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Two balls is too many: stadium performance and queerness among Portland's Rose City Riveters supporters club

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ABSTRACT

Portland, Oregon's Rose City Riveters is the largest independent organized supporters group for a women's soccer team in the world. They support Portland Thorns with an organized, expressive and organic performance of songs, musical instruments and displays that envelopes the entire stadium. Utilizing ethnographic subject-centred methods, this empirical study argues that the group's performance reflects two different performance lineages, organically organized transnational soccer fandom on one hand and disidentifying queer public performance on the other. This paper explores how different elements of these lineages overlap in the Riveters' performance to disrupt, negotiate and resist the dominant ideologies of hyper-masculinity and heteronormative femininity that shape professional soccer in the United States.

Introduction: Blow the fucking whistle

On 17 April 2016, 16,000 spectators watched as Rose City Riveters hoisted a giant fabric *tifo*¹ display, reading 'Year 4' covering most of the North End of Providence Park, just before the kick off of the National Women's Soccer League (NWSL) match between Orlando Pride and host Portland Thorns. As the *tifo* came down, the Riveters, an organized independent supporters group led primarily by women, filled the stadium with the rhythmic chant of 'P-T-F-C', the acronym for the team they adore. For the next 93 min, under the conductorship of mohawked fan *capos*,² but without assistance or guidance from the stadium's public address system, 900 or so Riveters collectively stood and sung an uninterrupted repertoire of songs that celebrated Portland, mocked the opposition, and chided the referee. Their deep bass drums and horns echoed from one end of the park to the other and at strategic moments, such as corner kicks, they held printed scarfs in unison with slogans like 'Get Stuck In' and 'Two Balls Is Too Many'. At the game's end, with Portland up 2 goals to 1, they rhythmically implored the referee to 'Blow the fucking whistle'.

Rose City Riveters is the largest independent organized supporter group for a professional women's soccer³ team in the world. The Riveters reproduce their performance at each Thorns home match, as they have since the team's inception in 2013. The performance's

organic fan-developed structure, expressive vocalization and atmospheric intent within the stadium draws on the legacy of collective fan practices in soccer. Organized supporter groups, in diverse national contexts, express 'symbolic ownership' (Carrington 2009, 24) over their teams by collectively generating club-related embodied traditions, symbols and narratives that are distinct from those created by team management, players or the media.

The Riveters' performance contains elements of stadium practices enacted elsewhere including visual displays, songs and a dedicated section of the stands. However, the performance differs from those staged by hyper-masculine fan groups that support men's teams in two key ways. First, a significant majority⁴ of the group identifies as women and second, their performance is unapologetically queer. The Riveters' performance is queer, not as a representation of homosexual desire, but rather as congruent to what King (2008) calls 'anti-identitarianism'. King unfixes queer representation from always-already having an association with a particular subjection position, by locating expressions of gender and sexuality that reject dominant ideologies. The Riveters members' non-normative gender-fluid physical appearance, organized stadium presence, and expressive, at times confrontational, behaviour 'interrogates incoherencies in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender, and sexual desire' (2008, 421). In this sense, their actions are what Jagose (1996) calls 'less an identity than a critique of identity' (131). Every Riveter may not identify their practices as queer, but as the performance is public, it holds the power of other disidentifying queer performances that, Muñoz (1999) argues, contribute to the 'formation of counter-publics that contest the hegemonic supremacy of the majoritarian public sphere' (1). The performance's disidentification is grounded in its ability to 'negotiate a phobic majoritarian sphere' by appropriating and changing the meaning of fan practices in stadiums, as 'powerful sites of self-creation' (4). In so doing, the Riveters' coordinated stadium actions join lineages of unapologetic queer performance that negotiate the normative constructs of gender and sexualities in sporting space (Wheatley 1994; Broad 2001; Enke 2007).

The performance in the North End contrasts with the stadium atmosphere that is organized and advertised by NWSL in Portland and elsewhere, which grounds acts of fandom in consumption rather than collective expression. Like previous incarnations of professional women's soccer in the US, NWSL markets itself as a family-friendly environment where individual girls are empowered by the moral actions of the women on the field. The Riveters' performance also takes place within an American soccer stadium culture that, outside the NWSL, remains a place where hyper-masculinity is cultivated by fans, teams and leagues. Men dominate fan groups for men's teams and their resultant actions normalize behaviours that objectify women, mimic militarism and aggressively marginalize non-normative performances of gender.

The following empirical study utilizes co-performative witnessing of the Riveters' Providence Park performance and words that individual members shared in intensive interviews to show how the group negotiates the institutional identities of the stadium, NWSL and women's soccer in the US. Co-performative witnessing, as defined by Dwight Conquergood, emphasizes the researcher's role as 'listening to and being touched by' (Conquergood 2002, 149) experiences in the field rather than participating as a detached observer. The study builds on critical inquiry into organized expressive fandom, social constructions of stadium spaces, embodied performance, feminist and queer resistance in sport, queer performance, and the specific structure of US American women's soccer to contextualize the Riveters' stadium performance. First, I trace the reproduction of the US American soccer stadium as

a normative space of hyper-masculinity and heteronormativity. Second, I place Rose City Riveters' collective performance within the lineages of organized supporter groups and queer performance in public space. Third, I present empirical findings on how disruption manifests through four interrelated aspects of the Riveters' performance: (1) the organic organization of about 900 fans into a public performance in a specific stadium section, (2) visual displays, (3) songs and (4) apparel such as scarves and t-shirts.

