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Barriers to adolescent female participation in cricket

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ABSTRACT
With the ever-growing number of opportunities for females to participate in a range of sports without the previous associated gender norms, females are starting to become more involved in traditionally male-dominated sports, however, we know little about their barriers to participation. In this qualitative study, we investigated the barriers to adolescent female participation in cricket in a regional city in Victoria, Australia. The socio-ecological model was utilized to help guide semi-structured focus-group interviews with 20 adolescent females aged 10–12 years old. The participants identified the following as key barriers to their participation in cricket: lack of confidence in skills, having to play cricket with males, an absence of pathway opportunities, and no female only cricket competitions. These findings highlight the importance of adequate coaching specifically for females, female only teams and competitions, and the importance of developing a player pathway for adolescent girls.

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Introduction
Recently, there has been a growth of females participating in sport that is traditionally male-dominated (AFL 2018; Cricket Australia 2017a). To promote and encourage females to be more involved in sport, including traditionally male-dominated sports, National Sporting Organisations (NSOs), State Sporting Associations (SSAs), state governments and state organizations such as VicHealth have developed some initiatives such as ‘Girls Make your Move’, ‘Her Sport Her Way’ and ‘Change our Game’ (Australian Government Department of Health 2017; NSW Government 2019; VicHealth 2017). However, as some of these sporting opportunities are within traditionally male-dominated sports, there are likely to be some barriers for female participation that slightly differ from the commonly reported barriers to participation in sport in general. There has been considerable research within the area of adolescent female participation in physical activity and sport which have focused on barriers to participation (Casey et al. 2009; Craike, Symons, and Zimmermann 2009; Eime et al. 2010; Rowe, Sherry, and Osborne 2017; Slater and Tiggemann 2010; Yungblut, Schinke, and McGannon 2012). There may be barriers to female participation in traditionally male-dominated sports that are unique because of the associated societal expectations and gender norms (Abadi 2017),
however, there is limited knowledge of the barriers for females playing traditionally male-dominated sports.

**Literature review**

**Gender and sport**

Historically, sport was created by men to benefit men (Alsarve 2018). It is suggested that sport transitioned boys to men and that the involvement of females in sport was uncommon due to the ‘competitiveness, toughness, aggressiveness and endurance’ (Alsarve 2018, 840) traits that sport requires (Norman 2014; Schlesinger and Weigelt-Schlesinger 2013; Sherry, Osborne, and Nicholson 2015; Tolvheden 2012; Wellard 2009; Whannel 2002). Furthermore, Spaaij, Farquharson, and Marjoribank (2015, 400) explain that ‘gender is arguably the most visible site of inequality in sport’. The gender inequality and gender imbalances in sport can occur on many levels such as less women in corporate board positions, minimal media representation, less female coaches, and less opportunities for participation as a player (Alsarve 2018; Burton 2015; Pletzer et al. 2015; Post and Byron 2015). These imbalances may be due to an underlying power discrepancy that is unconsciously ‘fuelled’ by societal norms and expectations.

The term ‘masculine hegemony’ reiterates the power differences between males and females (Connell 2005). Masculine hegemony is described as ‘the way that ideas about gender are embedded within social practices such as mass media, religious doctrines, and sport, and especially how those cultural ideals exert institutional power’ (English 2017, 185). It can be because of masculine hegemony that females find it difficult to be accepted in sport, especially in leadership positions. Over time, changes in society have helped overcome the barriers to female involvement in sport in general, however, there are still areas of female involvement that needs more research such as female involvement in traditionally male-dominated sports.

Participation in sport traditionally was largely driven by and for males and, until recently, there were some traditionally male-dominated sports that females were largely not permitted to play. In order to have sport fit the needs of females, we need to explore the barriers to them participating in traditionally and largely male-dominated cultures and clubs. As such, there has been comprehensive research investigating barriers to participation in physical activity and sport, especially for adolescent females. However, there is limited knowledge regarding female participation in traditionally male-dominated sports, such as cricket. Studies to date (Casey et al. 2009; Craike, Symons, and Zimmermann 2009; Dwyer et al. 2012; Eime et al. 2010; Langille and Rodger 2010; Mooney, Casey, and Smyth 2012; Slater and Tiggemann 2010) have focused on determinants of sport participation in general and not a specific sport or one that is traditionally male-dominated. Over time, the concept of females playing sport has changed, however, there are still societal expectations regarding what sports females should and should not play. According to social norms, there are some sports that females are not suited to engage with due to the nature of physical contact, size and strength of players and aggressiveness (Green 2010). Furthermore, some female participants have reported receiving negative feedback from others, such as family, friends and strangers, due to their participation in male-dominated sport (Migliaccio and Berg 2007).
There are some studies that have investigated female participation in male-dominated sports. For example, Abadi (2017) reported that some female participants dropped out of their chosen sport, which was viewed as male-dominated, due to consistent comments from other people regarding the sport not being appropriate for females. With these societal pressures and expectations of social norms, it is understandable why some females do not participate in male-dominated sports. In recent years, many Australian sports such as cricket, Australian football and soccer have provided more opportunities for female participation, both at the elite and grass-roots clubs. Not only does this give females more opportunity for sport participation, it also has the potential to engage those who are not physically active at all due to not having a range of choices.

