn't be enough to do what we wanted" (Head of football at FA WSL club B)*

The financial figures identified by the FA were, therefore, not enough for clubs to operate successfully in the League. While it was evident to respondents that some clubs had little capacity to obtain additional levels of funding:

*"of course at the time we were moving in to the economic meltdown so it was very difficult to approach people and say can you give us money ... [the FA said] come and get £70k worth of backing when we struggled to get £10k for transport costs [in the FA WPL] it is very difficult " (Chair of FA WPL club)*

Women's football has traditionally had difficulties attracting investment, however the FA's model for the future of elite women's football required previously amateur organisations to become self-funding and build solid foundations for a sustainable future. This mirrors developments within society, whereby voluntary organisations are increasingly required to take on responsibility for a wider

variety of service provision, while becoming more professional and business orientated (Fyfe 2005). In such an environment, organisations which had not previously been focused on financial returns have faced the introduction of market ideas such as maximising profits and the professionalisation of volunteer workforces (Bowlby and Evans 2011). In terms of the FA WSL it was envisioned this would be done through clubs engaging sponsors and partners to become financially viable entities. As the FA (2010b, p1) stated the clubs would be "aiming to develop partner and community programmes so that risk is spread and clubs and the league can build firm foundations". However, respondents identified that entering a commercial world and enticing companies to invest was far from straightforward:

*"when it comes to negotiations [the investor] is saying what is it making for me as a business. As an individual I love it but for my business what is it making me. Money and marketing is so hard to measure isn't it ... it is so hard to sell to new people, we need to find the investors then we need to find out what makes me as an investor want to invest ... until we find that bit it is hard to sell it "* (Head of football at FA WSL club A)

The problem of securing finance was compounded by the newness of the League and the inability of teams to provide potential investors with concrete figures and ideas on what they would get in return for their money. These problems created particular consequences for the clubs especially in terms of the kind of support they received to enable them to enter the commercialised environment venerated by the FA:

*"sponsorship in the [first] two years [of the WSL] I did get sponsorship from a gym which was worth £15,000 of gym memberships it wasn't real money just free membership"* (Chair of FA WSL club B)

In place of actual cash injections many clubs had to rely on expertise and services in kind from organisations, such as local universities, to provide the level of support services required by the tendering process in areas such as marketing, public relations, physiotherapy and sports science.

It appears from respondents' accounts that the FA attempted to incorporate women's football into the structures and definitions assigned by men to men's elite football. Men have historically defined successful football in accordance with notions attached to capitalism and masculinity (Clayton and Harris 2004) and nearly 100 years ago men used the principles of modernity, capitalism and

patriarchy to exclude women from the football community. Such exclusion is not deemed acceptable in the twenty first century, while women's football provides the possibility of opening up new markets in an increasingly commercialised world. In such a sporting environment still dominated by men, the FA chose to adopt a structure based on short-term, capitalist ethics, competition and profit, without directly addressing the systematic exclusion, under investment and minority position the women's game faced.

The predominance of these commerce based ideas leads to fundamental consequences in terms of the place of gender in organisations, the nature of the FA WSL and those who are involved in it. As discussed in Chapter Three, under neo liberalism the market is key and traditional markers of identity such as gender and disadvantage based on social, political or historical reasons play little part in success or failure. Indeed, issues of gender inequality can be masked by market ideas such as profit generation and marketability. As Meyerson and Kolb (2000, p560) identify, in such approaches once "men and women are given equal access to opportunity they rise and fall on their own merit". There is, therefore, no recognition or requirement to undertake dialogue relating to the way gender influences which sports attract spectators, sponsorship, advertising or media coverage. It is not seen as necessary to compensate for traditional and historical disparities with additional resources, emphasis or finance meaning that neo liberalism in effect shapes gender relations in an unjust manner (Carter and McLaughlin 2011). The prevailing neo liberal ethos in society, therefore, allows the FA to increasingly take a gender neutral position to the FA WSL and frame it principally within commercial criteria.

Closely linked to the FA's vision of the FA WSL as part of a commercialised, neo liberal world were its ideas about what success meant, in terms of the new League. Participants identified that this was being guided by the FA's preoccupation with attendances, as one stated:

*"Basically it is part of their strategy to increase attendances basically everything is driven around attendances because they see that as a way of measuring the success of the league you may like that or you don't like that but that is how they are choosing to measure" (Head of football at FA WSL club A)*

*"the big thing is attendances, the whole future of the game is about attendances ... the game is going to flourish or die on attendances "*  
(Chair of FA WSL club A)

Focussing on attendances can be seen within the commercially based vision the FA had for the FA WSL. As Hanis-Martin (2006, p269) identifies, the "world of sport is deeply imprinted by the capitalist drive for profit and complementary assumptions about what constitutes business success". In a commercialised society infused with neo liberalism, quantity is paramount, everything has to be measurable and the language of auditing is key (Davis 2005). The FA needed to see results for its investment and while increased standards in the quality of women's football and its long term sustainability are hard to quantify, attendances are easy to report. This trend is indicative of the tendency to embrace short-termism which is apparent in neo liberal societies where there is an emphasis on meeting immediate targets and easily quantifiable outcomes (Hutton 2002, Bone 2010). The proliferation of measurable outputs as opposed to inputs is part of what Power (1997) identifies as an 'audit explosion'. The increased use of quantifiable outcomes to measure success in society has, though, been questioned (Behn 2003, Van Thiel and Leeuw 2002). In terms of sport Sam's (2012, p210) study of the use of targets in governance of elite sport in New Zealand identifies "a typical managerial complaint in this regard is that performance assessments rely on information, that is, measurable rather than 'meaningful'". Grix's (2009) study into athletics also identified that increased focus on short-term targets meant they were adopted at the expense of longer term initiatives aimed at developing the sport for future participants. Therefore, a focus on attendances in the FA WSL provides a quantifiable outcome but may merely provide a simplistic indication of how the League is progressing in the short term.

#### **7.4 Taking responsibility**

Neo liberal ideas also have distinct consequences for those involved in society and sport, as Davis (2005, p9) states "a major shift in neo liberal discourse is towards survival being an individual responsibility". The reliance on the commitment of individuals, often volunteers, is a common feature in contemporary society (Dekker and Halman 2003). Volunteers are fundamental

to the organisation, governance and delivery of sport (Taylor et al. 2003, Cuskelly, Hoyer and Auld 2006, Nichols, Tacon and Muir 2013). Reoccurring throughout the research, it was identified that clubs continue to rely heavily on volunteers:

*"[the club is run by] ... all the same volunteers with the support of the people at [the men's team]" (Head of football at FA WSL club A)*

*"yes [the club is run by volunteers] and it really is the parents. We don't just get volunteers off the street so behind the scenes peoples daughters will play for the club and we ask them if they want to help behind the scenes which is not ideal because we have had situations when their daughter is not playing anymore they lose interest which is quite difficult" (Chair of FA WPL club)*

As discussed in Chapter Five government reports and research identified an overreliance on volunteers was one of the reasons change was required in elite women's football. However, a lack of insight within the upper echelons of the organisations, the use of outside consultants and the historically marginalised position of those actually involved at the grassroots meant decisions overlooked some of the realities of the game. The clubs and more specifically individuals within them were made responsible for meeting targets set by the FA. However, the structures and capacity of many of the clubs to do so remained relatively unchanged.

Negotiating the process for inclusion in the League was in part dependent on the people already involved in the clubs

*"[it was an] open bidding process and obviously with [the Chairman's] backing and somebody who worked for him who had worked on Olympic bids she worked on the bid and put the bid together and without her I don't think it would be as strong a case as it was" (CFA official previously involved in a FA WSL club)*

*"I wrote the bid I am use to writing bids I ran a company so was writing bids all the time. It would be [a complicated process] if you hadn't done that before" (Chair of FA WSL club B)*

It was noted that the tendering process required a great deal of clubs. Those who were already involved in the clubs were expected to draw on existing expertise and master an increasingly diverse array of information to meet the strict tender criteria (see Appendix E).



In terms of club personnel, the original tender requirements required each club to have a 'General Manager' and/or a 'Business Development' specialist and a 'Treasurer' as a minimum (FA 2009d). There was no stipulation that these were paid positions and individual clubs determined the remit of these roles. In the 2013 season when the original eight clubs had their licences extended for a year due to the two tier system being delayed the FA released funds to contribute towards a 'Match Promotion/Events Manager' position, therefore, after three years clubs had put in place paid employee's to oversee their transformation into a semi-professional team. However, clubs were generally still dependent on the dedication of individuals, in some cases the same people whose energy and commitment maintained them in the previous structure. Respondents identified that there were now extra responsibilities and criteria to meet:

*"the Chairman in effect he is a volunteer and the club secretary remains the same person he is a volunteer and we have a couple of other volunteers that keep things going because the things we had to do we still have to do them just more of it" (Chair of FA WSL club A)*

Williams (2011, p97) identifies the centrality of volunteers in implementing the commercial narrative occurs within women's football throughout Europe:

while the survey of the Women's Champions League clubs and those playing in some of Europe's female elite competitions indicates an increasingly market-oriented attitude towards commercial development, this again is largely dependent upon the voluntary and community structures that have historically been the mainstay. Helping these clubs to conceive of their product as something marketable and with a viable commercial future remains challenging

The continued amateur nature of clubs was brought into focus by the level of commitment required by individuals within the women's game which was evident throughout the research:

*"[at matches I run around] like a headless chicken, ticket sales, making sure all the girls know what they are doing with ticket sales programmes and the club shop, I have girls doing that but I have to manage it. Making sure the PA has the PA script, make sure the VIP's are OK, the music, the half time entertainment, counting the tickets, counting the money and then I have about 10 minutes to watch the game before doing the player of the match finding the sponsor to choose it getting the champagne, come with me and give it to the player, get flyers and fixture cards and give them to the Centre of Excellence girls and tell them to give them out to all the people in the ground, girls on the car park giving out flyers for the next game. A headless chicken but we just*

*haven't got enough staff to do all these things" (Head of football at FA WSL club C)*

*"You've got to do it for the love of it you have to be committed absolutely ... sometimes you can drown in it .... I think for 10 months of the year you have to commit, sell your soul to it a little bit, what I do say is we have been successful and it makes it a nice role ... but if you are getting beat every week I don't know how much I could do it... We are only two seasons in and it already feels like we are 20" (Head of football at FA WSL club A)*

To address inequalities neo liberalism claims that people must work hard and take advantage of the situations that are given to them (Cooky and McDonald 2005). It is the passion, commitment and dedication of individuals that keep the clubs running, sometimes at a cost to themselves and undertaken due to their love of the game. As one respondent identified:

*"it's taken over my life so consequently I gave up work to do it, so I gave up a salary to become a volunteer. It is difficult to hand it over to someone else because I can't find someone to do it and people find out the things that I do and I say would you like to do it and they say how much and as soon as they find out it is a voluntary organisation its sorry ... really I would like to hand it over to someone and just be a spectator now but I have to find someone first" (Chair of FA WPL club)*

The focus on individuals, which proliferates in neo liberal society, is compounded by the diminished responsibility on governments, institutions and organisations, including the FA, to address inequalities. Individuals are increasingly seen as responsible for their own decisions and must succeed through individual endeavour no matter what obstacles they face (Gill 2007). Individual action, self-reliance and people taking personal responsibility for changing situations are symptomatic of neo liberal ideas and the 'Big Society' envisioned by David Cameron (Evans 2011). Individuals must now become altruistic active agents, working hard and committing time and energy to achieve goals (Stott 2011). Sport provides an ideal arena for such ideas as it is historically built on volunteering, a key concept in the Big Society, selfless individuals dedicating their time and becoming virtuous citizens (Morgan 2013). This is exemplified at all levels with the majority of sporting events sustained by volunteers, from the 400 individuals who supported the 2013 national school sport competition (School Games 2013) to the 70,000 "Game Makers" who sustained the 2012 London Olympics (Olympic Movement 2012).

Individualism has particular resonance for the FA WSL clubs, players and officials, as the responsibility was placed on individuals in the clubs to provide solutions with very constrained resources. As Williams (2006, p163) notes "women players and administrators who hardly hold the majority of the fiscal resources or status within the game are being asked to break into new markets as a way of justifying their place in the sport". It was evident that those interviewed were committed to making the new elite semi-professional structures a success. Many of those involved in the research have been involved in the game for a number of years and the FA WSL was the first opportunity for them to be involved in a process which can potentially transform the women's elite game. The commercialised model chosen by the FA presented challenges for all the clubs. However, within the current climate those interviewed have little choice but to live within prevailing neo liberal structures and dedicate themselves as individuals to ensuring their clubs success, in effect becoming neo liberalised. This reliance on key committed individuals is not confined to the FA WSL. It is mirrored in the experience of other women's sports, as Mansfield and Killick's (2012) research on the English Netball Super League evidenced. They categorise the individuals as 'intrapreneurs' and identify that the "significance of such a role within the UK NSL franchises is in the ability to develop innovative practices for the success of one's own ideas as well as that of the broader commercial viability of netball franchises" (p557). Decisions about the direction and development of each netball team are reliant on the commitment and knowledge of their 'intrapreneurs'.

As individuals in elite clubs are committed to the development of women's football they have had to become part of the organisational discourses espoused by the FA. This again strengthens the process by which the FA is able to distance itself from acknowledging or accepting its role in the historical marginalisation of the women's game and alleviates any necessity to focus on its own organisational structures to address the inequalities in the game based on gender. As Giroux (2005, p9) states "within the discourse of neo liberalism, democracy becomes synonymous with free markets while issues of equality ... are stripped of any substantive meaning". Solutions and success are now dependent on individuals involved in the game, not the FA itself. Fielding-Lloyd

and Mean (2011, p357) identify this tendency in their research on football coaching in England and conclude that "the solution to inequality becomes located in the individual non-members themselves rather than within institutional practices and discourses." The FA was able to control how the marginalisation of elite women's football was framed and it constructed the solution by espousing the need to commercialise the game, requiring clubs to transform into commercially sustainable businesses. In doing so it is able to remove any requirement to alter its own structures or practices. As Kelan (2009, p204-205) identifies "individualism of experience is a common strategy for constructing the workplace as gender neutral ... the experiences of discrimination are downgraded and not seen as structural gender inequalities".

This issue is epitomised by the ironic position whereby those successful clubs who for the first time in their history qualified for European competitions suffered negative consequences due to their progression. As one club official stated:

*"If we get into Europe please don't let us have to go to Russia ... We'd lose money on it which is pointless isn't it" (Chair of FA WSL club A)*

Clubs run on small budgets, predominantly by volunteers, were faced with financial dilemmas and practical problems by earning the right to play in Europe. The FA took little responsibility for assisting clubs that only two years ago were struggling to survive. It was left to clubs and individuals to negotiate and facilitate the complexities that European football presents. When Bristol Academy was drawn to play Russian side Energiya Voronezh in the 2011 to 2012 UEFA Women's Champions League they incurred a financial loss of approximately £10,000. This would have been more had the players not taken the decision to forego appearance money and win bonuses for the two-legged tie (Leighton 2011a). Individuals, in this case the players, were forced to make sacrifices for the sake of their club, which was being asked to operate in a new commercial, financial based environment, a process which had, in reality, been hard to achieve in the short term.

The positioning of clubs as individual entities responsible for their own success has consequences for women's football as a whole. As a respondent noted:

*"the thing is and I have made this comment a few times when we're [in meetings] with these marketing offices, moving forward we are all working towards the same goal, we need to be sharing ideas sharing*

*good practice. You do feel from some clubs that they are [thinking] I'm not going to give away my best ideas in case they copy me and do it better than me. We do need to be working together I think that it's really important we build those relationships" (Head of football at FA WSL club C)*

Clubs are placed in opposition to each other which diminishes the ability and inclination to work together to increase the game as a whole. This is not specific to the women's game but is evident in sport and society in general. The intensification of commercialism and commodification in the men's game means clubs place little emphasis on enhancing the game as a whole. As Smith and LeJeune (1998, para. 2.1) state:

Since it is so successful, why should football bother about its occasional scandals? Why meddle with a success story? Does it matter if the world of football is tarnished by rumours of financial misbehaviour? There is a tendency for people within the game to dismiss this subject with a cursory statement: 'that's football', as if it were the natural order of things for financial misconduct to be part of the game.

The tendency for individuals and organisations to work towards their own goals is endemic in neo liberalism, which places competition at the heart of social life and questions collective arrangements (Amable 2011). As Silk and Andrew's (2012, p6) identify neo liberalism is characterised by "the morbidity of the social sphere, evidenced by the hegemony of a cynicism towards all things public and collective". In contemporary society the increased emphasis on the individual has been at the expense of focussing on what can be gained by working within a group (Davis 2005). Davies and Saltmarsh (2007, p3) conclude that "neo-liberal philosophy espouses 'survival of the fittest' and unleashes competition among individuals, among institutions and among nations, freeing them from what are construed as the burdensome chains of social justice and social responsibility". The way the FA framed the FA WSL resulted in increased pressure on individuals and impacted on relationships between teams, leaving little emphasis on working together to develop the game as a whole. As Sam's (2012, p217) New Zealand study identifies NGBs rarely worked together to develop best practice as they were "effectively competing against one another, [so] they could be less than forthcoming in sharing 'what works' with other organisations in the same funding tier".

The FA used their dominant position to control the FA WSL decision making process, deciding who was involved and setting the parameters of the questions that needed to be addressed. Those within the game with in-depth knowledge of key issues, strengths and challenges, were not central to the process of developing a way forward and therefore the adoption of an inclusive and open change process, which could facilitate fundamental transformation, was avoided. Many in the game believed the targets set were unrealistic, pushing a previously underfunded minority sport to embrace commercial narratives in a very short period of time. Within the parameters of neo liberalism the FA was able to define the issues in women's football in gender neutral ways. However, those working in the game, many still volunteers, had to face the consequences of years of marginalisation, discrimination and neglect, while at the same time been made individually responsible for ensuring success, a process which mirrors wider developments in society and sport. The way gendered societal narratives affected the way the FA envisioned the new League is addressed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT: ANALYSIS**

### **The FA WSL - Developing a new identity for elite women's football**

The FA played a dominant role in controlling the introduction of women into a professionalised footballing environment historically saturated with masculine connotations. This chapter explores how this influenced the way the League was conceptualised as a product and the consequences this had for the elite game. Initially it explores the vision identified for the new League by drawing on wider theories relating to hegemonic masculinity, femininity and heteronormativity, referencing authors such as Engh (2011), Caudwell (2006) and Williams (2011). It also considers the practical implications the chosen identity had in terms of the target audience and decisions about when the League would be played. The FA WSL's identity and success criteria are further contextualised using previously discussed ideas about spectacle (Debord 1994) and Bakhtin's (1984) idea of the carnivalesque. The discussion then addresses how they are linked to the FA WSL's development in the first three seasons.

#### **8.1 The FA's vision for the FA WSL**

The FA's commercialised vision for the FA WSL required the elite women's game to become an income generating product, which could be sold to spectators, sponsors and the media. This vision was developed within prevailing discourses which position the women's game as distinct from the men's game, as a fairer form played in a more sporting manner (Topping 2013). As Williams (2011, p77 and p87) identifies women's football is:

'normalised' through its multiple femininities as an aspirational, committedly athletic, attractive, fun, approachable version of the game ... there is a narrative about females bringing only good moral values to sport that risks essentialising women's football as a story of 'sugar and spice and all things nice' as the nursery rhyme goes. As we know from doping scandals, the occasionally violent world of ice-dance and the stories of exploitation, anorexia and sex abuse in swimming and gymnastics, girls and women can be the perpetrators and victims of immoral and illegal behaviour in sport

The FA's initial tendering guide, 'Be Part of Football's Future: The FA Women's Super League' (FA 2009a), identified this tendency to separate the different forms of the game when it stated that the new League needed to "enable the development of a niche product for football" (p9). Coche (2014) identifies that

the US Soccer Federation also positions the women's game as an alcove of the sport as a whole. A participant identified prevailing narratives which positioned the women's game as distinct:

*"football is exemplary in terms of women's football ... [it] can offer a high level of entertainment and no nastiness. I think not only will you see more women and children going to football you will see more men going to football. I think that in itself will help to bring an ethical perspective and a new morality that people understand is needed ... taking the tribalism out of the game. When you see a woman tackle another woman you see them use the same venom but not the hatred"*  
(Ex-FA Council Member)

The respondents view is also mirrored by others in the game including Kelly Smith (Winter 2012), England's record goal scorer and current Arsenal Ladies player, who states, "women's football is a prettier game to watch than men's football because there is no cheating going on. There is no diving or play acting ... no falling over, intimidation of referee's or trying to get players sent off". The use of the term 'prettier' and the idea that it is an ethical and moral form of the game sustains gendered narratives relating to women's position in sport, as identified in Chapter Three.

In examining the above quote, the position of the player must be examined. Smith is a current FA WSL player and England international who played for over 10 years in America. A participant indicated that players in the FA WSL received media training, which contributed to ensuring they publically conformed to official FA rhetoric:

*"how many times have you been told that they got crib sheets of what to say and what not to say when the WSL was launched. The media training thing bugs me because they are so dull to talk to officially but in private they will tell you it all ... it's a shame ... [there are characters in the game] but they have it taken out of them"* (Journalist)

Research has indicated that sport governing bodies often provide elite athletes with media training, including Monk and Russell's (2000) study of vocational education undertaken by young players at EPL clubs and McDonald's (2012) research into orientation programmes delivered to new players in the Women's National Basketball Association. Such courses reinforce Foucault's (1972, 1977a) theories relating to the ability of powerful elites to manage discourses and provide definitions of truth, as discussed in Chapter Six. Arthur's (2003) study of surfing indicated that the increased dominance of commercial



narratives resulted in professional surfers being trained to avoid controversy during media interactions. He states terms associated with surfing "such as 'individualistic', 'unconventional', 'anti-establishment', 'opposed to discipline or control over individual freedoms', 'dislike obligations or commitments' would hardly sit well in the regimented corporate world of athletes as endorsers. Thus it could be the case that traditional, core values of surfing are being eroded and sacrificed in pursuit of the corporate dollar" (p163). To exist in a contemporary, commodified and commercialised environment sports governing bodies increasingly manage athletes and narratives which represent their sport. FA training programmes are employed to coach players to frame women's football within the organisations traditional gendered descriptions.

