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# Talking Football: Challenging Discrimination and Homophobia<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Football is a common playground for grassroots players, fans, spectators and those whose profession consists of writing about football. I am interested in how non-professional football participants talk about gay (especially male) players and homophobia in football. Moreover, I ask further questions like “how do such talks, conversations and discussions affect sports journalists’ views on football fans and grassroots players?”.

The first half of this research took place between 2008 and 2011 and is based on 24 group discussions mainly with non-professional players. The participants cover a broad spectrum from appreciation towards gay football players to hidden and overt homophobia. In 2016, another 24 interviews with 25 German sport (football) journalists in broadcast, radio, print and online media were conducted. All of them acknowledge the acceptance of gay football players in society. This acknowledgement has a timely correlation with the coming out of a German national football player (Thomas Hitzlsperger) in 2014. Media showed the utmost respect for his decision. However, ambivalence between openness and exclusion can also be found in the way journalists position themselves. Their articulation still includes uncertainty towards the right way of dealing with homosexuality in football. As a result, their attitude is shifting between tolerance and acceptance.

*Keywords: football; homophobia; exclusion; non-professional players; sport journalism; the unmarked*

## Introduction

In recent years, German society has become more cosmopolitan and open. We find greater social acceptance towards minorities and homophobic media coverage is simply not tolerated anymore. For example, ex-football player Thomas Hitzlsperger’s coming out in 2014 produced a wave of solidarity. However, football is still a heteronormative bastion similar to the military or the Catholic Church. People involved in

1 With many thanks and more to Fawn H. Miller.

football culture such as non-professional players and fans contribute to the construction of football culture. This construct includes as well as excludes specific persons and groups. On the one hand, football is constructed as a field of fair play. On the other, talking about football discloses overt or subtle exclusions. How are these perspectives connected and what does it mean for non-professional players? Accordingly, this paper is structured as follows:

*Firstly*, I will present the theoretical and methodological framework of my study which is based on three founding pillars: A praxeological approach, the notion of heteronormativity as a basic principle of social life and the assumption of a methodological need for naming the unnamed.

*Secondly*, I am going to reconstruct the way in which several groups who discussed football referred to homosexuality in football. Then, I am going to compare these group discussions and the way media writes about being gay and playing football. Some group discussions demonstrate overt homophobia, whereas media coverage avoids exclusionary language.

*Thirdly*, I take the views which the non-professional players expressed about gay football players and homophobia and ask sports journalists about their own opinions on this matter. I am interested in the perspective of those who do the coverage themselves and also those who may be held responsible for player's difficulty with coming out as gay.

As far as dealing with taboos is concerned, both journalists and groups would agree that being gay and playing football do not fit together. Although there are many similarities between both parties, the main differences are found in the way they express themselves. A similar pattern of homophobia is noticeable, but is articulated in different ways. As a result, considering group discussions as well as interviews discloses attitudes that range from explicit to subtle forms of exclusions and discrimination.

## Theory and Methodology

The theoretical background of this study is based on *heteronormativity* as a core concept of everyday life. Heteronormativity refers to a binary pattern of perception, action and thought which presumes dichotomous gender and heterosexuality as given. Hence, it functions as a social regulating mechanism within institutions and relationships. As a consequence, it makes surplus of meaning in the context of gender and sexuality manageable. In doing so, it establishes structured matrices of perception, thought, action and institutions. Moreover, heteronormativity establishes a stability of

expectations by imitating, ignoring and parodying a regime of dichotomous gender.<sup>2</sup> Heteronormativity is still strong in media coverage. Firstly, this means under-representation and trivialisation of women.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, football is assumed to be a straight men's game. In journalism, by not writing about sexual minorities or gay issues, journalists emphasise and reinforce heteronormativity as normal.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, this work is rooted in a *praxeological perspective*. From a perspective of linguistic pragmatics, methods (scientifically based interviews or group discussions), embodiment (of the speaker's relaxation, professional interest, tension and aggression), and temporal/spatial settings offer insights into meanings of *what* is said as well as to *how* it is said. Concurrently, gendered bodies are based on everyday practices. Social practice consists of collective activities, which allows for the repetitiveness of similar activities beyond temporal and spatial boundaries. Therefore, praxeology is by no means a fixed theoretical structure. Rather, it is an attitude towards research, and/or a strategy of searching and finding. It is a methodology of doing practice.<sup>5</sup> In this perspective, shared practical knowledge and social meaning are not hidden *behind* social actions but rather within.

Thirdly, in a methodological sense, I am going to focus on the *unmarked* as hegemonic components of everyday knowledge. The unmarked is taken for granted, not reflected upon, and not questioned.<sup>6</sup> It is closely related to social desirability. Therefore, it constitutes social normality and often remains unspoken. As Wayne Brekhus suggests, the unsaid can be made explicit by reversing conventional patterns of markedness to foreground what typically remains unnamed and implicit. "Highlighting the 'negative space' between socially marked phenomena allows us to observe

