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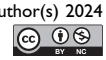
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‘This is my team … we’ve got this and we’re not going to stand for any of this shit!’: A queer anarchist do it yourself approach to football

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Abstract
This article critically explores the experiences of nine football players who identify as women, transgender and non-binary, and their perceptions of playing in queer DIY footballing spaces, focused around four key themes. The themes that emerged were the outsider identity, the decentring of competitiveness, queer community and temporalities and prefigurative practice and proliferation. Participants cited the political bottom-up structure of these football spaces as important to their (re)engagement with football. Furthermore, participants felt they were able to act out forms of queer activism through DIY practice and by playing a sport that they had previously been marginalised from due to their gender and/or sexuality. Drawing on a queer anarchist lens, this article examines how participants seek to disrupt hegemonic discourses within a sport that is often perceived as a masculine pursuit. This article argues for more prefigurative and diverse sporting practices to allow freer participation for marginalised identities within football.

Keywords
Queer, anarchism, prefiguration, DIY, football, gender

Introduction

Within the UK, the rise of women’s football has been well documented by scholars (Bell 2019; Clarkson et al. 2020). However, despite the FA’s efforts to make the sport more inclusive, mainstream footballing discourse still reflects persistent discriminatory forms such as racism, nationalism, homophobia and misogyny (Cleland et al., 2022; Leslie-Walker and Taylor, 2023; Pope et al., 2022). This article examines the experiences of players who participate in countercultural footballing practices through using a Do It Yourself (DIY) approach. DIY football seeks to articulate and create alternative spaces where football

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can be reimagined in a way that addresses the societal ills typically seen as symptomatic of the game (Pollock, 2021; Totten, 2014). DIY football clubs are run by the players, for the players. As well as self-running a football team, participants often create their own kits and merchandise, organise fundraising through DIY gigs, tournaments and other community events; attempting to practise alternative ways of organising and playing football that are influenced by anarchist and punk values. Within the limited work to date on how anarchist values have been applied to DIY football to create alternative, inclusive sporting practices (Kuhn, 2019; Simpson, 2015; Totten 2011, 2017; Zaimakis, 2023), it is notable that women's and marginalised gender players' voices are lacking. As some DIY football teams have their origins in local punk scenes, maybe this is not surprising. Ensminger (2010) and Strong (2011) document the 'forgetting' of women and queers in subcultural punk histories. Strong (2011:4) states 'there is a trend within contemporary society for women to become invisible and be forgotten when the past becomes "history"'. Academic scholarship on the DIY ethos of roller derby provides innovative and comprehensive accounts of women's experiences of DIY sport, punk and subcultural sporting practice (Beaver, 2012; Pavlidis, 2012). Informed by these studies, this article continues and extends the scholarship regarding women-centred DIY subcultural sporting spaces through the lens of football. Drawing upon qualitative interviews with nine women, non-binary and transgender players, four key themes are considered: the outsider identity; the decentring of competitiveness; queer community and temporalities; and prefigurative practice and proliferation. Discussion develops to highlight how football spaces that utilise bottom-up, prefigurative DIY practices can encourage wider participation for alternative identities within sport. Firstly, I will provide some further context regarding DIY Football and the queer anarchist lens adopted here, along with details of the methodology/methods.

DIY football

The most comprehensive account of different international DIY grassroots clubs has been compiled by Kuhn in his book *Soccer vs. The State* (2019). He interviews founding members of FC Vova (Lithuania) and Autonomos FC (Brazil) which both originated from a group of local punks getting together to arrange games of football. A quote from Danilo Cajazeira from Autonomos FC celebrates the utilisation of the DIY ethos to create their club stating 'we figured that our passion for DIY punk mixed with a passion for football could only make us stronger!' (Kuhn, 2019:214). Republica Internationale is another DIY team that arose from left wing origins (Totten, 2011, 2017; Tucker, 2011). The club is central to this article as both myself and most of the research participants are situated within the club.

Republica is an explicitly left-wing grassroots football club with teams that participate in several Sunday Leagues. However, Republica is not just a Sunday League team but is a member of multiple UK-based and overseas football networks of similar left-wing football clubs. They hold similar DIY values in their approach to organising, playing and supporting football. The teams in these networks regularly host tournaments that deny the importance of competitiveness, domination and winning. Instead, they place value on footballing space for friendship, community and knowledge-exchange of left-wing practices within alternative football. Republica is a dichotomy in that it is a club placed within the formal hierarchical institution of the FA Sunday League seeking to instigate change from within; whilst also being situated in other autonomous networks and spaces that present a more prefigurative vision of how football should be experienced.