Narratives connecting women's football to dominant notions of femininity are not confined to the game in England. They are also reflected in UEFA's (2014) vision for the game which states, "women's football is recognised as its own entity – as a skilful, dynamic, technical game promoting 'pure' football with integrity and proven values". While FIFA (2007c, p108) proclaimed:

AT THE MORE SOCIAL END of the spectrum, 40 million women of all races and ages around the world regularly take to fields and even makeshift, street pitches to experience the exhilaration and joy of playing football. Why? you may ask. The answer may at least in part be found in the initiatives undertaken by FIFA to break down the barriers associated with playing women's football – or as it is often described, "the more beautiful game" (their emphasis)

Women's football is, therefore, conceived, positioned and promoted as friendlier and more sporting than the established male game. Williams (2006, p157) identifies that this is part of a broader agenda, in which the FA are involved in:

a fine balancing act as the bureaucracies attempt to simultaneously sell the message of an established female appropriate sport with great potential for expansion in a number of ways but which will proliferate in a manner that poses no threat what so ever to the highly commercialised world of male professional football. It is the same sport, we are led to understand, but played crucially different

It would appear, therefore, that the women's game will only be accepted and promoted if it does not infringe on the men's game. This is a process often seen when women make inroads into traditionally masculine arenas (Ross and Shiness 2008). Consequently, to be accepted women's elite football needed a new, distinct character. A respondent questioned whether this compulsion, to

differentiate between the men's and women's game, was more pronounced in football:

*"it's peculiar to football because in other sports they don't seem to do it. It must be so infused in our thinking that we can't think of women's football without comparing it to men's football, whereas with other sports it doesn't seem to be that much of an issue" (Journalist)*

The same respondent later reflected on whether football needs to be placed in a wider context:

*"[is it] just our culture? People say it is the society that is at fault. We still live in a society that has Page Three"*

Certain sports, including football, are identified as reflecting patriarchal structures and hierarchical gender boundaries, which are often still seen in society (Scruton, Caudwell and Holland 2005, MacBeth 2007, Hoeber 2008). Traditional ideas, relating to what it means to be female and male, still underpin society and are magnified in historically male dominated sport. These ideas have distinct consequences for the nature of women's sport participation (Hartmann-Tews and Pfister 2003, Magee et al. 2007, Obel, Bruce and Thompson 2008) and impact on the introduction of semi-professionalism into women's football in England.

The way the League was framed, therefore, should be placed within the traditionally masculinised processes seen in society. As discussed in Chapter Three, through the ideals of hegemonic masculinity women are positioned as contrary and subordinate to masculine ideals. Femininity is underpinned by idealised notions of passivity, cooperation and grace, with women being more wholeheartedly accepted into sport if they encompass these traits (Adams and Bettis 2003). As Davis-Delano, Pollock and Vose (2009) identify, sportswomen often feel the need to offer contrition when using aggression or physical force. They conclude that "sport is associated with masculinity and women are supposed to behave in feminine ways ... women athletes sometimes 'apologise' for women's participation in sport by emphasising femininity" (p131). An argument which can be related to Kelly Smith's public description of the women's game as 'prettier' and fair. In this framework, appropriate roles are assigned according to gender.

Also, these ideas are often accompanied by theories about heteronormativity (Warner 1991). This idea asserts that heterosexuality is the normal sexual orientation, a bias which has been identified as a central organising principle in many societies and especially social practices like sport (Cox and Thompson 2000, Elling and Janssens 2009). Heteronormativity reinforces hegemonic masculine ideas about distinct gender roles and subordinate's homosexuality, a situation which is frequently dominant in traditional ideas about sport (Adams, Anderson and McCormach 2010). Research into lesbianism in football shows that it is often framed negatively by some of those who organise and play the game (Caudwell 2007, Harris 2005, 2007). Consequently, in a society in which hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity persist, women playing a traditionally masculine sport can suffer labelling, discrimination, homophobia and trivialisation (Cox and Pringle 2012). In keeping with these ideas, the FA promoted the FA WSL in ways that did not threaten the status quo.

As previously discussed, the female game was placed as an alternative to the aggressive men's game. It was not competing with the men's game or threatening to disrupt the gender order within society and the sport. This trend can be identified in other countries, as Onwumechili's (2011) study, of the history of the game in Nigeria, found "the female invasion ... [into football] was acceptable as long as legitimising myths served to create and maintain a hierarchical structure of superior (male football) over the inferior (women football)". The women's game is football but not as it is traditionally defined and is different and distinct from dominant ideas about the game. In following this normalising approach, when introducing the new League the FA mirrored the way women's involvement in sport is defined in narrow limiting ways. Williams (2006, p157) acknowledges this trend in the game when she identifies, the FA's "previous lack of enthusiasm has been hidden by slogans of a dynamic bureaucracy responding to a fast growing sport ... [many] ... slogans attempting to depict female players as an approved of part of modernity, increasingly well, normal".

These ideas, about hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity, are prevalent in sport as a whole and have direct consequences for how sportswomen are legitimised. As Engh (2011, p137) identifies:

sport is a social institution that perpetuates gendered ideologies in the wider society through appealing to discourses of the naturalness of men's privilege and domination in society ... women's participation in sports can be theorised as embedded in cultural norms and 'womanhood' but it should also be understood as shaped and regulated according to heteronormative ideas of femininity that render the body as distinctively different from the (male) athletic body

McGinnis, McQuillan and Chapple (2005) identified that the introduction of professionalism into women's basketball in America, was based on ideas about heterosexuality, motherhood and respectability. Cox and Pringle's (2012) study of women's football in New Zealand showed that to be accepted players were controlled by theories of normalised femininity. Consequently, to facilitate inclusion within the sport, "female footballers were discursively constructed as submissive, heterosexual ... not a threat to the existing gender order" (p217). This provides further evidence that those who define and legitimise inclusion in sport, especially male dominated sports, have a tendency to frame female versions within traditional gender norms.

However, the vision of women's football as prettier, fairer and more inclusive than the men's game is not a narrative expressed by all. As Katie Chapman (Daily Mail 2011), a Chelsea player who had to retire from the England squad due to being unable to juggle her international career with having two young sons states, "of-course there are dirty players in the league ... it's a very physical game, which is why people should come and watch". Important to note in terms of Chapman's quote is the fact that, in contrast to earlier discussions relating to Kelly Smith, she is no longer part of the FA's England international structure. When individuals are no longer bound to powerful organisations, the messages and definitions they broadcast can more easily deviate from official rhetoric. However, in the sanitised version of women's football that dominates narratives about the game, especially since the introduction of the FA WSL, such ideas contradict prevailing ideas of femininity and are erased from discussions. Without any attempts to acknowledge, address or compensate for long term structural inequalities, the game is framed by the FA in a way that conforms to dominant patriarchal ideas of gender. These ideas are amplified by some of those in women's football, especially those whose career is dependent

on the FA and others who are desperate for the game to gain the recognition and resources they believe it deserves.

## **8.2 Envisioning the target market**

The normalising and gendered identity which underpinned the introduction of the FA WSL was mirrored by the family based target market, which the FA (2009a) identified as central to the success of the League. With few examples of professionalised women's elite team sports and the existing FA WPL having very low attendances, the FA had few restrictions in determining the potential fan base. In keeping with the normalising values that underpinned its introduction they chose a very traditional view of who they thought would attend games as the FA believed the game should market itself as a fun, family friendly game. These ideas were emphasised in the FA's original FA WSL documentation (FA 2009a, p10), which proposed an annual 'Super League Sizzler' to be played at a central location, over the May or August bank holidays, where "all clubs play two fixtures ... with the aim being capacity crowds and a range of family-friendly entertainment".

In keeping with other FA WSL ideas which have been influenced by other sports this idea draws on the 'Magic Weekend' in English Rugby League. Over one weekend an entire schedule of elite Rugby League matches are played in one venue. Instigated in 2007 it has become an annual feature in the sporting calendar. As the Super League (2014b) state "the Magic Weekend is a unique concept that showcases the best of Super League ... fans from all 14 Clubs come together for two days of exciting action in a family friendly environment". Such ideas were attempted, less successfully, in men's football in 1988. The Mercantile Credit Football Festival was part of the Football Leagues centenary celebrations. Over one weekend sixteen teams from across the four divisions in the elite male leagues played 40 minute games at Wembley, with the ground split into sections to accommodate supporters from each team. 41,500 spectators attended on the first day and only 17,000 for the semi and final on the Sunday. The twenty minute each way format meant nine of the 15 ties went to penalties and the manager of the winning team stayed away from the tournament (Ashdown 2011).

The need to produce different products, to appeal to different audiences, is evident throughout sport. In a commercialised environment, world governing bodies have identified that there is only marginal increases to be made in spectator levels and interest in traditional versions of long standing sports. FIFA, for instance, has diversified into futsal and beach formats of the game. Additionally, cricket's governing bodies acknowledged that five day Tests are out of step with contemporary lifestyles and employment patterns. This led them to introduce new forms of the game, such as T20 cricket (Subhani et al. 2012). The decision to legitimise women's football on the grounds of it being a family, fun and friendly game was, therefore, an attempt to provide a distinct product for the game, enabling it to compete in a crowded commercialised sporting market.

The FA's commercial overview which accompanied the initial application process, stressed that the target audience was the 1.2 million dads, with 10 to 15 year old children, who already watch live football and the 263,000, 10 to 15 year old, girls who played in schools and clubs (FA 2009e). As Julian Eccles (FA 2010c), the FA's Group Director for Marketing and Communications, stated "the FA explored numerous names and branding routes, all based on solid research around the women's game. The main aim in this brand research was to find something that the key target audience, 9-15 year old girls, identified with".

The vision of a family friendly game espoused by the FA was, therefore, in reality defined in terms of fathers, with little mention of mothers. Researchers such as Free and Hughson (2003), Crawford (2004) and Dunn (2014) have identified that female fans are often overlooked in narratives relating to football. As Pope and Kirk (2014) state this occurs "despite the fact that women now make up a substantial minority of fans of the most popular professional sport in Britain, men's football. In England, female fans are estimated to make up around 19% of all Premier League fans". Research on football fandom which does incorporate female voices, such as King (2002), often adheres to simplistic binary classifications which positions female fans as less committed than the traditional male supporter. As Jones (2008, p517) concludes "when women are mentioned in the literature of football fans, scholars often assume that they are

less authentic and committed fans as men and that they operate outside of the 'imagined community' of fandom". This trend is not limited to football fandom in England but has been identified in research in other countries, including Cere's (2002) investigation of fan communities in Italy, Rodríguez's (2005) study of Argentinian football and Pfister, Lenneis and Mintert's (2013) analysis of experiences in Denmark.

The invisibility of female fans is not confined to football but is identified in other sports, especially male team sports (Gosling 2007, Wenner 2012). Crawford and Gosling (2004) explored the experiences of female fans of the Manchester Storm ice hockey team. They identified that female fans were not considered as serious fans of the team but merely groupies or 'puck bunnies' which "implies that these supporters are 'inauthentic', not 'dedicated' in their support, and are more interested in the sexual attractiveness of the players rather than the sport itself" (p478). However, they found that there was no significant difference in levels of commitment or knowledge between the male and female supporters interviewed. There was also no evidence that the attractiveness of players influenced the decisions of the females who attended games. Mewett and Toffoletti's (2011) study of the Australian Football League identified the underrepresentation of female fans in narratives relating the sport. They suggested this was related to the sport being seen as a male domain which furthered the ethos of masculine hegemony and marginalised women. Hoeber and Kerwin (2013) summarise that the position of female sport fans, including those involved in football:

researchers describe the social identity aligned with being a sport fan as creating a standard that men are naturally assumed to be legitimate fans and women are not. Despite evidence that shows women attend and consume sport events and products, some female spectators are marginalised as inauthentic sport fans because male fans see them as exhibiting non-traditional characteristics and behaviours

It is within these prevailing societal narratives that the FA identified that fathers and their children were central to the family friendly target market. The choice of such a narrow and closely defined market limited the scope of the League, placing numerous potential supporters at the periphery of decisions about its nature. For example, a respondent identified a potential adult audience which were excluded in decisions made about the game:

*"the biggest target market is the women that play. My argument is we [the elite league] play at the same time as they do. For me it should be a mid-week league, I know there are problems travelling mid-week but if they are not playing they will come to our games" (Chair of FA WSL club A)*

Also, the focus on young people and families meant other groups were not initially included within decisions made by clubs:

*"we launched our club shop, well I say shop I mean a tent, we bought a load of stock so when we sold some we could just replenish it ... at first I was stocking kids ones but I have had so many requests from middle aged men for like XXL, that's great I just wasn't expecting it ... we've got a supporters club here now as well ... it's a real random bunch, a lot of middle aged men ... when it first started I was thinking we would be attracting the kids, put on stuff for kids, but no, it has been mostly middle aged people" (Head of Football at FA WSL club C)*

Another respondent interviewed in the third season of the FA WSL was still struggling to identify the fan base:

*"I think other challenges we face as a sport is who our fans are ... we've found that if you look at the men's game the fan base stems from the father figure in the family ... whereas we have found we have to completely invert that. We have almost had to go and target the girls who are interested in football get them to games and as a consequence they drag the parent. I think that is one of our challenges, who is our fan base and if our fan base is predominantly girls between 7 and 14 who are interested in football I think it is hard to breakdown some stereotypes and perceptions in the adult fans about what women's football looks like" (Head of women's football at FA WSL club D)*

The FA, therefore, envisioned a narrowly defined target audience for the FA WSL based on traditionally gendered narratives which in the experience of participants was misleading.

Hanis-Martin (2006) identified that target audiences for women's sport, are often shaped by traditional beliefs of what sport should be and for whom. In her study of a women's basketball team, competing in the America Women's National Basketball Association, the owners sought a white middle class family audience. This excluded from their vision others, including the lesbian and African American communities, who played a large role in the game. Ultimately, she identified that the prescribed target audience was a fiction. The club was founded on heteronormative and traditional ideas of women in sport, which were unrelated to reality. Consequently, the marketing, advertising and



organisational decisions based on this myth were misguided and constricting. Southall and Nagel's (2007) study of the first professional women's soccer league in America, the Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA), identified similar trends in its primary target market. They identified that a reliance on a family market, especially young female players and their mothers, constrained the game's development as it targeted people who were not sport entertainment consumers, while also ignoring traditional supporters of the women's game. As they conclude:

While the WUSA's marketing efforts did reach members of the youth soccer community, unfortunately, these spectators, on average, were only persuaded to attend one to two games per season, resulting in a fan base insufficient to generate ticket revenue to meet league expenses or secure and maintain league sponsors. In addition, fears of alienating a significant percentage of the youth soccer community impeded significant activation of marketing strategies aimed at the lesbian community (p63)

The FA's positioning of the League as family friendly also had consequences for debates relating to the timing of the League fixtures. The FA (2011a, p10) announced that FA WSL fixtures would run through the summer months, as it would be "more family-friendly with the warmer weather and better facilities helping to attract larger audiences"; while the rest of the women's structure remained a winter league. At the heart of the FA's thinking was the need to create a new League away from the congested winter months, when the majority of men's elite football was played. It was assumed that this was one of the factors which hindered the women's games ability to attract supporters, sponsors and media coverage. Equally, a summer league meant it was not threatening to disrupt football's gendered nature or attempting the complicated task of pulling spectators from the men's game. A summer setting would overcome the problem of constant postponements during winter, due to the substandard facilities the FA WPL and its associated cup competitions were played in. Situating the FA WSL in the summer provided warmer weather and brighter evenings, which it was believed would encourage more families to attend. Respondents acknowledged the FA's summer league idea had its strengths:

*"[it is] warmer and lighter ... it's nice to go out and watch as a spectator, especially evening games you can be out in your short sleeves with your mates" (CFA Women's and Girls' Development Officer)*

*"The idea behind the summer league was because the women's season originally coincided with the men's, so they thought, well, if we run it over the summer diehard fans [might say] I need some football lets go along and watch the women's game and again the reasoning was great it is lovely to play in the sunshine compared to the snow" (Chair of FA WPL club)*

It fitted in well with the vision of the elite women's league being a fun family friendly league, played in sunny, warm conditions for all ages to enjoy.

Respondents though identified the reality of a summer calendar:

*"there was a lot of clashing with the men's Champions League, mid-week games, the climax of the [men's] season and that was always my question why on earth are you having it in the summer and they [the FA] just trot out the same thing, so we don't clash with the men but they do clash ... the summer is never free of sport" (Journalist)*

*"they had this idea to move it away from the men's game but they haven't, they play most of the games at the two peaks of men's football, the end of the season and the start of the season ... they say let's play in the summer and they have a big break to fit around the England side the Euro's and the World Cup and I don't think they got that right at all ... I don't think moving away from the winter is a bad thing but moving to the summer complicates matters" (Chair of FA WSL club B)*

In reality the existence of a summer free from sport, into which the FA WSL could fit to create its own identity away from the crowded winter calendar, was a myth. Although seemingly logical in theory, it proved more complicated in reality. The 2011 League started in April, just as the men's league competitions were coming to their conclusion. During the summer months, the League took a two month mid-season break due to the FIFA Women's World Cup in Germany, meaning it did not finish until October. The break meant there was a crowded FA WSL fixture schedule, as the matches had to be fitted into fewer weeks, meaning in some week's clubs played multiple games. As one participant summarised this had consequences for the players:

*"games are too close together, some of the girls still have jobs or are travelling to university so they find it hard to keep travelling and training... At least the FA has been quite honest about what's not working" (Journalist)*

As the FA's Head of the National Game, Kelly Simmons (She Kicks 2011, p17), stated at the end of the first season, "we all agreed we need to extend the season to reduce the number of weeks where there are two games". Consequently, the 2012 season was extended and started in March. However,

it also included an eight week break due to the Olympics, meaning the season didn't end until early October, by which time the winter sport calendar had already commenced. By the 2013 season, respondents were still commenting on the consequences of the summer league, especially the congested fixture list:

*"[there should be] a game a week but then there was a game at the weekend, another on the Wednesday then another game on the weekend and it was just a lot of football and I think the WSL has had quite a lot of injuries" (Head of women's football at FA WSL club D)*

*"the programmes been too condensed ... a high profile semi-final and four games in eleven days ... six girls, the Wednesday before, had done fitness testing with England at St Georges Park, so that two week period they had four really competitive matches and fitness testing. [One of the players] did her hamstring because she had not had a full pre-season and wasn't ready for that intensity ... they've had four ACL's [anterior cruciate ligament injuries] over the whole set up ... some of them you can say are innocuous but when people go over fatigue has to play a part" (CFA official previously involved in a FA WSL club)*

The FA's attempts to turn the women's elite game into a niche product played in the summer not only proved more complicated than the vision suggests, some imply it also contributed to players becoming injured. Matt Beard (BBC 2013a), manager of FA WSL side Liverpool Ladies FC, stated in the third season, "there are a lot of players that are injured because of the quick succession of the games. It's one of the frustrating things of the league. We seem to play games in quick succession and then we have weeks on end that we're not playing. It's not looking after the health of the players, especially going into the Euros". However, a participant identified the mid-season break would continue for the 2014 season:

*"we have had a close down each season for a major championship. Next season there isn't any [international competitions] for the first time but we are still going to close for the month of June to let the pitches [recover from the winter season]" (CFA Official and FA Council member)*

The opportunity to relieve problems caused by the congested nature of fixtures could not be fully exploited due to the women's games' continued structural disadvantage which means many clubs continue to share facilities with men's teams, an issue which is explored further in a subsequent chapter.

### 8.3 The FA WSL as spectacle

As discussed in Chapter Three, the focus on entertainment and providing a spectacle is a common theme in the current commercial, commodified world. Research has identified the role of spectacle as central to all areas of contemporary life (Debord 1994). The way in which commercialisation has come to dominate means that everything has had to become more extravagant, luminous and bright. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998, p82) identify that "contemporary society makes the world into spectacle because it is organised by capitalism which has commodified everything". This phenomenon is particularly evident in the leisure environment where the advent of television and mass multinational telecommunications has transformed sports (Kellner 2001). Contemporary sport needs to be more than a game; it has to be an event (Horne 2006, Smart 2007).

Observation of the first game of the inaugural season demonstrated the embodiment of such a contemporary spectacularised vision. Chelsea Ladies v Arsenal Ladies on the 13th April 2011 was played in front of a crowd of 2,510, considerably more than attendances at FA WPL matches. The day of celebrations included a football festival with opportunities for girls teams to develop their skills, entertainment such as face painting and bouncy castles and opportunities to meet the official FA WSL mascots. Before kick-off there was a performance from the official ambassadors for the League, an up and coming girl band 'Parade', a female football tricks expert performed on the pitch, balloons were released and at half time FA WSL T-shirts were fired into the crowd. As Lomas (2011) describes:

off the pitch, the stands were awash with face paint as a family-oriented atmosphere made a refreshing change from the aggressive aura that men's football matches tend to exude. Supporters of both sides mingled and the large contingent of children helped the evening seem more a festival of football than just a fixture

The game exemplified the family orientated vision of the FA and although this level of entertainment was not repeated at other games which were observed, some elements were apparent. Some teams organised girl's football tournaments before specific games, other teams provided additional entertainment such as bouncy castles, face painting and shooting practice

games. Bands played at some matches. T-shirts, club and FA WSL merchandise distributed at others. The provision varied between clubs with some matches having no additional entertainment while others had a plethora. For instance, Doncaster Rovers Belles for their opening game of the 2013 season provided a rock band to play pitch side, a Gospel choir, face painting, a cheerleading troupe, a guest appearance from a retired male English football international, free entry, free T-shirts and free miniature bells to ring. Variability of experience has been seen as an outcome in other sports, especially those who have introduced a structure whereby individual clubs are licensed to operate and have responsibility for the development of clubs. As Mansfield and Killick (2012, p561) noted in relation to the Netball Super League, "freedom to manage does not always create a consistent product particularly in relation to match day experience ... the creation of a netball spectacle on match day is also variable with some franchises providing a pre-match, interval and post-match entertainment of higher quality than others."