- 2 Nina Degele: Heteronormativität entselbstverständlichen: Zum verunsichernden Potenzial von Queer Studies, in: Freiburger Frauen Studien 11 (2005), pp. 109–133; Chrys Ingraham: The Heterosexual Imaginary: Feminist Sociology and Theories of Gender, in: Steven Seidman (ed.): Queer Theory/Sociology, Cambridge/US 1996, pp. 168–193; Stevi Jackson: Heterosexuality in Question, London 1999, pp. 163–165.
- 3 Daniela Schaaf/Jörg-Uwe Nieland: Medienpräsenz von Sportlerinnen – Emanzipation oder Sexualisierung? in: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte 16-19 (2011), pp. 15–20.
- 4 Nina Degele: Fußball verbindet – durch Ausgrenzung, Wiesbaden 2013; H. J. Lenskyj: Reflections on Communication and Sport: On Heteronormativity and Gender Identities, in: Communication & Sport 1:1/2 (2013), pp. 138–150.
- 5 Robert Schmidt: Soziologie der Praktiken: Konzeptionelle Studien und empirische Analyse, Frankfurt am Main 2012, p. 26; Theodore R. Schatzki: Practice mind-ed orders, in: Theodore R. Schatzki/Karin Knorr Cetina/Eike v. Savigny (eds.): The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory, London 2001, pp. 42–55.
- 6 I would like to thank Stephanie Bethmann as well as the reviewers for a clarification: The terms marked/unmarked and named/unnamed are not quite the same thing. In this paper, 'the unmarked' relates to facts so much taken for granted that they do not have to be mentioned. 'The unnamed' relates to issues not mentioned because they often are tabooed. Accordingly, in football, heterosexuality is the unmarked and homosexuality is the unnamed.

social life where it has not already been heavily articulated, typed, and ‘coloured’ within the popular culture.”<sup>7</sup> Not surprisingly, such a reversion follows Harold Garfinkel’s strategy of debunking that which is socially taken for granted as a highly controlled and embodied procedure.<sup>8</sup>

Since public homophobia is being criticised and not accepted as a norm anymore, homophobic attitudes need to be identified and analysed carefully. As part of the strategy for this project, I conducted 24 group discussions from 2008–2011. All of the people involved were either interested in playing, watching, and/or talking football. Why group discussions?<sup>9</sup> People involved in discussions are more than rational actors. Their emotions are far more than by-products of actions. Rather, these emotions are strategies of coping with uncertainty and deviations from the norm. They are basic components of team spirit and are articulated collectively. As an interactive event, group discussions are settings for both artificially induced and naturally expressed actions: On the one hand, social scientists are motivated by discoveries in and via interactions. They create a scientific background; negotiate the terms of location, time-slots and the technical conditions. Moreover, there is a moderator involved with scientific background and knowledge who conducts the discussion. The participants are in a stressful situation, because they realise they are being observed, recorded and analysed. For most of them, a situation like this is strange. They participate voluntarily, possibly as a consequence of peer pressure. In this sense, the setting is highly artificial. On the other hand, the setting is very natural. The participating groups are authentic groups, who regularly play together, attend football games, or discuss football issues. The participants are familiar with their locations of choice such as a clubhouse, favourite pub, private home or even locker rooms. They are also familiar with the dates and times for selected appointments; before a match, after training, during their regular meeting

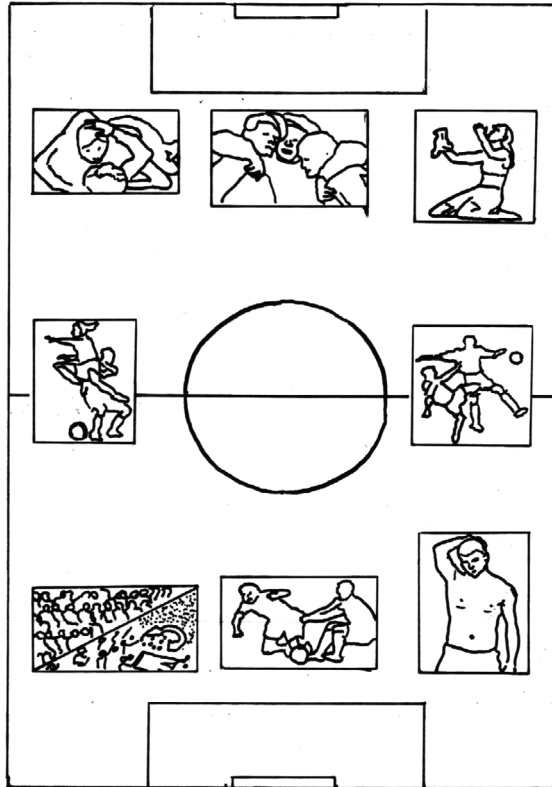
7 Wayne Brekhus: *A Sociology of the Unmarked: Redirecting Our Focus*, in: *Sociological Theory* 16 (1998), p. 44, pp. 34–51.

8 Harold Garfinkel: *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Englewood Cliffs 1967, pp. 35–37.

9 The more common English term for group settings in qualitative research is ‘focus groups’. This method was developed mainly in market and survey research as a tool for “gathering individual information quickly and efficiently in a group context”. Jocelyn H. Hollander: *The Social Contexts of Focus Groups*, in: *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 33 (2004), pp. 602–637, p. 606. The method group discussion distinctly differs from focus groups or group interviews through its rigid focus on interaction. As Jocelyn Hollanders points out in her re-analysis of focus group data, “all research situations are instances of social interaction” (*ibid.* p. 605), even survey interviews and qualitative interviews. As a consequence, Hollander suggests treating interactional phenomena (such as group pressure and conformity) not as an obstacle to be overcome, on the contrary: “they are the data” (*ibid.*). Ralf Bohnsack: *Rekonstruktive Sozialforschung: Einführung in die Methodologie und Praxis qualitativer Forschung*, 4th ed., Opladen 2000; Peter Loos/Burkhard Schäffer: *Das Gruppendiskussionsverfahren: Theoretische Grundlagen und empirische Anwendung*, Opladen 2001.

and so on. The 24 groups differed in age, gender, sexual orientation, social environment/milieu, city/village, nationalities and ethnicity, abled/disabled, and some who were settled and others homeless.

