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**Exploring ‘Race’, Ethnicity and Disability in the Fandom of Professional
Football in England**

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Abstract:

Football is one of the most popular forms of cultural life and is symbolised by the iconic and emotive phrase ‘the people’s game’ which suggests that football is democratic and that everyone can participate. This dissertation focuses on football fandom; specifically examining the experiences and barriers that BME and disabled people may encounter through being or becoming a fan. Because of the well documented oppression that these groups experience in society, relevant accounts of neoliberalism capitalism are explored and interwoven into the proceeding discussions. In order to arrive at a critical understanding of fandom, a Case Study of Nottingham Forest Football Club (NFFC) was undertaken: this used qualitative interviewing drawing on ethnography and the principles of Emancipatory Research (ER). Central to the analysis of data was the use of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the Social Model of Disability (SMT), although established tools in their own right, their use together within sports and leisure studies is unique and highlights a need for more transdisciplinary scholarship. Research with fans of NFFC produced a number of important findings: instances of racism and disability were common but to stay connected to Forest Fandom, participants needed to show a level of stoic resistance. However, it was NFFC and football authorities more generally

that were seen to underpin racism and disability most strongly; it is here at the level of governance and managerialism that this research argues change needs to occur: improvements in polices/practices that are ‘race’ and disability conscious, that take access, socio-economic and cultural issues seriously, would enhance the matchday experience, not only for existing BME and disabled fans but all fans. This more welcoming and accessible environment may also encourage greater interest from ‘potential’ fans from these and other groups.

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Frequently Used Abbreviations

BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CAFE	Centre for Accessible Football in Europe
CPS	Crown Prosecution Service
CRT	Critical Race Theory
ER	Emancipatory Research
FA	Football Association
FIFA	International Federation of Association Football
LPF	Level Playing Field (Previously NADS)
NADS	National Association of Disabled Supporters (Now LPF)
NFFC	Nottingham Forest Football Club
ONS	Office of National Statistics
SMD	Social Model of Disability
SMT	Senior Management Team
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations
UPIAS	Union of Physically Against Segregation

Chapter 1: The Conversation Before Kick-Off

1.1 Background

The phrase ‘the people’s game’ is indicative of plurality and is frequently fastened to the image of British football; it is a persistent trope that points seductively to an inclusive football culture but is rarely examined in any detail. For example, Russell (1999, p16) argues that the phrase ‘describes patterns of consumption not patterns of control’. Whilst his comment shows insight about the hegemonic nature of power within football (Cashmore, 1982) he also tacitly implies that football ‘consumption’ is unproblematic. It is not. It is produced by the strong forces of society, culture, politics and economics that combine to define the freedom, choices and experience that individuals have within sport and leisure (Jarvie, 1991). This paper recognises that football and being a football fan is important in the lives of many people (Jones, 2000) but equally important is the need to interrogate the egalitarian assumptions that surround the game (Burdsey, 2011; Carrington, 2010; Hylton, 2009). Therefore, this investigation into football fandom, asks if the ‘people’s game’ can be considered open to all people, specifically the extent to which Black, Minority Ethnic (BME)

and disabled fans can be included in this narrative.

Contemporary relevance for this study is introduced by Malcolm et al (2000). Their comprehensive quantitative study of professional football demographics across all four divisions of the English football league pointed out there were few spectators from BME communities sitting in the stands and they were unable to provide any data concerning disabled supporters attending these games. However, whilst their investigation was useful in highlighting the under-representation of BME and disabled supporters in professional football, they provide little in-depth analysis for the relative absence of these groups and cite a lack of scholarship in this area. Short papers by both Southby (2011) in relation to disabled fans with learning difficulty impairments and Burdsey and Randhawa (2012) in relation to fans from South Asian diasporas confirm only modest progress in creating inclusive environments for these groups in the intervening years and establishes the need for further research.

The thinking for this monograph began in the 2011/2012 season, a season mired in racial controversy: Luis Suarez, a Liverpool FC player was charged by the Football Association (FA), investigated and proven to have used insulting language towards Manchester United's Patrice Evra that contained references

to his colour. He was fined £40,000, suspended for eight games and cautioned not to use the term ‘negro’ on a football field in England again (Goulding et al, 2012). In addition, two individuals were found guilty and convicted for sending racist tweets and a Premiership footballer, Micah Richards closed his Twitter account after receiving similar abusive messages (BBC, 2012). John Terry the captain of the England national team (a title since rescinded) and current captain of Chelsea FC, was charged by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) with a racially aggravated public order offence. Subsequently acquitted, the FA has now charged him in respect of the same incident for allegedly using racially abusive language (BBC, 2012b).

These episodes give jolting notice to the resilience and widespread penetration of ‘race’ thinking in contemporary British football (Hattenstone, 2012). Whilst ‘race’ is completely imagined (Law, 2010) and unsubstantiated by biological evidence (Jones, 1994); its use throughout this paper reflects the need to subvert its taken for granted meanings (Gunaratnam, 2003) and demonstrate how it is performatively produced and reconstructed through social discourse (Tate, 2009). It is important that we wrestle with the notion of ‘race’ as its loss from the political sphere altogether may also signal the erasure of racism (Fuss, 1989; Nayak, 2006). Sepp Blatter the President of FIFA, the sport’s elite

governing body controversially drew attention to this when at the height of the Evra/Suarez and Ferdinand/Terry situations alleged to the sports broadcaster CNN that ‘there is no racism’ in football (cited in Murphy, 2011). Blatter’s comments can be read as part of the neoliberal drive to make racism a private matter between individuals thereby ‘diluting’ and ‘erasing’ its significance in the cultural and political landscape (Goldberg, 2009). What it also begins to illuminate are the institutional structures that support white, male, middle class, and invariably non-disabled privilege within sport (C. King, 2004).

The end of the 2011/12 season may also provide clues to disabled fans treatment within professional football and is portrayed by the *Sun* newspaper’s mocking headline concerning the recent appointment of Roy Hodgson as England national football team coach. Hodgson who has a slight speech impairment was caricatured as saying ‘Bwing on the Ewos! We’ll see you in Ukwaine against Fwance’ (McCourt, 2012). Hodgson’s distinguished career and capability as an international manager are overshadowed by his representation as a somewhat comical and intellectually inferior human being. Ironically some years ago, a former England manager, Glen Hoddle, was dismissed for asserting that disabled people’s ‘suffering’ was a punishment for their sins in previous lives (Arlidge and Wintour, 2012). However, the absurdity of his

remarks and public opprobrium his comments received cannot conceal a relegio-cultural logic that continues to have currency and be used to oppress disabled people (Miles, 1995). Kuppan (2011, p3) has argued elsewhere, with insight from Hughes (2007) that ‘infirmity and vulnerability characterise non-disabled people’s ontological view of disabled corporeality and embodiment’. Disability, as a process of excluding people with impairments from mainstream social, economic and cultural life (UPIAS, 1976) is rarely articulated in professional football’s boardrooms, stands or on the pitch. The reasons for this exclusion are an integral part of this project’s investigation into football fandom.

1.2 Rationale And Objectives

This paper has begun by providing some background, context and justification for the exploration of ‘race’, ethnicity and disability in the fandom of professional football. The overarching objectives of this study are to explore, identify and analyse the role of barriers in the experience of fandom for BME and disabled people within professional football. This will firstly be achieved by using a focused literature review to gain a deeper understanding of these phenomena; within this Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the Social Model of Disability (SMD) will be advanced as exemplars of confronting racism and disability respectively within social structures and this will be expanded to consider football fandom. To further the overall aims, this paper will secondly, critically examine the views of BME and disabled fans through a case study of one particular professional club, namely, Nottingham Forest Football Club (NFFC). Finally it will suggest ways on how BME and disabled fans can be made to feel more welcome by professional football clubs.

Throughout, the creative and analytical intent of this project is to bring together a theory (CRT) and model (SMD) that can be argued are on similar but parallel

paths and do not often meet, suggesting ways their application can be extended beyond their discrete disciplinary interest to support the Other in the fight against oppression. More is asked of CRT in this regard because as a theory, the assumption is, that it is further developed (Finklestein, 2001). The harmonising of CRT and SMD perspectives in this paper is unique and has not been attempted before within sports and leisure analyses, therefore, it is hoped this work will make a modest contribution to our theory and understanding of BME and disabled people in this area.

1.3 Structure Of Paper

This dissertation is organised into six chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction. Chapter 2 presents a literature review, that discusses and foregrounds the central themes used in this paper. Chapter 3 is the methodology section and provides an argument for the research strategy and methods. Chapters 4 and 5 are concerned with the exploration and analyses of research participants' data, highlighting the barriers they experience and recommending ways that may encourage greater participation by these groups of fans. Chapter 6 is the concluding chapter, providing a review of the project and a summary of key findings.

Chapter 2: Kick-Off

2.1 Outline And Terms

This literature review will examine the key ideas that have developed from sport and leisure studies, racism and ethnicity studies and disability studies to situate BME and disabled people's experience of football fandom and the barriers they face. By the conclusion of this major chapter it is anticipated that the reader will have a critical appreciation of the significant issues involved in football fandom for BME and disabled groups. It is thought that a suitable entry point for this discussion will be to define what is meant by 'football fandom'.