It was evident through observations and interviews that the spectacularised vision was being encouraged by the FA. As a respondent identified, clubs were urged to provide additional entertainment on match day:

*"you see [pointing at the ground] it's quite open and the kids will come and they're not watching the game, they're kicking a ball around or chasing the mascot, eating sweets, but it is a very safe environment here so the parents can come and let their kids play and know their fine. I do think that is how we are pulling the families in by advertising that it is a safe environment ... it's that match day experience again that's what the FA are pushing because as I said when the kids come they are not just watching the football, we have got to put on a whole experience and the football match just isn't enough. The food and drink, the sweets, the half time entertainment, the mascot it has to be something more than just the game" (Head of football at FA WSL club C)*

The perceived need to market the FA WSL matches as more than just a game of football was central to the FA's vision. This perception abounds in contemporary spectacularised, commercialised sport, as Smith and Stewart (2010, p6) recognised, "sport has been transformed into a fast moving consumable experience ... as a result it has gone well beyond being a symbol of a pleasant Saturday afternoon at the neighbourhood sports ground". While as Horne (2010, p1557) identifies in relation to cricket, "the game at the highest

level is now unimaginable without such spectacles and commodified relations of cultural production, involving a focus on celebrity players; branded mascots ...event-related merchandise; and entertainment".

Indeed, in relation to the FA WSL, merely providing a football match was not enough. It was imperative other activities were offered. This is not to argue that this situation is peculiar to the new elite women's League. It is recognised that contemporary sport in general embraces the use of additional entertainment to capture fans attention (Rein, Kotler and Shields 2006). More specifically half time entertainment, mascots and spectator challenges are all part of the experience at men's elite football in England (Giulianotti 2002). However, within men's football such activities supplement the game itself. In contrast, the intensity with which they were deployed at certain FA WSL games almost overshadowed the football being played.

In fact, observations at matches undertaken as part of this research identified that attempts to create a spectacle could distract from the game itself, making the football a peripheral part of the experience. In some cases more attention was given to obtaining free merchandise and spectators having their face painted. For example, at one Doncaster Rovers Belles match complimentary t-shirts and bells were distributed while the match was being played which meant that attention was drawn away from the game. Supporters, especially the younger people in attendance, were focussed on watching where the people distributing the merchandise were entering the stadium from to ensure they ran to the front to meet them and claim a t-shirt or bell before the supply was exhausted. This was repeated throughout the game as those distributing merchandise would leave the stadium and return with their stock replenished.

Furthermore, the provision of additional entertainment at FA WSL games could play a role in delegitimising women's football as a sport in its own right. The FA's enthusiasm for peripheral entertainment can be contextualised within wider discourses relating to sport as spectacle. It can, though, also be understood as a ploy to ensure an enjoyable experience, without having to rely on the standard of the game itself. As Smith and Stewart (2010, p7) suggest "to compensate for the variable quality of the core on-field sport product sport organisations also

offer a range of supplementary products and services like merchandise and hospitality that can be more easily controlled for quality".

The FA envisioned that previously amateur clubs would become part of a spectacularised commercial environment. The organisation decided that the women's game would have to depend on more than the on-field competition. The narratives being espoused revolved around safe environments for families, fun supplementary entertainment and whole day experiences. Less focus was placed on existing supporters, the actual sport being played, the history and rivalries of the teams, the personalities of the players or their strengths and weaknesses. Narratives relating to the sport had limited focus on what actually happened on the pitch, unlike the male version of the game where such discourses are central. In effect, for some of those attending games the actual football was peripheral and framed as having limited worth in its own right. This process was fuelled by the FA's decision not to allow elite women's football time and space to develop. Instead, the organisation focussed on short term easily quantifiable success criteria, such as an increase in attendances.

#### **8.4 The FA WSL as carnival**

The focus on attendances can be seen as part of other discourses, not just the spectacularisation of sport and the neo liberal focus on short term goals. The incorporation of supporters as active parts of the product, not mere voyeurs watching a game, is common in football (Clark 2006). As Ben-Porat (2012, p454-455) identifies, in "commercialised football the 'ideal' image of the fan is that of a customer fan who is responsible for the atmosphere in the stadium, which is crucial to the game and to television broadcasts". Fans are increasingly part of, what Bakhtin (1984, p122) described as carnivalesque, "a pageant without footlights and without a division into performer and spectators. In carnival everyone is an active participant, everyone communes in the carnival act ... its participants live in it". This concept is central to a sports commercial viability in contemporary society. Indeed, Burton (1995) noted this phenomenon in Caribbean cricket, where supporter's camaraderie, rowdiness and light-hearted behaviour were central to the carnivalesque atmosphere and ultimately the success of the sport. As Selmer and Sülzle (2010, p810) identify "the

football carnival itself becomes the draw for thousands of people who do not come to see the games but just to be part of the party".

Supporters are, therefore, central to contemporary sporting narratives relating to carnival. In terms of attracting more people, the run up to the new League saw an increased media focus on the highest level of elite women's football. Visibility for women's football was mentioned by participants as a key concern before the FA WSL. Those involved in this study identified that the introduction of the new league had gone some way to address this. As one participant explained:

*"when you talked about the elite league, the WPL National Division, people were falling asleep in the first sentence so at least now you can say the Super League and it has got eight teams and they say "can you watch it" ... yes yes you can, so just to get it across to the person who maybe previously hasn't had an interest, it's now got a brand and a logo" (Journalist)*

Attendances grew and increased viewing figures were seen for television coverage of the League. As McVeigh (2012) indicated viewing figures for live matches broadcast in the first season of the FA WSL were approximately 450,000, equal to those of the men's Scottish Premier League. Kelly Simmons (She Kicks 2011, p17) also stated that the new FA WSL had been "a really exciting competitive league with some excellent spectator and viewing figures ... The FA WSL has definitely helped raise the profile and credibility of the women's game".

Clubs were evidently working hard to meet the FA's (2010b) vision to build bigger and more loyal fan bases:

*"we have a tournament [before home matches] or what we call the club experience where they get a coaching session which is free for the kids, they get to meet the players, they get to do a pitch inspection with the players all before the match and then we have got player cards that players sign after the match" (Head of football at FA WSL club C)*

*"[the first initiative is] a knock out tournament ... before the game with four U10s side and four U12 sides ... we are starting [to provide free tickets to] different organisations including an Asperger's group, two care homes, disability groups we had about five of these groups so we are widening the net ... for grassroots clubs [we say] you come and see us and we'll come and see you ... so we are sending out two players to two of their training sessions and they have to commit to come to one of our matches ... we are getting the investment through the FA and if we*



*can invest in grassroots clubs it is a virtuous circle" (Chair of FA WSL club B)*

The clubs took on the FA's vision for the FA WSL, working hard to engage with young people who were identified as part of the target audience. However, the research identified problems meeting the FA's overriding success criteria:

*"attendances have gone down this [2012] season which I'm not surprised about ... and at the moment that is the problem, attendances aren't good" (Chair of FA WSL club B)*

*"I don't know how we get out and get new people in because most people around the area know about us now, which is great, so how do we get new ones ... this season [2013] you had to be averaging 600 so happy days ... but next year they want us averaging 800 and see that is my point that extra 200, I don't know where we are going to get them from" (Head of football at FA WSL club C)*

*"I don't really know where you go now, you can't drag them in, all clubs have been very proactive, all credit to them they've been fantastic at trying to promote it and the links with the community but you can see Liverpool were probably the poorest supported, they are still not getting big gates if you take the derby out, they are still only getting 300 or 400 fans, Bristol Academy have done really well but they use their Centre of Excellence and they have a proper structure and the kids come with their parents and they link in with that, Birmingham are averaging 300, Chelsea not much more" (CFA official previously involved in a FA WSL club)*

The focus on attendances as the symbol of success was not a surprise within the commercial neo liberal model set out by the FA, as discussed in Chapter Six. Although some teams, such as Arsenal, met attendance targets, overall participants indicated that they were not increasing at the rate the FA required. However, respondents suggested it was always an unrealistic goal, one which required clubs to divert a lot of resources to:

*"I think the people in the women's game realistically knew you have got a core there and you are going to have to work very hard to up that, when you think of, not just men's football now, all the other stuff I just think its 365 days a year that there are different sporting events" (CFA official previously involved in a FA WSL club)*

The focus on increasing attendances was a laudable goal, which fed completely into the commercialised sporting environment the FA envisioned for the women's game. As Kennedy and Kennedy (2012, p330) identify "fans help to create the spectacle that attracts commercial sponsorship". To be a viable product the women's elite league needed supporters to become part of the

performance. If the FA WSL was to become financially self-sufficient, enabling the FA to decrease its financial commitment, then the clubs and the League needed to attract fans. The FA anticipated increased attendances would entice sponsors and partners who were willing to invest in the sport, as well as providing an entertaining product to attract media interest.

This process relied on supporters creating a carnival atmosphere and contributing to the development of a spectacle. A consistent, high quality product was essential to entice people to become involved in the event. To this end, a respondent noted how the FA monitors this match day experience:

*"a WSL delegate, it might be someone who is high up in a CFA or someone from London, [look at] was there food and drink available, was there a room for drug testing, was there a physio room, were there signs, was there parking, was the PA announcer right, did they kick off on time, does it have a VIP area. They feed that back to you ... [also] the FA have this thing called the Mystery Shopper, so they will send a family to all the different grounds and we have no idea who this family are and they will be doing a checklist, how was the half time entertainment and give it a mark, could you find where the tickets were on sale, how was the parking, was it free, was it far away from the ground, so we are going to be judged on all these things" (Head of football at FA WSL club C)*

The FA, therefore, sent representatives to all matches and undercover spectators attended all grounds during a season to ensure that clubs were creating the spectacular carnival that the organisation had decided was central to the FA WSL. In keeping with the FA's vision for the League they send a family to assess the match day experience. This level of scrutiny by the FA is not unique as monitoring is central to contemporary society to ensure high quality and consistent spectacular, carnivalesque experiences are being provided. As Davis (2005, p10) states "surveillance becomes a key element of neo liberal systems necessitated by the heightened emphasis on individual responsibility ... reporting mechanisms for monitoring and producing appropriate behaviour are mandated ... [which are] very costly and devour enormous proportion of shrinking funds". As discussed in Chapter Six, in contemporary society extra responsibility and individualism comes with increased accountability and scrutiny (Clarke 2004). Davies and Saltmarsh (2007, p3) summarise that "an extensive audit system is needed since, in a

neo-liberal philosophy, trust and commitment to the collective well-being have been made redundant".

One respondent suggested that to adhere to the increased level of scrutiny which has accompanied the new League and demonstrate to the FA that they are achieving the naïve attendance targets some clubs may have falsified their returns:

*"so the first two years we tried hard to get attendance, attendances were poor, we are one of the few clubs that have reported accurate attendances. There are others who report accurate attendances and there are others that just double their actually, I wouldn't mention names, but that is true you only have to take a picture and count up afterwards to work out who is and who isn't" (Chair of FA WSL club B)*

There was even a suggestion that, as the FA had made attendances key to the success of the new League, the organisation itself had been part of a process to manipulate the figures:

*"one of the FA's targets was to increase the fan base ... without being unkind to the FA I think they are actually over milking what they are doing ... I think they are putting a bit of a PR spin on it" (CFA official previously involved in a FA WSL club)*

Attendances figures have been placed as a crucial indicator of the Leagues success. With such importance placed on meeting attendances targets their manipulation could be prove essential to clubs and the League. Davies, Ramchandani and Coleman (2010) identify that attendances are linked to the economic success in sport and they can be manipulated so they do not merely reflect how many people actually view sporting events. As they state it:

is not an uncommon practice for estimating attendance and there are numerous other examples of football clubs calculating attendance on the number of tickets sold rather than those passing through the turnstiles. Moreover, there are examples of other pay-to-view events at which spectator attendance has also been somewhat exaggerated, including Formula 1 Grand Prix events and county cricket matches in England (p14)

Van Thiel and Leeuw (2002) emphasise this tendency for organisations to misrepresent figures is heightened within contemporary neo-liberal society which is obsessed with the imposition of easily measurable success criterion. Madichie's (2013) study of Middle Eastern football following the FIFA's decision to award the 2022 World Cup to Qatar, identified the central position of attendances within football culture. He queried whether the focus on this

quantifiable target had put pressure on clubs and NGBs to manipulate official figures.

During the research, the type of carnival the FA advocated was witnessed to greatest effect not at FA WSL games but at the FA Women's Cup Final, the showcase women's football match of the season. Spectators came dressed as Smurf's with painted blue faces, horns were blown while comedy hats and numerous other novelty merchandise were worn. A television cameraman set up a situation where he gathered together a group of young female supporters and on cue filmed them all waving, cheering and clapping, almost creating a carnival for those watching live at home. Turner's (2013) research of the EPL, identified that atmosphere can be contrived within football stadiums in the men's elite game. In an attempt to create a carnival at Manchester City's Eastland's stadium, crowd noise was broadcast over the public address system to combat the lack of singing. As he states there is growing evidence that atmosphere can be imitated "within the passive experience of the 'live' event, where in some cases actual crowd participation and atmosphere have been simulated" (p5). Redhead (1997) also identified the requirement to simulate football experience within grounds when referring to Arsenal Football Club's attempts to replicate a crowd on the 'North Bank' stand of their stadium, Highbury. During the closure of the terrace, due to ground improvements, artists were commissioned to produce a mural of a crowd and recordings of singing, chanting and cheering were played at the empty end of the ground.

The FA Cup final which was observed as part of the research, was the nearest domestic women's football in England came to the commercial, spectacular and carnival FA vision. It does, though, also identify the difficulties encountered when attempting to reproduce ideas from male sports in previously neglected female structures. Indeed, attendances for the FA Cup final had started to fall even before the FA WSL was introduced and have continued to decrease dramatically in the years since its inception. The 2008 season saw the largest ever attendance for the competition, with 24,582 spectators at the City Ground in Nottingham. This was 53 more than the previous highest, the year before, at the same venue. In 2010, the same ground also hosted the last final before the FA WSL was introduced, which 17,505 attended. Since then 13,885 were at the

2011 final, 8,723 in 2012 and by the 2013 final, two months into the FA WSL's third season, the crowd was only 4,988 (Twentyfour7football 2013). The exact reason for the dramatic decrease was hard to identify, although a participant did suggest a number of possible factors:

*"they [the FA] have got to be very disappointed, ... the FA shot themselves in the foot in some respects, they take Donny [Doncaster Rovers Belles] out of FA WSL 1 and they knew they were already hosting the [2013] FA Cup ... [and it is] not in the centre of the country, whereas when they had it at the City Ground or Coventry [it was] ... what I think personally ... [is] it needs a home, [like] 20,000 at the City Ground [with a] good atmosphere" (CFA official previously involved in a FA WSL club)*

Whatever the reasons, it appears disappointing that attendances were seen by the FA as the measure of success in the elite domestic league when crowds at the showcase event they actually organise had dwindled. However, despite this discrepancy, attendances continued to be seen as the key to success. They provide an ideal short term measure which embraces society's obsession with quantity and numbers and contribute to demonstrating the game has become the carnivalesque spectacle seen as central to sport in contemporary society.

Indeed, to meet the FA's targets and attempt to increase interest in the elite game most clubs had to allow free entry to games:

*"we do need it to have a value but we still give away probably about half of our tickets. The Centre of Excellence and the Skills Centre [players] get two tickets each every match, if you go to the college you get free tickets ..., the players have complimentary tickets so they get about 5 each and the staff get free tickets ... There are VIP's, 25 of them, and the away team get about 25 and then there is player mascots, the kids and one parent get in free so we are up to 3-400." (Head of football at FA WSL club C)*

*"[we do an initiative] if you bring an organised group to our matches you will get free tickets for the kids and for the group volunteers, parents pay ... [for one game it] brought about 400 people and 200 in the [junior football] tournament [who get in free] ... there is never going to be a commercial case for a long time for running a women's football club on its gate" (Chair of FA WSL club B)*

Complimentary tickets are often seen as a vital tool in attempts to increase attendances at sports events. For instance, Dale et al. (2005) studied Rugby League and identified that free entry to matches was central to encouraging supporters to attend games. While Watanabe, Matsumoto and Nogawa's (2013)

study of professional golf tournaments in Japan concluded that over a half of attendees had entered for free. Whannel's (1993) research into the Seoul Olympics directly relates the use of free tickets to Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque. He identifies that sports events need to be well attended, as in contemporary commercialised spectacularised society they are a "form of performance rather than an artefact ...[they] represent the temporary triumph of process over product ... [due to] the tendency of capitalist commodity production to transform all such cultural processes into calculated packaged objects for consumption" (p341). Where there is an absence of supporters free tickets provide a solution to empty seats and the resultant lack of carnival atmosphere.

Chappelet (2014) and Tomlinson (2014b) identified a similar process occurred during the 2012 London Olympics. Empty seats in the early stages of the competition led to criticism about the lack of attendees, atmosphere and spectacle. This ultimately led the London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) to issue complimentary tickets (National Audit Office 2012). This study's confirmation of FA WSL clubs reliance on complimentary tickets, however, is counter to official FA targets. As Kelly Simmons (2012) asserted, for the 2013 season "we want a paying crowd who value the experience of going to a match and are willing to pay. So, we want a decrease in complimentary tickets, and an increase in paying fans, who pay a decent but affordable price for watching a WSL match live, £5-£8 for an adult and £3-£5 for a child". However, Hoeber and Kerwin (2013) identified concerns that those benefiting from complimentary tickets have little interest in the sport they are watching or its long term development, which in the case of the FA WSL does not fit into the FA's long term plan of creating a sustainable league.

The FA (2012c, p6) identified four significant benefits of the FA WSL, "a rise in domestic playing standards, improvement in playing and other career opportunities for talented players, growth in the profile of the game, including increased TV and media coverage and an uplift in commercial investment". All four are laudable long term aims for the sport, however, the first is hard to quantify, while the latter three are hard to accomplish, in any fundamental way,

in the short term due to the unaddressed structural, social and organisational disadvantages women's football has faced. As clubs struggle to identify the market they need to access, to increase attendances in the short term time scales set by the FA, complimentary tickets provided a solution. As Crouch (1997, p354) identifies "neo liberalism and its stark message of the commercialisation of as many aspects of life as possible ... [has a] ... maximum emphasis on short term decision making without respect to long term commitments". Decisions within sport are often focussed on short, fixed length contracts and funding criteria (Grix 2010). Meaning that the ability of sport organisations to implement initiatives that focus on long term aims are hindered.

Respondents identified that the FA's strategy to increase attendances involved a reliance on the success of the international women's team and Team GB at the 2012 Olympics:

*"I think they are disappointed, post-Olympics, about fan numbers ... at the Olympics 70,000 turned up at Wembley and they [the FA] keep quoting that but where are those 70,000 watching women's football? ... I think post Olympics it's not kicked on fan wise. I think the quality has definitely improved and as a product it is getting better. I've seen it [before] when we had the Euros in 2005 and they said this is going to be the big push on and that is when they were going to start the Super League. It never started and they never got that kick on and then they started the Super League and to get the fans in they spent a lot of money for the first game and just got 2,000 people there and it never really kicked on and then the Olympics" (CFA official previously involved in a FA WSL club)*

The anticipated increase in attendances after the Olympics did not materialise. As the chairman of Doncaster Rovers Belles, Alan Smart (Doncaster Rovers Belles 2012, p4), stated in programme notes after the Olympics, "nationally WSL crowds are a concern, sadly the tremendous crowds for the USA v Canada and Team GB v Brazil games at Old Trafford and Wembley respectively have not inspired those supporters to support the WSL game". The FA's belief that large Olympic crowds would transfer to the domestic game proved simplistic and misguided. As Fielding-Lloyd and Mean (2014) identify, spectator enthusiasm for women's soccer at London 2012 was attributable to people's eagerness to be involved in the Olympics irrespective of what sport they attended. It was not indicative of any significant upsurge of interest in the

women's game more generally. The FA has previously expressed a belief that the national team's increased profile would have a dramatic impact on the domestic game. In 2006 Trevor Brooking, the then FA Director of Football Development, claimed that England's qualification for the Women's World Cup finals for the first time in twelve years would transform the profile and funding of the women's game (Leighton 2006b). In hindsight, seven years later, this claim overstated the situation and in reality the impact was minimal. Similar narratives proclaimed the positive impact of the FA hosting the 2005 Women's European championships, claims which also did not come to fruition (Bell 2006).

The misplaced dependence by sports organisations on hosting large tournaments to boost domestic sport is a common narrative (Spracklen 2012, Veal Toohey and Frawley 2012). It is exemplified by Pfister's (2013) research into the 2011 Women's World Cup in Germany. She concludes that although it attracted record attendances and was seen as a huge success, "it did not produce the anticipated breakthrough of women's football. In the wake of the event, the number of females playing did not increase decisively, neither did the interest of consumers nor the coverage of mass media" (p1). Southall and Nagel's (2007) study also identified that the introduction of the first professional women's soccer league in America, the Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA), was partly a result of the unprecedented crowds at the Women's World Cup held in the country in 1999. As they state "seemingly blinded by the sight of 90,000 in the Rose Bowl for the Women's World Cup finals, the league attempted to buy its way into the U.S. sport consciousness" (p64). However the WUSA folded after three years as it was unable to attract the necessary sponsorship, media attention or spectators. As Southall and Nagel identify 'the WUSA was doomed to failure from its inception. The league never made the leap from a novelty item that spectators went to see once a year to a sport that had enough true fans to support it.' (p65)

Sport governing bodies often adopt such arguments in bids to become hosts of international competitions. However, research has shown that this belief is misguided, the notion of a participation legacy resulting from major events is hard to substantiate (Cashman 2006, Frawley and Cush 2011, Thornley 2012).



In fact, Bell's (2012) follow up research into the 2005 European Championships identified that once the tournament had finished interest in the long term impacts were forgotten. She concludes that, "unfortunately despite significant investment in the legacy programme and its women and girls development work, the FA was unable to fund the long term tracking and monitoring evaluation data, suggested as being important for demonstrating a clear evidence base for the event" (p354). Making such uncomplicated connections thwarts any need to discuss or address the structural disadvantages that women's football faces. By organising tournaments, sports governing bodies believe they are contributing positively to the domestic game. This allows them to abdicate some of the responsibility if positive effects are not seen as a result. As Bell and Blakey's (2010, p158) study concludes, "to infer ... that imbalance in participation and support ... is merely a lack of interest for women would be to ignore the institutional, social and cultural factors which have helped shape public attitudes to sport, as a sport for men played by men".