As part of the group discussions, a *poster*<sup>10</sup> was used as a tool which unveils taboos, namely homosexuality, but does not name it explicitly.<sup>11</sup>



“Sketch of the Poster” by Caroline Janz, reproduced by permission

- 10 Ideas for a visual stimulus were collected by surveying literature treating popular issues as well as taboos in current discussions on football. The poster was developed and evaluated in several workshops over the course several of months, before the group discussions got started.
- 11 Burkard Michel: Das Gruppendiskussionsverfahren in der (Bild-)Rezeptionsforschung, in: Ralf Bohnsack/Aglaja Przyborski/Burkhard Schäffer (eds.): Das Gruppendiskussionsverfahren in der Forschungspraxis, Opladen/Farmington Hills 2010, pp. 219–231; Nina Degele/Diana Cichecki/Kevin Kunz: „Also das meiste davon ist ja einfach durch die Medien vermittelt“: Zur bildgestützten Erforschung abstrakten Wissens, in: Zeitschrift für Qualitative Forschung (ZQF) 17 (2016), pp. 133–148.

As one can see, the poster includes several images which emphasise different aspects such as gender, race, a mesh of gender and sexuality, class, commercialisation as well as direct proximity, and emotions such as aggression, joy and grief. The interview groups met after training, before a game, or for their usual team meetings and discussed the poster together. The various groups included (queer) fan clubs, retired football players from the same town, a Catholic Church choir, a lesbian football team from a German football league (*Kreisklasse*), teams with physical disabilities, and a team of homeless grassroots football players. The discussions varied in length between one and two hours.

Focusing on comparison between non-professional and professional speakers, in 2016, 24 problem-focused interviews were conducted with 25 journalists. The journalists interviewed had an average working experience of 22 years and were predominantly in managerial positions.<sup>12</sup> The aim of the study was to reconstruct sport journalists' interactive construction and expression of the unspoken and the unnamed when it comes to homophobia and sexism in European football. The journalists worked for public and private television, broadcasting, daily press as well as weekly journals distributed throughout Germany. There are only two women included in my research. However, this in itself is not surprising, since sports journalists are predominantly male.<sup>13</sup>

As far as the framework of gender and sexuality is concerned, modern sport is "closely related to the re-production of power along the lines of gender as well as other social categories, such as sexuality, race, social class and ethnicity".<sup>14</sup> Thus, sport can be seen as paradigm for gender constructions. The media still focuses on the body of female athletes rather than on their athletic skills.<sup>15</sup> Being part of an androcentric, mil-

- 12 Michael Meuser/Ulrike Nagel: Vom Nutzen der Expertise: ExpertInneninterviews in der Sozialberichterstattung, in: Alexander Bogner/Beate Littig/Wolfgang Menz (eds.): *Das Experteninterview: Theorie, Methode, Anwendung*, 2nd ed., Wiesbaden 2005, pp. 257–272; Jonathan Potter/Alexa Hepburn: Eight Challenges for Interview Researchers. in: Jaber F. Gubrium et al.(eds.): *The Sage Handbook of Interview Research*, 2nd ed., London 2012, pp. 555–570.
- 13 The list of interviewees includes: *Newspapers*: Enrico, Tino, Ivo, Volker, Thea, Silvio; *journals/trade magazines*: Klaas, Hubertus, Jeremy; *specialized agencies*: Ole, Leo; *freelance journalists*: Klaus, Udo; *public service broadcasters and radio*: Helena, Salvatore, Vera, Lars, Zacharias, Konrad, Vadim, David, Bruno; *commercial television*: Paul, Peer, Oswald. The following quotes throughout the article are taken from the interviews, which are owned by the author and have been translated by her.
- 14 Jonah Bury: Non-performing Inclusion: A Critique of the English Football Association's Action Plan on Homophobia in Football, in: *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 50 (2015), p. 212. pp. 211–226.
- 15 Eoin Trolan: The Impact of the Media on Gender Inequality within Sport, in: *Procedia—Social and Behavioral Sciences* 91 (2013), pp. 215–227.

itary and heteronormative history<sup>16</sup>, exclusions are basic principles in European football. Accordingly, Eric Anderson reflects on “how early understandings about sport’s social roles were anchored in moral panics over homosexuality in companion with the growth of industrialisation”.<sup>17</sup> However, over the past few years, he has noticed decreasing homophobia in sports: Before the 90’s, it was tabooed for young men to be gay.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, homophobia is supposed to have been extended by ‘homohysteria’ which is based off of the fear of being feminine, but this fear does not mean being gay. According to this understanding, decreasing overt homophobic speech or violence still coexists with “broader inequalities, hidden prejudice, and the continued institutional privilege of some groups of men”.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, sexism has to be taken into account<sup>20</sup>, just as social change that is based on decreasing overt homophobia should be questioned.<sup>21</sup>

Many non-professional players have favourite football clubs they support; moreover they are also part of organised fan clubs. Accordingly, football fan research offers valuable insights into grassroots players’ perspectives. Analyses of online surveys,<sup>22</sup> message boards,<sup>23</sup> tweets<sup>24</sup> and fan-clubs<sup>25</sup> demonstrate evidence of decreasing homophobia within the fan culture. At the same time though, soccer fans themselves