The term 'football fandom' or 'fandom' describes a collection of individuals that are fans of football and/or more usually followers of a particular club. Fans can be distinguished from spectators through their active engagement and emotional connection with a sport or team (Dietz-Uhler and Lanter, 2008). In contrast spectators, whilst physically present merely observe or witness proceedings without the psychological attachment that is associated with fans (Wann, 1995).

2.2 Introduction

Zygmunt Bauman (2007) has compellingly argued that our modern day cities can be read as battlefields upon which global powers dispute and quarrel with tenacious local ideas and identities. Football clubs, as sites or enclosures within the city can be viewed as microcosms of similar struggles between rival clubs, players, managers, fans, styles and histories. These arenas create boundaries, borders if you will, where culture, identity and exclusion are contested (Burdsey, 2007). Borders mark territory and football is a highly territorial space (Dunning, 2000; Holt, 1986). Hussain (2005, p8) insightfully conceptualises the border as 'regulated, so that those who are alien and those that do share similarities are excluded'. This paper is interested in crossing borders both in terms of discipline and epistemology hoping that it brings greater insight to areas of academia that have traditionally been Othered (Carrington, 2010).

2.3 Interplay

Scholars of sport and football in the UK have repeatedly pointed to an institution that privileges white people as players, fans and employees where those groups from Other backgrounds are often overlooked and marginalised (Back et al, 2001; Burdsey, 2007, 2011; Carrington, 2010, 2012; Carrington & McDonald, 2001; Hill, 1991; Hylton, 2009;). These writings, while not always providing substantive accounts of fandom, make varying degrees of reference to it. However, in the context of mainstream sport, the ‘Others’ they refer to are invariably male and from racialised groups. Critcher (1986) asserts that gender should be central to any appraisal of sport and goes on to identify that:

‘Social divisions represented in and through sport are not exhausted by categories of class and gender; race and age require additional consideration’
(Critcher, 1986, p339)

Carrington (2010) bristles with indignation that ‘race’ is somehow relegated to a tokenistic afterthought in Critcher’s review. However, whilst he is right to draw attention to how some social locations can be obscured and others prioritised he does not himself make any effort to situate disability within a critical discussion

of sport. Since Critcher's (1986) remarks, gender imbalances have been tackled by amongst others Coddington (1997) on female fans and Caudwell (2003) examining women footballers. Furthermore, the intersectionality of ethnicity, playing football and gender is picked up by Ratna (2008, 2011). Social class is also widely discussed, for example, see Wagg (2004).

The missing Other in the context of football fandom is the disabled subject. This is being partially corrected by Southby (2011) and his continuing PhD research into football fandom and people with learning difficulties; his work should be valued particularly for his focus on social exclusion and the limitation of policies in removing barriers for disabled fans. However, his argument prioritising a cultural approach to disability, suggesting that it is a 'middle ground between previous paradigms' (Southby, 2011, p323) is a weak one and fails to either reference or engage with notable scholars of the SMD who have demonstrated its efficacy to the lives of disabled people in many spheres of social life (see for example Barnes, 2012; Barnes and Mercer, 2004,). This paper disagrees with his use of language, such as, 'people with learning disabilities', not only because it confuses the distinction between impairment and disability, but also because it is directly drawn from organisations that are *run for* disabled groups, such as Mencap and the British Institute of Learning Disabilities not *led by them* (Gray

and Jackson, 2002; Mack, 2001). Further, although he cites the good work of the National Association of Disabled (football) supporters (NADS), now known as Level Playing Field (LPF) in recognising the barriers that this group of disabled people face, he fails to point out that its guiding principles are underpinned by the SMD. Therefore, Southby's (2011) work represents only a small window on disabled people and fandom that this paper wishes to conceptually and ideologically enlarge.

If, as Hylton (2009) and Carrington (2010) argue sport not only reifies 'race' but also paradoxically produces new ways of thinking and seeing it. Can we not equally argue that sport does something similar with disabled people? Evidence for this is provided by Oliver's (1990, p34) material account of disability where he strongly links disabled people's oppression to the 'mode of production and the central values of the society concerned'. Contemporary life and the identities that rest upon it are mediated by cultural consumption, football as arguably one of the most resonant and popular of cultural forms (Carrington, 2010) is imbued with values brought to it by global capitalism (Eick, 2011). Central to the marketing of the game is the signifier of 'youthfulness', which is closely associated with beauty, hope, potency and strength. In cultures of consumption, disabled people are 'produced' in opposition to these values; their lives and

corporeality are represented as ugly, tragic, asexual and frail (Hughes et al, 2005). In short they are reviled as a ‘spoiled identity’ (Goffman, 1963). ‘Disabled youth’ is anomalous; it sits awkwardly beside the discourses of desire and potency that football fashions, tolerated but never fully embraced.

2.4 Bodies Of Resistance

The role of culture in the stigmatising and oppression of disabled people has been well documented (Barnes, 1992; Barnes, 2008; Garland-Thompson, 1997; Snyder and Mitchell 2006; Sutherland, 1997; Zola, 1985). Central to these representations is the depiction of disabled people as a burden; of lives framed by personal tragedy and of the ‘courage’ they must have in fighting adversity. Smith and Sparkes (2004) show an appreciation of these factors in their analysis of metaphor and narrative in the lives of a group of disabled men who have sustained spinal cord injuries through playing rugby union. Their findings reveal that the majority of these men now consider their bodies as ‘less than’ their previous non-disabled body-selves; their goal is to ‘beat’ or ‘overcome’ ‘disability’ which they regard as the ‘enemy’. Their language replete with metaphors reflecting war and sport became an important device in reconstructing, negotiating and sustaining dominant ‘courageous’ forms of masculinity together with their attendant patriarchal values (Jansen and Sabo, 1994; Murphy, 2001). Smith and Sparkes (2004, p618) contend that while these metaphorical limitations are injurious to their well-being, they provide opportunities for these men to ‘gain acceptance from themselves and others’. This paper suggests that disabled male football fans use notions of hegemonic

masculinity to negotiate and secure admittance to professional football fandom that is dominated by a white non-disabled male culture (Malcolm et al, 2000). Disabled people thus share similarities with black people who Fanon (1967) describes as having to don a white mask, suppressing their black heritage in order to promote their likeness to a white society.

The narratives of the disabled body/mind continue to find subaltern commonality with those of BME groups who are racialised and subjugated within western sporting discourses (Burdsey, 2007). Whereas African-Caribbean's are popularly regarded as being physically endowed with 'natural' sporting abilities (Hoberman, 1997, St Louis, 2003), British Asians are classified as the insufficient sporting Other lacking the physique, skill and inclination to be successful in these disciplines (Flemming, 2001). The embedding of these now taken for granted stereotypes can be traced back to slavery, colonialism and in the context of British Asians specifically, the creation of the Raj in India. Articulating the discourse of 'the west and the rest' (Said, 1985, Hall, 1996), the British portrayed themselves as a modern, civilised and potent 'race' contrasted with an indigenous Indian population who were backward, primitive and unhealthy. Within a colonial sporting frame (Carrington, 2010), Asian men were 'weak, effeminate and unmanly' (Branigan, 2001, p18). Following on from this,

Mills and Dimeo (2003, p118) argue that this rhetoric of superiority extended to football where ‘evidence of the flawed nature of Indian bodies was manufactured’. Despite the fallacy of these representations and their rebuttal by athletes like Amir Khan (Great Britain silver Olympic medalist in Beijing for Boxing), historical ideological and sporting myths have underpinned contemporary ways of seeing this group. Within education, this ‘common-sense’ thinking has manifested in British Asian students being advised by teachers to concentrate on academic subjects, whilst African-Caribbean pupils have been encouraged to develop skills in sport (Hayes and Sugden, 1999; Ismond, 2003). Thus, we see how ideas of ‘race’ and sport entwine constructing racial categories and sharpening divisions between Black and Asian people (C. King, 2004). African/African-Caribbean men are highly visible in elite football teams, accounting for around twenty-five per cent of professional players (Cashmore and Cleland, 2011); by contrast, during the 2005-2006 season, British Asian men playing at the same elite level numbered just five (Burdsey, 2007). Racialised sporting folklore, the lack of football ‘heroes’ from their own communities on the field and the continued spectre of racism within football all construct barriers to fandom. However, despite these structural and attitudinal challenges, there is clear evidence that British Asians are highly interested in football with some attending matches for decades (Bains and Johal, 1999;

Bhana, 2008; Dasgupta, 2006). There are many others that would like to be more engaged both as coaches, players and fans but require more reassurance and encouragement that they are welcome (Burdsey and Randhawa, 2012; Fawbert, 2011).