Saturday Football (SF) is an informal beginners' football session that was set up by two members of Republica in collaboration with Yorkshire St Pauli. This session was created as a safe, informal and friendly space to support women who had never played football or were returning to it after a break. The sessions have grown over the past five years and several years ago decided to explicitly add 'Non-Binary' to the name to promote a queer-inclusive environment. All sessions are non-committal, pay-as-you-feel and

run on a weekly basis. Through SF, many players have progressed and then joined Republica. In addition to SF, a new session has been set up called Trans and Non Binary Football Leeds (TNBFL). Where Republica was unable to meet the needs of trans-men, players decided to utilise a DIY ethos to create a new space explicitly designed for transgender and non-binary players. TNBFL follows a similar format to SF and is run by those who play within the session, all who identify as non-binary or transgender. All three footballing spaces utilise a DIY ethos which I will now consider within the theoretical context of queer anarchism.

Queer anarchism, prefiguration and DIY

A queer anarchist lens has been utilised throughout the research. First, I will define queer theory, anarchism, queer anarchism, prefiguration, and DIY. Finally, I will briefly define hegemonic masculinity and gender binaries as they are also referred to within this article when looking at the broader context of football within the UK.

Queer theory seeks to question heteronormative discourses around gender and sexuality through the disruption of the heterosexual matrix and hegemonic societal practices (Butler, 1990). In Butler's (1993) later work, she emphasises the importance of a continually reflexive approach to queer theory where the usage of the term 'queer' cannot remain static as its purpose is to always question the hegemonic order. Halberstam's (2003, 2005) and Nicholas' (2012) work highlights the importance of queer communities and subcultures to create alternative modes of enacting adulthood in a way that is oppositional to heteronormative practices of family-making. Halberstam (2003:328) refers to this as 'queer time' which they define as 'a different mode of temporality that might arise out of an immersion in club cultures'. This is considered within this article, as most of my participants have entered a footballing community at a phase in their lives which typically ought to be a time for settling down and reproducing children (Halberstam, 2003, 2005).

Anarchist theory seeks to dismantle all hierarchies within society by creating leaderless organisational structures which celebrate both individual autonomy and collective action (Graeber, 2004; Kinna, 2019; Ward 1973). Nicholas (2012), Halberstam (2003), Jeppesen (2010) and Shepard (2010) have identified similar engagement within both anarchist and queer theory of deconstructing hegemonic power structures and discourses. Queer anarchist scholars argue for a continually reflexive and intersectional lens in both theory and practice (Ben-Moshe et al., 2012; Volcano, 2012). By utilising these theories in tandem, I will be critically exploring intersectional dynamics of power with a focus on how gender and sexuality is de/constructed within football contexts.

Prefiguration is an important concept to consider when utilising a queer anarchist lens (Boggs, 1977; Jeffrey and Dyson, 2021; Raekstad and Gradin, 2020). Prefiguration encourages localised, radical praxis in the present. Jeffrey and Dyson (2021:643) explain it as 'an inherently spatial and performative genre of political activism in which people enact a vision of change'. A key concept of prefiguration is that 'ends and means ought to be seen as of a kind' (Swain, 2019:49). Typical prefigurative praxis includes but is not limited to consensual decision-making, bottom-up power structures, rejection of authoritative hierarchical institutions and creating social and community relations that are free from oppression. Prefigurative practice can be seen in the queer-inclusive environments of SF, Republica's autonomous network tournaments and TNBFL.

Jeppeson (2018:203) describes DIY as 'the quintessential practice of anarchist politics, bringing together other anarchist concepts such as prefiguration, anti-capitalism and horizontalism that are foundational to anarchist organising and cultural practices'. DIY was first considered within music and its surrounding counterculture, particularly within the punk scene as a rejection of the music industry and inauthentic capitalist mainstream society (McKay, 1998). However, DIY practice can also be applied to other forms of cultural production (Bennett and Guerra, 2018:18). Like punk's idea that any amateur can pick up a guitar and

start a band, DIY football believes that anyone can pick up a ball and start a team. Within Republica, and its surrounding network, this DIY ethos is evident. DIY follows the same ethos of prefigurative praxis in rejecting mainstream practices and culture to create alternative ways of being. In this sense, DIY and prefiguration can be seen as similar in their practice and intent (Jeppeson, 2018) and I will use both terms throughout this article.