#### **8.4 Evaluating the vision**

Meeting targets set out by the FA proved difficult for some clubs, however, throughout the research there was little criticism of the organisation. Whilst the vision may have been misplaced, requiring clubs to devote significant resources to its achievement, the FA WSL was still seen as the place to be for those in the women's game. As respondents from clubs not currently in the FA WSL stated:

*"whatever it may be or whatever the future holds, however it evolves, we want to be part of it, we want to play at the highest level" (Chair of FA WPL club)*

*"I was reluctant at first because I didn't know what the outcome would be but I am dead eager to be in the Super League and I hope as a club we can push for that at the next opening" (Head of football at FA WPL club)*

The lack of critique was, also, due to an acknowledgement of the fundamental role played by the small team of committed individuals in the FA. This was coupled with an understanding of the challenges faced by those trying to implement the new vision within the organisation:

*"it is difficult because when I have not very polite things to say I'm worried they [the FA employees] take it to heart but I'm not criticising them as individual's I'm criticising the framework ... I think sometimes I*

*am a little too diplomatic, I had to go and say [to an individual from the FA] you have done the wrong thing [but] their going to get upset, people do hold grudges but I should be more critical than I am ... Again you want to say that is crap but on the other hand you understand why that happened, sometimes I think as long as we keep doing that nothing is going to change " (Journalist)*

*"It has been hard for me as a fan and working in it, I find myself defending the people who I know have so much passion for it and the enthusiasm to make it work but I have to say look listen there are just three of them give them a break, it's taken so long to get to this point it's been a struggle" (CFA Women's and Girls' Development Officer)*

The lack of overt criticism of the FA WSL or calls for alternatives, by those directly involved in the game, echoes the inequality in the system. The FA defines and will continue to define what football in England is, they have the power over resources and truths. As a respondent stated:

*"you might have to toe the line a little because if you haven't been toeing the line you might not get your third licence" (Chair of FA WSL club B)*

This encapsulates Foucault's (1972) concepts relating to powerful elites, as discussed in Chapter Five, while furthering Bauman's (1987) theories about inclusion and exclusion, which were discussed in Chapter Six. Those who control organisational definitions, in Bauman's terms the legislators, hold the power and protect their position by determining on what basis the interpreters can be included. The FA, the legislators, have the power to determine which clubs, the interpreters, are involved in the FA WSL therefore constraining the latter's ability to criticise the structures in place for elite women's football.

Due to the FA's capacity to define football in England, there is little ability for others to question it or its decisions. Even when challenged, the organisation is able to define on what grounds this could be done, in what ways and how terms can be interpreted. For instance, Doncaster Rovers Belles appealed against the decision not to include the club in FA WSL1 from 2014, a decision which was announced one game into the 2013 season rendering the rest of their fixtures irrelevant as whatever position they finished they would be relegated. FA procedures only allowed appeals on the basis of issues with the process and not the outcome. They (FA 2013d, p14) were able to describe the process of

choosing which teams were accepted into FA WSL1 as "a purely administrative decision".

Doncaster Rovers Belles took the issue to appeal, with the aim of arguing that as three of the four members of the Selection Panel were FA officials the application process was not independent as the FA stated it would be. However, this was rejected on the grounds that the three FA officials were independent of the clubs in the bidding process. The three person Independent Appeals Panel, which consisted of two members of the FA, therefore ruled the decision was independent. The FA was able to impose its own interpretation of independence on the process. Using their discursive power, they were able to define the meanings of words to reinforce the viability of the established order and resist any challenges. When asked why the issue of independence was not raised during the process, Doncaster's Rovers Belles Chairman replied, "*you don't bite the hand that feeds you*" (FA 2013d, p35).

Indeed, like the position of many sports where women are encroaching on areas that are traditionally male domains the women's game is constantly walking a tightrope as its existence is defined by others (Gillenstam, Karp and Hendriksson-Larsen 2008). This position is unlikely to change in the near future, as Burke (2010, p21-22) identifies:

transformative change is more likely to occur when the subordinate groups is secure and wealthy enough to be able to produce some new ways of thinking about their relationship with their oppressors. It is unlikely that members of this group, when feeling legally economically or physically threatened with eviction, will come up with new and creative ways of thinking about society and sport, so that they are no longer oppressed people. People who are threatened are usually too busy trying to survive to give time to the creation of new languages.

The traditional way that football is defined by the FA and the inability to raise questions about decisions the organisation makes is not only due to insecurity within the game about the place of women, it is also linked to the nature of sport in general.

Sport has been identified as predominantly conservative, an apolitical arena where protest and challenge is limited (Giardina and Metz 2005, Darnell 2007). As Kaufmann and Wolff (2010, p167) state, "when many athletes step outside

their role in sports and enter into a role of responsible and active citizen, they are often viewed suspiciously at best and scornfully at worst". Not only are those involved in women's game in a precarious position within football in England, sport in general is not seen within society as an avenue to challenge authority. Sport teaches conformity and is often defined in ways that reproduce gendered, racist, patriarchal, heterosexual and capitalist ideas (Humphreys 2008, Kidd 2010). Although some authors identify that sport has the potential to engender progressive change, for example Harvey, Horne and Safai (2009) highlighted the central role it played in addressing apartheid in South Africa, even they contend that in contemporary society its transformative power is limited and restricted. This is especially relevant within commercialised sport, as Jarvie (2007, p413) articulates "if the public domain of sport is annexed to, or invaded by, the marked domain of buying and selling then the promises and possibilities of sport forging higher levels of trust and mutuality run the risk of also being sacrificed on the altar of individualism". It is into this ideological environment that the FA WSL was introduced, an environment imbued with ideas espousing conformity and tradition.

The FA WSL was legitimised in specific ways, due to the supremacy of men's football and the fact that traditional male dominated organisations control definitions of football. The new League would be distinct from the men's game, a fun and family friendly form of football played in the summer. It replicated normative ideas of femininity and the traditional role of women in society. To compete in the sporting market it needed to adhere to a spectacularised, commercialised view of contemporary sport, involving supporters to produce a carnivalesque atmosphere. Even at a time when attendances were dwindling for the FA's own female showcase game, attracting and retaining high levels of supporters were at the heart of the vision. Neo liberal ideas about the market and individualisation are seen as central to the organisation of the new League, while sport as a whole is often a conservative and apolitical arena. This has direct consequences on those involved the game and their ability to question and challenge the processes being introduced. Within this context the next chapter assesses how the vision for the FA WSL's actually developed in the first three years.

## **CHAPTER NINE: ANALYSIS**

### **The FAWSL - Meeting the FA's aims**

The introduction of the FA WSL aimed to transform the women's game in England by providing salaries for players, assisting clubs to grow and develop into financially viable entities, improve the standard of facilities, encourage more media focus and strengthen the player pathway and playing base of the sport (FA 2009a). An exploration of these five key FA aims forms the basis of this chapter. The debate about players and their salaries is contextualised using gender equality theorists, such as Skjeie and Teigan (2005) and Hovden (2006). The chapter then explores the commercial models adopted by clubs to become viable financial entities and the consequences of them. In terms of facilities, the symbolic, economic and practical consequences for women's clubs are explored using authors including Bale (2000), Malcolm (2000) and Whannel (2008). This discussion focuses on their theories about the centrality of space, locality and representation to sporting experience. The role of traditional media in the FA WSL's development is addressed with reference to authors such as Messner, Duncan and Cooky (2003) and Christopherson, Janning and McConnell (2002). While the increased focus on social media and its consequences are explored using Hutchins and Rowe (2012) and Baudrillard's (1998) idea of hyperreality. Baudrillard's (1983) theorising also contributes to the final part of the chapter, which explores the effect on those clubs playing outside of the FA WSL in the rest of the women's football pyramid.

#### **9.1 The impact on players**

From the start, the FA (2009a, p7 and p9) identified that an aim of the FA WSL was, to develop a "framework so that it genuinely delivers ... [a structure enabling] players to earn a good living from the game ... [and] ... create more paid career opportunities for players to play and work in football on a full time basis." Elite sportswomen, especially in traditionally male team sports, are rarely able to be full time athletes and are often required to make huge personal sacrifices. Research consistently identifies a disparity in pay between male and female athletes. A BBC survey (Fordyce 2013), carried out following the London Olympics, questioned British elite sportswomen and concluded that four out of

five believed they were underpaid and their financial rewards were inadequate, especially compared to their male counterparts. Flake, Dufur and Moore's (2012) study of professional tennis, identified that high ranking female players were paid significantly less than their male equivalents. While Parris et al's (2014) study of female wakeboarders showed that elite riders were reliant on the contribution of family members coupled with their own entrepreneurial abilities to enable them to compete. They conclude that "male riders may earn up to four times more on tour than female riders... earning a living through involvement in wakeboarding is difficult for women" (p1).

In 2009, the FA had already begun paying some female footballers with the introduction of central contracts for England international players who played their club football in England. Seventeen players were identified who each received £16,000 a year. The introduction of the FA WSL brought the next layer of player payment, allowing them to receive a salary for their club football. In order to promote a more competitive league the FA introduced a salary cap, whereby no club could pay more than four players over £20,000. The need to spread talent around the clubs and produce a more competitive league was welcomed by those involved in the research. There was, though, concern about the effect it would have within individual clubs and how it would work in reality. A participant from one club involved in the process stated:

*"if we have a team of players and we are paying four and in mid-week we have to travel so some players have to take ... days off [their other job] and you have someone else who is going to get paid £20,000, it wouldn't engender team spirit" (Chair of FA WPL club)*

In reality, the extent to which the introduction of semi-professionalism has enabled players to obtain payment for playing football varied considerably from club to club. At some clubs only a few players earn a full time living from the game, which was evidenced by one participant's overview of their situation:

*"the club rents two houses and there is four girls in one house and five in the other. [One player] works in the college, [one] is actually on an England central contract so she gets that money and she also lectures here two days a week, there are two full time professionals, [one player] is our community ambassador and then there is four or five girls that are in university. Then there are a couple of girls, one works full time in Aldi something like that and has to work everything around that, there is another who works at TGI Fridays and then there is a teacher. Can you imagine when we have got games away on a Wednesday night, it must*

*be really difficult for those girls ... those that are working full time I don't know how they do it, some get up at 5am to do their strength and conditioning" (Head of football at FA WSL club C)*

It is evident that for some international players, especially those England players on central contracts, additional payments from their clubs allowed them to earn a living from football. However, as previously stated, in the current economic climate finding additional investors proved difficult. There was, therefore, a limited amount of extra money in the game to pay players. A large number of players still have other careers to earn a viable income. Even some England internationals have to take second jobs. For example, Sophie Bradley (Magowan 2013), an England defender who works in her families care home business, outlined the position even at the top of the profession:

the women [in the England team] ... are expected to have a part-time job and even though I live at home, for others, with a mortgage, the cost of living is expensive. It's really hard so it would be nice to play football full-time. The amount of work we put in, I wouldn't say we get the reward in terms of money. All the girls just grin and bear it. We get on with it because we get paid more now than a couple of years ago. Back then we didn't even get a central contract. But now it's the next step and time to ask for a bit more to be able to be full-time professional players, to not have to work as much, and just focus on playing football and winning things as a country and at your club

As Sophie explains, despite the situation where players, even England players, have to juggle outside employment with their football careers and make personal sacrifices to play the game, they *"just grin and bear it"*. Stronach and Adair (2009) identified that elite sportswomen often have to accept the situation they are in. As their study of women's cricketers in Australia found "many respondents seemed content with the support they were receiving from CA [Cricket Australia], even though it was at a much lower level than that of their male colleagues" (p922). This is indicative of prevailing liberal approaches to gender inequality, providing another practice that nullifies attempts to question the decisions of sports organisations, including the way the FA introduced the FA WSL.

Indeed, those in control of agendas are able to abdicate responsibility for on-going gendered differences. This is achieved by coupling the tendency to individualise discrimination, as discussed in Chapter Six, with arguments that they are merely due to a naturalised time lag (Hovden 2006). This dominant

narrative espouses that entrenched inequalities of the past will not be rectified quickly, therefore, there is bound to be a period of continued discrepancies. There is a journey that needs to be negotiated, a linear, gradual, harmonious road that must be travelled to equalise power, resources and participation levels. As Skjeie and Teigan (2005, p187) conclude:

political leaders often frame gender equality as a kind of nationally encapsulated journey. This is the cherished image of the "road towards" gender equality—the view of gradual equalization between women and men vis-a-vis power and resources, participation and influence. The travel metaphor portrays equality as a linear process of evolution where we are all, together, continuously taking new steps towards the goal. This goal might still be "far ahead", but nevertheless it is securely within our reach; we just have to travel for long and far enough

Such arguments imply that the continued marginal position of women's football in England will be rectified eventually if players are patient. Consequently, this means there is no pressure on the FA to equalise the playing field by providing large amounts of resources. The FA is permitted to take a liberal, incremental and gradual approach to addressing evident inequalities. Players just need to wait for an unspecified period and eventually elite women footballers will not have to have other non-footballing careers, share club houses with their teammates or make personal sacrifices to play the game.

This situation is permitted to continue while women are the central focus of gender equality narratives. Men's dominance is not always addressed in policy and until male power is placed more centrally within contemporary debate the situation will continue. As Edwards (2002) proclaimed, to fundamentally address gender equality, men need to become a 'something', their powerful hegemonic position needs to be illuminated more forcefully and critically. Hovden (2006, p51) highlights that by focusing on the position of men in the gender debate and placing them "on the same footing as women pushes men to take responsibility in terms of gender and power". It is only then that necessary changes can be made to fundamentally address inequality in society. However, current discourses around football, sport and society do not include a comprehensive illumination of the role men.

These ideas are linked to other discourses that undermine challenges to existing social norms, including the tendency to reference comparisons with the



past when addressing inequality issues. This is exemplified in Sophie Bradleys quote when she identified, players *"get on with it because we get paid more now than a couple of years ago"*. This tendency was also embraced by respondents in the study:

*"I think sometimes we beat ourselves up a bit about it really because when you think about it, in really what is two years a lot has changed for our club ... a lot has changed in a very short space of time. It's easy forgotten where you were as you are always worried about what's going to come, sometimes it is good to think how far we have come"* (Head of football at FA WSL club A)

*"[increases in women's football is] a generational thing, now there is a generation of boys who have grown up playing with girls, it normalised it, it isn't odd to them ... ten years ago there were no teams in this area and now there are twenty ... people get worried that football is not going anywhere and it's not on television but they don't get the same chances and look what's happening in 10-15 years and its mind boggling"* (Journalist)

Again, respondents are complicit in narrowly framed discourses relating to gender equality. This is, conceivably, due to their limited ability to change the situation, a position which would be contingent on the FA relinquishing some power. It could also be coupled with the determination of those in the game to positively frame the sport to which they are dedicated. As Spoor and Schmitt (2011) identified when questioning women's current position in society it is often posited that equality is getting closer, especially as the current position is much better than it was in the past. This overemphasises the gains that have been made by subordinate groups, galvanising a veneer that inequality is being addressed. This allows the continuation of ideas which suggest gender discrimination is no longer a problem. As Schmitt et al. (2009, p56-57) states:

media and cultural representations tend to focus on women's advances, contributing to a widely shared belief that members of disadvantaged groups are doing better compared with the recent past. Thus when gender inequality is framed in comparison with the past they will appear to be doing fairly well ... [providing] a set of rose-coloured glasses that make the present social context appear relatively fair and open

Consequently, analysing the present in terms of unequal conditions in the past may provide evidence of significant improvement. However, making comparisons to an end goal of full gender equality may provide a less optimistic assessment (Eibach and Ehrlinger 2010). As Jackson (2006, p216) concludes "compared to the restrictions that faced women two centuries ago, the degree to

which gender inequality has declined seems remarkable. When weighed against an imagined state of full and unimpeded equality, the continued shortcomings in women's status seem inexplicable and remarkably frustrating". Dominant ideas which frame gender equality in relation to comparisons with the past not only mask ongoing discrimination but also have consequences for attempts to counter it. As Ellemers and Barreto (2009, p750) highlight, for "people to engage in protest or collective action they first have to acknowledge that they and other members of their group are treated unjustly". Consequently, as dominant temporal discourses frame gender inequality in positive terms the perceived requirement for collective action is limited (Barreto et al. 2009).

Comparisons between males and females in contemporary society provides greater evidence that gender inequality still exists and should be questioned, critiqued and challenged. This position is encapsulated in discussions about the financing of the FA WSL. The FA's initial £3 million financial investment is used as an example of its commitment to the game. Gender inequalities are being addressed due to more money being invested into the game than ever before. However, if compared with the sums which abound in football in the current day, the amount only goes a limited way to redress the imbalance. At £1.5 million a year, it was only 0.5% of the FA's 2010 turnover of £304 million and 1.5% of the £101 million put aside for investment in football (FA 2011b). The men's team winning the 2013 FA Cup earned nearly twice as much as the whole of the women's game is to receive per year between 2014 and 2018. Focussing on the discrepancies that still exist in funding allows the FA's gendered nature to be called into question. However, the organisation's ability to frame debates and its focus on identifying how its commitment to the women's game is different to the past allows it to present the veneer that it is moving on in terms of gender equality. Gender is no longer an issue so players cannot complain about the lack of a full time paid football careers as they are being paid more than before.

Indeed, when the England players central contracts were due for renewal the FA were reluctant to provide any significant increase. At the end of 2012, after the London Olympics, focus on the women's game was at a high and it was receiving more plaudits than ever. As Moore (2014, p641) identifies, "there is no doubt that women's football was a great success at London 2012. A total of

666,000 fans attended matches, an average of over 25,000 per game". Within this climate the FA (2012c) announced its commitment to the women's game for the next five years. One of the central aims was to develop "our best players by introducing an Elite Performance Unit and funding central contracts for England senior players" (p7). The FA, therefore, offered to increase the England women's central contract to £18,000. A £2,000 increase on the initial payment three years earlier may seem a significant increase in percentage terms. However, such assessments merely legitimise approaches to gender equality that focus on comparisons to the past, which ignore deeply entrenched, historical inequalities (Spoor and Schmitt 2011). For an organisation that proclaimed that women's football was at the heart of its vision, it could be argued that offering players £18,000 per year to represent their country was indicative of a lack of any fundamental change in attitude towards the game.

Ultimately, the players refused to accept the offer and trained for a month without pay. Eventually with the support of the players union, the Professional Footballers Association (PFA), they were able to negotiate an increase to £20,000. They also gained concessions on maternity and part time working hours, but not before questions were asked about the FA's real commitment to the game and its willingness to acknowledge and address gender inequality (Kay 2013). As the PFA chairman, Gordon Taylor (BBC 2013b), stated of the initial offer:

that figure is embarrassing. Top Premier League players are earning more in a day ... In some ways, [the FA] have done a lot for the women's game ... but they are offering to move these central contracts up from £16,000, which has been the figure since 2009, to £18,000

Walters' (2004) research highlighted the powerful position the PFA holds within football. He identified that, although, trade union membership and influence has declined in contemporary society the PFA position remains pivotal within football with its membership comprising 100% of professional footballers in England. The study attributed this to the strength of its leadership, its stakeholder position in the football industry and its low membership rates. Unlike other unions it does not depend on subscriptions to operate but over time has negotiated a percentage of broadcasting revenue. This allows the organisation to provide unrivalled legal and educational services to its members,

coupled with coaching and community employment opportunities to assist players to develop skills for their non-playing futures.

The union's support of female England players allowed players to gain concessions from the FA. It is, though, another example of the way football organisations which previously excluded women are now incorporating them within their structures. Indeed, the inclusion of female players into the players union must be conceptualised within the organisation's past assertions relating to the role of women within football. In 1997, only 15 years before he fought for increases in England central contracts, Gordon Taylor had banned a female football agent, Rachel Anderson, from accompanying the male players she represented to the annual PFA Awards as it was a 'men only' affair (The Independent 1998). Since its establishment in 1907 women had been excluded from being members until 2000 with the inclusion of the newly professionalised Fulham players. Then after the 2007 World Cup in China, at which players had no avenues to formalise their grievances with the FA about pay and conditions having been paid only £40 a day expenses to represent their country, the PFA incorporated them as members in 2008 (Leighton 2008).

The inclusion of female players in English trade unions representing traditional male team sports is a very recent phenomenon. The England women cricket players were incorporated into the Professional Cricketers' Association (PCA) in 2011 (English Cricket Board 2011) as Women's Associate Member which provides travel policy cover, limited educational funding and excludes all other insurances (PCA 2014). In January 2014 the Rugby Players Union announced it was taking responsibility for the welfare and personal development of the Women's Elite Playing Squad. European Union research into trade union membership across the continents sports sector in 2010 and 2011 showed that in terms of football the situation was varied (European Industrial Relations Observatory 2013). In England 1% of the PFA membership were female, whereas it was 20% in the Swedish footballers union, Spelarforeningen, 9% in the Danish organisation, Spillerforeningen and 30% at one of the three Dutch unions, Pro Prof, 30%. With the introduction of the FA WSL it will be interesting to note whether the PFA uses its considerable power within football to improve the position of female footballers or whether it takes a liberal approach to

gender using the numerical increase in women as members as proof of the organisations equality credentials.

## **9.2 The impact on clubs and facilities**

The need for clubs to establish themselves in a competitive sporting market, especially at a time of financial austerity, had distinct consequences on the models chosen. The FA's vision from the league required clubs to be financially independent entities. However, the lack of substantial funding from the FA left clubs and individual people in those clubs with the responsibility to create, nurture and penetrate new markets and income sources. This trend has been identified within women's football worldwide, as Williams (2011, p50) states:

A paradoxical situation has developed whereby employment opportunities for women are now emerging but the product 'women's football' remains intangible to prospective sponsors. Because FIFA, UEFA and national associations struggle to define the Unique Selling Point of the women's game in relation to the men's there are, in general, poor economic conditions for leagues, clubs and female footballers alike.