The common property of English football stadia is that the crowds in attendance have historically been overwhelmingly ‘white’ (Beck et al, 2001; Carrington, 1998; Hylton and Long, 2002). This phenomenon is strikingly punctured by the spectacle on the field, which is now clearly multiethnic and multinational; one fan described it like this:

‘We might all wear the same shirt but it’s easy to spot which ones are the players they are the ones with black faces’ (cited in Fawbert, 2011, p176).

It has already been mentioned that non-white players involved in the professional game in England are predominately, but not exclusively, from an African/African-Caribbean background. Given their numerical size on the pitch, their absence in the stands forms a glaring anomaly. Why should this be the case? In part this can be attributed to the fetishisation of the African/African-Caribbean athlete, particularly male athlete by white audiences (Burdsey, 2007). On the footballing stage, black bodies are revered for their hyper-masculinity

and are prized for their hyper-commercialised income generation. Despite the cultural prominence that black men have in elite professional football and sports more generally, Carrington (2010) argues that they are still socially and politically powerless. Wallace (1990) identifies both the ‘macho’ and ‘emasculated’ nature of black male identity with Mercer and Julian (1988, p12) understanding it as a ‘subordinate masculinity’.

These themes are viscerally amplified in Ralph Ellison’s (1952) novel *Invisible Man*. In his infamous opening chapter ‘Battle Royal’, a group of young, terrified, black blindfolded boys are pushed, disorientated, towards a stage surrounded by influential and important white men; their occupation for the evening is to ‘savagely’ set upon each other for the entertainment of the assembled townsfolk.

The melee was described by one boy thus:

‘Everyone, fought hysterically. It was complete anarchy. Everybody fought everybody else... I bled from both nose and mouth, the blood spattering upon my chest. The men kept yelling, "Slug him, black boy! Knock his guts out!" "Uppercut him! Kill him! Kill that big boy!"’ (Ellison, 1952, p22)

Ellison’s (1952) book and in particular, ‘Battle Royal’ was a potent commentary

on the oppression of African Americans in the United States at the time; central is the objectification of black bodies that are dominated and abused by the white male gaze. This symbolism can also be read as suggestive of what happens in football's modern day 'theatre of dreams'. Within these arenas, black players also struggle for acceptance and liberation; of course they have agency, but this is controlled by those who are observing. It should not be forgotten that football is a white bastion and as Kuppan (2012) previously argued:

'...watched by crowds composed of overwhelmingly white spectators, supervised by white match officials with teams governed by white managers and administrators' (Kuppan, 2012, p6).

Beneath the veneer of civility and 'fair play', Adorno (1998) reminds us that sport and football are 'ambiguous' subjects; the aforementioned qualities exist but are in tension with a game that also '...promotes aggression, brutality and sadism' (Adorno, 1998, p176). Adorno's (1998) comments are not only directed towards the conduct of players on the field but, more precisely, relate to fans and spectators who are regularly seen to be vociferously barracking from the stands. Within these sometimes 'hostile' spaces of consumption, the black Other's subject position has traditionally either been one of 'entertainer' or a person

employed in some ‘service’ capacity, maybe as a cleaner, to provide refreshments or show you to your seat; rarely are they simply welcomed as fans, there to support their football team. It is through these racialised social relations that the continuity of their historical oppression is re-produced (Burdsey, 2011).

However, it would be wrong to suggest that sports governing bodies are racist or disablist as there are a raft of policies and legislation that protect the rights of black and disabled people within football. For example, Kick it Out, Show Racism the Red Card, Football Against Racism in Europe, Football For Disabled People (FA, 2001), The Disability Football Strategy 2004-2006 (FA, 2004). All of which have sought to emphasise the advantages that participation in football can bring ‘whether as a player, referee, administrator, coach or spectator’ (FA, 2010). However, whilst these policies focus in detail on the positive assistance playing football offers to health and well being, little attention is paid to the social benefits of being a spectator or fan (Southby, 2011).

Aarti Ratna (2008) argues that anti-racist statements made by governing bodies and clubs only offer a limited solution to racism; there may be other policies and practices these institutions invoke that ‘protect the advantages of a dominant group and/or maintain or widen the unequal position of a subordinate group’

(Bulmer and Solomos, 1999, p124). This has led Back et al (2001) to highlight that public displays of ‘banter’, gesticulations or racist chanting entwine with subtler forms of racial practices that delineate an insider/outsider binary. Moreover, this paper argues that racism cannot be reduced to the phenotypic markers of skin and hair colour but are also insidiously linked to structures and systems (Dyson, 2009). The neoliberal postmodern times in which we live seek to evaporate racism (Goldberg, 2009) and also encourage more fluid mainstream identities, able to assuage impairment and dissolve the differences created by being Othered (Shakespeare and Watson, 2001). The problem with this cultural logic is that it obfuscates the persistence of structural racism and disability and the exclusionary practices that accompany them. The FA and individual clubs are interested in the public recognising their ant-racist, anti-disablist credentials and the policy documents mentioned above demonstrate a commitment to tackling these issues and becoming more inclusive. However, the rhetorical insistence that racism or disablism ‘should not’ be tolerated is often conflated with a view that these incidents ‘are not’ happening within football (Burdsey, 2011) and it is this ‘silencing’ (Goldberg, 2009) or ‘denial’ (Back et al, 2001) that must be challenged.

2.5 Second-Half Tactics

CRT and the SMD can be described as tools designed to explicate respectively, racialised and disabling ‘structures, processes and attitudes’ (Burdsey, 2011, p4). The SMD’s specific focus, simply stated, is to uncover the economic, environmental and cultural barriers that people with impairments experience in their daily lives (Oliver, 1990). This stands against a pervasive medical view of disability that asserts disability emanates from something ‘wrong’ in the individual (Bury, 2000) and it is these ‘flaws’ (Goffman, 1963) that have led to their marginalisation and exclusion from many areas of mainstream life (Oliver, 1990; 1996). Given the level of social oppression that disabled people face it is unsurprising that proponents of the SMD have chosen to focus their attention on access to core services and there is extensive research in these areas; for example, education (Barton, 2003), housing (Morris, 1990; Hemingway, 2004) and transport (Jolly et al, 2006). By comparison, there exists a lacuna of knowledge connecting disability and leisure (Aitchison, 2003). This has been partially addressed by SMD approaches to disabled people’s access to the countryside (Tregaskis, 2004) together with Level Playing Field’s campaigning work with disabled football fans (see NADS, 2008).

CRT is guided by several key principles (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001): a) it foregrounds ‘race’ and racism as a systemic recurring feature of society and central to BME group’s oppression. In addition it recognises that they work with other social positions, including disability (Crenshaw et al, 1995) to present a multilayered picture of subordination (Yosso, 2005); b) CRT confronts ideologies of white supremacy around colour-blind thinking, equal opportunities, objectivity, ‘race’ neutrality and meritocracy within polices, practices and research (Hylton, 2009); c) CRT has a forthright commitment to social justice, which works to reveal the ‘interest convergence’ of dominant groups. Bell (2004, p69) explains this as where ‘the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when that interest converges with whites in policy-making decisions’; d) CRT acknowledges the insight the marginalised BME voice brings to our understanding of the ‘lived experience of racialisation (Solorzano and Bernal, 2001); e) CRT has a transdisciplinary holistic approach drawing on scholarship from a wide range of fields to understand and situate racisms (Solorzano and Yosso, 2001).

CRT and debates concerning disability have met, for example in writings by Crenshaw et al (1995), Asch (2001) and Ferri (2010). However, it is Erevelles (2011) who cogently argues that the sociopolitical and economic analyses

provided by the SMD offers CRT not only a way of understanding the ‘cultural constructions of normal/ pathological, autonomous/dependent... but also the racial and social divisions of labour as well’ (Erevelles, 2011, p103). By further arguing that it is capitalism’s ‘concealed operations of power’ (Ebert, 1996), that foster inequality, she centralises an understanding of disability as integral to unlocking patterns of exploitation that govern and perpetuate unjust social hierarchies. UK Disability Studies has also engaged with disability and ‘race’ as a form of multiple or simultaneous oppression together with age, gender and sexuality (Morris, 1991; Thomas 1999; Vernon, 1999). This paper builds on such work and together with Erevelles (2011) suggests that there is a powerful synergy between CRT and SMD perspectives that could challenge the multifaceted ways that BME and disabled people are socially oppressed. CRT and the SMD dismiss the crude biological determinism of ‘race’ and disability, understanding that they are both socially constructed positions that change over time and place (Ferri, 2010). Moreover, they are frameworks that have a shared vision of social transformation, seeking to change the world through praxis, politics and policies (Hylton et al, 2011; Oliver, 2009). By situating CRT and the SMD within an analysis of football fandom, this project hopes to demonstrate that the barriers that BME and disabled fans experience have points of intersectionality; these provide opportunities to unsettle ‘naturalised’ discourses

'given' to different socially located groups, who can instead, build solidarity and nurture a co-operative resistance to fight racism and disablism within these arenas (Erevelles, 2011).