**Cricket**

Cricket is a sport played globally and is a popular Australian activity. In a report by the ASC (2016), cricket is in the top 10 most participated sports by children outside of school hours, however this is predominately males. As of recent times, it has become a strategic focus of Cricket Australia to increase female participation in cricket (Cricket Australia 2017b). Women have been playing cricket in Australia since early 1900s (Howell, Howell, and Brown 1989) however it was not until 1958 that the International Women’s Cricket Council (IWCC) was developed (ICC n.d.). There were five founding countries in this association. The IWCC merged with the International Cricket Council (ICC) in 2005 and currently has 11 countries in the association (ICC n.d.). Until recent times, elite women’s cricket has only been semi-professional where players were still required to work to provide an income (Cricket Australia 2017a).

Recently, there have been some initiatives to help assist females in participating in cricket and other sports. The ‘Growing Cricket for Girls Fund’ was developed to support the development of girls’ cricket competitions at a community level. The funding can be used to provide payment to a coordinator for the competition, purchasing equipment, marketing and promotion and ensuring coaches have accreditation (Cricket Australia 2018). The ‘Change our Game’ programme provides funding through VicHealth for sports including those traditional male-dominated sports of Australian football and cricket in order to try and get more females active though sport (VicHealth 2017). Whilst these initiatives have the potential to positively influence females participating in male-dominated sports such as cricket, there has been minimal research within the area of female participation in cricket and the barriers to participation. It is likely that some barriers to participation are similar across sport in general, however, there are likely to be some barriers specific to male-dominated sports. A model often used to understand barriers to sport participation is the socio-ecological model.

**Socio-ecological model**

The decline in physical activity and sport participation during adolescence is widely acknowledged (ASC 2016; Bélanger et al. 2011; Farooq et al. 2018; Hallal et al. 2012; Lubans, Sylva, and Morgan 2007; Zick et al. 2007) and many studies have investigated the barriers that affect physical activity and sport participation for adolescents and more specifically, for female adolescents (Casey et al. 2009; Craike, Symons, and
Zimmermann 2009; Eime et al. 2010; Rowe, Sherry, and Osborne 2017; Slater and Tigge- 
mann 2010; Yungblut, Schinke, and McGannon 2012). A framework that is implemented to assist in understanding the wide array of factors influencing behaviours is the socio-ecological model (Stokols 1996). The socio-ecological model concerns ‘the interrelations among environmental conditions and human behaviour and well-being’ (Stokols 1996, 285), meaning the ‘dynamic interplay’ (Stokols 1996, 285) between determinants is analysed rather than determinants exclusively. The determinants within the socio-ecological model are: intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, environmental and policy. The socio-ecological model has been utilized by a range of studies investigating the influences on participation in sport and physical activity specifically for female participants (Casey et al. 2009; Eime et al. 2010; Eime et al. 2015; Gargari, Hosseini, and Ahmadi 2018; Jenkin et al. 2016). Qualitative studies have allowed more in depth understanding of the barriers to participation and how some of the factors are interrelated (Casey et al. 2009; Eime et al. 2010, 2015) thus providing a holistic approach to understanding the behaviour (lack of participation). The aim of this study is to utilize the socio-ecological model to identify barriers for adolescent females who have none to minimal experience in playing a traditionally male-dominated sport.

Method

Context of location of study

This study was conducted in Ballarat, a regional city in Victoria, Australia. Ballarat is approximately 110 km north-west of Melbourne (City of Ballarat 2018). The population of Ballarat in 2016 was 105,668 (ABS 2018) with a Socio-Economic Indexes for Australia (SEIFA) score of 965 which is ranked 296th in Australia or 32nd in Victoria based on disadvantaged to advantaged local government areas (ABS 2016). Within Ballarat and the surrounding suburbs, there were 32 primary schools and 10 secondary schools (ACARA 2019).