- 16 Marie Hardin et al.: ‘Have You Got Game?’ Hegemonic Masculinity and Neo-Homophobia in U.S. Newspaper Sports Columns, in: *Communication, Culture & Critique* 2 (2009), pp. 182–200.
- 17 Eric Anderson: *Assessing the Sociology of Sport: On Changing Masculinities and Homophobia*, in: *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 50 (2015), p. 363, pp. 363–367.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 Sam de Boise: I’m not Homophobic, ‘I’ve Got Gay Friends’: Evaluating the Validity of Inclusive Masculinity, in: *Men and Masculinities* 18 (2015), p. 325, pp. 318–339.
- 20 Timothy Jon Curry: Fraternal Bonding in the Locker Room: A Profeminist Analysis of Talk about Competition and Women, in: *Sociology of Sport Journal* 8 (1991), pp. 119–135.
- 21 Sam de Boise: I’m not Homophobic, ‘I’ve Got Gay Friends’: Evaluating the Validity of Inclusive Masculinity, pp. 333f.
- 22 Ellis Cashmore/Jamie Cleland: Fans, Homophobia and Masculinities in Association Football: Evidence of a More Inclusive Environment, in: *The British Journal of Sociology* 63 (2012), pp. 370–387.
- 23 Jamie Cleland: Racism, Football Fans, and Online Message Boards: How Social Media Has Added a New Dimension to Racist Discourse in English Football, in: *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 38 (2014), pp. 315–431; Jamie Cleland/Rory Magrath/Edward Kian: The Internet as a Site of Decreasing Cultural Homophobia in Association Football: An Online Response by Fans to the Coming Out of Thomas Hitzlsperger, in: *Men and Masculinities* 21 (2016), pp. 1–21, doi: 10.1177/1097184X16663261.
- 24 Andrew C. Billings et al.: The Art of Coming Out: Traditional and Social Media Frames Surrounding the NBA’s Jason Collins, in: *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 92 (2015), pp. 142–160.
- 25 Dirk Leibfried/Andreas Erb: *Das Schweigen der Männer: Homosexualität im deutschen Fußball*, Göttingen 2011, pp. 67–74.

actively contribute to homophobia inside the stadium through chanting and visual displays. In doing so, it becomes a kind of normalisation.<sup>26</sup>

In comparison to men's elite football, grassroots football is a relatively marginalised area of the game. Literature focuses on the lived experiences of junior players, the significance of female participation/the role of elite females, and issues of immigrant youth participation.<sup>27</sup> Case studies focus on discriminatory abuse in grassroots sports in Australia and England<sup>28</sup>, and construction of masculinity and sexism in 'small goal football' in Trinidad.<sup>29</sup> Even at the lowest level—the grassroots game—racism is a serious issue.<sup>30</sup> British Asian footballers in England experience racial discrimination/Islamophobia on a regular basis.<sup>31</sup> Even though openly gay football players are lacking at the professional level, the situation in the sport at amateur levels is different. As an ethnographic study at the amateur level in Ireland and Scotland shows, openly gay players disrupt and reinforce norms simultaneously, better than openly gay leagues.<sup>32</sup> Reversing the perspective, an ethnographic study on heterosexual men participating in gay sport clubs in the UK demonstrates shifting traditional definitions of masculinity. The 12 straight men interviewed showed diminished cultural homophobia; they had no single conceptualisation of masculinity, but a more pluralised and inclusive one.<sup>33</sup>

Even though sport journalists stage themselves as being open-minded, they work within certain circumstances, which cannot be considered as gay-friendly.<sup>34</sup> Such

- 26 Jayne Caudwell: 'Does Your Boyfriend Know You're Here?' The Spatiality of Homophobia in Men's Football Culture in the UK, in: *Leisure Studies* 30 (2011), pp. 123–138.
- 27 Jimmy O'Gorman: *Junior and Youth Grassroots Football Culture*, Routledge 2018.
- 28 Paul Oliver/Jim Lusted: Discrimination Cases in Grass-roots Sport: Comparing Australian and English Experiences, in: *Sport in Society* 18:5 (2015), pp. 529–542.
- 29 Dylan Kerrigan: Languaculture and Grassroots Football: "Small Goal" in Trinidad, in: *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 51:6 (2016), pp. 735–751.
- 30 Gerry Holt: Is Racism a Grassroots Football Issue? BBC News, 13 July 2012, at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-18728377> (accessed on 26 December 2017).
- 31 Daniel Kilvington/John Price: British Asians, Overt Racism and Islamophobia in English Football, in: *The International Journal of Sport and Society* 3 (2013), pp. 169–178.
- 32 Teresa Willis: Kicking Down Barriers: Gay Footballers, Challenging Stereotypes and Changing Attitudes in Amateur League Play, in: *Soccer & Society* 16 (2015), pp. 377–392.
- 33 Nigel Jarvis: The Inclusive Masculinities of Heterosexual Men within UK Gay Sport Clubs, in: *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 50:3 (2015), pp. 283–300.
- 34 Eric Anderson: Assessing the Sociology of Sport: On Changing Masculinities and Homophobia; David Nylund: When in Rome: Heterosexism, Homophobia, and Sports Talk Radio, in: *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 28 (2004), pp. 136–168; Katja Sabisch: Tabuisierte Männlichkeiten: Der öffentliche Diskurs über Homosexualität in der deutschen Fußballbundesliga, in: *Soziale Probleme: Zeitschrift für soziale Probleme und soziale Kontrolle* 25 (2014), pp. 52–74.



circumstances are rather sexist,<sup>35</sup> and/or racist.<sup>36</sup> Sport journalists have to reconcile economic constraints and calculations with their notions of journalistic quality and independence. They have to continually develop new 'good practices' in conflicting situations. An ethnographic analysis of journalists' work in Germany demonstrates a steadily increasing pace and workload.<sup>37</sup> Since its introduction around a decade ago, Twitter appears to be on the cutting edge of rearranging media, sport and journalism. Investigating sports reporters' perception of their use of Twitter as part of their professional journalistic duties showed a discrepancy between journalist responses and measured content: they used Twitter for commentary and personal opinion more than for breaking news and promotion.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, based on interviews with 18 Canadian and U.S. sport media professionals, Twitter changes the nature of sport media relations in terms of flattening the sport hierarchy.<sup>39</sup>