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In order to fulfill the overall objectives of this research study, simply re-stated, to come to a greater understanding of the experiences and barriers that BME and disabled fans may encounter in attending live football matches, it seems clear that the opportunity to gain a variety of fan perspectives would significantly contribute to a richer appreciation of these phenomena. In order to facilitate this, a case study of BME and disabled fans supporting NFFC was undertaken. This highlights the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin this research; it discusses the research strategy, methods, sampling, data collection and analysis that have been chosen; it also reflects on the strengths and limitations of the investigation, revealing some of the difficulties and ethical concerns that have unfolded.

3.2 Perspectives

Social research is rarely a straightforward activity; it often involves grappling with ‘sticky’ issues (Bloyce, 2004). For the author of this paper, this has meant wrestling with and trying to clarify his ideas surrounding knowledge, methods and power (Gunaratnam, 2003). For example, my identity as a ‘black’ and disabled researcher, espouses a political ontology that some research participants may not agree or feel comfortable with. However, perhaps this was more an internal tension as overwhelmingly participants of the study thought this research an important subject area and were pleased they could contribute. My ontological position also encompasses ‘being’ a fan of a particular football club that my research participants are also affiliated to and I believe that this was helpful in establishing rapport and trust. Moreover, my interest in prioritising their interpretations of social reality (Bryman, 1988) and adopting a non-judgmental approach to their views goes some way towards demonstrating a commitment to their lived experience as BME and disabled fans.

This paper’s epistemology is framed by CRT and the SMD both of which have been discussed earlier. These perspectives have historical emancipatory significance for BME and disabled people (Barnes and Oliver, 2012; Crenshaw

et al, 1995) and are accredited as valuable analytical tools in illuminating racist and disablist practices in society and sport (Hylton and Long, 2002; Kuppan, 2012; Smith and Sparkes, 2004).

3.3 Research Strategy And Methods

This investigation is informed by retroductive and abductive research strategies. The former is designed to ‘discover underlying mechanisms that in particular contexts explain observed realities’ (Blaikie, 2010, p87). This retroductive approach is suited to understanding questions relating to ‘what’ and ‘how’ phenomena occur, used alongside CRT and the SMD it helps clarify one of the major research questions: ‘how can the perceived absence of BME and disabled supporters be explained at NFFC?’ (Kuppan, 2012, p5).

Because scholars and activists of CRT and the SMD argue that BME and disabled people experience structural oppression within society (Abberley, 1987; Yosso, 2005), the counter-argument is that ‘I may be searching for answers I want or expect to see’ (Kuppan, 2012, p7). Instead of summarily dismissing my prior assumptions, learning and principles, I have tried to be transparent about my perspectives (Fenney, 2011; Mason, 2002) ensuring that the iterative and reflexive nature of my research practice lends itself to methodological rigour and trustworthiness (Fossey et al, 2002).

Abductive strategy is less interested in structure, choosing to prioritise the

narratives explanations, the motives and perceptions of individuals that reflect an ‘insider’ view of social reality (Blaikie, 2010). An abductive approach is utilised by Beckett’s (2005) study analysing disabled people and citizenship. Its use is also advocated by CRT scholars; for example, Malagon et al (2009) argue that whilst a CRT perspective may influence phenomena, it is the data itself that catalyses new ideas and not the framework. Further, proponents of CRT and the SMD both value the insights that researchers from BME and disabled backgrounds bring to the research process; they still emphasise the importance of critical thinking but question the neutral objectivity of some sociological methodologies and thus give precedence to the prior knowledge and experience of researchers (Barnes and Oliver, 1993; Oliver, 1996; Malagon et al, 2009).

The methods used for this study reflect a case study approach, which Yin (2003) argues is useful for investigating social phenomena that emerge in contemporary every-day situations, particularly when the borders between a phenomenon and a context are indistinct or ‘fuzzy’. I considered the exploration of BME and disabled supporters to be well suited to this method. Moreover, when this was augmented with methods of qualitative interviewing and ethnography they were able to elicit textured, fine grain detail from research participants. An ethnographic approach was useful because my participation

and observation as a fan of NFFC for over thirty years allowed me more fully to comprehend what research participants were describing to me.

My qualitative interviewing used semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions characterised by an ‘exploratory, fluid and flexible’ (Mason, 2002, p24) style. It was further based on what Dexter (1970) called the ‘elite’ or ‘specialised’ interview, similar to what Marshall (1996) and Tremblay (1989) have described as the ‘key informant’ interview. In contrast to more structured, tightly controlled interviewing, the ‘elite’ approach loosens the grip on agenda allowing the research participant to ‘teach’ the researcher about the social world they inhabit and the problems associated with it (Dexter, 1970). Thus this approach reflects some of the key values within CRT and emancipatory SMD perspectives.

Initially, I thought that my research participants should be BME and disabled fans who must be season ticket holders as it was most likely that these people had thought through and had ‘expert’ knowledge of the barriers involved in fandom for these respective groups (Kuppan, 2012). However, I realised that this was short-sighted and potentially restricted participants and data. BME and disabled fans that only came to a handful of live games were also subject to barriers; perhaps it was these barriers that prevented them from attending more

live games? In any event, I also deemed them, ‘well informed experts’ (Dexter, 1970, p20).

It is reasonable to ask when conducting research about disabled people, why Emancipatory Research (ER) was not the methodological tool of choice? Fundamentally, this rests on the research agenda being formulated by the author, who although disabled himself, was not part of a collaborative research design process with his disabled participants or their organisations, a principle tenet of ER (Barnes, 2001; Barnes and Sheldon, 2007; Oliver, 1997). Perhaps this was an opportunity lost, particularly as this study also focused on BME participants and this methodology could have been extended to include them. This would have been innovative and exciting. However, given the time constraints of an MA dissertation together with the limitations of time and interest by research participants this would have involved considerably more planning and commitment than was available. That said, throughout this paper, a serious attempt has been made to articulate a ‘political commitment to confront disability’ (Barnes and Mercer, 2004, unpaged); that commitment extends to seeking ‘meaningful practical outcomes’ (Barnes, 2001, unpaged) from this research for BME and disabled fans of NFFC; values that lie at the heart of ER.

3.4 Sampling, Data Collection And Analysis

I chose to purposefully sample participants because of the lack of available data surrounding BME and disabled fans at NFFC and within football more generally. This approach provided the best opportunity to address the initial research questions and is a proven technique in ‘selectively sampling specialist knowledge’ (Tremblay, 1989, p98). Because I was trying to access fans who came from a ‘hard to reach’ (Babbie, 2007) demographic, it was also necessary to use ‘snowball’ sampling drawn from a variety of personal and professional networks (Emmel and Clarke, 2009). My objective was to recruit eight participants for the study, as it transpired I was only able to interview, three from each group.

Interviews were invariably conducted in participants’ homes or places of work according to their circumstances and preference. Permission was sought to digitally record the interview and they lasted between 60-90 minutes. Transcription proved a time-consuming process, with Holloway and Wheeler’s (2010) suggested six-hour timescale for a 90-minute interview being almost doubled.

Analysis was carried out by critically exploring the data in relation to the literature review. Mason's (2002) cross-sectional indexing was used to highlight themes and capture data; these categories were porous and elastic enough to allow for new material to emerge (Fossey et al, 2002). Central to the cross-referencing process was the application of CRT and SMD lenses to data, these frameworks helped explicate BME/disabled fans experiences and uncover some of the barriers they face. However, care was needed to allow the 'voices' of research participants to come through and prevent their elision in theory (Malagon, 2009).

3.5 Ethics, Strengths And Limitations

At the start of each interview, participants were given information about the nature and scope of the study together with advice about how their information might be used; they were assured that their identities would be anonymised, which guaranteed privacy and confidentiality. However, if they felt uncomfortable with anything they had said, it could be rescinded and would not be used. The issue of informed consent was re-visited and given at several points throughout the interview and formed part of my moral practice (Mason, 2002; Murphy and Dingwall, 2001). In dealing with people from oppressed and marginalised groups it was important that I showed awareness and sensitivity about their lived experience. In practice this was more difficult than I had anticipated; being a disabled researcher from a BME background perhaps gave me ‘research privileges’? However, these commonalities can be overly ‘romanticised’ (Oakley, 1981) and may occlude other social differences; these overlapping, complex and contradictory research processes made me think critically about power and how knowledge in these situations is generated (Gunaratnam, 2003).

The strengths of this study are that it draws together data relating to BME and disabled football fans for comparison and analysis something not done before.

Moreover, the use of CRT and the SMD for analytical reference is unique and has not been attempted by scholars interested in investigating the intersections of disability, racism, ethnicity, sport and leisure. It therefore breaks new ground. However, this is a pilot study that focuses on BME and disabled fans from one particular club only. These groups of fans, like football clubs themselves, are not homogenous but invested with diversity. Therefore, these findings, whilst contributing to our understanding of BME and disabled fandom, are only a partial window into this world. That said, the participants that engaged in this study were from variegated social backgrounds in terms of age, class, gender and ethnicity.