At the time of conducting this study, there were 15 cricket clubs in the Ballarat Cricket Association that provided opportunities for junior cricket with the far majority of participants being male (Ballarat Cricket Association 2019). Subsequently, opportunities for females to be involved in cricket in Ballarat was scarce. The schools in this study provided females the opportunity to play cricket in a mixed team against other schools within the region. In regards to club cricket, adolescent females had access to Milo into Cricket and T20 Blast which were entry-level cricket programmes, however, it was only available by local clubs who conducted these programmes and a majority of participants were young boys. Additionally, adolescent females had access to play junior club cricket with and against boys. Ballarat is the hub of Cricket Victoria’s Central Highlands region. Central Highlands has been successful over the past 15 years in fielding under 14, under 16 and under 18 female teams in the State Championships conducted by Cricket Victoria. In terms of senior cricket, similarly to junior cricket, females had access to play with a local club but it is with and against men. Females also had the opportunity to play in a senior women’s cricket team in the Victorian Premier Cricket Community. There were no opportunity for females to play in a senior women’s cricket team at a community club level in Ballarat.
Participants and procedure

Ethics approval was gained from the University Human Research Ethics Committee and the Catholic Education Office. School principals from all eight primary Catholic schools in the Ballarat area were contacted and invited to have their school participate in this research study. Three schools replied with an expression of interest in the research project, two of which were randomly selected to participate. One school selected to participate had 245 enrolments with 51% female students, and an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) score of 1082 (ACARA 2019). The ICSEA score takes into account parents’ occupation, parents’ education, geographical location and proportion of Indigenous students (ACARA 2014) and the average ICSEA score is 1,000. Schools that have a higher ICSEA score have a higher level of educational advantage for their students. The second school selected to participate had 332 enrolments with 56% female students, and an ICSEA score of 1026 (ACARA 2019).

Purposive sampling was utilized within this study to allow for only females to be involved (Patton 2002). This was to ensure that data from the study was reflective of female thoughts, feelings, beliefs and opinions. A personal visit to the two schools occurred and the research project was thoroughly explained to all female Year five and six students in jargon-free language. Plain Language Statements and consent forms were also distributed. Students had the opportunity to clarify any questions they had prior to giving consent. Year five and six students were approached due to their age (10–12 years), and research suggests (ABS 2012) that this age is the peak for when drop-off in sport occurs. Consent forms were signed by a parent/guardian and student. Students were randomly selected from the returned consent forms.

Focus-groups were conducted to encourage discussion between participants about their own experiences (Lambert and Loiselle 2008). Four focus-group discussions were conducted in total by one researcher, with two conducted per school. There were four to six randomly selected female students in each focus-group (n = 20) with each focus-group ranging from 30 to 60 min (average length was 39 min). All participants were born in Australia where English was the first language spoken in every household. One household also spoke French as a second language. Most (90%) participants lived in a household with two adults and a majority (95%) of participants had siblings with whom they lived with. All participants participated in regular physical activity on a weekly basis, with all participants involved in sport such as netball, basketball and swimming. Following the completion of the focus-group discussions, students completed a demographics questionnaire and were thanked for their participation in the research project.

Utilizing the socio-ecological model

The socio-ecological model was utilized throughout this study to develop the interview guide, develop the coding tree and reporting the results. The interview guide was developed based on the structure of the domains in the socio-ecological model and previous literature that has utilized this model. By following the structure of the domains, the semi-structured focus-group discussions were able to follow a clear direction starting with the participants themselves, then their family and friends, their school, the environment surrounding them, and finally, the rules and regulations that dictate how cricket is
facilitated. Additionally, it ensured all focus-group discussions followed a similar, if not same, question order. In relation to the coding tree, the transcribed data was coded into main themes that were the domains of the socio-ecological model – intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, environmental and policy. From there, sub-themes such as fun, family, school, club environment and girls’ only competition were identified within each theme.

**Instruments**

The demographics questionnaire that students completed after the focus-group discussions included open-ended questions that asked their age, country of birth, language spoken at home, how many adults and children live in their house, activities they do for fun (e.g. reading, spending time with family, taking my dog for a walk) and physical activity they participate in on a regular basis (e.g. at least once a week).

The focus-group discussions were semi-structured but had guided questions based on each domain of the socio-ecological model to ensure all topics were covered (Interview questions are provided in the appendix). The questions focused on the students’ views, beliefs and attitudes towards female adolescence barriers and facilitators in relation to physical activity, sport and more specifically, cricket. Examples of guided questions include: ‘How did you get involved in [said] sports?’; ‘How can cricket get more girls to play?’; ‘Do your friends influence your participation in physical activity and sport?’; ‘Do you know of any cricket clubs around where you live?’; and ‘What are the top three things stopping girls your age playing cricket?’ The focus-group discussions were audio recorded with a digital recorder which were then transcribed verbatim with pseudonyms assigned.

