

**From racial exclusions to cultural fusions**

**Black and minority ethnic inclusion in football  
clubs in Leicestershire**

**Dr Steven Bradbury  
Institute of Youth Sport  
Loughborough University**

# The presentation

## Background

- Findings drawn from survey, interview, and observational data (1998-2009)

## Aims

- Contextualise the socio-historical development of Majority BME clubs
  1. Experiences of and active resistance to racisms and exclusions
  2. Symbolic and realised sites for cultural continuities and identity production
  3. Delivering multi-cultural service provision and promoting racial integration
- Residential dispersal, displaced communities and the new 'multi-ethnic' clubs

# The social and cultural context of Leicester

## 2001 Census: population figures for ethnicity in Leicestershire

Ethnic group	Leicester	Leicestershire	England
White	63.9%	94.7%	90.9%
Asian	29.9%	3.7%	4.6%
Black	3.1%	1.1%	2.3%
Dual-heritage	2.3%	1.2%	1.3%
Other	0.8%	0.6%	0.9%

# About (five) Majority BME clubs

## Club make-up and capacities, histories and identities

- Focus for BME participation: 38% of BME players and 64% of BME workforce
- Strong BME representation: players (84%), coaches (88%), administrators (99%)
- Good club development infrastructures and expansive football provision
- BME clubs a distinctly male space
- Strong historical connection to local game: formed between 1968 and 1979
- Strongly ethnic, cultural and religious identities of clubs
- Increased culturally diversity within (some) club youth sections

# Racisms and resistance (i)

## Historical exclusions and BME club development

‘Traditionally, there’s never been much access for Asian people getting into White teams. It limited a lot of players in terms of where they could play. That’s the reason why all of these [BME] clubs were set up in the first place. There was a firm interest in football amongst young people, attached to their sort of gangs, you know, or the Sikh temples and Hindu temples and so on. That’s how it all started’ (Club Secretary, Majority BME club)

## Racisms and resistance (ii)

### Historical experiences of racisms

‘We’ve had a group of supporters behind the goal shouting “Get on with it, Nigger”; ‘You should stick to robbing cars’; ‘You fucking Paki’ and so on. It’s probably more [the] spectators than players, parents as well as young people. It happens more when we’ve played out of town, even more abuse there than when you play in the White inner city areas’ (Club Secretary, Majority BME Club)

## Racisms and resistance (iii)

### Ongoing expressions of racisms

‘More recently, opposition players haven’t used a swear word, but they have been derogatory and flippant about people’s cultural background, about cultural modes of dress and behaviour patterns. Really demeaning and derogatory behaviour. I think there is a subtle line between that kind of behaviour and the out and out rudeness and bullishness that may take place between white players. When you have black players involved they [white players] have that condescending tone’ (Committee member, Majority BME club)

## Racisms and resistance (iv)

### Solidarity and safeguards

‘It’s because that’s where Asian or black players feel comfortable, welcome, and they feel safe. I know last season there was this Asian boy playing for a White team. He was getting called racist names, not from his own players so much, but the opposition players and the parents and so on. Nothing was done about this and he’s left and he’s gone to [a Majority BME club]. That’s the reason why Asian stay at the clubs where they feel comfortable. They’re not going to get called names and so on. If something ‘kicks off’, the whole club, the whole team will stick up for you, so you’re not just on your own like you would be at a White club’ (Club Secretary, Majority BME club)



# Cultural continuities and identity production

## Cultural identity production and community collectivism

‘It’s our history, it’s embedded in ‘black’ people’s struggle, do you see what I mean. The struggle to get a decent job, the struggle to get a decent education, the struggle to get decent housing, the struggle to get promotion at work, the struggle to make ends meet basically. ....

.....It’s about the ability for ‘black’ people to mobilise themselves and to say to the wider world ‘look, we can organise ourselves, we can bring about equality and self-improvement’. It’s the identity of those [Majority BME] clubs and the identity of the people. They set themselves up to create their own identity to establish themselves as a force and to continue that sort of common purpose. ‘Black’ people need to have that identity, and all these clubs identify with a specific identity, you know, religious, cultural, a common identity for the community’ (Vice-Chair, Majority BME club)

# Multi-cultural service provision and racial integration (i)

## Including the excluded, empowering the disempowered

‘I think a lot of people like to play for [the club] because it gives them self worth. It’s not just about football, it’s about family, people unifying themselves, the different races, the different cultures. But that’s what we aim to do, give hope basically, you know, to people who may not be able to go to any other club and just walk in there, we develop the person and we give everybody an opportunity. We aren’t selective like other clubs’ (Vice-Chair, Majority BME clubs)

# Multi-cultural service provision and racial integration (ii)

## Equal opportunities and the cultural appeal of BME clubs

‘We’ve got no problems with kids from different ethnic backgrounds. We just want the kids to enjoy themselves and be part of the club. My teams have been predominantly Sikh. But I’ve also got 4 Muslim boys, and I’ve just signed a couple of English lads who want to play for me. I said ‘Yeah, come on, come and join the training’. We want anybody, there’s no prejudice from our point of view’ (Vice-Chair, Majority BME club)

# Residential dispersal and displaced communities

## Changing local landscapes and new multi-ethnic clubs

‘Basically, we’re a deprived area of the city. At the end of the day, there is a lot of families on benefits, there’s a lot of single parent families and so on. The door is always open and we make it as easy as possible for the kids to play football with us.....

.....The make-up of the community has changed and so has the club with it. We’ve had a lot of Somali refugees in the area and some of those lads are getting involved in the club. I think we’ve got more black children than Asians at the moment in the team. I’ve seen the club change in the last few years, [the area] has kind of been settled with new communities from different nationalities, whatever you like, that’s basically what’s happened, it’s been a natural thing rather than a conscious effort’ (Chair-person, male youth club)

# Concluding comments

## From racial exclusions to cultural fusions

- BME club development and the local cultural structure
- Negative source: positive function
  1. Historical and ongoing resistance to racisms
  2. Site for cultural continuities and identity construction
  3. Site for new (youthful) inclusions, hybridity and ideological 'third space'
- The shifting roles and significance of BME clubs