Chapter 4: Research Findings On NFFC Fan Culture

4.1 Introduction

This chapter together with chapter 5 discusses the findings of the case study described in Chapter 3, Methodology; it focuses on the views of two groups of NFFC fans, BME and disabled and relates these to literature discussed in Chapter 2. The themes that emerged from these interviews broadly relate to culture, access and policy. This chapter investigates the cultural terrain as experienced and observed by research participants.

Firstly, it seems appropriate to make some introductory remarks about the club upon which this case study is centred. NFFC is a Championship side that plays in the second tier of English professional football. In the 2011/12 season, it had an average attendance of 21,969, which ranked in the top six of Championship league attendances (Football League, 2012). Attendance figures for BME and disabled fans were unavailable from the club but relevant demographic data relating to the city may provide some quantitative context. The city of Nottingham is ethnically and socially diverse; the most recent census data released by the Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2011) shows the city has a

total population of 305,700 of which 25% are made up of BME groups and 20% are defined as long term ill or disabled; both these sets of population figures are considerably higher than the national average for England (Nottingham City Council, 2010).

4.2 But We All Wear The Same Shirt Don't We?

Both BME and disabled groups broadly agree that the experience of watching live football in stadia has changed for the better. Richard, a 55 year old white disabled man captures the spirit of other participants when he says:

"well, I've been a fan since the 70s and it's improved a lot. It could be a lot better but you know the amount of racism that was going off when I first started going... thinking back about it now fills me with absolute horror..."

Anthon, a 44 year old Black man, agrees explaining that:

"...and now sitting down and having all seated stadia, the atmosphere has changed, it is less of a tribal thing. It's more civilised..."

Anthon's notion about football becoming "more civilised" is a powerful statement; it relates back to literature and Adorno's (1988) comments about the 'ambiguity' of sport, that Anthon in other statements shows himself to be cognisant of;

'civility' is an important trope and will be picked up later but the putative assumptions of a 'modernising' and increasingly 'plural' football culture are also relevant to this discussion. The 'improvements' to stadia and fan culture are outlined below to highlight the continuing notion that 'some bodies matter more than others' (Erevelles, 2011, p6) and that some of us are still excluded.

Modernisation began in the aftermath of the Heysal and Hillsborough stadium disasters and paralleled the continued spectre of racism and violence both on and off the field; football had no choice but to change. Improved safety standards and the transition to all-seater stadia at the elite level (top divisions of English football) inaugurated a change in relationship; fans now became consumers and demanded higher levels of service (A. King, 1997). The gentrification of football in the 1990s and 2000s was seen by journalists and administrators alike as attracting a wider audience of middle class supporters, women and families (Crinnion, 1998). On the field, teams were now in large part made up of players who were from BME backgrounds (Burdsey, 2011). Superficially at least football had cleaned up its act and was embracing diversity.

Football's commodification, recast as a shiny new product, imbued with the values of neoliberal capitalism (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2004) partially

resonates with Patricia, a 52 year old Black woman who sometimes takes her son and teenage daughter to watch NFFC but has not quite been able to shake off football's racist violent history:

"because it should be a family game, it should be a fun day out but you know I am definitely conscious of that element all the time..."

Patricia's testimony also contains autobiographical reflections of supporting Forest in the 1970s where she sometimes felt "fear and dread" provoked by home and rival supporters' behaviour outside of the stadium and on public transport. They were "causing absolute mayhem...you had to run to get away from that sort of violence". Whilst she acknowledges that "things have got better", she sees no BME supporters around her and continues to hear Forest fans in close proximity to her shouting "black this and black that" about various players. Although such outbursts are upsetting, "it's the vulnerability of getting back to the car" that causes most anxiety. I am reminded of her opening remark, "things haven't really moved on, it's a total front!"

Deepak, a 38-year-old British Indian man is more stoic in his appraisal. A season ticket holder for the last 20 years and although "very very aware that me

and my brother are the only non-white people in that section”, he initially insists that he has not heard anything racist but then volunteers, “there’s a group who sit at the back of the stand who are “maybe a bit on the edge” and have on occasions chanted “you black bastard”. He says, that he’s “not offended” and even “quite comfortable” with this. Presumably because the remarks were not directed at him or the Forest team but opposing BME players.

The testimonies from Patricia and Deepak in particular articulate the processes of accommodation that BME fans and players must negotiate as they struggle to find acceptance and belonging. Back et al (2001, p86) suggest that such processes have ‘particular local, gendered and class inflected qualities’. Football fandom is a ritual practice where inclusion and acceptance are coterminous with expulsion and marginalisation. It would be too simplistic to frame Deepak’s apparent nonchalance as a form of ethnic false consciousness; he is alert to the possibility that the “You black bastard” comment may veil more menacing ideas, questioning: “...if you say that what else are you prepared to say?” and has together with his brother, reported another incident to stewards.

In order to inhabit the white cultural space of a football ground (Burdsey, 2007, 2011: Fawbert, 2011) all BME research participants exhibit a phlegmatic quality

when asked about their feelings of being a minority in the crowd. For example, Anthon says, he is, “disappointed (pause), I don’t feel, it doesn’t weigh me down because obviously I’m used to it...”. Patricia comments, “I’m not bothered...because I haven’t got a chip on my shoulder about anything like that...” Deepak’s attitude is “get your head down and get on with it” What characterises these statements is a seeming lack of emotion; however, in the context of colonial/postcolonial discourses, keeping an ‘emotive sensitivity’ (Fanon, 1986, 127) in check can be read as both a protective and disruptive device; it distances BME groups from the cultural stereotypes of being ‘irrational, depraved, childlike and different’ (Said, 1978, p40). In assuming a white mask and ‘controlling their emotions’ they earn respectability and normalcy (Fanon, 1986) which in turn expedites their entitlement to identity and belonging in Forest fandom.

In point of fact, this sense of belonging and pride in ‘wearing the shirt’ is keenly felt by all research participants, yet the conditionality of their acceptance can be understood as fragile compared to their white fan counterparts. For example, Deepak talks of coming across some Forest “skinheads...chanting about a small town in Baghdad and a town full of Pakis...”. He feels sure it wasn’t aimed at him or his brother (who was wearing a Forest shirt) but contends:

"it was an anti-Leicester thing...I didn't feel any intimidation against us... but if we lost 5-0 and met them on the way out, well I couldn't be so sure?"

The conditional nature of inclusion for BME groups is also illustrated by Patricia who cites a generational shift between herself and her children: "we were more subservient in a way...we'd have to bite our tongues". She recognises that her daughter's 'passion' for NFFC is mediated through her white school friends' interest and of having one of Forest's black 'star' players as a family friend. These factors offer a passport to inclusion but this is by no means secure; the adoration shown to BME home players and acceptance of BME fans are both conditional on their performances. This sits alongside more direct or vituperative racisms aimed at BME opposition players and fans. Back et al (2001, p90) powerfully argue that, within the complex co-existence of football fandom, a common bond exists between BME and white players/supporters that cuts across the colour line connoting a deeply felt 'symbolic identity' and belonging, but at the same time leaves the broader culture of racism untouched.

Whilst it is important to be conscious of and condemn the vernacular racisms of

some football fans as illustrated above, it is also important that such incidents are contextualised within a broader footballing and societal ecology. Care is needed not to further reify the working-class ‘skinhead’ figure as the archetypal and exceptional racist, thereby rendering invisible the structural racisms that exist within football’s major governing bodies, club boardrooms and management hierarchies (Back, et al, 2001, Bulmer and Solomos, 1999).

Disabled fans position is discussed in more detail in the following pages, but it is relevant to point out here that they did not report any physical or verbal abuse aimed directly at them; however, this type of behaviour has been on the increase within football more generally (NADS, 2008). Similar to racist abuse, disablist abuse whilst unacceptable and to be criticised, is merely symptomatic of the way in which disability too remains untroubled within wider football culture. Disabled fans articulate an ardour and kinship with the Forest team that is commensurate with their non-disabled and BME peers. This self-identification with Forest fandom superficially supports Shakespeare and Watson’s (2001) assertion that the disabled/non-disabled divide is ‘outdated’ and that disabled people’s identity no longer needs to be singular but can be and is multifaceted. However, the plurality of postmodern logic that makes football fandom available through thawing differences and accentuating similarities is unable to deal with

the material structures of footballing institutions that bolster disability within football (NADS, 2008).

The new contours of the football landscape, reflected in the inclusive prose of purportedly more sensitive and progressive institutions (FA, 2010) marketing an improved product in ‘modern’ stadia, is at odds with the experience of disabled fans who took part in this research study. These discontinuities should be unsurprising given that scholars and activists engaged with the politics of disablement have long argued that capitalism has fostered an unequal society, one in which disabled people are marginalised and discriminated against (Barnes, 2012; Oliver, 1990; Finkelstein, 1980). Football’s smart neoliberal livery is not recognised by Martin a 43 year old, white disabled fan, who says that the club have: “no knowledge, appreciation or understanding at all regarding the challenges and barriers disabled people face”. His mother Margaret, a 68 year old, white disabled woman agrees saying that she would like to speak to the new owners and tell them “how bad the disability situation is in the ground”. Richard mentioned earlier in the chapter and involved with the Disabled People’s Movement locally for many years talks of:

“non-disabled supremacy...I don’t think disabled people are very

good marketing fodder for the club or their big sponsors...they're not going to have disabled people, wheelchair users wearing the latest club shirt and that sort of stuff... there's no positive imagery of disabled supporters..."