Investigating Rose City Riveters provides an opportunity to explore the liminality of the constructed identities of stadiums and teams, how organized supporter groups negotiate and disrupt those identities through performance within the specific context of women's soccer in the US. The Riveters' queer collective fan identity as asserted through performance, negotiates the stadium atmosphere of Providence Park and by extension the heteronormative and hyper-masculine identities of Portland Thorns, NWSL and US soccer fandom.

Portland boys, we are here/shag your women, drink your beer

Feminist geographer Massey (1994) argues that physical spaces are 'constructed out of social relationships', and therefore 'never still' and 'inherently dynamic'. As such, spaces are 'an ever-shifting social geometry of power and signification' (2–3). Viewed in this way, spaces, both public and private, lose their fixity, and their meanings become entwined in power relationships between the people who interact with each other in a particular place at a particular time. In sports stadiums, fans, administrators, players and others contest the space's meanings.

Sports clubs and stadiums are at the centre of the sports industrial complex (Crawford 2004), part of what Antonio Gramsci refers to as 'the whole organizational and industrial system', ([1971] 2010, 234) in which people establish and contest cultural hegemony. Sporting institutions and their attendant media companies reproduce gendered ideologies that construct stadiums and fandom as male preserves (Dunning 1986) limiting women's involvement in the stands to that of 'space invaders' (Massey 1994, 185). Consensus histories frame women's stadium presence in men's sport as outside of tradition, inauthentic and equated with the middle class as a civilizing force on hyper-masculine behaviour (Dunn 2014, 7). Commercial media also represents women fans as disruptive to male autonomy through over-sexualized desire or relational demands, or as passive functionaries and shoppers (Wenner 2012). The constructed binary between authentic passionate men's fandom and inauthentic passive women's fandom marginalizes performances of gender that do not fit within heteronormative prescriptions. Women's sporting institutions, such as NWSL, reinforce this binary through portrayals of and appeals to women fans that emphasize heteronormativity.

Women have long attended men's soccer matches in the United Kingdom (Dunn 2014) and the US (Plenderleith 2015, 206–207). However, the stadium manifests as a place in which men are able to enact a particular version of masculinity, including aggression, taunting and violence that limits women's engagement. This hyper-masculinity takes the form of fans' public vocalization of misogyny, sexism and homophobia (Wheatley 1994; Caudwell 2011) that allows men to enact fantasies of agency and domination that they may be unable to vocalize in other parts of their lives (Spaaij 2008, 377; Caudwell 2011, 125–126). Athletic failure is repeatedly and vocally associated with femininity by players, coaches and fans (Dunning 1986, 170). Additionally, stadium spaces are often homophobic with the

stadium song, in particular, conveying virulent gay bashing of male players and opposing fans (Wheatley 1994; Caudwell 2011). This combined behaviour is an assertion of gendered power. As Massey writes, 'the limitation of women's mobility, in terms of identity and space, has been in some cultural contexts a crucial means of subordination ... the attempted consignment/confinement to particular places on the one hand and the limitation of identity on the other' (1994, 179).

In the US American soccer context, hyper-masculinity manifests among the organized supporters groups for men's professional soccer. These fan groups' iconography includes incorporating skulls and weapons into logos and displays, wearing bandanas to shield their identities, and selecting names that include terms like army or battalion that reference militarism, or *ultra* and *barra brava* that reference hooligan groups from other national contexts. Supporter group songs include lyrics that objectify women. For instance, the Timbers Army supporter group that backs the Portland Timbers performed a song that until June 2016 included the lyric, 'Portland Boys, we are here/ Shag your women, drink your beer'. Outside of the stadium, rape jokes appear on the message boards of the American Outlaws group, which acts as an umbrella group for chapters of organized fans of the US national teams. *The Guardian* (6 June 2016) reported on sexual harassment at American Outlaws gatherings. Men dominate leadership of supporter groups for men's soccer, including Timbers Army, both in the stands and in their organizing structures.

That night of family entertainment

Sport team administrators utilize the stadium as a site to sell a sense of 'unified belonging' where fans can enhance their allegiance through consumption of the game and its attendant merchandise (Crawford 2004, 86–87). In North American stadiums in particular, Anouk Bélanger (2009) asserts that conformity and consumption are induced through the reproduction of a 'sanitized urban imaginary as an explicit repression of vernacular culture' and a 'carefully constructed series of thematic, and usually branded, consumption experiences' (53). In the construction of idealized women's soccer stadium space, NWSL ties consumption to heteronormativity and domesticity. In particular, the league makes wholesome family experiences a dominant theme of its imagery and marketing initiatives, in which young girls aspire to be like the athletes they watch, but access the game through their parents, most often their father.