## Group Discussions 2008–2011: Expressing Different Positions on Gay Football Players

Football is basically a male sport. For most of the 177 discussants from the 24 groups, women's football differs fundamentally from men's: they are supposed to be bodily inferior, slower, have less strength, and supposedly cannot tackle each other. Moreover, men's and women's football is supposed to be imbued with different emotions. For a young male team of town football players, several football players and fans stated that women did not show enough or at least not the proper emotions in football. They perceived them as being rational and unaffected. Since women did not perform the proper emotions in football (if any), they did supposedly not really belong to this culture: on the other hand, football makes it possible for men to sing, wear necklaces, touch each other, to be intimate with one another, to cry one's eyes out and express their

- 35 Inge Claringbould/Annelies Knoppers/Agnes Elling: Exclusionary Practices in Sport Journalism, in: *Sex Roles* 51 (2004), pp. 709–718; Eoin Trolan: The Impact of the Media on Gender Inequality within Sport.
- 36 Jamie Cleland: Racism, Football Fans, and Online Message Boards: How Social Media Has Added a New Dimension to Racist Discourse in English Football; Marie Hardin et al.: 'Have You Got Game?' Hegemonic Masculinity and Neo-Homophobia in U.S. Newspaper Sports Columns.
- 37 Marcus Bölz: *Fußballjournalismus: Eine medienethnographische Analyse redaktioneller Arbeitsprozesse*, Wiesbaden 2013.
- 38 Mary Lou Sheffer/Brad Schultz: Paradigm Shift or Passing Fad? Twitter and Sports Journalism, in: *International Journal of Sport Communication* 3:4 (2010), pp. 472–485.
- 39 Chris Gibbs/Richard Haynes: A Phenomenological Investigation into How Twitter Has Changed the Nature of Sport Media Relations, in: *International Journal of Sport Communication* 6:4 (2013), pp. 394–408.

emotions. Such emotions are usually attributed to women. But in football, men have an exclusive right to these emotions, which suggests that they feel threatened and want to mark their territory. As a result, the heteronormative structure, which is based on clear-cut gender differences and male superiority, is supported and stabilised. Heteronormativity is deeply interwoven with homophobia and sexism, which becomes explicit in the groups' practice of talking: Women are othered and tolerated, as long as they do not claim rights. One player from one out of two veteran's football team said, "We don't have anything against it, it just doesn't fit". For him, there is no need to clarify what does not fit—the heteronormative structure of football is left unmarked.

However, just through their participation in 'football culture', women show that they cooperate and accept such conditions of participation. In doing so, they reinstate, support and stabilise male superiority. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu describes this sort of symbolic violence as "the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity".<sup>40</sup> This complicity can be observed, in situations like the following. One out of three groups of female league players discussed athletic and muscular appearance of other female players. In this group discussion female players were busy admiring U.S.-American goal scorer Brandi Chastain's power, physical appearance, and performance enthusiastically. At the same time, they were disappointed to state that she does not look feminine: "That's crazy. It's crazy for a woman... when she has too many muscles.... it does not look pretty". The group agrees on a compromise in referring to her appearance in the specific situation: "No, she is flexing everything. This is why it looks like that. Otherwise she doesn't usually have muscles like that". The conclusion is that Chastain still counts as a woman as long as her physical appearance is not permanently visible. This is an exceptional situation; therefore, her celebration of a goal is justifiable. Accordingly, this demand for femininity which female players have to cope with—whether they want to or not—is the price they have to pay. In a praxeological sense, how these women alternate between excitement and disappointment is a key to understanding the contradiction of being a woman and playing football. They perform what they are discussing, they negotiate and make meaning of the world they live in.

Heteronormativity in football is demonstrated by different intersections for men and women with regard to gender and/or sexual discrimination. Since female football players have the experience of being othered as butch and/or lesbians, lesbians are not unusual in football, rather that is what is expected. As one participant from a women's grassroots team says: "Sometimes... they give you a strange look... when you tell people you don't know very well, that you play football. Then, the second or third question is always: so ... how many lesbians are in your club?"

40 Pierre Bourdieu/Loic J.D. Wacquant: *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Chicago 2002, p. 167.

Men in contrast are compatible with football due to their sex. In their case, breaking a taboo refers to sexual orientation which is dramatised more: “When I see a fag with pink shoes prancing on the field, who just skips around but doesn’t tackle, of course you’ll start cracking up.”

Sexism and homophobia are functionally equivalent: Gay players are said to be effeminate men and female footballers as masculinised women. As a consequence, gay men have to distinguish themselves from women and female players have to prove their femininity. Both of which are used to construct a heteronormativity bubble encircling football.

Gay men stir up and provoke problems in terms of football. A main topic that arises is talking about the shower room. In the discussions, there was no other topic which caused more anxiety than the scenario of sharing a shower with a gay man. As one member of a veteran’s football team says: “When I know from the get-go that he’s gay, and I haven’t known him long, I would not share the shower with him.”

The topic of sharing a shower is handled in an ironic way:

Bernd: Today, it’s not that dangerous anymore, because today, we don’t have bars of soap anymore [Laughter]. Today, we have bottles.

Eric: Gel.

Bernd: In the past, it was worse. The soap could fall down and you had to bend over. Today, it’s okay. [Loud laughter]

Such dialogue hardly veils the fear of the man to be naked and open for gaze, sexual harassment, or even rape. The less the ‘enemy’ is distinguishable, the harder it is to deal with for heterosexual men. Being heterosexual is taken for granted and unmarked. For these men, there is no need no name heterosexuality as the norm or homosexuality as a deviation.