Goldberg's (1993) CRT insight of bringing awareness to 'race' and racism can be extended here to understand how the predominantly non-disabled football institution with its rational commitment to individuality, progress, improvement, equality and tolerance not only reproduces 'colour-blind' thinking within sport but also eviscerates the disabled body-mind from view. He argues:

'the liberal world would assume away the difference in otherness thereby maintaining the presumed sameness, the universally imposed similarity in identity' (Goldberg, 1993, p7).

The ideology of non-disabled normalcy pervades society and reaches into the world of leisure and sport, its potency is in part derived from the invisibility of its form (Oliver, 1993) which privileges those who 'correspond to conventional ideas around form, shape, conduct and or economic ability' (Kuppan, 2011, p2; Tregaskis, 2002). Martin speaking about the Chief Executive of NFFC says:

“people like Mark Arthur sail through life healthy, wealthy without any of the pressures and strains that a disabled person will face and totally ignores it...he’s in his privileged bubble”

Richard explains this cultural phenomenon thus: “People don’t want to talk about disability, they don’t want to even think about it. It’s a taboo subject full stop”. For him disabled people are “seen as heroes or as people with individual problems to overcome”. These notions of disabled people individualised, medicalised and framed by ‘personal tragedy’ (Oliver, 1990) relate directly to the SMD’s politicised engagement with disability: revealing it not as a functional restriction of individuals or a problem of performance but more accurately as oppression and discrimination where disabled people’s participation is restricted by social organisations that do not take into consideration their impairments (UPIAS, 1976, Carr et al, 2012). CRT also rests on a political footing; it would acknowledge and support the importance of disabled fans voices as offering a counter-narrative or an alternative version of ‘truth’ (Hylton, 2005, 2009) to that presented by a non-disabled sporting organisation like NFFC. Analyses of the disabling and racialised barriers that exist in this arena help challenge, reconstruct and redefine those ‘marked out’ as being ‘Other’, whether this is

through invisibility, freakery and or sentimentality associated with impairment (Garland-Thompson, 1997), or through the fiction of ‘race’ logic (Bhattacharyya et al, 2002). CRT’s collaborative and social transformation agenda could potentially work with SMD perspectives, with disabled and BME fans, helping expose these cultural myths and social exclusionary practices that restricts their participation in sports recreation, transforming these environments into welcoming spaces for all fans to watch football (Solorzano and Yosso, 2001).

4.3 Conclusion

The hegemony of white non-disabled football culture (Hylton, 2009) has come under scrutiny from accounts by research participants and linkages to literature, this unveils the alleged ‘civility’ as having a more unfair, unequal and at times more sinister underbelly (Adorno, 1998). However, the social barriers that are involved in football fandom cannot be unpicked through analysis of cultural discourse alone, there *must* be an engagement with the relationships of power that exist within major sporting structures (Hylton, 2009). Therefore, this paper will shortly move on to examine the structural forces at play in BME and disabled fans disadvantage; with regard to disabled people these forces have historically provided the rationale for their expulsion from the prevailing environment of economic and social life (Borsay, 2005; Gleeson, 1999). In order to further understand football fandom’s freedom and constraints on BME and disabled people, this paper will now move on to interrogate research participants views of access and policy issues at NFFC; these operational situations and practices are important to uncover as they provide a practical framework with which to illustrate, question and address possible concerns (Barnes, 2012).

Chapter 5: Research Findings On NFFC Access And Policies

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore access from the perspective of environmental or physical barriers and how they impinge on disabled Forest fans. It will use their accounts to gain insight into the current match day experience at NFFC and link these to literature (particularly CRT and SMD viewpoints), policies (or lack of) and best practice in the industry, to suggest how accessibility at live football events, particularly at the City Ground (home of NFFC) can be improved. In addition, it will also investigate what BME and disabled fans think about the policies and practices at NFFC and more broadly within football assessing to what extent they are successful and how they might be improved to encourage greater participation by these groups.

5.2 Getting There

There is strong evidence to suggest that disabled people's access to the built environment continues to be impeded (Barnes and Mercer, 2010; Imrie, 2000). Richard underscores this by arguing that the barriers he faces, "don't start at the ground, it starts from getting to the ground, it starts from home... which is a mammoth task". As a disabled person with a visual impairment living ten miles from the stadium, to attend a game using public transport, he would have to walk thirty minutes to the bus stop. He would have to travel on one bus to town, and then walk another twenty minutes to catch another bus to take him to the ground; if the game was played on a Saturday, he would have to negotiate busy city centre streets, which is highly stressful for him. The total travel time to and from the ground could easily amount to four plus hours.

The situation is not much easier for Margaret; who although only living three miles from the City Ground stadium, must leave by midday in order to get a non-disabled parking space for a 3pm Saturday kick-off. Despite having an accredited impairment, in receipt of a 'Blue Badge' and being a season ticket holder for over fifty years, she has not been given an accessible parking space. There are 130 free accessible parking spaces at the ground and according to

NFFC's Safety Officer, 'all are presently occupied' (Bexon, 2012). Margaret has been on the waiting list for several years. Instead, in order to park at the ground she must arrive excessively early to get a non-disabled space, because as she says, "its first come, first serve!". As well as posing a barrier for disabled season ticket holders who do not have a designated parking space, disabled fans who may only be able to attend matches on an occasional basis, perhaps because of a fluctuating impairment, are also disadvantaged because there is no flexibility built into the parking resource to accommodate them.

The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and more recently the Equality Act (2010) have included a legislative duty that service providers make 'reasonable adjustments' for disabled people to access their facilities. However, the term 'reasonable adjustments' is contested and has been applied unevenly, whilst pressure has been exerted on organisations to become more accessible, particularly in the leisure industry, disability remains a constant (Barnes and Mercer, 2010). In the interests of balance, it should be pointed out that 26% of the five hundred car parking spaces available at the ground are given over to disabled people (Bexon, 2012) this is a considerably higher figure than the 6% the joint policy guidelines by the Centre for Accessible Football in Europe (CAFE) and UEFA (2011) recommend. Notwithstanding this achievement, there

is still more that the club could do to facilitate access, for example, organising buggies to pick up ambulant disabled supporters from club and long stay car parks or public transport stops and take them to their seat inside the ground (UEFA, 2011; NADS, 2008). This would certainly help Richard attend more live matches, and may also persuade Martin to renew his season ticket, as a key factor in his non-attendance are access issues from the club car park to his seat.

5.3 Being There - Where Do You Go To The Toilet?

Disabled research participants complain of poor access and facilities in the City Ground stadium where NFFC play. Margaret sits in what is called the Main Stand in which there is no accessible toilet; this presents significant barriers to her comfort and enjoyment of the game. In order to go to the toilet she has to walk the breadth of the ground to another stand some considerable distance from where she sits. This she finds “exhausting and painful”. Margaret makes the point “...but there’s only one toilet for the whole of the Bridgford and Main Stands”. She goes on:

“you have to ask permission to go to transfer from the Main Stand to the Bridgford End so you have to go and ask the man on the gate and if he says, “Oh there’s no transfers today”, where do you go to toilet?”

This problem is exacerbated by having to walk past the away supporters who can be boisterous and intimidating. There is only one accessible toilet for this part of the ground that has a capacity of 13,475 people (Virtual Designs, 2008); whilst this number is only ever reached when there is a high profile game on,

there is still considerable pressure put on this resource. Margaret comments “that it would take ages to get in and the smell would be awful...”. In a non-disabled world, concerns such as accessible toilets may appear trivial, however, as Barnes and Mercer (2010) and Lewis et al (2004) argue, these barriers are far from uncommon. A social model perspective would highlight this as part of an ongoing pattern of discrimination and oppression that disabled people face on a daily basis.

It should be noted that Margaret’s seat is not in one of the ‘designated’ disabled areas. However, this is her prerogative and she should have the same choices that are open to other non-disabled fans. It seems perfectly reasonable for her to occupy a seat that she has historically sat in for many years. Additionally, it is important for her to be close to her non-disabled family members who sit in this stand. Moreover, NFFC assert that disabled people may sit in any part of the ground they choose (Nottingham Forest, 2011) but it is clear that they are unable to deliver access and facilities to support this policy. Richard’s experience of being allocated a seat as disabled person, is that “it’s obvious straight away that you’re segregated in a covert kind of way...” What he’s referring to here, is that a portion of the designated disabled seating is directly next to the away supporters. Richard has found the experience of sitting in this

part of the ground to be “intimidating” and “scary”. At the same time, he feels he “sticks out like a sore thumb”. This is because there a very few non-disabled home fans situated here compared to the away support and this can feel very isolating. His substantive point would be that disabled fans should be consulted on matters of policy, they should be brought into the discussion on seating arrangements and “leading that debate”.