The comments of Herm Sorcher, CEO for the league's lowest attended team, Sky Blue FC are typical, 'We're going to go beyond the soccer fan. We know soccer fans are going to be interested in this product. Now we have to take it to the next level. We have to find people who are looking for that night of family entertainment and get them connected to the team and connected to the experience' (*The Equalizer*, 5 January 2016). Sorcher minimizes the value of fans whose main motivation is the game itself, in favour of families looking for what they deem wholesome entertainment. Franchises target families by giving away tickets to suburban youth soccer leagues and by running promotions like the Houston Dash's 'Dads and Daughters'.

The connection between heteronormative family values and elite women's soccer in the US began well before NWSL. At the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, the US Women's National Team was among the women's teams framed by television broadcaster NBC as heteronormative and representative of suburban America, rooted in youth sports. The US Women's National

Team was a representation of upstanding moral sportsmanship in the face of foreign deviancy and scandals in men's sports (Cole and Giardina 2013; Narcotta-Welp 2015). The marketing that followed the team through its triumphs at the 1999 and 2015 World Cups continued to place emphasis on the players as uncomplicatedly feminine, heterosexual and connected to children (Meân 2015). Rachel Allison and Mary McDonald identify the 'cause narrative' in women's sport as constituting a dominant institutional framing of players as depoliticized individual role models of empowerment for girls. This framing appears repeatedly in the marketing of US American professional women sports leagues, including NWSL predecessors Women's United Soccer Association (WUSA) and Women's Professional Soccer (WPS) and the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) (McDonald 2000; Allison 2016). This post-feminist marketing, as Allison states, 'relegat[es] the challenge of women's professional sports to the level of individuals, women's professional soccer becomes divorced from a social structural and explicitly feminist understanding of gender inequality in sport and the collective activisms needed to challenge this inequality' (259).

The cause narrative manifests frequently in NWSL. The league and its franchises produce marketing videos of players greeting children before and after games. The league-wide 2016 NWSL Twitter campaign was 'Strongher, Fasther, Further. #Supporther', with Fasther and the 'her' in Supporther offset in pink. Additionally, NWSL actively projects a particular standard of normative beauty in its framing of players and fans' womanhood. The league's logo features a silhouetted ponytailed player with definable curves. The advertisements that loom over the entrances to Providence Park feature individual women fans represented as waifish, white and dressed in clothing that reads as professional-class. The Thorns include a promotional video on their website called 'Thorns at Prom' in which players discuss their high school prom dresses alongside pictures of themselves in them as teenagers. Body types among fans and players that do not fit within this standard are sidelined in league promotions.

NWSL makes token efforts at acknowledging that many fans do not fall in line with heteronormative conventions, including hosting Pride events during June with associated rainbow-themed merchandise. The league's approach to non-normative fans reinforces dominant assimilative narratives of visibility through consumption and reenactments of binary sexuality. As in other women's leagues, the league seeks to erase lesbianism and queerness from its idealized fan portrait in order to venerate a particular type of uncomplicated heteronormative womanhood, while at the same time appearing inclusive enough to maintain non-normative fans and their allies as consumers (McDonald 2008; Meân 2012). In NWSL stadiums, the emphasis on families and the link of fandom to supporting the athletes' upstanding character lends itself to an atmosphere shaped primarily by girls and their parents who expect wholesome entertainment.

Team officials further emphasize this atmosphere using of the stadium's public address system to orchestrate fandom that is limited in expression. Advertisements for local businesses and team merchandise play over the loudspeakers during game action. Announcers coordinate short non-confrontational cheers during discrete game events like goals and kick-offs. The combination of ads and celebratory directives emphasizes individual expression through consumption rather than organic collective display. The result is a stadium atmosphere closer to the pastoral serenity of suburban youth soccer than the expressive confrontational stadium space of men's professional soccer.

Organized independent supporters groups, who operate outside the conventions of individualism, heteronormativity and limited expression, are met with hostility and apathy by

fellow NWSL fans and franchise officials. For instance, New Jersey's Cloud 9 waited three years for official recognition and their own section. Washington's Spirit Squadron clashed with management over Megan Rapinoe's national anthem protest, while Rose City Riveters face complaints about their presence from fans in their own stadium and at away games.

Some collective expressive outlet

Rose City Riveters joins a deep and varied legacy established by organized supporter groups in a variety of national contexts who assert themselves as communal cultural voices through independent structures ranging from loose affiliative groups to formalized trusts that seek a financial stake in clubs (Free and Hughson 2006; Goldblatt 2014; Dorsey 2016). Organized supporter groups utilize their organic structures to protect an imagined local culture as resistance to the constructed club identities foisted upon them by owners and governing bodies (Free and Hughson 2006; Carrington 2009). In establishing traditions, narratives and symbols that are independent of a team's financial owners and by forming associations, organized supporter groups engage in a contest over the cultural identity and meaning of sporting institutions. Hall (1981) identifies this process as 'a battlefield where no once-and-for-all victories are obtained, but where there are always strategic positions to be won and lost' (232–233). Fan resistance is 'fragile ... temporary ... and limited', (Carrington 2009, 24). Even as fans reinterpret team iconography to subvert dominant ideologies, fan-generated culture is vulnerable to co-optation by management for its own ideological purposes.