Talking about homosexuality in football or avoiding this subject is not new. Participants in the group discussions make use of several strategies that cover a broad range of emotions from acceptance to rejection/hostility when discussing it. On the one hand, there is acceptance. For several groups, being gay and playing football is taken as a definite sign of improvement. At the other end of the spectrum is negation (“being gay doesn’t exist in football”), and its culmination in overt aggression: “fag”, (“schwule Sau”), “with a faggot I won’t share the shower” (veteran’s football teams and league players form village teams).

Beyond these explicit and clear statements, there is something in between. When it comes to gay football players, the more common strategies used are avoiding the issue. A picture used in the discussion, showing two players lying on the pitch embracing each after scoring a goal, offers reactions such as jokes and laughter (“fun on the grass”) and irony “they like each other” (one out of two groups old age home residents). Another strategy consists of avoiding clear statements and hiding them behind

commonly shared critique, such as a critique of commercialisation. This strategy is often connected to political correctness.<sup>41</sup>

In this study, political correctness is a strategy to avoid being criticised as somebody resentful towards disadvantaged or discriminated groups such as women, foreigners, people of colour, homosexuals and others. It allows avoiding, redefining, shifting, and ignoring homosexuality without outing oneself as homophobic (or as sexist or racist). As a consequence, resentments often appear as subliminal racism, sexism and so on. A Catholic Church choir that was part of the group discussions does not explicitly say aloud that they are against gay men and women playing football. Its' strategy of exclusion works in more subtle ways. The group started explicitly criticising the dramatic gestures in football with respect to fans as a desired audience, as well as criticising the commercialisation of football. In this case, criticising commercialisation is hidden homophobia ("repulsive/repugnant", "abstoßend"), since it is connected to "almost tender", "demonstrating their happiness", "awful/terrible". However, the term 'gay' or 'homosexual' is never mentioned. Again using the poster as a stimulus, both men pictured on the poster who are hugging are addressed as repulsive/repugnant and impersonally as "those over there", naming homosexuality is not necessary, but still can be criticised.

Christopher: I see... I feel disturbed, when they.... how those two on the very top left, um, well.. left um ....

Finn: .....demonstrate their happiness .....

Christopher: .....yes, awful!

41 The term has been in use since the 1980s and is conceivably vague. Political correctness is not primarily about the content, but about the form, which means language. According to the English Oxford Dictionary, Political Correctness means "the avoidance of forms of expression or action that are perceived to exclude, marginalize, or insult groups of people who are socially disadvantaged or discriminated against." ([https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/political\\_correctness](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/political_correctness), accessed on 30 December 2018) Likewise, it is also used to caricature such a language as censorship, prohibition of thinking and exaggerated sensitivity. It is not just what is said, but how it is said, who speaks, when and for whom. A fundamental underlying assumption proposes that language always discriminates: "Using a weapon purposefully includes killing or injuring and who uses language appropriately, cannot help but discriminate." (Anatol Stefanowitsch: *Sprache und Ungleichheit*, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 62 (2012), pp. 16–17, p. 27, translated by the author). Since language is based on distinctions, which can (and often are) linked with a negative valuation, there will never be a truly non-discriminatory language. Accordingly, it is the specific context that creates, and imbues the debates with, specific meanings. The speakers need to know dominant norms and historical contexts (Sabine Wierlemann: *Political Correctness in den USA und in Deutschland*, Berlin 2002, p. 202). As a result, reservations against the choice of language are always reservations against the issue itself.

Christopher and Finn not only criticise gay men, they criticise their coming out in public. Displaying homosexuality seems to be worse than being homosexual itself. In a similar way, the choir is guided by a double moral standard: You can do what you want, but do not let others know. This is the message. The public and the private are two completely segregated spheres, and homosexuality has to be excluded from the public. That could be an explanation for the lack of gay football players' coming outs: they have internalised the taboo completely and insist upon their private sphere.

There is a connection to the shift away from oneself being responsible for being homophobic. Accordingly, fans, countries in southern Europe, and especially media are blamed for homophobia. The discussants declare themselves not responsible for homophobia, it is the others who are guilty. This is where media comes into play. The coverage of world championships for men 2010 and for women 2007 and 2011 shows growing openness towards women and gay men in football. In these years, leading media such as *Bild*, *Fokus*, *Kicker*, *11Freunde*, *Spiegel*, *Stern* and *Welt* demonstrated congruency of political correctness concerning race/ethnicity as well as with respect to gender stereotypes.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, differences between the group discussions and media coverage with reference to homosexuality in football can be observed: Mass media demonstrate more attention and sensitivity regarding homosexuality than several group discussions. Even before ex pro-player Thomas Hitzlsperger's coming out in 2014, most of the media commenting on homosexuality demanded recognition in football, and cited German pro-player Mario Gomez: "Being gay isn't a taboo anymore. We have a gay vice-chancellor, Berlin's mayor is gay. So, even gay football players should confess their sexual orientation".<sup>43</sup> Group discussions work differently. They offer an impressive spectrum of taboos, clichés and open insults.

In 2014, after the world championships, Thomas Hitzlsperger became the first national professional soccer player in Germany to announce that he is gay.<sup>44</sup> After this event, the media demonstrated an overwhelmingly accepting response, and newspapers reported positively.<sup>45</sup> They responded in an extraordinarily respectful way which

42 Nina Degele: Heteronormativität entselbstverständlich: Zum verunsichernden Potenzial von Queer Studies, pp. 116–124, pp. 144–158.