Finally, both hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987) and the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990) are drawn upon within the wider context of gender and footballing participation in the UK. Connell (1987:840) states that hegemonic masculinity is 'based on practise that permits men's collective dominance over women to continue'. Scholarship indicates that hegemonic masculinity is experienced at all levels of football culture within the UK (Pfitser, 2015). The heterosexual matrix is an important theoretical tool to be considered alongside hegemonic masculinity as it also concerns the hierarchisation of sex, gender and sexuality. Butler (1990: 151) believes the heterosexual matrix 'assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender … that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality'. Within football, and most sports, gender binaries are often insisted upon, especially at the competitive level which leads to the exclusion of marginalised genders (Caudwell, 2014; Edwards et al., 2015; Themen, 2016).

Methodology and methods

Rasmussen (2017) says that what we choose to read is always from a political and ethical position. My utilisation of a queer anarchist lens provides an indication of my positionality. I am a White cis-gender woman who identifies as a queer feminist who attempts anarchist praxis within their activism and scholarship. My position as a football activist who participates in both footballing spaces within my research frames me as a participant-observer (Skeggs, 2011). Due to this, all interview participants had a previous relationship with me. I hope this alleviated some feelings of intellectual vanguardism (Firth, 2013; Graeber, 2004; Morini, 2017). I believe this was evident from the informality of the language used by participants, and what appeared to be an ease in which they shared their experiences with me. I was an 'insider' in research terms in the football spaces within which empirical data was collected. This was evident as, at times during interview, participants would refer to an incident that I was present at and so would potentially not fill in as many details of the story/event. At times, I would ask them to clarify the story as if I wasn't there, but I also have summarised some events from my own experiences. Being situated 'in the field' during these events allowed me to have a deeper relational understanding and, therefore, ask more specific questions during interview and analysis. Although my positionality also posed challenges; I had to reflect on which moments were most salient, who was central to these events, and why it was necessary to include some observational moments and not others. The events that are discussed were chosen because of their salience to the participants as they were spoken about by several players at length. I also believe them to be representative of some of the challenges that marginalised genders face when playing Sunday League. This methodology of bricolage is advocated by Morini (2017:166) as a form of punk ethnography where the researchers 'engage in messy, noisy dialogues where voices both mix and clash'. By being situated within my research group, I had to be reflexive about my ontological and epistemological positioning throughout the research process (Nicholas, 2012).

Before conducting my interviews, I reflected on ethical considerations for my research and completed an ethics application through my university's Ethics Committee. I utilised the British Educational Research Association's ethical guidelines to support this process (BERA, 2018). I recruited research participants through posting an advert on Spond, an app that is used by both Republica and SF for messaging, organising events, matches and training. All participants came forward for interviews voluntarily, were made aware of the

research process throughout, and gave written consent to participate. I complied with confidential data collection and storage and have given participants pseudonyms to protect their identities as much as possible. Prior to publication, I contacted all participants and offered to send a copy of my article so they could comment if they felt their voices were not represented accurately or felt they were identifiable within the work.

My research group comprised of 9 participants aged between 25 and 40 who had all participated in Republica and/or SF. My research asked for participants who identified as women, transgender, or non-binary who had started playing football for the first time or since school. 4 of my participants identified as cisgender women, 3 as non-binary, 1 as non-binary/transmasc and 1 as a trans-man. When reflecting on my research sample, it was important to consider what Caudwell (2014) describes as 'the hierarchy of invisibility'. For example, no trans-women came forward for my research, so I had to consider how their voices were excluded. Another important consideration is that all participants were White, able-bodied, held at least a bachelor's degree, and mostly self-identified as middle-class or emerging middle-class. A limitation to this research is a lack of working-class, disabled and minority ethnic voices being present. Queer anarchist theorists such as Ben-Moshe et al. (2012) and Volcano (2012) highlight the importance of considering intersectional power dynamics with queer anarchist research. Some feminist sport and leisure research engages with intersectionality and methodology (Watson, 2018) but there is evidently a gap in analysis of DIY footballing spaces.