Stadiums are key sites for the negotiations over the meanings of sports teams (Crawford 2004; Spaaij 2008). The 'unified belonging' (Crawford 2004, 86–87) sold by teams through merchandise and game tickets is not the sole source of fans' assertions of allegiance. Free and Hughson (2006) argue that supporter groups are able to disrupt management-based narratives because 'individual acts of consumption cannot make a "common" culture without some shared, "organic" dimension – organic in the sense of collective organization, however informal, and resulting in some collective expressive outlet' (101). Stadium performance, then, is an essential part of cultural creation amongst organized supporter groups. Attendance alone does not signify affiliation with the 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983) as the collective behaviour inside the venue enables groups to establish culture and pass it on. Performances act as repertoires that are what Taylor (2003) calls 'vital acts of transfer [that] transmit social knowledge, memory and a sense of identity through reiterated ... twice-behaved behavior' (2). Expressive stadium performance generates, codifies and preserves fan identity. In different national contexts, it includes dancing, songs, instrumentation, dress, flares and visible displays that carry varying levels of confrontation from territory to territory. In the process of cultural contestation through organization and stadium performance, supporter groups have disrupted dominant social constructions of the stadium space and fandom along the power lines of class and ethnicity (Kuhn 2011; Dorsey 2016). Recent examples of this contestation include the switch of Cardiff City (Wales) colours from blue to red in 2012 before returning to blue after fan protests in 2015, the 2015 boycott by Roma and Lazio (Italy) fans regarding stadium policies and Egyptian organized supporter groups' involvement in the Arab Spring (Dorsey 2016).

While the Riveters are part of the legacy of active fan support, they occupy a very different site of resistance because of their location in the US. NWSL teams (and their

counterparts in the US men's league, Major League Soccer) did not grow organically and independently from nineteenth- and twentieth-century athletic clubs as was the case in other national contexts, but instead appeared in large part as the result of wealthy owners establishing franchises for commercial purposes. Additionally, the league is a business cartel, in which power is concentrated in a central league office that licenses franchises based on predicted profitability (usually tied directly to the construction or renovation of a stadium) and exorbitant entry fees (Szymanski 2015, 229). In this system, team identities and symbols are the private property of the league rather than belonging to the independent clubs themselves.

The relatively new creation of teams and their lack of independence creates an environment where the central identity contestation between the 'imagined community' of fans and the 'unified belonging' perpetuated by management is not over a romanticized past. Rather it hails a not-yet-realized future where fans' voices offer a more serious counterbalance to the economic, political and cultural power of management and the players. The majority of organized supporters groups in the US, including Rose City Riveters, have close, often personal, relationships with their local team's front office, even as they operate as independent entities. This relationship is necessary in order to gain access to the stadium and carry out their performances.

Queer space invaders

While geographic territory frames the unique cultural and economic context in which the Riveters negotiate the meaning of their team, it is the way their performance disrupts normative gender constructs of stadium space that makes it distinct from the fan groups organized around men's soccer. Here they can be placed in the context of other non-normative groups who have disrupted the phobic public sphere of sports. Women who challenge gender norms have adopted several practices in order to negotiate their position as space invaders in stadium space. For the Riveters, three in particular are relevant: claims to autonomous space in contested geographies, appropriation of hyper-masculine behaviours and unapologetic embrace of deviance.

Claims to autonomous sporting space involves the choice by women choosing to participate in sports in public, fully aware of the dominant conflation of sports participation and lesbianism. In doing so, non-normative gender identities become 'thinkable and operative,' and 'the terms of inclusion' in the space are transformed (Enke 2007, 9). Additionally, amongst women fans, the appropriation, but not mimicry, of hyper-masculine behaviours have been, 'incorporated into the women's "stylistic ensemble" and ... simultaneously transformed, translated, and reorganized to express different meanings' (Wheatley 1994, 194). Confrontational displays of fandom are not simply in support of the team, as they 'enable [their] participants to cultivate alternative sporting, social and sexual identities through violating and disrupting socially dictated gender prescriptions' (207). Further, lack of decorum, embrace of vulgarity and unapologetic celebration of deviance amongst women sports fans have been identified by K. L. Broad as queer resistances that 'comprised of transgressing gender, destabilizing the heterosexual/homosexual binary, and "in your face" stigmas' (2001, 186). However, as King (2008) points out the opportunity to perform public queer resistance can often only be accessed by calling on reserves of race and class privilege grounded in whiteness. Fans are 'challenging particular kinds of femininity- white,

middle-class, heterosexual- that [many of] themselves are supposed to embody' (434). The Riveters' public performance then calls on a lineage of queer public performance that distinguishes it from fan resistive practices in other contexts.