**Analysis**

The transcribed data was analysed using N-Vivo software – version 11. The transcript was initially read and coded by the lead author. Qualitative thematic and content analysis were undertaken (Clarke and Braun 2017; Elo et al. 2014). This data was analysed through a constant comparison and coded into themes based on the socio-ecological model. The constant comparison was repeated until no new themes were identified within the data. Collaborative coding occurred with the other researchers, in which a coding tree was developed together to clarify themes and sub-themes. Once data was coded, main themes were established. Sub-themes were developed to help explore the data more rigorously (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana 2014). Standardization also occurred through using the same semi-structured interview questions and demographics forms for all focus-groups as well as one researcher conducting all of the focus-group discussions.

**Results and discussion**

**Intrapersonal – ‘I want to do it for fun, but I also need skills’**

Fun is a frequently occurring theme when focusing on female sport participation (Casey et al. 2009; Skille and Osteras 2011; Slater and Tiggemann 2010). This study supports
the idea that fun is a crucial aspect for adolescent female participation in sport in general, and more specifically in the context of a fast-developing female sport, cricket: ‘I want to do it for fun’ (focus-group three). Slater and Tiggemann (2010) found that adolescent females were more inclined to stop physical activity or sport if they did not enjoy it, or if they were bored. However, fun is more complex than just having a good time. Enjoying sport has also been linked to having an adequate level of competence, and confidence in themselves (Casey et al. 2009; Skille and Osteras 2011; Slater and Tiggemann 2010). Skille and Osteras (2011) suggest that adolescent females are self-conscious about their skill level, in turn, affecting their confidence. Cricket was identified by the participants in this study as a highly technical sport, therefore requiring a certain level of skill, and that a level of skill was required to enjoy playing. For example, one female stated that in relation to cricket skills, in general females: ‘Are not advanced. They don’t have the basics’ (focus-group one). Females may not have the basic cricket skills due to their exposure to cricket has been limited. Casey et al. (2009) established that if the females were in a team where the skill level was not strong, they were more confident as opposed to being in a team that was strong and feeling pressured to perform. If female adolescents do not have appropriate skills, it could affect their level of competence and, therefore, affect their level of confidence which is summarized by another study participant: ‘A lot of girls can actually do it (play cricket) without realising. They think they’re really bad, but they’re awesome’ (focus-group two). This strengthens the importance of children developing fundamental motor skills when they are young. O’Brien, Belton, and Issartel (2016) concluded from their study that approximately 11% of participants had either mastered or nearly mastered all nine of the fundamental motor skills (run, skip, horizontal jump, vertical jump, kick, catch, overhand throw, strike and stationary dribble) by the age of 13. Whilst it is not impossible to attain the core fundamental motor skills in early adolescence, it was recognized by participants in this current study that some individuals may be required to practice more to improve: ‘If I put in the time to improve, I could probably play’ (focus-group four) and ‘You can’t just say, I’m not good at cricket. You have to try and practice’ (focus-group two). Individuals who have not mastered the core fundamental motor skills by early adolescence nor practice the fundamental motor skills may find it challenging and, at times, intimidating participating in sport with sport specific skills required.

Interpersonal – ‘Some of the boys don’t let us play because we are girls’

Boys were commonly reported to be a barrier to participation in sport in general and specifically to cricket for adolescent females. Consistently, research has established that boys sometimes tease the females, intimidate them and were too competitively focused (Bevan and Fane 2017; Eime et al. 2010; Slater and Tiggemann 2010, 2011). The issue of males teasing, may also be emphasized in the case of cricket, whereby females may feel intimidated by their skills, since this is a traditionally male-dominated sport. This is reinforced in the current study as participants mentioned that they were apprehensive about joining in at cricket due to the boys’ attitude, judgement and intimidation: ‘The boys might say something’ (focus-group four) and ‘They make fun of you’ (focus-group three). Another key factor in the relationship between males, females and physical activity was the notion that females often have less motor skill abilities therefore making them ‘not as good’ as the males. The participants in this study often felt that their perceived lack of
competence excluded them from playing with the boys: ‘If you tried out for the cricket team, mainly boys would get in, unless you are really good’ (focus-group two) and ‘Boys are just selfish, they think they are the best, and they can do it better than girls’ (focus-group two). It may be that the female participants felt that in order to reduce teasing from the boys, they needed to have a high level of competency in male-dominated sports. This is supported by Casey et al. (2009) who were able to conclude that due to the females’ lack of motor skills, the males intimidated, embarrassed and excluded the females. However, some participants noted that some boys are able to help improve cricket skills by teaching based on their experiences: ‘The girls can encourage you, but the boys can teach you’ (focus-group one).