It is telling that none of the disabled research participants knew that the club had a Disabled Supporters Branch (DSB); this is despite being long term fans and having a vested interest in disability rights. The DSB is not well publicised on the NFFC’s website and it is unclear what function it performs. This emphasises a lack of commitment to disability issues at a senior policy level within the club. Richard suggests that if they were interested in getting “disability on the agenda” then an announcement could be made over the tannoy at half time to introduce these matters. He says, “wouldn’t it be good if some players were interviewed about their experiences of disability” citing a former ‘legend’ of the club whose father was blind as a possible way of introducing the subject. He points to a lack of awareness amongst stewards, one who he quotes as saying “I’ve had training in all disabilities”. This for him is suggestive of the rudimentary and inaccurate form the training must have taken. He is very clear that:

“If they are going to get training it should be by disabled people and it ought to be from the social model... which needs to be a central part of their policy”

Martin has stopped going to games in the last few years principally related to the social barriers in getting into and being at the ground. He says:

“they expect you to sit in a stand come rain, blow or snow which is nothing better than a cow shed... I refuse to pay the highest price for a ticket and get the lowest facilities.”

He believes the club's policies and practices are a direct reflection of the Chief Executive's position towards disabled people, “not bothered”. Martin and his mother Margaret contrast this with other sporting venues they have visited such as the City of Manchester Stadium, where Premiership side Manchester City play. Here it wasn't a case of “struggling or feeling like a burden” the assistance, access and facilities made “the whole experience a pleasure”. He says he'd be “happy to pay £50 to get the same level of service”. However, whilst the disabled research participants in this study could be considered middle class based on

either profession or disposable income this should not obscure the fact that poverty and social isolation form the fabric of life for many disabled people in the UK (Barnes, 2012; Beresford, 1996; Sheldon, 2010).

CRT would support disabled fans and an SMD perspective by arguing that disability and the barriers that accompany it need to be made more prominent within sport, leisure and recreation. It would argue that an engagement with these issues must be led by the senior management teams (SMTs) within these institutions; CRT would seek to educate executives around the need to create policies and practices that 'see' and dismantle disability within its organisational structures (Hylton, 2005). This involves listening and taking on board the views of disabled supporters, something NFFC have not done very well according to the research participants in this study. A CRT approach to disability at NFFC would want to see more consistency in its policies towards disabled people and would make conscious the social processes that structure discrimination in this area.

For example, NFFC offer a complimentary ticket for the Personal Assistants of fans with accredited impairments. This is a positive step but the information is not widely circulated and disabled participants confirmed they were not fully

aware of this service. More pointedly, until the start of the 2011/2012 season, disabled fans were also offered a concession on the price of match or season tickets in line with senior citizens, this concession in respect of disabled fans was abruptly dropped without any publicised consultation or explanation. This policy demonstrates that the club is either unaware or chooses to ignore the extra costs involved in being a disabled person (Large, 1991; O'Sullivan, 2011; Tibble, 2005), imposing further economic barriers on disabled fans inclusion at live games.

The City Ground where NFFC play is an older stadium and there are practical limitations on the accessibility that can be achieved here. Discussion of the redevelopment or relocation of the ground was started by the club some years ago (Nottingham Evening Post, 2009). However, pending a decision, Martin argues that the CEO:

“...refuses to listen to disabled people’s views on access and facilities until Forest are back in the Premiership... and with the best will in the world this could be some time away”.

Whilst the increased revenue streams from being in the Premiership, particularly

from television are well documented (Conn, 2012; Williams, 2006) and undoubtedly inform the club's commercial strategic planning, there is still more the club could do to enable disabled fans comfort and attendance in the interim.

The State of the Game Report (NADS, 2008) in respect of disabled supporters highlights an apathy by many football clubs in dealing with the social barriers faced by disabled people; Level Playing Field persuasively refute the suggestion that clubs cannot provide equal access for disabled fans because of old stadia or financial resources, emphasising that it is the commitment of SMTs that define how successful clubs are in meeting their responsibilities to disabled people. They highlight Derby County Football Club (DCFC), a similar sized Championship club to NFFC, as an example of good practice in this area. Notwithstanding that Pride Park is a relatively new stadium compared to the City Ground, it is the manner in which the club has tried to find imaginative design and service solutions for its' disabled fans that distinguish its practice. For example, they utilise accessible remote parking supported by a shuttle bus and 'golf buggy' service to bring disabled supporters to the game. They retrospectively adapted non-disabled seating areas throughout the stadium to accommodate several impairment groups such as wheelchair users, those with limited mobility and visual impairments: the net result being that disabled fans

were easily able to sit amongst their own supporters, friends and family something that the research participants in this study could not always manage. Despite moderate resources, DCFC are able to provide access, facilities and choice for their disabled fans. It demonstrates that, with awareness and political will, much can be accomplished. This is reflected in DCFC compliance with 89.63% of UEFA's (2011) *Accessible Stadia Guide* compared with NFFC's 47%.

5.4 BME Voices

The access issues for BME fans may take different forms to their disabled peers but the barriers to their inclusion in live match settings are equally real and prohibitive. Patricia is the only research participant from both BME and disabled groups who cites finance as a material factor in determining how many games she can attend. This is an important point because it problematises the notion that the barriers to fandom for BME groups rest simply on the representations of racism within the game (Fawbert, 2011). She extrapolates from her personal situation that “economics has definitely got something to do” with the lack of BME supporters in the ground. However, she notes that “affording to go” is only one element; she also says that it is a “tradition that I think you don’t get a lot of black lads going to watch teams like that”, going on to carefully point out that if you do go “it’s making sure that you’re with a group of mates because you don’t want to be the only person standing there shouting your head off”. Patricia’s comments reference an inter-twining of both structural and cultural forces that define BME supporter outcomes.

Deepak forwards a socio-economic argument as an explanation for the lack of BME supporters in the stadium, observing that the Meadows area of

Nottingham, which is adjacent to the City Ground, has a high BME population, confirmed by the ONS, (2011). Deepak says it is “quite poor... so you wouldn’t be able to afford to go”. Nottingham City Council’s *Child Poverty Report* (2007) underscores these possible linkages, pointing out that the Meadows has disproportionately high levels of out of work or low income BME households compared to the national average. Platt (2011) substantiates these local findings by arguing that across the UK all BME groups encounter higher rates of poverty than the majority population. However, Anthon is unsure whether all BME fans are “being priced out of football”; he recognises there are economic barriers but argues that:

“although there is a higher instance of unemployment and that black people are more likely to dip below the poverty level... there are now a greater number of more affluent people than their used to be...”

Platt (2011) along with Barnard and Turner (2011) suggest that there can be variations *between and within* BME groups. All research participants pick out these complexities in BME fandom with Deepak noticing that:

“Obviously the majority of the crowd is white but I’m pretty sure I’d say that there are more Asian fans than there are black fans”

Heterogeneity is a feature of BME populations (Platt, 2011) but it is difficult to come to any strong conclusions here, Burdsey and Randhawa (2012) note that some South Asian fans have been active supporters at games for years but these numbers are still relatively low. Back et al (2001) identify a similar phenomenon in relation to African Caribbean fans. Therefore, BME fan experiences require more focused empirical research to untangle the extent to which access can be said to be predicated on poverty and or across different ethnic groups.

When it comes to NFFC’s polices and practices to encourage BME participation at live games, research participants see little evidence of engagement or impact. Patricia says ‘there’s nothing in the press and certainly nothing in schools’. She does acknowledge that the NFFC youth team works in schools but says, “it’s not publicised to any great degree”. Deepak has a similar viewpoint, stating that, “the single best thing would be for the players and coaching staff to go into schools and get involved there”. He was aware of some initiatives when the former chairman, Nigel Doughty first joined the club some years ago but says, “I

don't hear anything about that anymore". Patricia outlines several ways the club could address the under-representation of BME spectators and fans, such as, "offer discounted blocks of seats to different schools in urban areas" stating that because "they are all going together, it's a good day out" The emphasising of *togetherness and fun* is highly relevant because of the isolation that BME research participants have suggested; in addition literature makes clear that football is an overwhelmingly white space (C.King, 2004). Patricia also suggests that children "can meet the players as reward...get to interview them and have them as role models within the school". Patricia and Deepak believe that the players involved in these campaigns could be from both BME and white backgrounds, CRT would certainly support this approach but would argue that one of the ways to address racism within football would be to pro-actively work with BME children to encourage their inclusion as spectators and fans.

At the player level, this engagement has happened, with black players such as Wes Morgan, Jermaine Jenas and Julian Bennett amongst many others being 'liberated' from tough inner city estates, forging first team careers and in the process becoming iconic figures to a legion of Forest fans (Culley, 2011). However, the juxtaposition of these practices, that is the adulation of the black athlete against a background absence of welcoming policies towards BME

supporters speaks to Carrington's (2010) argument of the hyper-commercialisation of the black body within sport and Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* (1952) whose narrative draws on observations of the African American experience suggesting the ways in which blackness can be commodified and packaged for the entertainment of white spectators. CRT would work to make these racialised processes clearly visible, building on the work done by Macpherson (1999) in identifying the institutional racisms embedded within football governance and its consumption more generally (Hylton, 2009). One way this could be achieved within sports and leisure policy is to use Nebeker's (1998) CRT approach to the education sector and develop policies that are far more colour conscious and less 'race' neutral.