Among the Roses

Prior to my direct contact with the Riveters, I accumulated context for their place in US American soccer fandom through my experiences as a reporter and observer at NWSL matches in Massachusetts, New Jersey and Maryland, as well as professional men's soccer matches in Portland, New York, New Jersey, Montréal and Philadelphia. To supplement my knowledge of Rose City Riveters, Portland Thorns and NWSL, I reviewed video and print marketing, merchandise, and social media presences for each organization and the Riveters' blog. Additionally, I reviewed coverage of Portland Thorns and the Riveters in local and international press including *Stumptown Footy*, *The Oregonian*, *The Equalizer* women's soccer news website and *The Guardian*.

Therefore, I was aware of the Riveters and their role in the popularity of the Thorns franchise; however, in order to fully grasp how their performance manifested in the stadium and more importantly understand the meanings connected to their actions, it was necessary to visit Portland. In my approach, I followed Dwight Conquergood's methodology of co-performative witnessing, which argues that 'ethnography is an embodied practice; it is an intensely sensuous way of knowing' (Conquergood 1991, 180). Rather than detachedly observing the performance's participants, I performed alongside the Riveters at their invitation. On the day of the opening match of the Thorns' 2016 season, I helped install the *tifo* in the morning, which involved carrying the large banner with about 20 other volunteers two blocks from the club's warehouse to the stadium and assisting in rigging and organizing the display. In the hours between the installation and the match, I socialized with members of the group, who were aware of my identity as a researcher. For the hour before the match, I gathered with members at the *Fanladen*, a small clubhouse that is a key social site for many dedicated group members of Rose City Riveters and Timbers Army. During the match, I stood in each of the three sections of the North End and participated in lifting the *tifo*, singing and displaying scarves. Immediately after the match, I helped volunteers clean the North End and accompanied members back to the *Fanladen*, where I participated in a brief assessment of the days' activities.

During my two days in Portland, I did intensive interviews with six Riveters leaders. Later, I interviewed two members over the telephone. Rose City Riveters is an all-volunteer organization and decisions occur through consensus, therefore manifestations of leadership derive from active involvement, rather than formal status. Interviewees self-selected for participation, which reflects the fluid structure of the group. All eight interviewees were involved in group leadership by serving on the organization's four-person steering committee, as *capos*, and/or by participating in organizational activities outside of gameday performance such as creating and installing *tifos* or selling merchandise. I asked open-ended questions about their involvement in the group, soccer fandom, the group's role in stadium performance, and team and league identity. Though I did find out their names and ask them optional demographic questions, including their gender, racial and queer identity, employment and living status, interviewees remain anonymous and identifying information was not included in the final study.

This approach centres the Riveters' voices alongside my own experience in the stadium in order to emphasize what their stadium performance means to the participants, rather than an objective recounting of what takes place at Providence Park from an observer's point of view. As the performance is ongoing, fluid and constantly reproduced, the central area of inquiry is what actions the Riveters take to organize and carry out their stadium performance, how this process takes place and most importantly, how they come to understand the meaning of their embodied practices.

The liberty to yell

There are four interrelated aspects of Rose City Riveters' stadium performance. First, it requires coordination, before, during and after each gameday by an organization that is independent of the team, but capable of creating cohesion among 900 fans in three connected stadium sections. Second, the group creates visual displays including giant fabric *tifo* at the start of each match and smaller signs that remain visible throughout it. Third, the Riveters generate assertive, aggressive, often humorous songs performed collectively throughout the match. Fourth, the group designs, sells and wears apparel, such as scarves and t-shirts, that is donned on gameday and in everyday life, the sales of which generate organizational funds under the auspices of a non-profit entity.

Each element contains varying levels of disruption at specific moments before, during and after each match, but it is the collective organization, grounded in the volunteer leadership structure, that allows the other elements to occur and imbues them with the power to impact the stadium atmosphere. The organizing principle of the group is the open-ended 'if you want to be a Rose City Riveter, you already are'. Membership status derives from going to games or monthly meetings rather than a fee structure. While there are few parameters to participation, the Riveters structure activities through a steering committee and a selection of gameday performance conductors known as *capos*. From the start, the group's leadership consisted almost entirely of women. For the first two years, they intentionally allowed only people who did not identify as men to *capo*. In the fourth season, 2016, at least one *capo* identified as male and the steering committee remained entirely women.

The group's initial leaders emerged primarily from women members of Timbers Army. Timbers Army formed in 2001, but its origins date back to groups of fans that attended games together and organized chants in the 1990s for the then lower league Timbers. Several founders were Scottish expatriate Glasgow Celtic fans who took an interest in the local Portland team. By 2016, Timbers Army had grown into the highest-profile organized supporter group in the US providing a unique space in US sports where fan voice and identity became enmeshed in the team's structure and ideology.

Timbers Army members brought with them the experience of building an independent supporters club. Some Rose City Riveters traditions including their open-ended membership structure and *tifo* organization are akin to Timbers Army ideas. Many individuals continue to participate in both groups and the two groups remain affiliated through the 107ist⁵ non-profit that manages funds, provides marketing, material and space resources, and liaises with the teams' front office. Despite this close connection, Rose City Riveters is a clear break from the institutionalized hyper-masculine culture of Timbers Army. In the genesis of their group, women realized an opportunity to take on leadership roles that were unavailable within the male-dominated space of Timbers Army. As one Riveter said,

Anyone who had ever been a *capo* [in Timbers Army] had always had a penis. That's stupid, because what you need [to *capo*] is arms and strength and endurance and vocal chords, it has nothing to do with your gender.