Additionally, as cricket is seen as a traditionally male-dominated sport, some of the participants felt that cricket and other traditional male sports were portrayed exclusively for males therefore making it unusual for females to participate: ‘Some of the boys don’t let us play because we are girls’ (focus-group one) and ‘They might think there is more boys that like it, it is their game’ (focus-group four) and ‘I think it would be weird if I did cricket. Only boys do it’ (focus-group one). This is reinforced by Abadi (2017) who suggest that females do not participate in certain sports to conform with gender roles and social norms. Furthermore, Green (2010) states that there is a perception of females not suiting certain sports because of social norms. These social norms can be also be reinforced or negated by parents and their views of physical activity and sport (Nielsen et al. 2012).

Additionally, parents play a crucial role in female adolescent physical activity participation (Casey et al. 2009; Craike, Symons, and Zimmermann 2009; Eime et al. 2010; Ferry and Lund 2016; Hardy et al. 2010). The support that family provide adolescent females plays an important role in exposing them to physical activity and ensuring that they can attend through facilitation of transport. As this current study suggests, the parents are responsible, and often expected, to organize transport for their children to physical activity or sporting events:

They would say if I really wanted to (I could play cricket), but I’d probably have to give up a sport… They would probably say you would have to give up one of them because we can’t keep driving you to everything. (focus-group two)

Results of this study also propose the idea that parents would allow their children to play whichever sport they wish such as cricket, however, they may have to drop out of another sport: ‘I tried to get my parents to let me play in (cricket) Summer, but they said I did too much sport already’ (focus-group two). This could be due to time restraints as cricket, in comparison to many other sports, is played for many hours. Some parents may not have the time to watch their child play cricket on a weekend. Whilst the reasoning behind why is not clear, Craike, Symons, and Zimmermann (2009) claim that their adolescent female participants were forced to reduce the variety of sports they were playing as they got older. It could be assumed that parents prefer their children to play a couple sports over the year as opposed to many sports once they are older so they can also focus on school work as well.

In relation to siblings, they can play a significant role in the exposure to specific sports or physical activity. This is reinforced through the findings of this current study, that suggest that siblings, especially older male siblings, enabled the exposure to sports such as cricket and, provided opportunity to play in a casual setting, and taught skills
relevant to the sport: ‘My brother played cricket, so I just played’ (focus-group one) and ‘They might encourage you to come out and practice with them. Like do you want to come and play, and I will teach you how to play’ (focus-group one). The exposure that siblings can provide to sport is crucial as young females may not have a similar exposure at school or within their community. Research conducted by Casey et al. (2009) and Craike, Symons, and Zimmermann (2009) explain adolescent females were likely to ‘follow in the footsteps’ of their older siblings and the siblings provided encouragement and the opportunity for adolescent females to be active. Although, sometimes the exposure to sport does not come from within a family, but from friends at school (Laird et al. 2016).

The influence of friends on adolescent girls is, at times, underestimated. Females who have not been exposed to physical activity or sport by their parents or siblings rely on their friends to guide them into participation. Friends are relied on due to the assumption that playing sport with friends leads to a key intrapersonal factor of fun and enjoyment which is supported by Casey et al. (2009) and Skille and Osteras (2011). Participants in this current study identify that making new friends motivates them to play sport: ‘I am doing netball, part of it is that I enjoy the game, but also making new friends’ (focus-group two) and ‘I started playing sport to get better at sport and to make new friends’ (focus-group one). Physical activity not only allows for friends to participate together, but also facilitates the development of new friendships which is important for adolescent females (Eime et al. 2010). Lee, Lee, and Min-Haeng (2004) suggested that adolescents were encouraged greatly if their peers valued and participated in physical activity. This current study strengthens the views and influence of friendships on adolescent females’ participation in physical activity and sport: ‘One of my friends asked me to join, so I did’ (focus-group three) and ‘The reason I joined basketball is because I liked it, and because lots of my friends played’ (focus-group two). Also, within this study, the idea of having someone of the same gender to participate in cricket with is crucial. Adolescent females are more inclined to play cricket if they know there is another female when the rest of the team is boys.