This situation limited the potential models women's clubs could adopt to meet the requirements dictated by the FA. As a respondent stated about the new expanded league:

*"at the moment they have put out that it is going to WSL1 and WSL2 between 18 and 20 clubs and again anyone can bid but the FA are now touting it to professional clubs. The thing that they have learnt and we have all learnt in the first few years is that the only real successful policy is attach to a men's club" (Chair of FA WSL club B)*

The FA stated, throughout the application process, that clubs tendering for a place in the FA WSL would benefit from being part of a men's club. In the brochure for the new expanded FA WSL the FA (2013c, p16) stated, "partnerships with men's clubs have proven to be very successful in the 2011 and 2012 seasons ... Such committed partnerships will fast track the development of professional women's football in this country". Centrally, the FA were using their control over the tendering process to require clubs to become part of existing men's structures to gain legitimacy.

During this study, it became apparent that linking to men's clubs can have positive benefits. Having finished bottom of the league in both the first two seasons, ahead of the third season, in 2013, Liverpool Ladies became

increasingly aligned to their men's club who provided sizeable cash injections.

As one respondent identified in 2013:

*"to run a women's football club properly it is going to cost approaching half a million pounds ... there is only Liverpool and Arsenal who are approaching these figures" (Chair of FA WSL club B)*

Liverpool Ladies have become an example of the FA's ideal model of club structure and in the 2013 season won the League. However, as a respondent identified the reliance on support from an associated men's club can have problems:

*"the FA certainly support and give us guidance and from what I can tell they are in a bit of a difficult position ... it's a bit like our football club really they are ingrained in the men's game and they are expected to almost envoy out to do bits and pieces in the women's game, but it doesn't really feel like it is a big part of their role and the men's game is the bread and butter and if they get a little bit of down time or a little bit of time to focus on the women's game they will try and do what they can do, but obviously it's not a real priority or it doesn't feel like it is a real priority to them. They only help us when everything is quiet around the men's game so I think that is a challenge" (Head of football at WSL club D)*

Previously, aligning to men's clubs has caused problems, especially when the parent club experienced financial difficulties or a downturn in on-field fortunes (Leighton 2007, Turner 2005). A participant in the research also identified linking with men's clubs is not always the only model to follow, citing Bristol Academy as a prime example. Their approach of aligning to a local sports academy and football Centre of Excellence provides them with a clear player pathway in which their youth set up is relied on to produce quality first team players. This approach brought them success on the field during the third season of the FA WSL, when they finished second behind Liverpool.

The trend towards aligning to financially committed men's clubs intensified in the club selection process for the new expanded FA WSL for 2014-2018. As a respondent explained:

*"well there is Manchester City and they seem to have an open cheque book now and Liverpool they finished bottom of the league, below Doncaster, but because they have so much money behind them, its poor Doncaster who run on a slightly different system so they have gone down a lot of the charitable routes and the FA don't want that. [Doncaster Belles omission from the WSL1 in 2014] was still such a shock for all of us" (Chair of FA WPL club)*

As a result of the new tendering process all but one of the existing FA WSL clubs were included in the new FA WSL1. Doncaster Rovers Belles (2013), having been the only women's club to have played in every season of the elite league since its inception in 1991, would start the 2014 season in FA WSL2. They were replaced in the top division of the new extended two tier FA WSL by Manchester City, a club which had little pedigree in women's football. They also finished fourth in the final FA WPL season before the reorganisation, which would not have led to them being promoted in terms of league position based on football merit. Crucially, though, they had the backing of their free spending men's club.

Without financial backing from their associated men's club, Doncaster Rovers Belles adopted a community model launching 'Belles for the Community' in 2009, becoming Britain's first women's sport based social enterprise. The approach taken by the club adhered to prevailing sporting narratives in that football and community are often seen as synonymous (Saunders et al. 2014). As Blackshaw (2008, p325-326) states:

Of course community has always been universal in football ... Most football fans know the upbeat story of the golden age of 'the people's game', when working class communities nestled happily in terraced streets as approximately local cultures of identity and belonging made from the same red brick and mortar as the cathedrals in which they worshiped their local clubs.

Although Blackshaw critiques the notion of community, claiming it is elusive and extraneous in contemporary society, its traditional connotations continue to resonate in football narratives. As Brown, Crabbe and Mellor (2008, p306) identify "community is now, more than ever, a central theme in sporting and social policy ... The point is that, whether theorists find the term useful or not, 'community' continues to be an important and defining 'conceptual reality'".

'Belles for the Community' aimed to build on such narratives and use female sport to deliver social, health and educational services, while demonstrating the importance of opening up women's football to the community (Doncaster Rovers Belles 2013). Such an approach accords with narratives connecting sport and its ability to address social objectives (Green 2006). As Sherry (2010, p60) identifies "sport is now regularly being presented as a method of

addressing the issues of social exclusion and anti-social behaviour". It has been questioned whether sport can positively influence broad societal objectives (Hartmann 2003, Crabbe 2007). However, its use still forms the basis of government strategy with the DCMS's (2013) most recent policy, 'Getting More People Playing Sport', advocating that playing sport helps to keep people healthy and is good for communities.

Sports organisations, such as the FA, adopt similar rhetoric relating to the use of sport to meet broader social objectives. As Breitbarth and Harris (2008, p193) identify, "the FA itself strongly believes that football has a unique place in British society and can act as a power for good off the pitch in a number of policy areas ... Football has been offering itself as a public agent to help to solve such problems in a win-win partnership with local communities". Doncaster Rovers Belles were attempting to embrace such an approach and as Cloake (2013) highlights "you'd think the FA would be rushing to make the Belles its poster material. But instead of holding the club up as evidence of all the things the game likes to tell you it stands for, the FA has opted for another approach"; one that placed business narratives at the heart of the vision for the FA WSL, at the expense of footballing pedigree or community development, all of which are non-market based concepts which are marginalised in neo liberal discourses (Harvey 2007).

Respondents worried that the focus on finance would intensify with the new two tier FA WSL structure:

*"it's where it goes? You don't want it to plateau out ... your Liverpool's your Arsenal's your Chelsea's your Manchester City's they will be able to maintain sticking in half a million a year because that's nothing to them and your Bristol model will probably carry on but eventually they'll plateau out if they don't keep producing the quality girls and other clubs are bringing in better kids, they're not going to match it, the Birmingham's are going to be up and down because their always on the lookout at what the men's investment is" (CFA official previously involved in a FA WSL club)*

There was a concern from respondents in this study that success will increasingly be confined to a handful of clubs which are aligned to men's clubs who are able and willing to provide substantial financial commitments. This situation is intensified as the FA's funding commitments are not long term and



they have explicitly stated that after the 2014 season the money provided to clubs "will be reviewed annually. The fund awards are expected to taper down towards 2018. At that point clubs are expected to be sustainable and not dependent on FA funds" (FA 2013c, p20). However, this research has shown that the original levels of funding have not assisted some clubs to develop successful sustainable business models. Finance is, for some, a constant struggle and clubs are still predominantly run by volunteers, with few full time paid staff. The vision of a league of players concentrating on their football is in many cases a myth. This leads to apprehension on the part for some participants who have to negotiate how to survive in the commercialised world of the FA WSL:

*"sometimes I sit and think this is great. When I think about where we were eight to nine years ago, on the point of extinction, to now playing amongst the elite ... I think it is absolutely wonderful and then I think about what's ahead and it is frightening" (Chair of a FA WPL club)*

Participants anticipated that to ensure a vibrant future, the League would require financial assistance from the FA for longer than initially proposed. Without it, it is hard to identify how some clubs are going to be able to deliver the vision that has been created for the League; the vision they were only minimally involved in producing, but which clubs have become responsible for ensuring succeeds.

One central area which could, potentially, assist clubs to develop as a marketable product are the facilities games are played at. Bale and Vertinsky (2004, p1) identify the "significance of space and place as central dimensions of sport". The space in which sport is observed is crucial to the experience of those involved. As Westerbeek and Shilbury (1999, p2) highlight, stadiums are the "means through which sport is produced, consumed and delivered to sports fans". Football grounds are seen as vital to the ways people understand the game (Bairner and Shirlow 1999). Facilities were, therefore, central to the FA's (2013c, p18) plans for the FA WSL:

the long term vision is for FA WSL clubs to own their own grounds, modern, family, friendly and at the heart of community welcoming 1,000 plus spectators to live games week in week out ... another important factor when considering applications [for WSL] is the location of a clubs ground and the potential fan base in the local area. Grounds with better

access and in areas of high population will be more likely to secure regular higher attendances

The FA recognised that emotional attachments are made with football stadiums, while identities with and affinities to the game are formed to an extent by the places from which people watch their club (Wann 2006). As Charleston (2009, p148) identifies, football grounds are thought of like home by many supporters who "felt place attachment ... feelings of belongingness, territoriality or ownership, and valued personal memories associated with the stadium". Whannel (2008, p194) also acknowledges that "football grounds ... literally are a world apart, separate from all concerns, excitements, tensions and disappointments of the outside world. They have their own concerns, excitements, tensions and disappointments". It is acknowledged that sport is increasingly globalised, with the clubs having increasing amount of fans living in different localities, who Kerr and Gladdon (2008, p61) defined as 'satellite fans' who "despite being geographically removed from the epicentre of a team's influence, the host city or country in which the sports team is located, these fans go to sometimes great lengths to sustain a connection with the organisation". Place, though, still has relevance, as Edensor and Millington's (2008, p190) study identifies football clubs:

are not placeless organizations ... clubs have local roots and make material decisions that inextricably link or bind the football economy to particular localities. Even the most 'global' clubs are heterogeneous organizations that may challenge assumptions that globalization inevitably produces placeless transnational corporations with little loyalty to localities.

Place is particularly relevant for a new league, such as the FA WSL, where attendances are seen as key.

The FA's vision to build on such narratives and advocate modern grounds at the heart of communities is a laudable aim. However, a respondent identified a problem which abounds in the women's game:

*"the biggest problem is few of us have our own ground ... we have a good relationship with [our men's club who own the ground] more as a partner than a tenant but most don't, you pay your money and you play on the pitch and that is it" (Chair of FA WSL club B)*

None of the league clubs, even those who receive high levels of support from their associated clubs, are able to play regularly at their grounds. Attending

matches to undertake observations demonstrated that some clubs played at grounds which are usually some distance from the communities the club name indicates they represent. For example teams such as Arsenal playing at Borehamwood over 13 miles from the Emirates, Birmingham Ladies at Stratford, over 30 miles away from the city and Liverpool Ladies initially played 15 miles away in Skelmersdale. Everton Ladies played in Crosby, a town 5 miles from the home of their men's team, Goodison Park. Doncaster Rovers Belles shared a stadium with the city's men's team, Lincoln Ladies played at both the men's teams ground and the home of the city's non-league team on the outskirts of the city. Bristol Academy on the site of the further education college they are linked with. As respondents identified the positioning of grounds was a central concern to some:

*"[our ground] is not in a massive conurbation and the transport links are not good you can't get to it by public transport and it's a long way [from where the club is based] and a long way from anywhere ... [but] ... there is a great shortage of appropriate grounds [in our area]" (Chair of FA WSL club B)*

*"Liverpool don't even play in Merseyside .... it's really a problem because you create some enthusiasm at festivals and people want to go and they say where it is and you tell them and they go (big sigh). If your mum and dad don't drive you can't go on a train and walk with your friends it's just a bit too far" (Journalist)*

Indeed, this is linked to another key dimension of place and football, the development of a connection to the locality in which it is situated. As Malcolm (2000, p107) identifies, "football clubs are representation not just of individuals but also of 'places'. This identity is both strong and enduring because it is linked to the notion of 'community'". Bale (2000, p91) also states, "professional football clubs represent places ... an urban community in which the club is located, after which it is invariably named and which the club can be said to represent". However, some elite women's football is played in stadiums unrelated to the name of the team, a considerable distance from the areas, communities and identities they purport to represent. Their grounds are scattered around surrounding outposts with no real connection to the clubs, limiting their ability to tap into or become representational of a place.

FA WSL clubs not owning their grounds also has economic impacts, as one respondent explained:

*"where is the income stream going to come? You compare us to non-league and I say about Conference North but they all have a ground that has a bar and a 3G and a conference room which provides income"*  
(Chair of FA WSL club A)

The reliance of women's clubs on the benevolence of men's clubs continues and they are not able to maximise revenue from match day food and drink sales, hiring out facilities throughout the week or additional sponsorship opportunities. This considerably impedes their ability to generate income, attract resources and become the self-financing entities the FA envisioned. As highlighted by Williams (2006, p164), this issue has been apparent in women's football for many years and "the lack of women's own grounds has symbolic and practical implications with immediately recognisable effects for marketing and commercial currency of women's sport". There have, though, been some positive developments in terms of grounds since the introduction of the FA WSL. For instance, in time for the 2013 season Liverpool moved to a new, more accessible ground with a 13,000 capacity, the Halton Stadium, which it shares with a non-league men's football team and a top tier Rugby League team. Although still not based in Merseyside and 14 miles from Anfield, the ground provided better facilities than the one which was used for the first two FA WSL seasons. Probably one of the great successes in terms of grounds is Bristol Academy's Stoke Gifford's Stadium. Having gained entry to the FA WSL the club decided, in conjunction with Filton College, to address this issue and constructed the first stadium purpose built a for women's club.

As well as symbolic and economic consequences, the fact that clubs play at smaller grounds had practical implications for those clubs that are successful and progress into Europe. The standard of facilities required by UEFA from those who take part in European competition are higher than those required from clubs in the FA WSL. Officials from clubs taking part in UEFA competitions, therefore, have to negotiate complicated procedures to ensure their grounds meet these requirements, for instance in relation to floodlights and safety issues. This involves incurring financial costs as they have to obtain certificates over and above the domestic requirements. As a participant identified:

*"Europe, don't say that to me it means safety certificates"* (Chair of FA WSL club A)

In fact, the costs involved are so high that clubs often play their European games in the afternoon so floodlights aren't needed, thereby curtailing the need to provide new documentation that form part of the UEFA criteria. Thus providing another example of how their lack of ground ownership hinders women's clubs in their attempts to negotiate the contemporary commercialised and spectacularised sporting environment they now inhabit.

### 9.3 The Impact on Media Coverage

The media are central to the growth of sport in contemporary society (Cooky et al. 2010); increased coverage was, therefore, central to the FA's vision for the League. From the outset, they proclaimed that the new League structure "encourages broadcasters to see women's football as a new platform which has huge development potential" (FA 2009a, p7). Research, though, has shown that the level of media coverage of women's sports is negligible (Eastman and Billings 2000, Messner, Duncan and Willms 2006). The Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (2012) state that in Britain, "only 5% of all sports media coverage is dedicated to women's sport". While Elling and Knoppers (2005, p259) identify, "although women are no longer officially excluded from participating in ... [male dominated] ... sports they are still regularly marginalised and made invisible by the dominant sports media". Weber and Carini (2013) highlighted the power of the media but also the lack of promotion of female team sports, especially relating to new leagues. They conclude that:

sports media also have the power to raise awareness of – and hone appreciation for – women in masculine sports, and sports classed as feminine or gender neutral. A similar phenomenon has occurred with upstart professional women's leagues, such as soccer and bass tournament fishing. While these organizations may struggle to capture audiences, they often are not provided sufficient – and sustained – media coverage necessary to socialize fans into the sport (p201)

In terms of media, respondents stated that traditional outlets, such as national newspapers and magazines, paid little attention to the women's game or most other women's sports. As a participant identified:

*"I am quite disappointed that the national printed press hasn't got behind it. If I pick up a newspaper I very rarely, if ever, see anything on the women's game which I think is very disappointing considering the amount of pages they need to fill on a daily basis" (Head of football at FA WSL club D)*

Participants, though, acknowledged that in local media in areas where there was a FA WSL club there had been an increase in coverage of the elite women's game, a situation investigated in Adams et al. (2013) study of coverage of women's football in local newspapers in the four main cities in the East Midlands; Nottingham, Leicester, Derby and Lincoln. They identified that the Lincolnshire Echo which covered the Lincoln Ladies, the only FA WSL club in the area, did increase coverage after the League was introduced. In 2008 the paper had no articles relating to women's football, there was eighteen in 2009 and twenty one in 2010. In 2011, the year the FA WSL was introduced, this rose to sixty six and by July 2012, forty two articles had already been published that year. However, they conclude that this increase wasn't replicated in the cities in the area without a FA WSL team where there was a "patchy, irregular coverage of women's sport in local media. The frequency of local coverage of women's football, reportedly the country's fastest growing sport, is negligible compared with that of men's football. The monthly rate of local newspaper articles about it seems to be either staying the same or declining in spite of a surge of female interest and participation" (p13).

Participants acknowledged that the FA gave prominence to any form of national press coverage the game could acquire:

*"the FA are desperate to get broadsheet column inches it's still how they measure things ... they favour having people in their bras in the women's section of the Daily Star over a regional newspaper having a real interview with a women's footballer" (Journalist)*

*"I said to [an FA employee] it is all well and good having an article in Easy Living magazine [a national women's lifestyle title] but I don't believe that it is going to help our game" (Head of football at FA WSL club A)*

This study, therefore, showed that part of the FA's interaction with the media can be seen in terms of the overriding strategy which constructed an identity for the women's game that focused on ideas peripheral to football itself, for example the spectacular and carnival match day experience as discussed in Chapter Seven. Indeed, a Daily Mail (2011) article previewing the 2011 Women's World Cup, contained profiles of seven England players pictured in a studio, in gym attire and started with the line, "the group of leggy and enviably toned young women in acid-bright designer sportswear could be a bunch of

yummy mummies about to do an aerobics class. The only clue to their real identity is the studs on the soles of their high-tech trainers". Framing elite women's footballers within such traditional views, for example, those surrounding femininity and physical appearance, impacts directly on the way the game in England is presented in the media. Their athletic achievements are minimised and the game itself is marginalised. Emphasis was put on narratives which conform to conservative and traditional ideas about women and depict female footballers as embodying traditional femininity. Relating the game to female lifestyle stories relegated it from the sporting pages, corresponding with attempts to normalise the game and place it as distinct from men's football. The media have very narrow definitions of the roles different genders should play (Vincent, Kian and Pedersen 2011) and consequently, coverage of female athletes often diminishes, marginalises and trivialises their achievements (Bernstien 2002, Vincent et al. 2007, Weber and Carini 2013).

Christopherson, Janning and McConnell's (2002) examination of media representations of the 1999 Women's World Cup in America, also identified these gendered narratives. The study analysed 576 American newspaper articles published in the daily papers with the largest circulation in each of the six metropolitan areas where the American team played; Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York City, San Francisco, and Washington. The research identified that the tournament attracted an unprecedented amount of media coverage for female football. However, it also indicated that the coverage complied with gendered discourses. The event was portrayed as a wholesome and family orientated, while the players femininity and heterosexuality was highlighted in ways that reinforced patriarchy and masculine hegemony. The study concludes that the coverage presented a "representation of femininity that praises the players while still maintaining control of their behaviour, and celebrates their individual achievements within a group-oriented, heterosexual, middle and upper-class white context" (p184).

Similar interpretations were also acknowledged in Shugart's (2003) study which analysed print media articles and television coverage of the 1999 tournament. She identified numerous examples which highlighted a focus on the sexualisation of the USA team which downplayed their sporting abilities. For

example, the players were described as 'sexy pin up girls', 'glamour girls' and one article in a national magazine stated 'well, the revolution is here, and it has bright-red toenails . . . just look at the players! They've got ponytails! . . . They've got (gulp) curves'. The coverage commodified the female footballers as sexualized female athletes. As the study concludes:

the strategies by which said sexualisation was accomplished in this case—passive objectification; sexualisation of performance; vigilant heterosexuality; and asexuality as foil—are not all new; however, even those that have an established track record appear to be more sophisticated, less visible, camouflaged as earnest, legitimate coverage or derisively attributed to someone else's poor taste (p27)

These media discourses are indicative of perspectives already addressed within this research. For instance discussions in Chapter Seven, about how women's football is positioned as a niche, feminine form of the game, fun and family friendly, with limited focus placed on narratives relating to the actual football being played. They are also in keeping with ideas explored in Chapter Eight relating to the dominance of narratives relating to hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality.

The FA (2009a, 2012c, 2013c) hoped that television would provide a key medium to bring women's football to a new audience and help grow the game. For women's sport to establish itself on television takes genuine commitment and financial backing from sports governing bodies. As a respondent identified:

*"I think netball has done well ... they had the Coop sponsoring them and they took all that money and paid Sky to televise it" (Journalist)*

The sponsorship money gained by netball's NGB, from the Cooperative Bank, was invested in paying Sky TV to televise the Netball Super League games. This process acknowledged the central place of the media in increasing visibility of women's sport (Mansfield and Killick 2012). However, the FA was unable to obtain a title sponsor for the FA WSL and appeared to be unwilling to accommodate any large expenditure on television coverage. Coverage of the FA WSL was, therefore, initially an add on to the four-year deal with ESPN for the men's FA Cup broadcasting rights, a decision which participants questioned:

*"I think I am up there as a big fan [of women's football] but I haven't got ESPN ... it has to be accessible and I don't know what percentage of the population have ESPN but it can't be that high. You are not going to*



*hit loads of people ... the impact is minimal" (CFA Women and Girl's Officer)*

*"the FA won't put in any more money, I mean they paid ESPN to televise the games, ESPN are on the brink of pulling out because even though they were receiving money from the FA, the advertising revenue was of course not what they wanted ... giving the level of audience it would probably get more advertising revenue from darts ... which is a shame because I love watching women's football" (Chair of FA WPL club)*

During the research, women's football precarious position was highlighted when the kick off for the first match televised after the 2012 Olympics, by ESPN, was delayed due to the over running of the live cricket match that preceded it. However, when Sky TV's coverage of the 2012 FA Women's Cup overran due to extra time, the resultant penalty shootout was switched to the red button so the television channel could switch to its extensive build up to the men's League One Playoff. The Sky TV statement (Birmingham Mail 2012) explained:

Sky Sports covered the Women's FA Cup Final live in full but due to exceptional scheduling issues we had to cover the climax through the red button service rather than on Sky Sports 2. The buildup and match were shown live on the main channel ... With the match stretching to penalties the decision was made to switch to the red button. It was a difficult scheduling decision, caused by the wealth of live sport shown at the same time across five Sky Sports channels

Women's football was placed on non-terrestrial television and had to compete with other sports for coverage.