Individual Riveters also shared that the two groups are treated differently by the 107st. The Riveters organization is treated as 'at best a little sister' with 'active hostility from some of the old TA people' who 'act like they invented soccer support and [we] need their permission.' Even before they reach the stadium then, the Riveters trouble some of the entrenched sexism of Portland soccer.

About 70 fans attended the group's first meeting in November 2012, before the team had a name, the squad had players or the franchise's corporate identity had been publically established. A 14-year-old fan, the child of two Timbers Army members, came up with impetus for the group, hosted the initial meeting at their house and coined the group's motto, 'By Any Other Name.' The reference to Juliet's line in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*⁶ combined Portland's municipal Rose City iconography with the idea that the Thorns were as worthy of support as the Timbers. By the Thorns first exhibition game in March 2013, the Riveters were able to collectively organize a performance that has continued at every match since.

Organizational capacity manifests in the stadium as the Riveters stand and perform as a group throughout the match. The *capos* direct the performance without interference from the stadium's public address system. In this way, the section serves as the primary generator of stadium atmosphere. A significant amount of the performance's power is located in its *collective* enactment of actions and appearances that deviate from gender norms. The Riveters have not only accessed to the stadium as individuals with marginalized identities. Rather, they participate in fandom as a large organized identifiable group that allows them to maintain the fluid non-normative identities that they held previous to their attendance at the game.

In the stadium, they utilize their collectivity and performance to claim and create an autonomous space where multiple fan identities can stray from dominant constructions of what soccer fans should look like and how women, in particular, should participate. Therefore, their presence in the stadium is less about diversifying opportunity and access to dominant institutions through inclusivity than struggling for power by negotiating the limits where Judith Butler's 'formative exclusions' (2000, 35) occur between queer/normative, masculine/feminine and man/woman in binaries of dominance. One Riveter informed,

It's the default in our society that women aren't allowed to be loud, women aren't allowed to scream, or sing off-key, caterwaul at a stadium or display any sort of emotion that is assertive. So it is very freeing, I hadn't considered the liberty of being able to yell.

They are conscious of the role they play and how their non-normative appearance, body types and actions disrupt the stadium's norms. The dominant narrative of fandom that is created by the league in its public statements and perpetuated by the media is that fans should feel grateful to have a league and that they should show allegiance through passive consumption. Therefore, even as the pervasive stadium presence consists of young girls and their parents, the Rose City Riveters' collective, assertive non-normative identities challenge NWSL's mass-marketed heteronormative gender imagery and expectations. Specific activities of displays, songs, and apparel creation are part of the Riveters' performance that work against this narrative of passivity on one hand and hyper-masculine exclusion on the other.

Displays: underpaid superheroes

The most visible element of the Riveters' performance is the *tifo* raised as each match begins. No other organized NWSL supporter group has the resources to consistently produce *tifo* and assert their identity as part of the team's public image. The design, construction and installation of *tifo* are volunteer efforts under the guidance of a Rose City Riveters sub-committee. Displays are elaborate, often paying tribute to Thorns players or Portland. *Tifos* have imagined Thorns players as superheroes in capes, as silhouetted dancers and as famous paintings of women.

While *tifos* are the most visible and dramatic part of the performance, it is the least counterhegemonic. *Tifos* consciously avoid confrontational messages as they must be approved in concept by the Portland Thorns front office and require the cooperation of stadium staff to rig. The front office has never rejected a Rose City Riveters concept, therefore the consequences of a *tifo* violating management's policies are unknown.

Smaller visual displays sometimes take a more confrontational approach. During 2016 games, a black banner with white lettering hung over the rail at the front of the Riveters' section reading 'Pay Them'. This ambiguous reference may reflect the Equal Opportunity Lawsuit that US National Team players filed against the US Soccer Federation in early 2016. However, the reference could be to the low salaries of non-National Team NWSL players, who that year made between \$6800 and \$39,000 and/or the entirely unpaid amateurs that NWSL permits teams to use when national team stars are away at international matches. That a simple phrase such as 'Pay Them' can carry multiple meanings points to the multiple forces that define and restrain women's soccer in the US. In interviews, individual Riveters criticized NWSL's pay structure and the inequalities that have led to the pay gap. One related,

NWSL's pay structure is appalling ... It's no wonder that players leave the league and go back to school and become doctors ... I'm really glad that the NWSL has survived to the 4th season and I hope that it continues on, but it needs some dramatic changes to be sustainable and that's partially US Soccer's fault.

A sign like the 'Pay Them' banner provides a visual marker of fan voice. While the sign lacks the explicit challenges to heteronormative gender constructions of some other actions taken by the Riveters, it is among the most widely disseminated images of the section. It therefore provides the fans with a visible opportunity to express their discontent with gender-based inequity in US soccer. In keeping *tifo* non-confrontational, but voicing opinions with smaller but still visible displays, the Riveters appear to know the boundary between access and rupture that allows self-expression without losing the front office's cooperation.