**Organizational and environmental – ‘You don’t really see female cricketers’**

Within this current study, it was established that exposure to physical activity, sport, and more specifically, cricket, at school can sometimes be the students’ first experience. Results from this current study show that adolescent females enjoying implementing skills they had learnt in Physical Education classes into informal games at lunch-time and into more formal competitions at interschool sports: ‘I always play cricket at school’ (focus-group two) and ‘I went to a school competition for cricket’ (focus-group one). This gives students a chance to develop their skills and test their skills against others within a school environment. The exposure to physical activity and sport is supported by Casey et al. (2009) and Craike, Symons, and Zimmermann (2009) who found that school Physical Education provides an opportunity for students to learn a range of new skills. Furthermore, Langille and Rodger (2010) established that Physical Education should not just be about exposing students to physical activity and providing them with opportunities, but also teach them and influence their perceptions on health. In addition to Physical Education classes providing exposure, schools providing opportunities for students to compete at lunch-time and against other schools is important.
Whilst the school provides some opportunities for females to participate in physical activity and sport, adolescent females do not feel in general that there are enough opportunities for them to participate. The notion that opportunities are limited for females in sport, and in particular, sports that males traditionally play is reinforced by Slater and Tiggemann (2010), Ferry and Lund (2016) and Bevan and Fane (2017). Slater and Tiggemann (2010) found that boys had more sports to choose from when looking to play a sport as opposed to females. Results from this study demonstrate that the female participants felt that if there were the opportunity to participate in an all girls’ team, more females would play: ‘I think to get more girls we should encourage them more. Like a girls’ team and a boys’ team’ (focus-group two) and ‘if they get the chance to, and they like it, they should play’ (focus-group two). Additionally, Ferry and Lund (2016) concluded that sport participation is often limited by gender expectations in society. These expectations can be established by family, friends, peers and strangers (Migliaccio and Berg 2007) and can lead to drop out or not participating in certain sports due to the sport been portrayed as not appropriate for females (Abadi 2017). Bevan and Fane (2017) conducted a study which investigated adolescent females opinions about participating in traditionally male sports. The participants stated that participating in a traditionally male sport can be ostracizing and not conducive of creating an enjoyable environment because of the negative connotations associated with females playing traditionally male sports. This strengthens the concept that there are societal perceptions about which sports and activities are appropriate for females and males instead of the person, themselves, playing an active role in participating in something they enjoy.

The pathway for females to aspire towards is also not as clear or acknowledged as the pathway for boys. This could be due to the ideology of sport is not females, therefore, there have been no developed or proven pathways for females to progress their sport. Findings from this current study explore the less-than-regular viewing of female cricket on television: ‘You don’t really see female cricketers’. (focus-group one) and ‘I think if we want to get more girls, we should actually like have it as advertising’ (focus-group two). Pavlidis (2018) explains that females have been excluded and marginalized in many forms of sport thus shaping the perception, value and coverage of female sport. Although, the lack of female cricket coverage on television that the participants discuss may be due to the influential role of their parents and what their parents allowed them to view. Due to the generational gap between parents and their children, some parents may not be open to or aware that female cricket is on television as it would never occurred during their upbringing. Slater and Tiggemann (2010) found that adolescent females believed there were less opportunities for females to play elite sport as a career. Additionally, there is the likelihood that adolescent females do not see other females playing cricket in their local communities.

By not having exposure to seeing female cricket locally or on televisions, adolescent females are unable to see or aspire to play cricket as there is no clear pathway to reach an elite level or role models to follow. However, the importance of a visible pathway across the lifespan to accommodate for young females aspiring to play elite level cricket, and young female adults who wish to play community club level, is vital as it provides a clear path to follow to reach their goal. It also assists young cricketers who wish to follow a similar path to their role model. The findings from the research Caple, Greenwood, and Lumby (2011) conducted strengthen the idea of females not receiving television
coverage. Caple, Greenwood, and Lumby (2011) determined that female sport receives significantly less air time than males on Australian television regardless of the level of success which does not allow females to get the recognition for their achievements nor show a pathway for young adolescent girls to follow in the footsteps of. Furthermore, Toffoletti (2017) suggests that the media coverage female athletes receive is generally sexualized in nature which discredits the athletes and their achievements. Conversely, females who are fans of sport can sometimes be viewed as disingenuous which strengthens the concept that sport is a male domain (Toffoletti 2017). As a consequence of discredited female athletes and female fans who do not want to appear as ‘fake’ fans, the concept of role models may not be as influential as it could be. Meier (2015) suggests that female sport role models play an important role in being an ambassador for their sport and female participation.

In addition to this, female sporting role models have the ability to advocate for and motivate young females who aspire to hold a powerful position, which in turn, breaks down the barriers to stereotyping and societal gender barriers. Results in this study drew comparisons to the Australian Football League (AFL) who have recently introduced a Women’s AFL (AFLW) competition which is on par to the Men’s AFL. The participants identified that the AFL is now encouraging females to play, and maybe cricket should develop in a similar way: ‘Footy is starting to encourage some girls to play because now they have got the women’s AFL teams’ (focus-group one). Interestingly, Cricket Australia released the Women’s Big Bash League (WBBL) – the equivalent of the Men’s Big Bash League (BBL) – in the 2015/16 season, which completed two seasons before the AFLW began their first season. This reiterates the lack of exposure women’s cricket has received as the participants in this study were able to comment on the positive things the AFL were doing for women’s sport, but they were not aware of a national women’s cricket competition that is aligned with the BBL franchises. Therefore, a lack of exposure to female cricketers at both elite level and bottom grass-roots level, is likely to influence participation for females. If they do not see it as an opportunity for females, if they do not see other females playing, they are not likely to see club-based cricket as a viable option for them to play.