I conducted 9 semi-structured qualitative interviews for my data collection. Additionally, I used photo elicitation as a useful tool to evoke feelings, memories and stories (Harper, 2002). Participants were asked to bring one photograph from school age and one from adulthood that they felt represented them playing football/sport. To interpret my data, I utilised reflexive post structural thematic analysis (Jackson and Mazzei, 2013; MacLure, 2013). Due to the richness of my data, many other themes arose from my research. However, for this article, I have narrowed this to five core discussion points. These themes were chosen for their relation to queer anarchism, DIY and prefigurative practice and it is these I next turn to.

Discussion of themes

Now, I present some of the themes that arose from my research findings. First, I will discuss participants' experiences of the outsider identity and how this is related to queercore. This will be followed by the importance of decentring competition and ability. Then I will discuss how players have negotiated/experienced their gender/sexuality in informal spaces through the theme of queer community and temporalities. I will then discuss prefigurative DIY footballing spaces as potential solutions for marginalised identities. Finally, I will summarise my findings in the discussion.

The outsider identity and queercore

When recounting their first experiences of entering a new football space, nearly all participants cited a welcoming, friendly and non-judgemental atmosphere designed for beginners or those returning to football after a long period. Dukic et al. (2017) and Stride et al. (2019) discuss the importance of inclusive footballing spaces that alleviate feelings of the outsider identity and social exclusion. This is important to consider for my participants who, due to their gender, previously felt marginalisation within football. SF was created to alleviate anxieties of marginalisation for new players, and this was evident in my participants responses:

> Robin:
>
> I feel much more welcome to play now than I did then. Because … that Saturday session in particular … everybody's welcome … and it's not pressured. And I don't feel judged. (Eden)

> I think that there was something … about … the fact that it was the beginner's space, and the fact that it wasn't like a totally gendered space. That made it feel more interesting, more welcoming.

Most participants named particular people who made them feel welcome and supported during their first sessions which alleviated feelings of the outsider identity. Clark (2012) states the importance of sporting spaces being inclusive of a range of identities and sporting bodies. This stands in contrast to some players' experiences of other footballing teams and spaces (such as university teams) where cliquey-ness was referred to as a deterrent to playing.

Three participants cited university football teams as unappealing due to their cliquey-ness and feeling like an outsider identity within that. The outsider identity became a common theme across my research, most obviously felt for those when recounting school/late teen/early adulthood experiences. Several participants expressed their identity as being alternative, outside the mainstream or part of a particular subculture due to their politics, fashion, or music taste. This was also mostly embedded with a queer identity. Despite one participant feeling there was a more identifiable lesbian presence within their university football team, they felt these players still fitted into a more mainstream, digestible lesbian sport aesthetic and lifestyle. Devonport et al. (2019) researched female university football and netball teams and found that femininities and sexualities were self-policed within the teams. This was reflected in Morgan's experience:

> A lot of people that I played with were a very … specific type of … either quite … femme woman who wanted to … be out with the rugby lads and very … heteronormative … Or it was … 'we are lesbians' … who just felt different to me. I always just felt … a bit scruffy and a bit queer and weird. And … they were like the two … polished versions… you know, like 'we're like polished gay people that go to … certain types of clubs' and … 'we like to go to … VIP and drink cocktails' or, just really … straight people that were like 'yeah, we wanna hang out with the rugby lads and … we really fancy men'. And I was just a bit like, 'Oh, I just want to … still smoke cigarettes and not go to the VIP areas and go and … sit on the grass and drink some cans.'

Morgan explains how they felt that their desire to drink cans and smoke rollies in a park did not fit the typical sports habitus and interests of their teammates. They felt instantaneously more comfortable seeing others who fitted a more subcultural identity within a footballing space.

> Sport is a place for me to like … still enact my values of social justice… and that feels nice to me. Like, it feels like I'm not having to maybe give up any part of myself.