Songs: 'Does It Make It OK because I Have Tits?'

The Riveters' songs are more consistently subversive. The majority of them have roots in fan-generated songs performed in other soccer stadiums. Many reference a specific player or Portland, but others aggressively admonish the referee or deride an opposing player. The entire performance is coordinated by five *capos*, who stand with their backs to the field and decide in unison which chants to start and when to switch. On the night that I attended, the *capos* on the main stage included white women with Mohawks and a 16-year-old African-American girl who had also sung the national anthem.

The *capos*, however, do not completely control the repertoire of songs. Chants can also generate from the crowd. There are no rules for lyrics, aside from a general avoidance of racist, sexist and/or homophobic language. The group is self-regulating, shutting down chants that violate the rules against discriminatory language. Many songs, however, include vulgarities and confrontational lyrics. In an agreement with the front office, the *capos* do not initiate the most profane chants, but the section will regularly generate songs such as, 'Fuck the ref', 'We peed on your jersey', and 'Take another bong hit, ref', which tread a line between vulgar, abusive and discriminatory.

Their performance has brought the Riveters into conflict with other fans in Portland and at away matches. The issue of language is particularly fraught with many Riveters fully aware that their treatment arises from their identification as women. The performance of brashness, which includes refusing to alter their displays and language after criticism from fellow fans and management, publicly confronts dominant constructions of gender within the stadium. In doing so, the Riveters choose to enter stadium space and disregard expected behaviours of their assigned subject positionalities. One *capo* reported a reprimanding by Thorns owner Merritt Paulson after the game for swearing. She said, 'I guarantee you, he has never pulled aside one of the dudes from the Timbers Army to ask them not to cuss. *Does it make it ok because I have tits?*' Despite the conflicts that arise with fellow fans and management, leaders asserted that the volume and content of the performance is an essential part of the viability of the team,

If we want women's soccer to stick around, it requires creating an environment where people really want to be there and we get that backlash. I just got it last week, somebody complained about the loudness of the drums, saying that it was a horrible noise, that it made no sense, and how dare we think it's music. I said, 'I'm sorry if your sensibilities are different than mine. It's not offensive.'

Subject positionality is important here: through aggressive language and the acts of singing and swearing in public, the Riveters are collectively asserting themselves against normative behaviour and in so doing are helping to solidify the queering of the space. Their songs challenge dominant gender constructions of women's passivity and imbue the stadium with less of NWSL's aspirational middle-class idealism. Riveters are conscious of the offence that their behaviour causes and how it challenges NWSL's sense of the league, as one member articulated,

I ... get the feeling that NWSL doesn't care about the fans. They care about the idea of what they're marketing and practically the Riveters don't fit that demographic. I mean if they look at us we're yelling and screaming. Other fans will go, 'oh my god, you're swearing, think of the children.' This is not a children's game.

At the same time, the group reinvents the power of the stadium song as a liberating action in their avoidance of homophobic, racist and sexist lyrics embedded in the history of organized soccer fandom. Thus, the Riveters take hold of this tradition and imbue it with their own feminist and queer call to power seizing social agency.

Apparel: 'I Survived The F Bombs'

The Riveters have utilized their conflicts with other fans and management over language to assert their identities. Rather than change their behaviour to conform, the Riveters have instead codified their deviance into the apparel they produce. One t-shirt mimics the MPAA

ratings logo, reading 'Rated R, Some material may be unsuitable for children, strong language, civic pride and unwavering support throughout'. Their best-selling member-generated scarf, that doubled as a fundraiser for a local animal shelter, read: 'Two Balls Is Too Many', undercutting the masculine dominance of professional soccer. 2016's edition read 'Get Stuck In', which affirms sexual liberation utilizing a double-entendre that conflates goal scoring and intercourse. In reaction to Seattle fans complaining about their language, the Riveters made a scarf for youth members that read 'Think of the Children' on one side, and 'I Survived the F Bombs' on the other.

By inserting mocking humour into concerns about language, children and femininity, the Riveters are able to publicly display their full awareness of the disruption caused by their appearances and actions. Further, they revel in the fact that they might offend normative sensibilities. One Riveter mused in a 2013 blog, 'We yell louder, we sing louder, we live louder and, yes, sometimes we might swear. *In public*. Where people might hear us'. The Riveters' performance, therefore, is indicative of other queer performances identified by K. L. Broad as 'confrontational, "in your face" individualized unapologetic expressions of sexuality and gender transgression ... as queer subversions' (2001, 1). However, the opportunity to enact disruptive acts and mock authority is also partially grounded in the pervasive whiteness of the Riveters, Portland and Providence Park. This leaves open to question whether the disruption would manifest in the same way without many individual Riveters holding privileged racial status.