Those involved in the research, however, identified that, as the FA WSL developed, television coverage increasingly became a focus of the FA's media strategy, especially after the Olympics:

*"the big thing next season [2014] is BT Sport are coming on board ... and it will get more coverage and it will be available for people who have got a normal television, whereas before we have only had a weekly highlight show on ESPN" (Head of football at FA WSL club D)*

In March 2013, the BBC (2013c) announced coverage, on BBC Two, of the women's FA Cup final and European Championships, coupled with four FA WSL programmes providing goals round-ups, highlights and features as well as a preview of England's World Cup qualifiers. In addition, throughout the FA WSL season, a weekly goals round-up would be provided on BBC Sport online. This decision can be seen within the corporation's commitment to increase

coverage of women's sport after London 2012 (Deans 2012). The BBC had also come under increased governmental pressure to address the gender disparity in its coverage. Indeed, Maria Miller, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the Minister for Women and Equalities, wrote to the organisation to convey her anger over sexist remarks made by a leading sport commentator in coverage of the 2013 Wimbledon tennis championships (Phillipson and Hope 2013). The use of governmental pressure to drive change within the BBC mirrors discussions in Chapter Seven about the need to force resistant organisations to be more malleable. The ability of the government to influence the BBC is more direct than its power over the FA as the broadcaster is a statutory body which operates under Royal Charter issued by Parliament.

Also, in May 2013, a partnership was announced between the FA WSL and the newly launched BT Sport channel which acquired the rights for the elite domestic League, as well as the England Women's Senior Team and The FA Women's Cup (BT Sport 2013). After two seasons with limited interest, there was increased attention from broadcasters, in part due to the success of Team GB at the Olympics. Researchers such as Messner, Duncan and Cooky (2003) have identified that television is generally considered a cautious arena in terms of women's sport. It rarely takes the role of spearheading genuine change in the sporting market, generally only becoming involved once a sport has become established. As they conclude, traditionally television will "cautiously follow rather than lead or promote the growth in girls and women's sport" (p38). However, contrary to evidence it is hoped by participants in the study and the FA (2013c) that the increased television coverage will help the game make a breakthrough that has so far been hard to achieve.

Through observations and interviews this study found that the FA decided to focus on social media to help expand the game. Researchers, including Clavio and Kian (2010), have shown that social media sites can increase access to sports marginalised by mainstream outlets. Hutchins and Rowe (2012, p5) state, social media is a "challenge to the hegemony of television, which can be alternatively bypassed, undercut and complemented by online media. TV is in effect no longer the only medium that matters when it comes to the exercise of major economic and cultural power in sport". Social media was, therefore, seen

as key to providing increased visibility for the new League. The FA WSL (2012) proclaimed that "the lack of profile of women's football is driving fans to social networks for their news and causing them to be up to seven times as interactive as fans of the men's game ... [the FA WSL aim is] ... ultimately to transform the player-fan relationship by making it the most interactive league in the world".

Respondents confirmed this focus:

*"The big thing at the moment is the social media side and I understand the value because I think it has a reach beyond what you put in financially ... one of the main reasons they go for the social media is due to the lack of interest in the mainstream media " (Head of football at FA WSL club A)*

Indeed, social media not only provided a practical solution to the virtual absence of national media attention, it was also central to the FA's vision of building a new identity for women's football, one which was distinct from the men's game. Recent rhetoric espoused an increased distance between fans and decisions made about men's clubs (Brown 2008). The introduction of the FA WSL could, therefore, provide a redefinition of the spectator and sport relationship giving fans greater ownership of the game and bringing them closer to decisions about the League. Social media campaigns were undertaken to allow supporters to choose the name of the FA WSL mascot, the music played at games and the food offered at grounds. Social media was also seen to play a central part in providing fans and potential fans with information about the FA WSL, by connecting them directly to clubs and players. For example, the launch of the second season was dominated by the focus on the new Digital Ambassador initiative, whereby each club assigned a player to represent it on Twitter. As identified in this research:

*"The FA sets the targets for them [the Digital Ambassadors] ... Ours must have 400 followers or something like that and that is driven by the FA .... The idea is to get more people at games, basically it is part of their strategy to increase attendances, basically everything is driven around attendances" (Head of football at FA WSL club C)*

Kassing and Sanderson (2010) identified that Twitter provides increasing interactivity between players and fans, allowing people to gain insights into athletes as people. Increasingly in contemporary society social media provides people with more accessible forms of communication. This is theorised within Tomlinsons (2007, p111) idea of telepresence, which he defines as "the

possibility, and increasingly for many, the preference, of "keeping in touch" without actually, literally, being in touch". Fans are increasingly able to feel connected with players without actually meeting them or even the necessity to have any dialogue with them.

The aims of increased connectivity and placing fans at the heart of the game were closely linked to the focus on getting more people interested in the sport. However, questions were raised in this research as to whether relying on social media to increase visibility would produce significant results. As respondents identified:

*"it sounds like the FA are taking steps forward, I don't know if it is reaching the right people they seem to be reaching those close, they need to try and get it out to other markets" (Ex-CFA Women's and Girls' Development Officer)*

*"yes the profile has raised but I think it is really hard when you are in women's football you see it so I know where to look ... if I am nothing to do with women's football I don't know how much I know about it, that's the hard part ... the digital stuff its great and it really is good as there is a real interaction between the players and the fans and the clubs and the fans but we have got to break outside the bubble and I think the only way to do that is to spend your money on a 30 second advert in Big Brother or something" (Head of football at FA WSL club A)*

Information about the FA WSL on social media was, therefore, accessible only to those who embraced such sites and those consciously looking for information. It is acknowledged that social media, especially Twitter, is used extensively by some male footballers to communicate with fans. However, comparisons are erroneous as people already know about the men's game through mainstream media outlets so fans are not relying on player feeds to find information about the sport. Hambrick et al. (2010), also question the ability of Twitter to bring marginalised sports to the fore by engaging an extensive new audience. They identified that this was due to a large amount of people not using it regularly and the tendency for people to perceive it as trivial. It can be seen as an inconsequential medium for conveying inane information rather than an avenue to base a marketing strategy on. A significant issue in relation to its central position in terms of promoting elite women's football, a sport which has been delegitimised in others ways, as already identified in this thesis. As one respondent identified:

*"I don't really understand Twitter, I don't get it, am I supposed to tweet that I am going for a coffee now" (Ex-CFA Women's and Girls' Development Officer)*

Twitter feeds by individual players, including the League's eight Digital Ambassadors, do contain information about the FA WSL which is hard to access elsewhere. However, much of the content revolves around people's everyday life and is not specifically related to the League or the players as athletes. Hambrick et al's (2010) study, acknowledges a trend to focus on non-sport related topics, "relatively few of the tweets (15%) involved players discussing their own teams or sports ... only 5% of tweets were promotional in nature" (p454). In this context, Twitter's ability to drive increases in attendances in women's football seems debatable.

The focus on social media may have unintended effects on the development of the game. It could be seen as part of the trend, already discussed in terms of traditional media, to marginalise female athletes by focussing on their private lives and in so doing decreasing the focus on them as elite athletes (Hardin et al. 2007, Eagleman, Pedersen and Wharton 2009). In order to assist the League to become successful, the onus was on players to be interesting, exciting and informative. The players use their Twitter sites to connect with fans but also as a personal communication with friends and family. They are, therefore, required to open up their private lives to fans and potential fans in order to make connections and publicise the women's game. As discussed in relation to neo liberalism in Chapter Seven this is further evidence of the proliferation of individualism in contemporary society. Consequently, they are being forced to play a part in what Baudrillard (1998, p12-13) describes as hyperreality, in which:

modern society is characterised not only by simulated objects but also simulated partnerships ... [which involves] ... personal modes of communication in an effort to produce a sense of intimacy where, in fact none exists ... in modern society we have a gigantic simulation model of such reciprocal human relationships

Baudrillard emphasises the simulated nature of contemporary society in which people are seduced and fascinated by an inauthentic reality. Rojek and Turner (1993, pxi) interpreted Baudrillard's ideas in stating, "image makers have opened up a Pandora's box of illusions, treatments and enhancements which

have obliterated the division between reality and unreality". Giulianotti (2004) also notes that in Baudrillard's hyper real society there is an obsession with excessive detail. Consequently, the FA's focus on social media within their strategy for the FA WSL means the players are no longer merely elite athletes performing on the pitch. They must now make connections with fans and reveal the minutiae of their personal, social and sporting lives. As Kellner (2008) identifies in contemporary society the distinction between private and public is broken down.

A respondent identified another limitation of an overreliance on social media:

*"I've got a concern, during the World Cup [a player] had a nightmare and she got loads of abuse on Twitter and Facebook and at some point they are going to have to stop them being on because ... as much as it is all lovely now there will be a time when the criticism will come"*  
(Journalist)

If players do not conform to the expectations of the FA relating to behaviour on social media sites they can be disciplined. The use of Twitter caused problems for one player, in 2012, who was suspended for six matches for a tweet that included a reference to sexual orientation. Due to the small number of clubs playing in the League this amounted to a third of the season (FA 2012d). The actual content was not identified within the FA report which only listed the category the offending Tweet related to. It is, therefore, impossible to identify if the player was being homophobic or the Tweet was seen as offensive by the FA as it is reluctant to acknowledge the existence of lesbian players, thus enabling the organisation to maintain control over narratives around the women's game. This lack of transparency in the FA's decision making process was addressed in Chapter Six, while its ability to impose its own interpretation within its internal processes was identified in Chapter Eight.

It is interesting to note that, even with the increased visibility on Twitter and the media coverage that the introduction of Digital Ambassadors received, attendances in the second season varied little to those seen in the first season. As Hutchins and Rowe (2012, p46) state:

the 'digital revolution' is so far proving less than revolutionary in the context of sport. Hierarchies of popularity and media coverage which have seen elite men's sport occupy a disproportionate amount of time

and space compared with women's, disabled and lower tier sports for several decades, have not dismantled online so far

Social media has been placed at the centre of the FA's vision for the FA WSL, a decision partly forced on the organisation due to the limited interest paid by traditional media outlets. The extent to which it can transform the profile of the game and help clubs increase their attendances, however, is open to question.

#### **9.4 The impact on the women's football pyramid**

One of the aims of the FA WSL was to strengthen the player pathway and playing base of the sport. As the FA (2013c, p13) stated "the FA WSL is a crucial step in the women's pathway, providing elite players with regular, competitive football and providing a vital link between national teams and amateur football". It was claimed that the introduction of the FA WSL would benefit all levels of the women's game not only those within the new League. The experiences of those clubs outside the FA WSL can be conceptualised using Baudrillard's (1983) theory of 'after the orgy'. He states, "the orgy in question was the moment modernity exploded upon us, the moment of liberation in every sphere ... We have pursued every avenue in the production and effective overproduction of objects, signs, messages, ideologies and satisfactions" (p3). In contemporary society, everything has become unequivocally interwoven, "every individual category is subject to contamination ... Politics is no longer restricted to the political sphere, but infects every sphere, economics, science, art and sport ... sport itself meanwhile is no longer located in sport, but instead in business, in sex, in politics, in the general style of performance" (p8). These ideas are connected to Baudrillard's (1998) concept of hyperreality, which was discussed earlier in this chapter in relation to social media. Under hyperreality, society becomes enmeshed, constructed and defined to meet commercialised and commodified demands. Once dominant aspects of society become simulated, the simulation is posited as more real than the actual reality.

In applying Baudrillard to the FA WSL, the FA produced a vision for elite women's football based on sport as a business. Consequently, the FA WSL was a simulated form of women's football. It was created in an attempt to instantly

construct a commercialised, spectacularised version of the game. As Baudrillard proclaims "now everything has been liberated, the chips are down and we find ourselves faced collectively with the big question: What do we do now the orgy is over?" (p3). Once the FA has achieved what they wanted, in the case of women's football a semi-professionalised elite league, what happens to those who are not part of it? This situation encapsulates Ballif's (2001, p128) interpretation of Baudrillard which asks "what comes after the obscene, to wonder what lies beyond the banality of truth, meaning and representation". Within such a framework, examining the FA WSL to gain an understanding of the game is futile as it is merely a simulation. Consequently, it is only by analysing the realities of those clubs outside the simulated orgy of the FA WSL that the actuality of women's football in England can be glimpsed.

Participants identified the introduction of the FA WSL had immediate negative effects on clubs outside the new League:

*"we lost players, we had quite a good squad and all of a sudden they were tempted and you can't get in the way ... and we couldn't attract players as they went elsewhere" (Chair of WPL club)*

*"I have seen the rise and fall of [my WPL club]. When I say fall in mean it in the loosest sense because the WSL has affected us massively ... we had a mass exodus of our players that were either cherry picked, or floated across with the hope that they would be picked even if it was for the reserves, but whatever it was we saw them all drifting away" (Head of football at FA WPL club)*

Remaining in the FA WPL meant clubs faced serious financial implications, as they could no longer say they were playing at the top of the elite game and were unable to attract as many sponsors. One participant, from a FA WPL club, identified:

*"I think everything has been ploughed into it [the WSL] we are the forgotten ones and I think they [the FA] are forgetting how much work goes in at the lower end to try to feed into Super League ... The [2012] FA Women's Football Awards, it was all about the Super Leaguer I can't even remember any other clubs mentioned except Super League ones, it was just not even boring it was embarrassing" (Head of football at FA WPL club)*

The position intensified with the introduction of the expanded FA WSL in 2014, when eighteen clubs were chosen for the new two league structure. As with the original one league structure, there is no promotion or relegation between the



FA WSL and the FA WPL. Consequently, those not included at that stage have no opportunity to reach the pinnacle of the elite structure until a new tendering process for the 2018 season. As a participant from a FA WPL club which had been accepted into the new two league system, stated:

*"to be perfectly honest when we had a look at what was going to be left, you would think was there any point in carrying on, I mean we would have carried on in one sort or another but as we are now we would have ceased to exist, I imagine, the vast number of players would have left, coaching staff would have left and it would have become a junior team" (Chair of FA WPL club)*

The FA's focus on the FA WSL has, therefore, left unanswered many questions about the game as a whole, leaving those clubs outside the elite League unsure of the future. This was highlighted by one participant when they identified that the showcase fixture for clubs outside the semi-professional league, the FA WPL Cup final, was *"scheduled on an afternoon when there was WSL fixture so the chances of getting a good crowd are going to be tough"*. The FA WPL clubs also suffered another financial blow when ESPN scrapped its planned coverage of the fixture in 2011, having initially announced it would be broadcast (Leighton 2011b).

Some FA WPL clubs have encountered problems simply surviving. For instance, Nottingham Forest Ladies had to stage a bucket collection at the home ground of their men's team as their financial position had become so precarious (Nottingham Post 2011). While, in 2011, Jeff Maslin, the then Chairperson of Sheffield Wednesday Women's FC, summed up the position, "I have continually petitioned the FA for more money to be made available for the grass roots football teams which tends to fall on deaf ears. ... the FA [are] ploughing all their time and resources into the WSL. Clubs like mine ... are the ones that suffer" (Women's Soccer Scene 2011). A year later he announced (She Kicks 2012) that the club was folding:

Bills in excess of £10,000 this season has put a major strain on everyone that is involved in this club and with little help from outside sponsors due to the economic climate has made this even harder to operate ... Unfortunately, until women's football is recognised from the top downwards, other clubs will be following SWWFC as the infrastructure and investment into women's football at this level is, to say the least, embarrassing

The FA vision, which proclaimed that the FA WSL would improve the game as a whole, has proved hard to substantiate. Ideas about elite structures and their positive effects for the whole pyramid are used by sports governing bodies to validate investment at the top although Hanstad and Skille (2010) question whether these arguments are valid. As Green and Houlihan (2005, p173) state, "the concentration on elite development has usually resulted in a relative neglect of the development and maintenance of the club infrastructure". In a study specifically relating to women's football in England, Bell (2012, p359) states that the FA's first national strategy for women's and girl's football in 2008 was based on the "assumption of trickle down of resources from the elite through the sport to the base of the participation pyramid, an assumption with limited evidence of effectiveness". Research has consistently been unable to corroborate narratives that elite success leads to a cascade affect throughout a sports infrastructure (Grix and Carmichael 2012, Leopkey and Parent 2012, De Bosscher, Sotiriadou and van Bottenburg 2013).

Indeed, respondents provided a practical example of one way the trickle-down effect was poorly thought out in the first three seasons of the FA WSL:

*"they [FA WSL clubs] have the reserves playing in the winter and the firsts in the summer ... everyone wants to play their best players and you have a squad of 22 so you have about 6 players who are on the fringe, but they can't play reserve team football because that is at a different time and they are not allowed to play then because the WPL clubs, who they are playing reserve football alongside, don't want players dropping down ... it's OK for the players who have made it but those players who are just about to make it their careers are being ruined as they are stuck doing nothing, they can't play in the summer because they are part of a squad and they can't play in the winter because the you are restricted to just one player playing down [in the winter WPL reserve league] so they haven't got that right they haven't thought that through properly" (Chair of FA WSL club B)*

The lack of a summer reserve team league provided a structural impediment to the envisioned and espoused seamless cascade of benefits from the top of the game to the bottom. Those players on the fringe of FA WSL clubs were unable to play regular football to help their game develop, while those hoping to break into the FA WSL had less opportunity to step up as they could not be brought in to play reserve team football. Respondents did, however, note that the FA had announced plans to address the absence of a reserve structure in the 2014

season, which would be implemented with the introduction by all FA WSL clubs of a development team.

The introduction of the FA WSL has undeniably addressed some of the inadequacies apparent in the previous structure in that some players can earn a living from the game and television coverage has increased. However, progress is still needed to enable the FA's aims to be met. Many players still have other non-footballing careers, make personal sacrifices to play at the highest level of the women's game and have to open up their private lives via social media to compensate for the lack of coverage in traditional media outlets. Some clubs have little option but to become dependent on men's clubs, this is especially relevant as the centrality of financial narratives and the imposition of short term neo liberal ideas require them to become financially self-sufficient. This has occurred at a time when gaining an income through charging spectators to attend and obtaining independent sponsorship has proved difficult. It is further compounded by the practical, symbolic and economic consequences of most clubs not owning their own ground. In opposition to rhetoric proclaiming that investment in the elite level of the game will positively affect the rest of the pyramid, those outside the FA WSL continue to struggle. It is hard to identify how the FA's stated aims for the League will be reached in any meaningful way while it is able to continue to adopt a liberal approach which does not radically acknowledge or address gender inequalities in the sport.

## CHAPTER TEN

### Conclusion

Women's football in England has a richer tradition than is conventionally acknowledged, one that is often overlooked in historical accounts and research. As Foucault (1972) identifies such omissions are a reflection of the power certain individuals and organisations have in society (Foucault 1972). As Hargreaves (2000) recognised in terms of sport, dominant interpretations have been predominantly written by men who tend to focus on male interests. However, in recent year's increased academic focus has been placed on female sport. In terms of women's football authors have illuminated areas such as its long history (Williams 2003, 2006), the consequences of male dominance (Davis-Delano, Pollock and Vose 2009 and Engh 2011), the relationships between women's football and sexuality (Caudwell 1999 and Drury 2011) and the experiences of people from different ethnicities (Ratna 2008 and Ahmad 2011). Few studies, though, have focussed on the elite competitive structures in England or the role of the FA within them.

The introduction of the first semi-professional women's football league in England provided a unique opportunity to situate and explore contemporary discourses relating to elite football. Consequently, this study has begun to address this gap by contributing new insights relating to the organisation of elite women's football. It also assessed whether women's increased presence within elite competitive league football provides an important challenge to dominant discourses or the way football is defined, legitimised and organised by the FA. In keeping with theorists such as Meyerson and Kolb (2000) and Shaw and Frisby (2006) this study, therefore, adopted a critical approach which deconstructed the assumptions, values and practices that framed the female game and the introduction of the FA WSL, including a critical examination of the way dominant ideas allow it to be defined and structured in particular ways.

The study concluded that the FA was a closed, bureaucratic and powerful organisation. Its discursive power as the game's governing body allows it to situate its position as unique and therefore it rejects numerous reports critical of its structures and its ability to govern contemporary English football, a situation

mirrored in studies into other sport organisations including FIFA (Pielke 2013, Tomlinson 2014a) and the IOC (Jenning 2011). It has been able to disregard numerous inclusive practices on which successful change in other sports NGBs was based, such as a participatory culture and a partnership approach (Bayle and Robinson 2007, Persson 2011). The study found that those within the female game who have in-depth knowledge of its key issues felt that they were placed on the outside of decision making processes, a position encapsulated within Bauman's (1987) distinction between legislators, the traditional experts in a field who hold the position of power and are able to protect their superiority through their position as gatekeepers and interpreters who possess extensive knowledge and understanding of the field but have little power to impose their interpretations (Ritzer 1997).

The study identified the lack of focus placed on the previous FA WPL structures by the FA and the ways in which the introduction of the FA WSL addressed some of these inadequacies. Some players can now earn a living from the game, television coverage has increased, attendances are higher than in the FA WPL and in terms of facilities Bristol Academy, for example, play in a stadium purpose built for a women's club. However, the more official incorporation of elite women's football into FA operations was not seen by those in the study to be based on or to have delivered a fundamental change in attitudes relating to female participation in this traditionally male sport. Players within the elite structures still have to undertake other non-footballing careers, share accommodation with their team mates and make personal sacrifices to play the game. Participants also identified that most teams do not own their own stadiums which causes practical problems in terms of fixtures and financial issues, limiting their ability to raise revenue through match day hospitality or hiring out the facilities on non-match days. Increased inclusion, therefore, has not necessarily signified greater acceptance or equity (Fielding-Lloyd and Mean 2011).