Whilst role models and player pathways are influences on female participation in sport, the actual clubs and sporting organizations play an important role in attracting and retaining players. Results of this current study show that adolescent females are more inclined to play for a club who support, include and encourage them, as well as challenging them when it was needed: ‘Support, encourage, and teach us’ (focus-group one) and ‘Challenge you, so you are not doing stuff you already know, but you are doing stuff you don’t know’ (focus-group one). However, some of the adolescent females were not comfortable playing for a club where winning was crucial: ‘Like if you don’t win something, they might get really angry at you and the team, because you didn’t win’ (focus-group four). Research conducted by Eime et al. (2010) and Slater and Tiggemann (2010) validate the concept that adolescent females were not comfortable with aggressive, unsupportive, strict and unfair coaches within community sports clubs. This was supported by Casey et al. (2009) who found that club sport was more competitive and exclusive than school sport, thus making adolescent females more apprehensive about joining sporting clubs.

A unique finding in this current study, which has not previously been reported, is cricket sporting clubs only recognizing male sporting achievements: ‘You go into the club rooms
and there is just photos and jumpers and trophies of people, the men, who have won’ (focus-group one) and ‘If you give the men the achievements, but some ladies would have done it too’ (focus-group three). This is because cricket in Australia, until recently, has been a male-dominated club-based sport. The club environments are important influences on participation, and for adolescent females, they need to feel welcomed (Eime, Payne, and Harvey 2008) and a lack of visibility of females throughout the club is a deterrent for female participation. Additionally, Pavlidis (2018) stated that clubs need to make their female players ‘feel special and bring them in part of the club’ (p. 349). Results in this current study show that adolescent females would feel undervalued and that their achievements are not equal to the boys and males within their sporting club if they are not having their achievements recognized. The adolescent females wanted their achievements to be valued the same as their male counterparts: ‘A bit like, I have done something great, why isn’t my picture on the wall’ (focus-group four). Sporting clubs can counteract the masculine stigma attached to sport and their club by supporting and encouraging the adolescent females within their club, that includes their on-field performance, but also recognizing and valuing their success. Additionally, sporting clubs are able to develop policies that focus on equity for participants, a culture that facilitates enjoyment and fairness for all, and a welcoming environment.

Policy – ‘I would play but I would at least have to have another girl in with me’

Findings from this current study also show that adolescent females would rather play cricket in an all females’ competition: ‘If there was lots of other people doing it, and lots of other girls doing it’ (focus-group one) and ‘I would play but I would at least have to have another girl in with me’ (focus-group two). This reinforces that National Sporting Organisations and State Sporting Associations need to consider female only competitions and teams to encourage participation that filters down into communities. Cricket Australia has a strategic focus of being the leading sport for females by providing opportunities, making participation for females sustainable, providing welcoming environments and making female cricket a viable career (Cricket Australia 2017b). The participants in this study were open to the idea of starting in a girls’ only competition to develop skills, and if they wanted to challenge themselves, to play with the boys: ‘You could start with girls against girls, then try for mixed’ (focus-group three). To our knowledge, no other studies have researched females’ only competitions in traditionally male-dominated sports such as cricket by females who do not play cricket. By having a females’ only competition, adolescent females are more likely to participate in cricket as opposed to playing in a boys’ team against other boys.

Limitations

It is important to recognize the limitations within this study. The sample of participants was limited to two Catholic primary schools within Ballarat, thus limiting socio-economic status and diversity. Of government and Catholic primary schools in Ballarat, the Catholic primary schools have an Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) average score of 1,053.6 compared to 974.8 of government primary schools. The ICSEA differences between the Catholic and government primary schools in Ballarat may
suggest that students at the Catholic primary schools could be exposed to differing parental values, education, affordability and accessibility regarding physical activity and sport. Additionally, due to time restraints, focus-groups were limited to an hour with 20 participants overall. Finally, all participants participated in weekly physical activity therefore their views about physical activity, sport and cricket may differ to those who do not participate in physical activity. It was encouraged for the participants to think about their peers who were not active, and empathize how they may feel in regard to physical activity, sport and more specifically, cricket participation. It is imperative to be cautious when generalizing findings due to these limitations.