To Morgan, subcultural identity and presentation were inextricably linked with queer political values. Nault (2018) definition of queercore is a useful reference point here. Queercore relates to an identity where gender and sexuality interplay with radical politics and subcultures. Although queercore specifically refers to queer politics and the punk music scene, parallels can be drawn between punk and the alternative football scene, both largely inhibited and originated by straight cisgender-men (Nault, 2018; Totten, 2011). Halberstam (2003, 2005), Nash (2016) and Nault (2018) discuss queer subcultures as an alternative to 'the oppressions of the mainstream and the lifeless sexual politics and assimilationist tendencies of dominant gay and lesbian society' (Nault, 2018:2). Nash (2016) and Drury (2011) argue that despite being regarded as an oppressed minority, lesbian and gay communities can be just as vigilant in their self-policing of certain queer identities. This was felt by Morgan within the university team where they felt like an outsider for not fitting particular gendered and sexual normative cultures. Morgan, and other participants, expressed the importance of feeling valid in their identity when in a footballing space. When they felt othered due to their queer subcultural identity, it ultimately led to drop out. Halberstam (2003:328) believes 'queer subcultures afford us a perfect opportunity to depart from a normative model of youth cultures as stages on the way to adulthood,

allowing us to map out different forms, or the refusal, of adulthood and new modes of deliberate deviance'. Most participants discussed alternative lifestyles which most felt they could not separate from their experience of playing football due to the communities that are created within a DIY footballing space. These was reaffirmed later by Morgan explaining:

> I also felt … in order to … be the best I can be at football; I have to be around people that … make me not feel like a weirdo.

Similarly, Eden referred to their footballing community as having alternative identities:

> I feel like the people I play football with are a very strange bunch of misfits of … varying ages, who are turning up to matches… hungover. It's a very different world.

Here, participants acknowledged an outsider identity that is inverted to an insider identity due to the inclusive, subcultural and queer ethos of their footballing spaces. Similar themes arose in Beaver's (2012) research into DIY sport within roller derby leagues where participants found that the DIY ethos allowed them to take ownership and find new senses of belonging. Previously they had felt alienated from team sports participation due to their subcultural identities as 'misfits' and 'outsiders'. Halberstam (2003:314) argues that these subcultures 'make visible the forms of unbelonging and disconnection that are necessary to the creation of community'. This sense of alternative community was cited by many as a source of joy, support and solidarity. The opportunity to DIY gave participants a heightened sense of ownership and pride in their footballing stories. One participant summarised this by saying:

> This is my team … we've got this and we're not going to stand for any of this shit! And we've actually really got each other, and we get to play together and play really well together and like, prove people wrong and experience a lot of joy through that.

Participating in queer-inclusive and subcultural DIY football spaces provided new ways of engaging with sports activism whilst simultaneously providing senses of joy and belonging. These were important factors for most participants in (re)entering and maintaining participation in football.

Decentring competitiveness and ability within informal football spaces

Due to limited experiences of previously playing football, participants stated that this made them acutely aware of their lack of ability and this was a source of anxiety. Clark's (2012) research highlights the identity binaries that are created within sport regarding ability. Players are either deemed as 'good' or 'not good' which can create a barrier to participation. Clark (2012:1190) believes that these designations regarding ability are inevitably gendered and require 'ongoing support from adults and peers in sports settings that are inclusive and encouraging' to disrupt this. This also relates to the sporting/footballing habitus where those identities (typically able-bodied and male) that are socialised and competent at sport can negotiate new footballing spaces with greater ease (Dukic et al., 2017). Although participants expressed concerns around ability and competence, most found that the de-centring of competition and ability in SF was an important factor in choosing a new footballing space.

Sam said:

> Because everyone was on … a level playing field, whether they'd … played football before, and were coming back to it or literally … never even touched a ball before. It was so brilliant to be in a space where there was no assumptions of that.

Similarly, Robin stated:

> When you're on a team, it's especially in that school environment … you felt like you could lose your place in the team. And when you're … an outsider anyway, to that team, I think that is quite stressful. Whereas this is kind of social. And I don't think … if I don't do well, no one's gonna be like 'well, you can't come again'.

Sam and Robin's quotes demonstrate the importance of a judgement-free space where anxieties regarding performativity are reduced. In comparison to participants' experiences of school's predominantly male spaces and competitive university teams, these grassroots spaces alleviate the urgency to perform with a certain level of footballing competency to be seen as valid. By decentring competition and performance, this provides a queering of mainstream sport where ability is no longer celebrated. Halberstam (2011) believes that finding joy in failure is an important tool within queer discourse. SF celebrates failure by providing a space where failure is not possible.