In agreement with previous studies such as White and Kay (2006) and Lusted (2009) participants described the FA as a highly gendered organisation, especially in terms of its governance structures (Griggs and Biscomb 2010). This contributed to its ability to adopt a liberal approach to addressing gender

inequality in its structures (Fielding-Lloyd and Mean 2011, Welford 2011), a position which is often adopted by contemporary organisations both within sport and in wider society (Laurendeau and Sharava 2008, Kelan 2009). Prevailing liberal approaches to gender equality view quantitative increase as evidence of more inclusive policies and are satisfied with gradual change (Cooky 2009). They do not focus on questioning underlying gendered structures, practices and assumptions thereby allowing dominant gendered practices within sport to continue (Hoerber 2008, Welford 2011). Having banned the game for 50 years and begrudgingly included in its structures over 20 years after the ban was lifted, its response to addressing the challenges faced in the elite game, the introduction of the FA WSL, did not question the underlying gendered nature of the organisation or significantly disrupt its historical inequitable arrangements.

The study ascertained that the model chosen by the FA was based on financial narratives, mirroring trends in the men's game which draw on an increased focus on markets, commercialisation and commodification in contemporary neo liberal society (Horne 2006, Silk and Andrews 2012, Wenner 2013). Some clubs in the study, though, were unable to obtain the necessary financial resources to meet the FA's requirements and financial stability became increasingly based on aligning to a men's team. The focus on financial narratives within the tender process led to the demotion of Doncaster Rovers Belles, the only club to have played in the top league since the structures were created in 1991. Tradition, community focus and fairness found little place in the commercialised and commodified neo liberal sporting structures the new League was placed within (Harvey 2007). Another central feature of neo liberalism which was identified as central to the experiences of those in the women's game was the individualisation of responsibility (Davies and Saltmarsh 2007, Jarvie 2007). The success of the FA WSL was predicated on the commitment and dedication of individuals involved in women's football. Prevailing neo liberal narratives allow the FA to place the onus for ensuring success on those working in women's clubs who have limited access to resources but face the consequences of years of marginalisation, discrimination and neglect.

The study demonstrated that the FA WSL was conceived as a fun and friendly league and as a fairer form of the game than men's football. It was, therefore,

framed by the FA within traditional narratives relating to hegemonic masculinity, femininity and heterosexuality (Krane 2001, Anderson 2002, Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), which are often seen in discourses relating to sport (Clayton and Humberstone 2006, Engh's 2011, Velija, Mierzwinski and Fortune 2013). There was also a focus on ideas around the role of sport as spectacle (Debord 1994, Manzenreiter and Spitaler 2010) and the inclusion of spectators as active parts of a carnival atmosphere (Bakhtin 1984, Burton 1995), concepts that abound in the elite men's game (Giulianotti 2002, Selmer and Sülzle 2010, Ben-Porat 2012). This coupled with the family friendly vision meant peripheral entertainment became an integral part of the FA WSL experience. Narratives relating to the game as a sporting contest were at times overlooked due to the presence of bouncy castles and free merchandise. This was linked directly to the FA's overriding success criteria, attendances figures, an easily quantifiable measure which adheres directly to neo liberal short term, audit based narratives (Clarke 2004, Davies and Saltmarsh 2007).

The introduction of semi-professionalism into the elite structures of women's football in England cannot, therefore, simply be taken as evidence that women are now accepted in to the football mainstream. The FA WSL does not appear to have disrupted the pervasive and deeply entrenched power imbalance in gender relations in the sport. However, throughout the study it became apparent that perhaps traditional male dominated elite sport structures are not the environment to expect radical and transformative change (Harvey, Horne and Safari 2009, Burke 2010). Sport within this setting appears conservative, apolitical and compliant with traditional, unequal, societal narratives (Giardina and Metz 2005, Kaufmann and Wolff 2010). This is compounded by the FA evidently controlling definitions, access to decision making and resources meaning those within women's football are dependent on the FA for their participation in the elite League and ultimately the survival of their club. The power dynamic is, therefore, fundamentally unequal leaving little scope for challenge, protest or alternative voices. As FA structures, sporting narratives and societal discourses allow gender equality to be framed in liberal terms it may be some time until radical change or real equality is attained.

## **Limitation of the study and recommendations for future research**

As discussed within Chapter Five this study makes no claim to be a definitive account of the FA WSL and leaves itself open to critical analysis. In agreement with the broadly relativist ontological and non-positivist epistemological approach the study took, the FA WSL is ever changing and subjectively framed by all those involved in it, including myself as a researcher. The themes identified through analysis and the resultant theorising were, though, grounded in the information gathered as part of the study and provide new insights into the organisation, development and nature of elite women's football in England. As research into and debate about elite women's football and the organisation that controls the game is currently minimal this study, therefore, opens up discussions within the research community. The FA's aims for and claims about the new League evolve and therefore it is hoped that this is just the start of research into domestic elite competitive women's football. Future studies are necessary to continue to develop an understanding of the place of the women's game within elite footballing narratives and structures.

As an initial examination of the first three years of a new League this study analysed several key themes; in future there is scope to look at a number of areas in more depth. For instance, will the focus on commercial narratives increasingly homogenise the models clubs adopt, for example aligning to men's clubs, or is there scope for diversity, for example aligning to an educational establishment like the approach adopted by Bristol Academy? Participants noted an uncertainty about who the target spectator market was, especially as the one espoused by the FA does not reflect reality. Therefore, an area of interest would be investigating who attends games and the reasons for their attendance. This may also even assist clubs to become more financially stable and operate in the commercial environment they have been placed in. Further emphasis also needs to be placed on those who work within woman's football and how they negotiate their identities while working in such a deeply gendered environment.

The FA as an organisation has consistently proved resistant to change. Additional research into and focus on its structures might add extra weight to



calls for more substantial transformation. It is, though, acknowledged that the power dynamics within the organisation and its own discursive discourses, which proclaim it to be unique, may hinder access to its structures and its acceptance of criticism. These factors, though, should not dissuade researchers from providing further critical illuminations rather it should compel them to do so. Increased presence cannot be taken as evidence of increased acceptance therefore future work needs to continue to look beyond numerical increase or simplistic assertions that the introduction of a new League signifies greater gender equality. As this study has identified, the FA's elite women's football structures are a fascinating microcosm in which to theorise gender, sport and organisations. Therefore, it is hoped other researchers will take on further critical analysis in the area.

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## ***Appendix A: Interview guide***

### **Initial questions/areas to cover in interview**

How did you get involved with women's football?

Reasons for the FA WSL being introduced

The processes that lead to the development of the FA WSL

- who was involved?

The process for clubs to get into the FA WSL

Changes at clubs

- players
- staff
- facilities
- training etc

Effects on grassroots game

Advantages of FA WSL

Continuing challenges women's football faces

Future direction

## **Appendix B: Successful ethics application**

**CONFIDENTIAL**



*Sheffield Hallam University*

**Faculty of Health and Wellbeing**

**Research Ethics Committee**

**Sport & Exercise Research Ethics Review Group**

### **APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL OF RESEARCH**

In designing research involving humans, principal investigators should be able to demonstrate a clear intention of benefit to society and the research should be based on sound principles. These criteria will be considered by the Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group before approving a project. **ALL** of the following details must be provided, either typewritten or word-processed preferably at least in 11 point font.

Please either tick the appropriate box or provide the information required.

<b>1) Date of application</b>	January 2012
<b>2) Anticipated date of completion of project</b>	February 2014
<b>3) Title of research</b>	The Women's Super League - Women's Football and the Impact of Introducing Semi Professionalism
<b>4) Subject area</b>	Sociology of Sport

<b>5) Principal Investigator</b>  Name  Email address @ SHU  Telephone/Mobile number  Student number (if applicable)	Ruth Sequerra  Ruth.sequerra@shu.ac.uk   
<b>6) State if this study is:</b> (If the project is undergraduate or postgraduate please state module name and number)	<input type="checkbox"/> Research <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate  Module name:  Module number:
<b>7) Director of Studies/Supervisor/ Tutor name</b>	Simon Shibli
<b>8) Intended duration and timing of project?</b>	3 year PhD from March 2011 to February 2014
<b>9) Location of project</b> If external to SHU, provide evidence in support (see section 17)	Sport Industry Research Centre / SHU
<b>10) State if this study is:</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> New  <input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative (please include appropriate agreements in section 17)  <input type="checkbox"/> Replication of :

<p><b>11) Purpose and benefit of the research</b></p> <p>Statement of the research problem with any necessary background information (no more than 1 side of A4)</p> <p>The aim of this research is to investigate the nature of elite women's football in England and the impact of the introduction of the new semi-professional Women's Super League (WSL). It will evaluate the discourses which underpin the WSL and the role played by key organisations, including the FA and elite clubs. The research will identify how the inclusion of women into professionalised elite football has been affected by how football is understood through current discourses and analyse whether semi-professionalisation indicates new ways of thinking.</p> <p>Sport is recognised as a highly gendered institution, predominantly played and organised by men (Knoppers and Anthonissen 2005). Discourses relating to sport have mainly been created, controlled and reinforced by men (Shaw 2006). The powerful and gendered discourses which frame sport have developed to produce knowledge and definitions which are often taken for granted (Foucault 1972, Markula and Pringle 2006). This is particularly evident in regard to football (Caudwell 2007, 2009). Football in England is organised, regulated and to a large extent defined by the Football Association (FA), an organisation dominated by men (Lusted 2009, Fielding-Lloyd and Mean 2011). Women's increased participation in football in recent years provides an important challenge to sporting discourses and a valuable opportunity to understand how sport continues to be defined, legitimised and reworked.</p> <p>Recently participation in football by females has increased dramatically which led, in part, to the FA announcing the introduction of the FA Women's Super League (WSL) to commence in April 2011. The FA WSL offers, for the first time, a semi-professional summer league, to 'give women's football a platform on which to build a new identity' (FA 2009). Women are rarely included in the extensive academic research and literature relating to football (Finn and Giulianotti 2000, Soccer and Society 2007). Authors such as Williams (2003) have illuminated the long history of women and football. Research has also focused on the continued dominance of masculine hegemony and its impact on sport in general and football specifically (Davis-Delano, Pollock and Vose 2009, Engh 2011). Other authors focus predominantly on the gendered experiences of women who play the game and the social norms that construct and valorise heterosexual femininity (Caudwell 2003, 2006a, 2006b, Scraton, Caudwell and Holland 2005).</p> <p>Little research, however, has been undertaken on the organisations involved within the game and the nature and consequences of the decisions made by them. The introduction of the first ever semi-professional women's football league in England provides a unique opportunity to situate and investigate contemporary discourses relating to football. The FA, an organisation which banned women from the game for 50 years and has taken nearly 20 years to include women in the elite league system, continues to play an influential role in defining football. The introduction of the WSL cannot simply be taken as evidence that women are now accepted in to the football</p>	

mainstream. Women's inclusion in sport is often seen as demonstrating equality however it is the nature of the inclusion which is of central importance (Mean and Kassing 2008, Fielding-Lloyd and Mean 2011). Taking this into consideration this research will critically examine the introduction of the WSL, the discourses which underpin it, the effects on women's football as a whole and whether it indicates a reimagining of previously gendered discourses relating to football.

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## 12) Participants

### 12.1 Number

12 to 15

### 12.2 Rationale for this number

(eg calculations of sample size, practical considerations)

Observations will take place during two seasons of the WSL and will involve about 10 games per season. Attempts will be made to attend games at all the different grounds.

The interview stage will involve between 12 to 15 participants. This number is appropriate due to timing considerations and the qualitative nature of the study (Guest, Bunce and Johnson 2006). It will allow for in depth analysis and the drawing out of relevant information pertinent to the study. It will also make the transcription and analysis practically possible within the PhD period. It is envisioned that if data saturation has not been reached and new ideas are still forthcoming within this

	<p>number there is leeway for a number of extra interviews.</p> <p>Other studies into women's football have taken a similar approach drawing from extensive observations and in depth interviews with a small sample (Harris 2005, Drury 2011).</p> <p>DRURY, Scarlett (2011) 'It seems really inclusive in some ways, but ... inclusive just for people who identify as lesbian': discourses of gender and sexuality in a lesbian-identified football club, <i>Soccer and Society</i>, <b>12(3)</b>, 421-442</p> <p>GUEST, Greg BUNCE, Arwen and JOHNSON, Laura (2006). How many interviews are enough? <i>Field Methods</i>, <b>18(1)</b>, 59-82.</p> <p>HARRIS, John (2005). The image problem in women's football, <i>Sport and Social Issues</i>, <b>29(2)</b>, 184-197.</p>
<p><b>12.3 Criteria for inclusion and exclusion</b></p> <p>(eg age and sex)</p>	<p>All participants will be over 18 years old. Initial interviews will be undertaken with FA officials involved with the formulation and implementation of the WSL, County FA Women's and Girls' Development Officers who organise women's football at the local level and the chairpersons of elite women's football club. This will include both those whose clubs were involved in the introductory WSL and those that were not, either due to being unsuccessful at tender or those choosing not to apply. From these interviews it is envisioned other important figures in the field will be identified such as other club officials, individuals who have been brought in from other organisations to implement and manage the WSL.</p>

<p><b>12.4 Procedures for recruitment</b> (eg location and methods)</p>	<p>I initially intend to undertake purposeful sampling (Silverman 2010). From these initial sources other individuals will be identified through snowball sampling (Browne 2005, Noy 2008). The process of sampling will be an on-going process throughout the research, ever changing in light of emerging and developing insights. I already have contacts within the FA and the County FA who can be approached to be interviewed.</p> <p>BROWNE, Kath (2005). Snowball sampling: using social networks to research non-heterosexual women, <i>International Journal of Social Research Methodology</i>, 8(1), 47-60.</p> <p>CRESWELL, John W (2007). <i>Qualitative inquiry and research design</i>, London, Sage Publications.</p> <p>NOY, Chaim (2008). Sampling knowledge: The hermeneutics of snowball sampling in qualitative research, <i>International Journal of Social Research Methodology</i>, 11(4), 327-344.</p> <p>SILVERMAN, David (2010) <i>Qualitative research: Issues of theory, method and practice</i>, London, Sage.</p>
<p><b>12.5 Does the study have *minors or ‡vulnerable adults as participants?</b></p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes      <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p><b>12.6 Is CRB Disclosure required for the Principal Investigator?</b> (to be determined by Risk Assessment)</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes      <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p><b>12.7 If you ticked 'yes' in 12.5 and 'no' in 12.6 please explain why:</b></p>	



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\*Minors are participants under the age of 18 years.

‡Vulnerable adults are participants over the age of 16 years who are likely to exhibit:

- a) learning difficulties
- b) physical illness/impairment
- c) mental illness/impairment
- d) advanced age
- e) any other condition that might render them vulnerable

### **13) Details of the research design**

#### **13.1 Provide details of intended methodological procedures and data collection.**

(For MSc students conducting a scientific support project please provide the following information: a. needs analysis; b. potential outcome; c proposed interventions).

The proposed methodology for this study allows for an original and innovative investigation of the organisations which control football and have been involved in the introduction of the WSL. It attempts to capture fully a multitude of experience and perspectives of women's football and the nature and impact of the WSL. In keeping with this aim a predominantly qualitative approach will be undertaken (Gerson and Horowitz 2002). The research will involve various methods, primarily observation and semi-structured interviews. The world of women's football is virtually invisible in the media, practically absent from academic literature and the newness of the WSL means the area of study is virtually unknown. In such an unfamiliar field the initial stage will involve observation. The research will be founded on a commitment to experience and explore the WSL at first hand, in doing so avoiding the pitfall of armchair theorising (Tagsold 2010). Observing WSL fixtures will provide a vital understanding of the position, organisation and nature of the league. It is also envisioned that attendance at these games will provide information about who is involved, providing pointers to who would be useful to interview. The rich data obtained through observation and interviews will be supplemented by documentary analysis of the ideas presented by the FA and the clubs at WSL games, events and through media sources. This will involve collecting such information as strategy documents, promotional literature and reviewing information provided on websites. Such a mixed method provides a more innovative, open minded and creative approach, than is traditionally adopted in some sports

research (Rudd and Johnson 2010).

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### 13.2 Are these "minor" procedures as defined in Appendix 1 of the ethics guidelines?

☒ Yes      ☐ No

### 13.3 If you answered 'no' in section 13.2, list the procedures that are not minor

### 13.4 Provide details of the quantitative and qualitative analysis to be used

The data will primarily be qualitative in its nature. The observation notes and interviews will be transcribed immediately so as to most fully capture the information and experiences. Documents will be evaluated and appropriate notes taken, dated for future reference. The process of analysis of all these sources of data will be on going throughout the research process. During analysis I will be looking for recurring themes and contradictory messages encountered in the interviews, through official documentation and experiences at matches, while at the same time identifying themes to be aligned to pertinent theoretical frameworks, which will develop through the research process. Of particular theoretical relevance is how the changing position of women's football reinforces, illuminates or rejects current theories on the nature and power of sports organisation, which many theorists identify are often sites of male privilege, dominance and hegemonic masculinity (Shaw 2006, Shaw and Frisby 2006, Sartore and Cunningham 2007). It will focus on what the introduction of the WSL can tell us about the nature of women's inclusion in sport (Mean and Kassing 2008, Fielding-Lloyd and Mean 2011), which currently depends on a liberal approach that does not challenge existing gender relations (Meyerson and Kolb 2000, Kelan 2009). While also examining the role of powerful and gendered discourses which frame sport and have developed to produce knowledge and definitions which are often taken for granted (Foucault 1972, Markula and Pringle 2006).

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### **14) Substances to be administered (refer to Appendix V of the ethics procedures)**

**14.1 The protocol does not involve the administration of pharmacologically active substances or nutritional supplements.**

Please tick box if this statement applies and go to section 15) [ X ]

**14.2 Name and state the risk category for each substance. If a COSHH assessment is required state how the risks are to be managed.**

### **15) Degree of discomfort that participants might experience**

Consider the degree of physical and psychological discomfort that will be experienced by the participants. State the details which must be included in the participant information sheet to ensure that the participants are fully informed about any discomfort that they may experience.

It is not envisioned that the participants will experience discomfort through participation in the research. Observations at matches are intended to study the organisation and running of the WSL games so the primary focus will not be the individuals at the games. I will be open with all those I encounter about the reason for my attendance at matches. The interviews will not aim to address any particularly sensitive issues e.g. sexuality so it is not envisioned that participants will encounter physical and psychological discomfort. I will provide those interviewed with in-depth information about the study, their right to withdraw and assurances about confidentiality through the use of a participant information sheet. The role of those interviewed will be formalised through a signed consent document provided to and returned by all of those interviewed. This will formalise the process by which the participants give informed consent.

## 16) Outcomes of Risk Assessment

Provide details of the risk and explain how the control measures will be implemented to manage the risk.

### IN DEPTH INTERVIEWS

#### Risk

**Risk** of [emotional upset and offense] caused by [discussion of sensitive topics]. ( $R2 = C1 \times L2$ ) **LOW RISK**

#### Control Measure

Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. If necessary, the participants will be given information on where to seek appropriate counselling.

#### Risk

**Risk** of [danger to personal safety] caused by [travelling alone and meeting with unfamiliar persons]. ( $R1 = C1 \times L1$ ) **LOW RISK**

#### Control Measure

Others (relative, friend) will be informed of the location, time and duration of the interview. The researcher will carry a mobile phone.

### OBSERVATIONS AT FOOTBALL MATCHES

#### Risk

**Risk** of [danger to personal safety] caused by [travelling alone to unfamiliar places].

(R1 = C1 x L1) **LOW RISK**


**Control Measure**

Others (relative, friend) will be informed of the location, time and duration of the observation. The researcher will carry a mobile phone.

17) Attachments		Tick box
17.1 Risk assessment (including CRB risk assessment)		√
17.2 COSHH assessment		N/A
17.3 Participant information sheet (this should be addressed directly to the participant (ie you will etc) and in a language they will understand)		√
17.4 Informed consent form		√
17.5 Pre-screening questionnaire		N/A
17.6 Collaboration evidence/support correspondence from the organisation consenting to the research (this must be on letterhead paper and signed) See sections 9 & 10.		N/A
17.7 CRB Disclosure certificate <u>or</u> where not available CRB application form		N/A
17.8 Clinical Trails form (FIN 12)		N/A
18. Signature  Principal Investigator	Once this application is approved, I will undertake the research study as approved. If circumstances necessitate that changes are made to the approved protocol, I will discuss these with my Project Supervisor. If the supervisor advises that there should be a resubmission to the Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group, I agree that no work will be carried out using the changed protocol until approval has been sought and formally	

	<p>received.</p> <p>_____ Date _____</p> <p>Principal Investigator signature</p> <p>Name _____</p>
<p><b>19. Approval</b></p> <p><b>Project Supervisor</b> to sign <b>either</b> box A <u>or</u> box B as applicable</p> <p>(refer to Appendix I and the flowchart in appendix VI of the ethics guidelines)</p>	<p><b>Box A:</b></p> <p>I confirm that the research proposed is based solely on 'minor' procedures, as outlined in Appendix 1 of the HWB Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group 'Ethics Procedures for Research with Humans as Participants' document, and therefore does not need to be submitted to the HWB Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group.</p> <p>In terms of ethics approval, I agree the 'minor' procedures proposed here and confirm that the Principal Investigator may proceed with the study as designed.</p> <p>_____ Date _____</p> <p>Project Supervisor signature</p> <p>Name _____</p>
	<p><b>Box B:</b></p> <p>I confirm that the research proposed is <u>not</u> based solely on 'minor' procedures, as outlined in Appendix 1 of the HWB Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group 'Ethics Procedures for Research with Humans as Participants' document, and therefore <u>must</u> be submitted to the HWB Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group for approval.</p> <p>I confirm that the appropriate preparatory work has been undertaken and that this document is in a fit state for submission to the HWB Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group.</p>

	_____ Date _____
	Project Supervisor signature
	Name _____

	Sheffield Hallam University
	Faculty of Health and Wellbeing Research Ethics Committee
	Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group
	Risk Assessment Pro Forma

**\*\*Please ensure that you read the accompanying  
Risk Assessment Risk Ranking document before completing this form\*\***

Title of research	The Women's Super League - Womens Football and the Impa of the Introduction of Semi Professionalism
Date Assessed	4 <sup>th</sup> January 2012
Assessed by (Principal Investigator)	Beth Fielding-Lloyd

Signed	Position
	Principal Investigator

Activity	Risks	Control Measures
In-depth interviews	<p><b>Risk</b> of [emotional upset and offense] caused by [discussion of sensitive topics]. (R2 = C1 x L2) <b>LOW RISK</b></p> <p><b>Risk</b> of [danger to personal safety] caused by [travelling alone and meeting with unfamiliar persons]. (R1 = C1 x L1) <b>LOW RISK</b></p>	<p>Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. If necessary, the participants will be given information on where to seek appropriate counselling.</p> <p>Others (relative, friend) will be informed of the location, time and duration of the interview. The researcher will carry a mobile phone.</p>

Observations at football matches	Risk of [danger to personal safety] caused by [travelling alone to unfamiliar places]. (R1 = C1 x L1) <b>LOW RISK</b>	Others (relative, friend) will be informed of the location, time and duration of the observation. The researcher will carry a mobile phone.
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<b>Risk Evaluation (Overall)</b>	
LOW	
<b>General Control Measures</b>	
Is a pre-screen medical questionnaire required? Yes [ ] No [X]  1. Participant given Participant Information Sheet. Confirm understanding. 2. Participant reads and signs Informed Consent Form	
<b>Emergency Procedures</b>	
1. Leave location if personal safety is at risk. 2. Alert named individual if untoward incident has occurred	
<b>Monitoring Procedures</b>	
Continuously monitor throughout interview for signs (verbal and non-verbal) of emotional distress or offence. Continuously assess the observation environment for potential factors which could present harm.	
<b>Review Period</b>	Annually
<b>Reviewed By (Supervisor)</b>	<b>Date</b>



Beth Fielding-Lloyd	
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## Appendix C: Participant information sheet



Sheffield Hallam University

**Faculty of Health and Wellbeing Research Ethics Committee**

**Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group**

**Participant Information Sheet**

<b>Project Title</b>	The Women's Super League - Women's Football and the Impact of Introducing Semi Professionalism
<b>Supervisor/Director of Studies</b>	Prof. Simon Shibli / Donna Woodhouse
<b>Principal Investigator</b>	Ruth Sequerra
<b>Principal Investigator telephone/mobile number</b>	
<b>Purpose of Study and Brief Description of Procedures</b> (Not a legal explanation but a simple statement)	
<p><b>PURPOSE</b></p> <p>The aim of this programme of research is to investigate elite women's football in England and the impact of the new semi-professional Women's Super League (WSL). I will be looking at the ideas which underpin the WSL and the role played by key organisations, including the FA and elite clubs. The research will identify how the inclusion of women into professionalised elite football has been affected by current ideas in football and analyse whether semi- professionalisation indicates new ways of thinking.</p>	

## PROCEDURE

I would like to interview you because you are involved in the women's game and can provide information which will be valuable for my research. The information I gain from your interview will be interpreted by me so I can gain a better understanding of the WSL and how it fits in with the women's game as a whole. The information gained will be published in the resulting PhD thesis and academic journals. It will also be available to organisations and individuals with an interest in the WSL.