Future research and practical implications

As it is one of the first studies in the specific area of females and participation in traditionally male-dominated sports, future research could strengthen the research in this area. Future research could delve into further conversations with females to understand what would encourage them to participate in more sport in general; parental attitudes about their children, more specifically their daughters, participating in traditionally male-dominated sports; adolescent males and their views and attitudes towards females participating in traditionally male-dominated sports; and evaluating strategies that are currently implemented by sporting bodies. Practical implications of this research could lead to local, regional and/or state level cricketing organizations to assist in developing an all girls’ cricket programme, which in turn, may provide more opportunities for females to participate in cricket. Additionally, this research could assist in evaluating current girls’ only cricket programmes to identify if they implement some of the key factors that influence female participation in cricket. Finally, this research can provide considerations for decision makers at all levels of sport. For example, this could include player pathway clarity from a national and state perspective, development of female only teams and competitions and ensuring coaches have the correct accreditation to assist players in their skill development, and developing policies on an inclusive and supportive environment and culture from a club perspective.

Conclusion

This paper contributes to research in the area of adolescent female participation in a male-dominated sport such as cricket. Whilst some of these barriers may be similar to sport in general, they are exacerbated in male-dominated sports because females have not had previous opportunities to play and develop skills due to societal expectations that cricket is not a sport for them. Whilst participation in sport is not for everyone, we provide some recommendations specifically for females in traditionally male-dominated sports. To reduce the barriers to participation in cricket for adolescent females, multiple key factors should be considered. To enhance participation in cricket for adolescent females, it is recommended that the following be considered; implementing skill development for adolescent females, which in turn, may provide confidence, and therefore the opportunity, to compete confidently and competently; develop a females’ only cricket competition which incorporates skill development, and facilitates friendships. By having a females’ only competition, it gives females a choice as to whether they play with
females or males; having a clear and visible pathway across the lifespan for females. This includes those who aspire to play elite level cricket, but also those who wish to play community club level cricket; and finally, sporting clubs to be supportive encouraging and inclusive, but also recognizing and valuing female achievements on the same level as for what they do for males. This could be further enhanced through the media valuing and representing female achievements. These recommendations can heavily be influenced by decision makers at a national, state, regional and club level. For example, changes could include; ensuring coaches are qualified to provide adequate skill development to retain players; developing female only teams and competitions with appropriate rules to encourage success; providing a player pathway; and ensuring clubs have a supportive and inclusive environment and culture for all players.

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References


Appendix: Interview questions

**Background**

- Do you participate in leisure-time physical activity?
  - What activities do you participate in?
- What sport(s) do you participate in?
- What age did you start participating?
- How did you get involved in that/those sport(s)?
  - Did family/friends/media coverage/school influence this?
- Are there sports that you did participate in but then stopped?
  - Why did you stop?
  - Would you participate in that sport again?

**Intrapersonal factors**

- If you participate in sport or did, why do/did you?
  - Did friends/fun/social reasons/pressure from family influence this?
- If you do not participate in sport, why?
  - Not enjoy it, don’t have time, other interests
- Do you feel you have adequate skills to participate in sport?
  - Were you taught skills at schools?
- Have you been introduced to or played cricket before? If so, where?
  - Family, friends, school, Christmas
- Do you have any experience playing cricket at all?
  - Beach, backyard, community club, school, T20 Blast
- What do you think your skills are like in cricket?
  - Can you bat, bowl or field?
  - Which do you prefer to do?
- What are your thoughts on participation in cricket?
  - Do you think you might participate if the opportunity was there?

**Interpersonal factors**

- Do your friends influence/impact/support your participation in sport?
  - How?
- Do any of your friends/family participate in cricket?
  - Community club, beach, backyard, social, indoor
- Does your family influence/impact/support your participation in sport?
  - How?
- Now thinking about cricket, does your family/friends influence your participation or not in cricket?
  - Why and how?
  - Do you play/not play because your family member does/does not?
- Do sporting role models (e.g. elite players, school PE teachers, playing parents) influence your participation in sport?
  - Do you participate in sport because of certain sport stars?
  - In cricket, do you know any ‘famous’ female cricketers?
- Does cricket, being a traditionally male sport, influence your choice on types of sports to participate in? For example, netball is traditionally more of a female sport.
  - Do you not play because you don’t want to be seen a ‘tomboy’?
**Organizational/environmental factors**

- Are there any factors relating to the cricket clubs that influence your participation in cricket?
  - Do they have a welcoming environment?
  - Why would you choose one club over another?
- Do you have access to community facilities to participate?
  - Do you have access to ovals, courts, gyms, nets
- Would you play competitive cricket?
  - Why or why not?
  - Could it clash with other sports such as netball on the same day?

**Policy factors**

- How could things be changed for you to start participating in cricket?

**Conclusion**

- Is there anything you would like to share about barriers to female adolescent participation in cricket?