Making money off us

The Riveters continually negotiate the boundary of what behaviour can be performed in the stadium. At the same time, the Thorns' front office and NWSL are eager to capitalize on the Riveters' visual displays of fandom. Management is keen to keep the Riveters in the building. Yet, they prefer to co-opt the performance for their own ends, in order to maintain the stadium as a normative space. The contrast between the Riveters and the individual empowerment/heteronormative family imagery that NWSL produces is exhibited in the Thorns' corporate marketing video, 'Together, we are the Rose City'. In the two-minute video, the first four shots are of white girls under age 12, the first of whom is holding her father's hand as she enters the stadium. The cuts that follow alternate between the players, wide shots of the field and more white children, primarily girls. The Riveters' first appearance is a close-up of a thin 16-year-old African American *capo*. Rather than framing her at the front of the section, she is isolated and decontextualized from her role leading the crowd in chants. Throughout the video, the Riveters are shown at a distance, or as individuals, or disembodied completely as only hands on a flag, but never as an identifiable collective. In this video, the Thorns' crowd is overwhelmingly families with children, not the diverse group of people who perform in the North End. The Riveters' queer appearance is caricature, and therefore positioned as individualized extreme fandom, rather than as the collective basis of the Thorns' support. The video's lack of context weakens the potential subversive impact of the group's inclusion. Instead, Rose City Riveters' performance is used to associate soccer with a sense of diversity based on individualized style choices in order to market the team to families who value inclusion without disruption. The Riveters are aware of the team's intentions, realizing that it is part of the constant negotiation over how their performance is interpreted outside the stadium. As one Riveter stated, 'We're not a hooligan state, because

otherwise we wouldn't be able to be in the building. But [the front office] is making money off us being loud and being who we are'.

Conclusion

The inclusion of a multiplicity of possible subject positions within an institution matters, not for incorporating difference into a homogenized whole, but in the ways that diverse subject positions can negotiate and disrupt the institution's sense of itself. As Butler (2000) argues,

It is one thing to struggle, politically, to extend the claims that might be made in the name of the human in violently restrictive ways, and quite another to claim that a full overcoming of all the exclusions that form the human might be made. A full reversal of every formative exclusion into an 'inclusive feature' would undo the condition of the subject itself. (35–36)

As an organization, Rose City Riveters alters the institutional atmosphere of NWSL stadiums through performance. The Riveters do not enter the stadium as individual fans acting independently in extreme fandom. Rather, they claim space as a collective whole that allows them to re-envision sporting identities and enact behaviours that challenge the space's normative constructs. They have not requested a place in Providence Park for mere inclusion; they actively maintain the fluidity of their subject positionalities in order to stake a claim to the stadium that negotiates the space's meaning.

By consciously and collectively entering hyper-masculine heteronormative public space, appropriating masculine behaviours, and unapologetically embracing non-normative gender identities, Riveters members 'trouble and subvert [fixed identity] categories to create and defend spaces for non-normative desires and practices' (King 2008, 422). In this way, they exhibit an anti-identitarian queerness that does not ground itself in the specific identity of individual Riveters than in the group's collective actions. Together they create a disidentifying spectacle, defined as 'survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform with the phantasm of normative citizenship' (Muñoz 1999, 4).

As disidentifying subjects, they call on the legacies of queer performance and expressive soccer fandom to 'tactically and simultaneously work on, with and against a cultural form' (Muñoz 1999, 12). Their stadium performance includes actions that are at once appropriated from men's soccer fandom, but imbued with new meanings and simultaneously unapologetically queer. At points, they choose to limit their confrontational behaviour, as in their choice of *tifo*, in order to maintain access to the stadium. In other areas, however, such as language, they readily assert their brash behaviour in order to vocally challenge dominant gender constructions. It is a process of continual negotiation. As the performance is produced and reproduced with knowledge being transferred through embodied practice, Rose City Riveters' collective identity changes, as does their effect on the stadium's atmosphere.

Rose City Riveters' stadium performance is a manifestation of a complex representation of personhood that includes people with multiple and fluid subject positionalities, marginalized or otherwise. However, the presence of a diverse group of women alone does not account for the subversiveness of Rose City Riveters as an organization. The Riveters choose to collectively enter stadium space and enact behaviours unattached to their subject positionalities and in the process question identity construction itself. In this way, they disrupt the public space of Providence Park, the Portland Thorns and NWSL.

Notes

1. *Tifo* is an Italian word for fan support. In the US American context, the word refers to enormous fabric displays that fans rig to the stadium infrastructure. Fans create, display and produce *tifo* in many national contexts.
2. The word *capo* is Italian. In Portland the *capos* stand at the front of the section and lead the chants. The practice originated in Italian organized supporter groups, but is part of soccer fandom in many national contexts.
3. For consistency, the employment of the term soccer is used for association football, although Portland Thorns Football Club is the name of team that Rose City Riveters supports.
4. Rose City Riveters members estimate that 60–70% of the group identify as women. Participant observation reflected similar numbers.
5. The 107ist takes its name from the section of Providence Park where the Timbers Army initially organized and continues to stand. Section 107 is also one of the sections where Rose City Riveters conduct their performance.
6. ‘What’s in a name? that which we call a rose. By any other name would smell as sweet’ (Craig 1914).

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