The decentring of competition has been considered by some scholars as a tool for creating more inclusive sports spaces (Drury, 2011; Pollock, 2021; Stride et al., 2019). In Stride et al.'s (2019:779) study of women returning to football they note that 'this de-centring of competition meant that the women felt less pressure to perform skilfully and felt more included and valued as a consequence'. Drury (2011) also found that this decentring of competition was a way to challenge hegemonic masculinity in gay football spaces. Drury (2011:423) states 'some gay sports spaces have entirely rejected the notion of competition and shifted focus away from ability and athleticism, thus disrupting the dominant order of domination and subordination'. Like the gay sports spaces in Drury's research, both SF and Republica have values of fostering inclusive, non-competitive atmospheres where competition and ability are subsidiary. Pollock (2021) regards this as a way to deconstruct hierarchies and diversify sporting practices. SF and Republica attempt to alleviate the hierarchy of ability so that multiple identities can enjoy football regardless of competence. Now, I will consider how these spaces have allowed freer participation for queer identities.

Queer football communities and temporalities

My participants were asked how they identify regarding their gender and sexuality. They gave a variety of responses including queer, straight, lesbian, bisexual, and 'not sure'. Within Republica, there is a range of gender and sexual identities. One of the club values is to strive to ensure all players feel safe within that space. This is not always truly achieved, especially for Republica's trans-masc players due to playing restrictions of the FA Sunday League which insists on gender binaries (Themen, 2016). Scholars argue that football and sport can play a role in reaffirming gender norms and binaries (Devis-Devis et al., 2018; Pfitser, 2015). Although Republica participates in Sunday League, the weekly training sessions, internal matches and friendlies, and network tournaments are run autonomously and allow mixed gender participation. Most participants saw Republica as a queer-friendly space which has built an alternative DIY footballing community. For most participants who identified as transgender or non-binary, it felt validating to experience a football space that did not conform to the typical gender binaries within sport. Participants discussed how important the practice of introducing names and pronouns at the beginning of each session was and how it aided feeling accepted in a football space. This is common practice in SF, Republica and TNBFL. Bobby, who helps run SF explained the reasoning for this practice:

> I think the whole thing with gender exploration is normalising … not assuming people's gender, regardless of how they present … it's really helped having regular names and pronouns… And I think it also allows for … fluidity. And I might not have to … announce it to everyone or come out as such. It's more just like one day you're this, one day

> you're this… so that it can … grow and change and you know, gender should always be fluid. And it's kind of about how you feel in that moment.

Here, these queer footballing spaces allow identities to express the gender identity in a way that feels comfortable to them, instead of basing assumptions on someone's gender presentation. This practice seeks to challenge Butler's (1990:151) heterosexual matrix which argues that gender representation and sex must align and remain static.

Playing football can be seen as an embodied experience (Connell, 1987; Stride et al., 2019). Participants commented on how that gendered body needs to feel empowered within a space to be able to play the best that they can:

> It's like when you are … yourself in that space. So, when I'm like,' Oh, I'm non-binary person. These are my pronouns.' And there's like … 'of course you can be here'. But then … if you're like having to hide that part of yourself in any way because it's like not accepted because it's a women's team and … maybe you're like, 'oh, okay, I won't use my non-binary pronouns'. The way that your … body feels in that space is constricted and it's constrained and it's uncomfortable. So … the most … empowering thing to me is that … I feel free because I'm allowed to just be who I am… So … my body feels comfortable in that space.

By creating queer-inclusive environments then, participants felt this allowed them to fulfil their footballing potential in a way that other spaces did not. Not only did some participants feel more fulfilled in their footballing abilities, but this also translated to their personal lives too. Several participants acknowledged that they came into football identifying with a particular gender/sexuality that had now changed. They believed that the experience of playing in a queer subcultural community had helped them to explore that. Halberstam (2005:2) describes queer subcultural spaces' influence as 'it has the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations'. When Rory was asked about how her gender/sexuality impacted on her experience of playing football, she said:

> I think it's inseparable… I found my sexuality through football… being around a lot of people that were acting out of the gender norm…and it seems to be quite common in terms of people realising aspects of their either gender or sexual orientation that they didn't really know… Like, it's really nice…to see someone come into football in one version, and almost like then becoming a 2.0 version of themselves…that community like helped me through it and help just normalise it.