43 SID: Gomez: Schwule Fußballer sollen sich outen, 9 November 2010, at: <https://www.welt.de/sport/fussball/article160307489/Gomez-Schwule-Fussballer-sollen-sich-outen.html> (accessed on 25 June 2012).

44 Carolin Emcke/Moritz Müller-Wirth: "Homosexualität wird im Fußball ignoriert", in: *Die Zeit*, 13 January 2014, at: <http://www.zeit.de/2014/03/homosexualitaet-profifussball-thomas-hitzlsperger> (accessed on 27 February 2016); Marcus Christenson: "Thomas Hitzlsperger Announces He Is Gay in Newspaper Interview", 8 January 2014, at: <http://www.theguardian.com/football/2014/jan/08/thomas-hitzlsperger-gay-announces-homosexual> (accessed on 8 January 2014).

45 Christiana Schallhorn/Anne Hempel: Media Coverage of Thomas Hitzlsperger's Coming out in German Newspapers, in: *Journalism Studies* (2015), pp. 1187–1205, doi: 10.1080/1461670X.2015.1112243 (accessed on 28 January 2016).

reflects sport journalists' present attitudes toward gays and women in soccer. "[W]hen sport media do write about homosexuality, they have changed tone from a hostile disposition to one of acceptance".<sup>46</sup> Media address homophobia as a problem rather than reproducing it.<sup>47</sup> According to an Emnid survey in Germany published in 2010, 63 per cent of respondents did not think that a public coming out in the professional soccer world would create a disadvantage for the players. In Great Britain, a comparable study shows that this percentage is even higher (93 per cent).<sup>48</sup>

However, since Hitzlsperger no other famous German soccer player came out, homosexuality in soccer is still being tabooed.<sup>49</sup> Men's sports remain the standard for "trivializing, sexualizing, and heterosexualizing women's bodies within the context of sport".<sup>50</sup> Media play a central role in getting homosexuality out of its 'dirty corner', but journalists are reluctant to get their hands dirty. "By positioning themselves as being supportive towards gay players, journalists and Twitter followers alike can engage in self-congratulation for progressiveness and tolerance while systemic homophobia in sports remains prevalent".<sup>51</sup> Tabloid press in Germany is supposed to bargain a six-figure euro range by confirming the name of a gay soccer player. However, journalists remain silent, even if they know their names. This is mostly due to their ethical standards and as well as to their intention of maintaining their position as trusted partners behind closed doors.<sup>52</sup> Media and gay soccer players still have a difficult relationship. As demonstrated elsewhere, spectators, fans and recreational soccer players blame 'the media' and deem it somewhat responsible for homophobia in soccer.<sup>53</sup> Are such accusations convincing?

- 46 Edward M. Kian et al.: Sport journalists' views on gay men in sport, society and within sport media, in: *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 50 (2015), p. 907, pp. 895–911; Billings et al.: *The Art of Coming Out: Traditional and Social Media Frames Surrounding the NBA's Jason Collins*.
- 47 Jamie Cleland: Association football and the representation of homosexuality by the print media: a case study of Anton Hysén, in: *Journal of Homosexuality* 61 (2014), pp. 1269–1287.
- 48 Dirk Leibfried/Andreas Erb: *Das Schweigen der Männer. Homosexualität im deutschen Fußball*, p. 16.
- 49 Marie Hardin et al.: 'Have You Got Game?' Hegemonic Masculinity and Neo-Homophobia in U.S. Newspaper Sports Columns.
- 50 Eoin Trolan: *The Impact of the Media on Gender Inequality within Sport*, p. 224.
- 51 Billings et al.: *The Art of Coming Out: Traditional and Social Media Frames Surrounding the NBA's Jason Collins*, p. 154.
- 52 Dirk Leibfried/Andreas Erb: *Das Schweigen der Männer: Homosexualität im deutschen Fußball*, pp. 97f.
- 53 Nina Degele: *Fußball verbindet—durch Ausgrenzung*; Marie Hardin et al.: 'Have You Got Game?' Hegemonic Masculinity and Neo-Homophobia in U.S. Newspaper Sports Columns.

## Journalists 2016: Looking for the Right Balance

To find an answer to this question, 25 (experienced) journalists working in the field of football were interviewed, in 2016. When it comes to homophobia in football, some of them sympathised with people who blame the media, especially tabloid press, because they were accused of not respecting football players' private lives. As Udo, a freelancing journalist, says about mainstream media: "They continue to report about football players as being gladiators, they give them school grades and even their language and visualization of them, cultivates this masculinity cult. The message is still: There are no gay football players". Mainstream media did not serve as a platform for gay fan clubs or was not used for reporting on events such as games for gay athletes. Instead, they just focus on outing the first active professional football player.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, media researcher Katja Sabisch analyses mainstream media in Germany since 1995. According to her, the search for a gay football player and the request for coming out as a call for order is supposed to make gay players identifiable and susceptible to being othered.<sup>55</sup> In the study, BILD, Germany's most popular tabloid, is not considered being interested in "creating a gay friendly atmosphere in Germany. They want to sell their newspaper, via headlines, via news" (Konrad). BILD was the most popular bogeyman for journalists who do not work for tabloid press. Their idea of media as an obstacle for gay football players is focused on tabloids. In Hitzlsperger's case, however, BILD did not act disrespectfully. On the contrary, BILD's coverage of Hitzlsperger's coming out at January, 9<sup>th</sup> (which was entitled "Respekt!") 2014 was a good example for a positive change of atmosphere: Several journalists were amazed by political correctness concerning Hitzlsperger.