The lack or ineffectiveness of policies that redress the inequality of BME people is a systemic failure of football's organisational structure; colour-blind thinking maybe an 'unwitting' oversight by the game's senior controllers but its impact permeates every level of the sport (Macpherson, 1999). Anthon states that although "positive discrimination is controversial" in the English game, American Football and its National Football League (NFL) is "an example of how it works". Garber (2007) has argued that the 'Rooney Rule' policy, which stipulates that at least one BME candidate is interviewed for a vacant head-coaching role, has

dramatically transformed the nature of the NFL. Prior to the ruling in 2002, only 6% of senior football coaches were from a BME background; by the beginning of the 2006 season, this figure had climbed to 22%. Moreover, Collins (2007) has argued that the ‘Rooney Rule’ has helped challenge the widely held beliefs that African American candidates do not possess the intellectual capabilities to deal with the organisational complexity of the sport. This form of positive action in policy is currently absent in the English context and Anthon observes, “we lag behind in this regard”. According to research by Cashmore and Cleland (2011), of the ninety-two professional English football clubs there have only been between two and four BME managers in any season up to 2011. Whilst this does not directly relate to fandom, it is suggestive of how the social, economic and political forces operating in football boardrooms might communicate their racism; in relationships of white conviviality it is not only BME managers that are excluded but also BME fans. Using CRT scholar Derrick Bell’s (2004) influential idea of ‘interest convergence’ Daniel Burdsey (2011b) has applied this to the widespread recruitment of black footballers in the 1970s. This inclusion was not an anti-racist stance, but instead he argues, determined by the ‘interest’ of black players to secure entry to the world of professional football ‘converging’ with the ‘interest’ of clubs to increase their profits, which necessitated finding a greater wealth of talent. In extending this idea to football fandom, accounts from

literature and research participants show a demonstrable ‘interest’ from BME and disabled communities to watch live games. However, that meeting or ‘convergence’ at NFFC and more broadly within football has still not happened, this paper suggests that is:

‘because of the ways that white *non-disabled* men create forms of familiarity that ensure they are never made accountable for the ways that they exclude predominantly black men (*but also black women and disabled people*) from different spheres of the football industry’

(C. King, 2004, p3, my italics added)

Chapter 6: They Think It's All Over...But It Isn't Time To Celebrate Yet!

This paper began by promlematising the beliefs surrounding the egalitarian nature of football fandom with a particular focus on BME and disabled fans. A central argument has been the idea that certain bodies are more important than others; a review of literature revealed how historically BME and disabled bodies have been deconstructed and re-cast as 'Other' in order to exercise control and generate profits. Contemporary socio-economic structures and discourses embedded within neoliberal capitalism have continued this oppression with much research into how these groups access areas such as education, housing, health, transport and work. However, the leisure spaces of football grounds for BME and disabled fans are less well known, therefore, in order to gain a deeper insight of these experiences and barriers, a Case Study of NFFC was conducted. This made use of qualitative interviewing and was informed by ethnography and ER. CRT and SMD perspectives were also utilised and helped illuminate the 'moments, situations and processes' (Kuppan, 2011b, p14) of disablism and racism.

At an empirical level, the data uncovered numerous instances of racism and disablism, some of these personal incidents were 'troubling' and various

strategies were used by research participants to minimise their impact. However, it was on the organisational plane that research participants felt most dissatisfied; pointing to the interior dynamics of NFFC and football's governing bodies in failing to deliver an accessible and inclusive match day experience, not only for current fans but in the recruitment of new ones also.

At the theoretical level, the knitting together of CRT and the SMD within football fandom has made some headway; although each is concerned with respectively examining 'race' or disability, their fundamental positions are, that we live in an unequal society. By concurrently using both lenses to interrogate these phenomena within a sports and leisure environment, it has highlighted the social, political and transformational connectedness they share and insight they can offer the 'other'. These have been tentative steps but the dovetailing of CRT and the SMD in analysis of fandom provide evidence of a nascent theoretical alliance that makes a contribution to theory within sports and leisure scholarship.

Recommendations for NFFC include:

Physical Access:

- More accessible integrated seating in all parts of ground, close to accessible toilets.
- Pick-up and drop-off from bus stops and remote parking sites for disabled people.
- Buggies to transport disabled people to seats

Economic Access:

- Reinstatement of concession for disabled people in-line with senior citizens.
- Discussion of economic barriers for BME fans. Seek input from Kick it Out/Sporting Equals.

Culture/Educational Access:

- More consultation with BME/disabled fans and their allies, eg Kick It Out/Sporting Equals/LPF.
- Specific work in schools/communities to encourage BME & disabled children and parents to experience 'matchday'.
- Mentoring by 'star' NFFC players of BME and disabled children.

Policies/Practices:

Overall what is required at NFFC are improved policies/practices that recognise and respond to issues of ethnicity, racism and disability, including:

- Greater compliance with UEFA and Café (2011) *Good practice guide to creating an accessible stadium and matchday experience*.
- Training in the SMD for staff by disabled people.

Despite the evidence presented in this paper, football as 'the people's game' is

such an iconic phrase that it will continue to have currency; football is controlled by multi-millionaire owners who are saturated in the neoliberal project, which, as Stuart Hall argues, is ‘grounded in the free possessive individual’ (Hall, 2011) and runs counter to equality. However, by de-cloaking football’s assumed innocence, it opens up as a political space where as a range of fans, BME/disabled, white/non-disabled we use the insights of CRT/SMD perspectives to challenge our clubs to find techniques, strategies, policies and approaches to the barriers of racism and disability and create truly accessible and welcoming stadia.

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Appendix A: Some Notes on Interviews

‘Big’ Research Questions

There are several overarching research questions that I wanted to answer in this research project:

1. ‘How can the perceived absence of BME and disabled fans be explained at NFFC?’ (Kuppan, 2012, p5)
2. What are the barriers for BME and disabled fans attending games at NFFC?
3. To what extent does Culture influence BME and disabled fans experience and supporter numbers at NFFC?
4. To what extent does Access influence BME and disabled fans experience and supporter numbers at NFFC?
5. To what extent does Policy influence BME and disabled fans experience and supporter numbers at NFFC?

Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and took a semi-structured form, which gave some direction/prompts for the ‘conversations with a purpose’ (Mason, 2002, p62)

but also gave the opportunity for research participants to introduce new themes to the discussion. Questions to the BME and disabled interviewees were driven by the ‘Big’ research questions and were broadly similar but with a few differences, typical questions to each group are shown below:

BME research participant questions:

- Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
- How long have you supported the ‘Reds’
- How did you first get interested?
- Are you a season ticket holder?
- How often do you go?
- Do you go to away matches
- Who do you go with?
- Where do you sit?
- How do you find the atmosphere at the City Ground?
- Do you see any other BME fans around you?
- What are your thoughts on those numbers?
- How does it make you feel?
- Why are there so few BME fans?

- What impact does culture have on your experience? For example the representations of BME people within society/sport? How does it impact on potential BME fans?
- What role do socio-economic factors play on you getting to the City ground, such as work, money, someone one to go with? How does it impact on potential BME fans?
- What role do policies/practices play in your experience of being BME a fan? For example what policies are you aware of that encourage BME participation? How does they impact on potential BME fans?
- What else influences your experience as a BME fan? Potential BME fans?
- Have you experienced any racism at the City Ground?
- Can you tell me about that?
- Have you witnessed racism towards anyone else?
- What are your thoughts on racism generally within the game?
- Does it put people off going?
- How could the situation be improved?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Disabled research participant questions:

- Can you tell me a bit about yourself?
- How long have you supported the ‘Reds’?
- How did you first get interested?
- Are you a season ticket holder?
- How often do you go?
- Do you go to away matches?
- Who do you go with?
- Where do you sit?
- How do you find the atmosphere at the City Ground?
- Do you have any access requirements?
- Can you tell me what they are?
- Are they being met?
- Do you see man other disabled fans around you?
- What are your thoughts on those numbers?
- How does it make you feel?
- Why are there so few BME fans?

- What impact does culture have on your experience? For example the representations of disabled people in society/sport? How does it impact on potential disabled fans?
- What impact does access have on your experience? For example physical access requirements? Any other access requirements? Socio-economic factors - work, money, PA support, someone to go with? How does this impact on potential disabled fans?
- What role do policies/practices play in your experience of being a disabled fan? Are there any policies/practices that enable you as a disabled fan? How do these impact potential disabled fans?
- What else influences your experience as a disabled fan? Potential disabled fans?
- Have you experienced any disablism at the City Ground?
- Have you witnessed disablism towards anyone else?
- What are your thoughts on disability issues within football generally?
- Do disability issues put you off going?
- How could the situation be improved?
- Did you know there was Disabled Supporters Branch?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?