Similarly, Eden stated:

> And I think we've had so many players…come into that space identifying as, like, cis and straight, and then within a number of weeks sometimes … being like, 'I'm fully gay'. And you're like, 'okay, welcome to the fold!' And I think, yeah, that can end up being like a real eye-opening space for people.

Eden, Charlie and Rory discussed how seeing others acting outside of gender norms inspired them to question normative discourses and reflect on their own gender and sexual identity. The act of playing football is considered an embodied experience that is often perceived as masculine (Connell, 1987; Pfitser, 2015; Themen, 2016). By being non-cisgender men enacting a masculine pursuit, participants felt this helped them interrogate their gender and/or sexuality in other ways too. Drury (2011:421) argues that 'mainstream football is understood to be one of the greatest institutions involved in the production and maintenance of homophobic discourses'. However, queer football spaces disrupt those discourses through an alternative, queer-positive narrative that allows people to explore their gender/sexuality within a space that is typically seen as male, homophobic, and heteronormative (Cleland et al., 2022; Connell, 1987; Drury, 2011; Pfitser, 2015; Themen, 2016).

When utilising photo elicitation, most participants chose a photograph that was candid and captured a moment of joy/silliness. Photo elicitation can evoke emotions in a way that simple talking interviews cannot (Harper, 2002). This was evident in the photographs selected by participants and their emotional responses to them. This can be analysed through the theory of queer temporalities (Halberstam, 2003, 2005). Most participants cited the joy they felt when reverting to a more silly, childlike, playful nature when playing football. Nearly all participants had not entered the heteronormative phase in their life of family-making despite being at the age when this typically begins. Halberstam (2003:328) argues that 'queers participate in subcultures for far longer than their heterosexual counterparts'. As discussed previously, Halberstam believes this refusal of adulthood within queer communities helps to establish new modes of being for those who participate. This is evident within my research group, with some participants only starting to play football for the first time in their mid-late twenties. When Blake was asked to compare playing football in school and in adult life, she said:

> The similarities are definitely just how silly you get …it's very nostalgic, like childish freedom in running about outside in the mud and chasing a ball around that's just, I don't think that would change.

Eden also referred to the 'silly' nature of playing football:

> And there is nothing that…matches up to just having that silly energy of where you're having a kickabout with your mates and you're just laughing and like falling over and trying out stupid things.

Within these queer footballing spaces, participants found meaning and joy in a way that was counter to normative discourses around adulthood by entering into a sporting community instead of the typical trajectory of child-rearing. This silliness and joy appeared to be an important factor for many players in why they continued playing football. Halberstam (2011:187) states 'the queer art of failure involves the acceptance of the finite, the embrace of the absurd, the silly and the hopelessly goofy'. By failing to conform to the child-rearing expectations of their age group, participants embraced the childlike silliness they experienced playing football whilst rejecting the identity of family-maker.

Queer prefigurative football spaces

For players who wanted to progress from a casual kickabout to more competitive football, then players typically joined Republica's Women's Sunday League team. Scholars argue that The FA is a male-led institution that reaffirms gender binaries and hegemonic masculinity (Edwards et al., 2015; Themen, 2016). When participants were asked how football could become more accessible for transgender players, it was interesting that no one responded with reforms to the FA. This implies that participants did not see this hierarchical institution as changeable. Discourses around sex-segregation and gender binaries within formal sport structures felt too embedded to disrupt. However, participants found hope in other solutions such as grassroots bottom-up DIY organising. The organisational structure of DIY footballing spaces such as Republica attempts to dismantle internal hierarchies by encouraging everyone to actively participate in the running of the club so that all voices are considered. Within Republica, there is an annually elected committee that is made up of players from within the club and all major club decisions are voted on by the whole club. Therefore, members of Republica resist the typical hierarchical organisational structure of typical Sunday League clubs by collectively taking ownership of their club (Totten, 2011). This standpoint can be referred to through prefiguration where, instead of relying on protest to instigate change, the creation of alternative practices is encouraged and celebrated (Jeffrey and Dyson, 2021). Raekstad and Gradin (2020:21) state 'we cannot use hierarchical organisations to achieve a non-