Your identity will remain anonymous and pseudonyms will be used.

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

It has been made clear to me that, should I feel that these Regulations are being infringed or that my interests are otherwise being ignored, neglected or denied, I should inform Mr David Binney, Chair of the Faculty of Health and Wellbeing Research Ethics Committee (Tel: 0114 225 5679) who will undertake to investigate my complaint.

**Appendix D: Informed consent form**



*Sheffield Hallam University*

**Faculty of Health and Wellbeing Research Ethics Committee  
Sport and Exercise Research Ethics Review Group**

**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** The Women's Super League - Women's Football and the Impact of Introducing Semi Professionalism

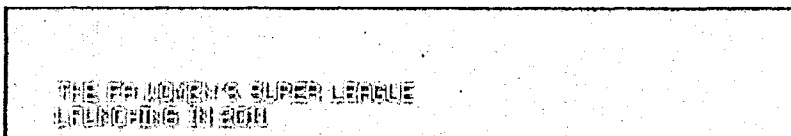
**The participant should complete the whole of this sheet himself/herself**

Have you read the Participant Information Sheet?	YES/NO
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	YES/NO
Have you received satisfactory answers to all of your questions?	YES/NO
Have you received enough information about the study?	YES/NO
<p>To whom have you spoken?</p> <p>Ruth Sequerra.....</p> <p>Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• at any time</li> <li>• without having to give a reason for withdrawing</li> </ul>	YES/NO
Have you had sufficient time to consider the nature of this project?	YES/NO
Do you agree to take part in this study?	YES/NO

Signed ..... Date .....

(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS).....

## **Appendix E: Club Development Plan Checklist**



### **Club Development Plan Checklist**

#### **Guidance for clubs applying for a licence to The FA Women's Super League.**

This document is to be read in conjunction with the new information pack for The FA Women's Super League launching in 2011. This is an updated edition of the document published in February 2009 titled 'Be part of football's future: An overview of The FA Women's Super League 2010-12'.

It is designed to provide you with a basis and checklist to create your club's two-year Club Development Plan. It will help ensure you address all the minimum requirements for your application to The FA Women's Super League.

These minimum requirements are summarised at the end of each section in the checklist. Clearly, those clubs which exceed the minimum requirements and provide additional information as requested in this checklist will increase their chances of a successful application.

A Club Development Plan Template for you to construct your plan is also provided and for the sake of consistency, we would ask all clubs to work to this template.

Your Club Development Plan will form the basis of your application, along with any further supporting documentation you would like to provide. It will be reviewed by The FA Women's Super League selection panel.

Within this checklist reference is made to an applicant 'club'. It is recognised that at this stage 'club' could relate to an established club, or a newly-created club or organisation, depending on the nature of the applicant. However, it should be noted that the 'club' will be required to be a separate, independent legal entity.

Satisfying The FA Women's Super League minimum requirements will help ensure the Super League clubs have in place:

- Adequate standards of financial and business management.
- High standards of commercial, marketing and community programmes.
- Adequate levels of management and organisation.
- High-quality infrastructure to provide players, staff, spectators and media with well-appointed, well-equipped and safe working environments.

Clubs are advised to provide supporting evidence in any area where the club is relying on potential or expected changes in future circumstances.

There are four main sections to the Club Development Plan, each with its own set of minimum requirements:

1. Financial and business management
2. Commercial and marketing
3. Facilities
4. Players and support staff

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## **1. Financial and business management**

As part of the Club Development Plan, each club is expected to include a section outlining its organisational, financial and management structures, so The FA can clearly identify the legal entity which represents the club. Detailed two-year financial forecasts are also required, with proof of funding or clear plans to generate these funds. This section of the Club Development Plan should include, but not be limited to, the areas listed below.

### **1.1 Organisational structure**

Clubs should identify their personnel and leadership structure:

- This should be in the form of a club organisational structure chart, which clearly explains the governance structure.
- It should include all staff (management/administrative), coaches, players, and volunteers who provide regular services to the club.
- It should also identify the roles any club expansion will involve.

### **1.2 Staffing qualifications**

- Clubs should identify all individuals by name working for the club, including full-time and part-time employees.
- As a minimum, each club is expected to have a dedicated General Manager and/or a Business Development specialist (this could be a combined role) and a Treasurer with relevant skills.
- Please supply a copy of the contract of employment if these personnel are already in place, or the contract outline/job description of anticipated appointments and when they will be made.
- The Treasurer should have as a minimum, one of the six Consultative Committee of Accountancy Body recognised qualifications; i.e. The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, in Scotland, and in Ireland, The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, The Chartered Institute of Management Accountants or The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy.

### **1.3 Corporate governance**

There is no prescribed corporate structure or ideal ownership model for a club. It is anticipated that these may vary between clubs, depending on their links or partnerships with other bodies such as, for example, men's football clubs, Centres of Excellence, universities and other further education bodies.

What is important is that the club is a clearly identifiable separate and independent legal entity with transparency of ownership, such as, for example, a private limited company.

It is this separate, independent legal entity which will be licensed as The FA Women's Super League club and which will receive any Super League Club Development Fund award. Information supplied as part of the club's application should relate to this entity, unless otherwise specified.

The FA recognises that some existing clubs may not currently be in a position to fulfil this separate, independent legal entity requirement. In such circumstances, the club must be able to evidence clear progress towards being such a separate and independent legal entity and provide confirmation that the club will be a separate and independent legal entity by no later than 1 July 2010.

As evidence of compliance with this requirement, the club should provide the following as attachments to their application, along with any other relevant information:

- Certificate of Incorporation, the Memorandum and Articles, or Club Constitution for the relevant entity (in compliance with The FA's Rules regarding club articles and constitution).

- Explanation of its structure (including parent companies/supporting partners, e.g. a university where applicable).

**Clubs should:**

- Confirm the contracting entity that will sign The FA Women's Super League Licence and The FA Women's Super League Club Development Funding Agreement, in accordance with the above requirements for a separate and independent legal entity.
- Identify all shareholders of the club with a 10%+ shareholding.
- Identify all directors (or senior officers) in the club.
- Identify all shareholders in any parent companies or group undertakings of the club with a 50%+ shareholding (as defined in sections 1159 to 1161 of the Companies Act 2006).
- Identify any change of club structure/trading company in the club in the previous three years.

#### **1.4 Club policies**

Whilst not a minimum requirement, the club should also provide evidence of its policies in the following areas, or evidence of how it is working towards approving and implementing these:

- Anti-doping.
- Equality and diversity.
- Equal opportunities.
- Health & safety and crowd safety.
- Risk management.

#### **1.5 Performance and projections**

The following should be provided as attachments to the application:

- Accounts, including profit and loss account and balance sheet where available. Copies are required for years ending 2008 and 2009 (draft acceptable). For merged or newly-formed clubs please provide historic accounts of the clubs from which the new club has been formed, if relevant.
- Detailed financial forecasts for two years from 1 November 2010 to 31 October 2011 and 1 November 2011 to 31 October 2012. Please use the Income and Expenditure Model provided as a guide when preparing these forecasts. Please support the forecasts with explanatory notes for each income and expenditure item so that the selection panel understands the basis of your calculations.

#### **1.6 Solvency, revenue and overheads**

Current and up to date evidence and information, so far as it is available, should be provided as follows:

- Salary costs broken down between playing and non-playing staff on a role by role basis with full financial information. NB From the start of The FA Women's Super League season, the player salaries must fall within the salary cap rules– see section 3.2 of the overview document for salary cap details.
- Sponsorship income (two-year history, if applicable, and two-year projections).
- Attendance analysis (two-year history, if applicable, and two-year projections for gate receipts).
- Other income streams from third-party grants or funding, including funding in kind, (e.g. from partner or host organisations, facility providers, professional men's clubs or Sportsmatch etc.) Please indicate any conditions which exist in relation to such income streams and compliance to date with such conditions (if any).
- Any current debts, specific intentions or plans to reduce these debts, and any security granted to any party in relation to any debt.
- Any insolvency event in relation to the club or the withdrawal of core funding in relation to the club or any of its core funding partners e.g. a men's football club, which threatened the club's ability to continue operations, in the two years prior to the application.



### 1.7 The Super League Club Development Fund

The Super League Club Development Fund has been created to help clubs become robust and sustainable organisations. Funds will be available for the first two seasons of The FA Women's Super League to support the selected clubs' development activities in three areas.

The three key investment areas are:

1. Up to £25,000 is available per club to go towards management, commercial and marketing services.
2. Up to £25,000 is available per club to go towards coaching, medical and other football-related support services.
3. Up to £20,000 is available per club to go towards facilities.

Each club should consider and present innovative and challenging ways to use this money to help improve their performance as a small business. For example:

- To employ sales/business development/operations managers.
- To fund outreach regional development plans to help generate new support for the club.
- To create up to three paid career opportunities for players, with the goal of attracting excellent players whilst providing paid employment. The rationale for this and further information is summarised in section 3.1 of the overview document.

Up to a maximum of £12,000 is ring-fenced within investment areas 1 and 2 to pay for the three above mentioned career opportunities for players. Each club must decide in advance whether it wishes to apply for this ring-fenced fund, which cannot be used for any other activities.

Each club should:

- Confirm how much money the club wishes to apply for and explain how this money will be used to support staffing and activity in one or more of the priority investment areas.
- At least match fund FA investment and specify the clear outcomes which they will deliver with such investment.
- Provide detailed Club Development Fund financial forecasts for 1 November 2010 to 31 October 2011 and 1 November 2011 to 31 October 2012.

Please use the Club Development Fund Model provided as a guide when preparing these forecasts. Please support the figures with explanatory notes under the three key headings. The forecasts should be provided as attachments to your Club Development Plan.

### 1.8 Overview of minimum requirements

Clubs will need to satisfy the following minimum requirements in the 'Financial and business management' section of their application:

- Evidence of a clearly identifiable legal entity representing the club.
- Evidence of a fully transparent ownership structure.
- Appointment of/costed recruitment plans to appoint a General Manager and/or a Business Development Specialist (these can be combined roles) and Treasurer, with the necessary skills and qualifications.
- Detailed financial forecasts for two years demonstrating solvency (including Club Development Fund awards and match funding of anticipated FA investment).
- Clear proof of income or comprehensive evidence of plans to generate income.
- Detailed Club Development Fund forecasts for two years demonstrating spend against the priority investment areas with clear and specific outcomes which promote club sustainability.

## 2. Commercial and marketing

The following areas should be covered in section 2 of the Club Development Plan:

### 2.1 Regional profile and partnerships

- The club's catchment area and reach of activities and services should be defined.
- Evidence should be provided, covering:
  - Population size of catchment area.
  - Geographical size of catchment area.
  - Extent of transport links (major roads, railway lines, airports).
  - Links with FA Girls' Centres of Excellence within the catchment area.
  - Current national players (senior, under-23, under-19) playing within the catchment area.
  - Current FA Women's Premier League clubs in the catchment area.
- Evidence should be provided of partnerships, networks and relationships with other clubs, football services and organisations in the catchment area e.g. universities etc.
- Credit will be given for demonstrating clear and identifiable access to a catchment area which includes areas of high population density. This is so that each club, through its marketing and media and commercial plans can raise profile, generate income effectively and attract the maximum number of spectators possible to each game.

### 2.2 Spectator base

- *Historic:* Figures should be supplied, where applicable, from the 2007-08 and 2008-09 seasons, showing core/average attendances (except for a newly-created club):
  - Evidence or reason should be given for lack of current/recent support.
  - If attendances peak/trough or fall below average, reasons should be provided.
- *Future projections:* Please provide anticipated average spectator base for the 2011 and 2012 Super League seasons:
  - Independent market research and/or historical evidence should be included. Each club should confirm that the minimum and maximum spectator attendance projections per game. Minimum projections should be in excess of 300 per game.
  - Credit will be given for demonstrating larger audiences attending games on a regular basis.

### 2.3 Marketing and media plan

In this section, each club needs to demonstrate how it will grow and retain its fan base and build its profile in its catchment area. To do so, a two-year plan should be provided for The FA Women's Super League seasons 2011 and 2012 and will include:

- Clear and measurable objectives to grow the fan base.
- How the club will ensure regular communication with fans and the wider community.
- The marketing/media budget per season.
- The personnel who will deliver the plan.

### 2.4 Commercial plan

Each club will need to demonstrate how it will maximise revenue through partnerships and club-based sponsorships and business development opportunities. To do so, a two-year commercial plan should be provided for 2011 and 2012 to include:

- Detail of any existing or potential partnership/sponsorship packages and business development opportunities including merchandise and licensed products.
- Clear and measurable commercial income objectives, showing the sources (sponsorship, merchandise, advertising etc).
- Commercial income and costs clearly shown in the accounts/projections supplied (see section 1.5 above).

- The strategies by which each of the above will be achieved.
- Detail of any associated costs.
- The personnel who will deliver the plan.

#### **2.5 Overview of minimum requirements**

Clubs will need to satisfy the following minimum requirements in the 'Commercial and marketing' section of their application:

- Independent research and/or robust evidence to confirm regular spectator attendance projections in excess of 300 per match and the confirmed maximum spectator potential.
- Marketing/media and commercial plans which clearly address the points in sections 2.3 and 2.4 above and which align with and support the financial forecasts provided.

### **3. Facilities**

#### **3.1 Ground grading and pitch maintenance**

- Grounds must meet the 'National Women's Grade A' ground grading minimum criteria, a copy of which is enclosed. A physical examination of any proposed ground may be carried out by The FA.
- Clubs should also provide a comprehensive and fully-costed ground maintenance plan including details of remedial works, considerations for summer usage and any breaks required for maintenance. This is to ensure that pitches are maintained in the best-possible condition to showcase the sport and are not overused during the summer months.
- Details of ground staff, equipment or similar provision for ground maintenance should be provided.

#### **3.2 Ground location**

- Grounds should be in close proximity to areas of population density with easily identifiable transport networks. It is important that the league has the maximum potential reach in terms of its spectator base.
- Clubs should provide evidence of the maximum potential spectator base within a 20 minute and a 40 minute travel time of the ground.

#### **3.3 Occupancy**

- The club should have a minimum tenure of one year.
- Evidence should be provided of the lease confirming minimum tenure or a signed Service Level Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding with relevant parties.
- Additional credit will be given for longer tenure.

#### **3.4 Broadcast facilities**

- The stadium should be 'broadcast-friendly' i.e. there should be access for broadcast vehicles, equipment, position to build/install studio and/or camera positions etc.
- The stadium should contain a press and interview area for the written and broadcast media.

#### **3.5 First-team training facilities**

- The club should have a formal agreement e.g. a written contract or a Memorandum of Understanding with the owner to show a minimum tenure of one year.
- Additional credit will be given for longer tenure.

Additional credit will be given if the training facilities also contain any or all of the following:

- Floodlighting.
- Artificial surface.
- Gym.
- Team meeting rooms.
- Football staff offices.
- Medical facilities.
- IT facilities.

#### **3.6 Overview of minimum requirements**

Clubs will need to satisfy the following minimum requirements in the 'Facilities' section of their application:

- Evidence that the ground meets 'National Women's Grade A' ground grading minimum criteria.
- The provision of a comprehensive and fully-costed ground maintenance plan (containing details of remedial works and considerations for summer usage) to ensure the pitch is maintained in the best-possible condition.
- Evidence of the maximum potential spectator base within a 20 minute and a 40 minute travel time of the ground via identified transport networks. This should support the spectator base projections provided in section 2.
- Minimum one-year security of tenure for both ground and training facility.

#### **4. Players and support staff**

##### **4.1 The FA Women's Football Pyramid**

Each club should provide details of its current status in the Women's Football Pyramid (please confirm if you are not an existing club within the Women's Football Pyramid).

The application should also provide details of the following personnel:

##### **4.2 Coaching staff**

The coaching team, which should consist of a minimum of:

- A Head Coach with a UEFA A Licence or a UEFA B Licence. The B Licence must have been held for a minimum of 18 months prior to March 2011, and the coach must be working towards the UEFA A Licence by March 2014.
- An Assistant Coach, with a minimum UEFA B Licence.

Names of the above should be supplied, plus details of current/anticipated contract(s) of employment. Alternatively, a commitment to such an appointment(s) by 1 September 2010 with detailed recruitment plans should be provided.

The appointment of apprentice coaches is encouraged.

Details should be provided on all coaching staff covering:

- Relevant qualifications and CVs.
- Job remit/responsibilities.
- Relevant experience.
- Continuing professional development.

##### **4.3 Medical staff**

Medical staffing should comprise of a Chartered Physiotherapist and a Doctor. Please refer to The FA Women's Super League Medical Guidelines for further information.

Names of the above should be supplied, plus details of current/anticipated contract(s) of employment. Alternatively, a commitment to such an appointment(s) by 1 September 2010 with detailed recruitment plans should be provided.

Details should be provided on all medical staff covering:

- Relevant qualifications and CVs.
- Job remit/responsibilities.
- Relevant experience.
- Continuing professional development.

##### **4.4 Player support staff**

Details should be provided for any other performance management, player welfare and sports science support staff.

- The minimum requirement is a strength and conditioning coach with a BSc in Sports Science. In addition to this degree, the coach must hold a BAWLA award or UK Strength and Conditioning accreditation (UKSCA).
- Names of the above should be supplied, plus details of current/anticipated contract(s) of employment, or other terms of engagement.

#### 4.5 First-team squad

To evidence a robust squad clubs are expected to provide the following information:

- Duration and type of contracts anticipated for all players the club intends to sign for the 2011 season.
- An indicative player list (including details of home-grown players and any who will require a work permit), supported by expressions of interest from players intending to sign for the club.
- Clubs must adhere to FA Rules where possible when approaching players under contract.
- Anticipated salary costs.
- Recruitment plans.
- A list of any England senior centrally-contracted players currently and/or anticipated to be registered in the squad.

**Note:** 'Home-grown players' means those players who have played with a club in the club's regional catchment area as defined in section 2.1 for at least three years.

#### 4.6 Partnerships and youth development

Clubs should provide evidence of alignment to at least one lead and, ideally, other Centres of Excellence within the club's regional catchment area.

- Applications should fully describe the current or planned partnership(s) with this/these Centres of Excellence.
- Evidence of links with feeder/focus clubs for key relationship building and increasing participation should also be provided.

Whilst The FA Women's Super League will not initially have a reserve league, The FA will work with the Super League clubs to find a workable solution which provides playing opportunities for young, talented players e.g. 16-23 year olds. With this in mind, to strengthen your application you should also cover:

- The club's anticipated regional youth development strategies and programmes e.g:
  - Programmes which link to current County FA and regional structures i.e. Academies, Centres of Excellence.
  - Personnel who will run/support these programmes.
  - Educational links (existing and anticipated).
  - Performance lifestyle support.

#### 4.7 Overview of minimum requirements

Clubs will need to satisfy the following minimum requirements in the 'Players and support staff' section of their application:

- Head Coach with a UEFA A Licence or UEFA B Licence. If a B Licence, it must have been held for a minimum of 18 months prior to March 2011 and the coach must be working towards UEFA A Licence by March 2014
- Assistant Coach, with a minimum UEFA B Licence.
- Chartered Physiotherapist and a Doctor. Please refer to The FA Women's Super League Medical Guidelines for further information.
- Strength and Conditioning Coach with a BSc in Sports Science, plus BAWLA award or UK Strength and Conditioning accreditation (UKSCA).
- The provision of first-team squad information as per section 4.5.
- Evidence of a clear relationship with one lead Centre of Excellence in the club's stated catchment area (as defined in section 2.1), and links with more than one feeder/focus clubs, with details of the terms of these relationships.