hierarchical society'. Indeed, participants challenged typical sporting discourses by utilising a DIY attitude to situate themselves out of the hierarchy of the FA. Richards and Parry (2020:659) state 'with the creation of new spaces, those who inhabit them will develop their own norms and boundaries, which can marginalise traditional practices and create alternative inclusive environments…they become sites for resisting, overcoming and negotiating power'. The participants' experiences of both SF and Republica provide evidence of how they felt they could contest typical discourses around gender, sexuality and ability/competitiveness in alternative footballing spaces. Most participants saw the value in these spaces being set up by the players who inhibit them to ensure certain identities felt included.

Morgan reflected the need to seek alternative spaces outside of the hierarchical structures of The FA:

> It's really important for… grassroots space to just…exist outside of…The FA or … outside of school…because those spaces are still very like… 'Men's League/ Women's League'…it's still very binary spaces or like, 'you're good at football; you're bad at football'. I think sometimes you just need those spaces that are…free from the constraints of… the other structures that allow those… binary positions to exist.

Finley additionally highlighted the importance of allyship in prefigurative practice:

> I think what is needed is for more cisgendered allies to step out of their formal structures to support things like informal leagues … because trans-people could play in it. But that requires probably seven other predominantly cis-female teams to also agree to that. So, it's not just about self-organising as trans-people, but it's having the people who won't take up your space, and won't try … enforce it. But who you can play against and who will be there regularly to play against.

Rory concurred, stating:

> It takes a bit of onus of people … from those groups to help self-organise. And I think it takes a bit of push from people that have had access to football for a long time to help them…it's down to grassroots to …offer lots of different ways of having a sense of community and … a sense of identity and doing all of those…bigger things, that money and commercialization can't.

Here, all three participants express a desire to DIY by creating footballing spaces that enact queer-inclusive, bottom-up politics and community. This was recently enacted by some of the participants with the creation of a new informal football space called TNBLF. Eden recalled the first TNBFL session:

> It was just really fun and very clear that … trans people just really want to play football and people are hungry for it. And everyone was just so excited to have that space that it felt … really electric and … like, oh my God, what's this gonna be? It's full of possibility.

Morgan, who helped run a TNBFL session, highlighted the importance of how inclusive DIY spaces influence and support these prefigurative practices to proliferate. Across Leeds, there is a network of grassroots football spaces that support and inspire each other to create new spaces. Morgan explained how the DIY format of SF felt easy to replicate:

> That makes me actually feel like, oh, I could do that too…coming from Saturday Football…seeing people very much just start something that is a gateway space…to empower people to play football or to get back into football. Without…going to those sessions, playing for Republica, I don't think there's any part of me … that would like run … some drills for like a group of trans, non-binary football players, like let's start this new thing.

Morgan's statement reaffirms Swain's (2019) argument that prefiguration proliferates as 'micro-utopias' that create networks of alternative praxis. Jeffrey and Dyson (2021:645) state 'prefigurative actors often create protected spaces where counter futures can be further developed'. Beaver's (2012) research on DIY roller derby leagues found that networks were created where DIY teams supported others to create additional teams which then quickly expanded. For those who were part of TNBFL, they referred to the futurity of the space and excitement for its potential growth. Since TNBFL's first session in April 2023, it has now participated in several tournaments organised by Republica. Participants hoped it had raised the visibility of trans-inclusive football within Leeds. Here is an example of how participants have negotiated their gender through prefigurative praxis as a solution to the trans-exclusionary practices of the FA Sunday League.

Concluding comments

This article highlights the importance of utilising a queer anarchist lens to examine alternative, subcultural DIY footballing practice. Queer anarchist DIY practices challenges the rigidity and hegemony of mainstream formal sports organisations and discourses. Their ability to modify their existing structures in a way that is truly inclusive is contested. The creation of alternative countercultural footballing spaces represents the agency of the participants to reject these structures and enact the changes they want to see in the world. By considering discourses that queer notions of competition, gender binaries and sporting identities then football can be reimagined in a way that has the potential to provide more inclusive, joyful and meaningful spaces for previously marginalised identities. Queer DIY football can be a space of and for radical possibilities.

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