Accordingly, most of the journalists are now surprised by an 'anonymous mass' view on media, of readers, spectators, audience, sports consumers or non-professional players who accuse them for being homophobic. By contrast, they claim that most media are respectful: "This is the excuse that has been around for years. So a bit of passing the buck to the others" (Leo). For him, the accusation lacks differentiation. Zacharias emphasises his editorial department's efforts to practice "a very open approach to this issue. We don't have any need to catch up". Even though media are important multipliers, fans and non-professional players are supposed to be responsible, as well. However, several journalists' critique is directed towards the quality press, as well. Vera still does not observe 'normal' ways of dealing with homosexuality. For her, it is very

54 John Hughson/Marcus Free: Football's 'Coming Out': Soccer and Homophobia in England's Tabloid Press, in: Lawrie Zion/Ramón Spaaij/Matthew Nicholson (eds.): *Sport Media and Journalism*, Media International Australia 140 (2011), pp. 117–125.

55 Katja Sabisch: *Tabuisierte Männlichkeiten: Der öffentliche Diskurs über Homosexualität in der deutschen Fußballbundesliga*.

clear that she would never give a piece of information about a gay football player to her colleagues, because “what is gossiped about in the corridors when it comes to soccer players who may or may not possibly be gay, it’s crazy!” Talking about gay soccer players is considered a highly emotional and contested issue for the public. According to her, not much has changed in her work over the past 30 years. As far as most of her colleagues are concerned, “I think the males are still blatantly homophobic”. She observes homophobic behaviour (mainly gossip) on an everyday basis in the corridors of her company. Her colleague Lars, on the contrary, takes gossip differently: “I admit, it’s still a topic. It’s not about rejecting homosexuals, but more about journalists being one foot ahead of the other[s]”. He emphasises ‘knowledge’ as the ultimate advantage. To be precise, there are two very different defining situations involved. Vera speaks of homophobia and Lars sees it as (professional) curiosity and a competition for information. In this way, journalists process a range of behaviour from homophobia to curiosity—which is not different from non-professional players’ and fans’ views.

What do journalists think about people who are involved in football as fans, spectators, non-professional players and those who love this sport? First and foremost, many of them criticise their lack of differentiation. As for David and most of the journalists, speaking about ‘the media’ does not make sense to them. However, many of them understand readers’ and spectators’ concerns, even though they do not agree with their point of view. Taken Hitzlsperger’s coming out as a test case, they agree with Volker’s assumption that the majority in the stadium would encourage him. For them, football basically unites people instead of separating them (Hubertus), and homophobia is limited to a small part of fans’ (Ole). For Vadim and several others, homophobia is being attributed to individual remarks, but not to groups. Media convey the message, but they do not create it (Ivo).

On the one hand, society has increasingly become more open. On the other hand, fans can make gay players’ lives difficult. Fans can be very brutal, especially when it comes to away games. Insults like ‘fag’/‘schwule Sau’ are cultural standard in the stadium. Ivo observes: “I see that fans often discredit gays, even if they are not gay at all. But it is because of the wording: Fagot/fag! What the fuck that passing is so gay! And all of these things are quite common”. Such behaviour is not limited to committed fans, it can be observed in expensive box seats, too (Vadim). Among homophobic fans, gay players would not have fun in the stadium: “6000 stupid idiots calling ‘schwule Sau’ one must be able to withstand” (Salvatore). In light of this, some journalists would advise a gay football player to not come out. He would be booed in the stadium. However, concerning social climate beyond football, most journalists claim social openness and acceptance towards homosexuality. As Klaas puts it: “Meanwhile, I don’t think anyone would have to be scared because of their sexual orientation”. Most journalists do not accept a general accusation of acting homophobically. Rather, they appreciate social progress in society and they refer to it as a fundamental basis of football.



## Football-Related Groups and Journalists: Dealing with the Unmarked

Journalists talk about people they write about, who they work for and who they work with. They do so in a professional way. Non-professional players and fans talk about journalists' concerns, too. For both groups, talking about taboos is a challenge. How do they make things understandable that do not belong to everyday knowledge about football and are scarcely communicated? The 'unmarked' or that which is taken for granted comprises the vast majority of social life, and "represents the vast expanse of social reality that is passively defined as unremarkable, socially generic, and profane".<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, the normal standard for the majority of people is not named and in interviews often remains silent. Silence can point to ignorance, absence of knowledge, taboos or self-censorship, but to familiarity, too. Since only considering the context may clarify the actual meaning, appropriate structural and context-specific knowledge is required.<sup>57</sup>

Following Brekhus's demand for drawing more attention to the unmarked as well as unnamed, I will take heteronormativity in football as the unmarked norm for non-professional and professional expressions of opinion. As I have demonstrated, in group discussions, non-professional players expressed a broad range of (not) talking about homosexuality in football. Often, they used several strategies to avoid the issue. Thomas Hitzlsperger's coming out in 2014 provided an opportunity to discuss homosexuality, homophobia and the media's reporting on professional soccer players. His coming out was an important issue for German media.<sup>58</sup> It is remarkable that the leading football magazine in Germany, merely mentioned this incident—for information only available online. The chief editor's commentary noticed the urgent message, but did not qualify it as important. The printed edition explained this procedure as being grounded in the fact that this was a private matter and therefore without any newsworthiness for sports. In terms of political correctness, this practice of not naming can be understood as biased behaviour that supports prejudices and discrimination in society. Such "[m]icroaggressions are the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that

56 Wayne Brekhus: *A Sociology of the Unmarked: Redirecting Our Focus*, p. 35.

57 Blake Poland/Ann Pederson: Reading between the Lines: Interpreting Silences in Qualitative Research, in: *Qualitative Inquiry* 4 (1998), pp. 293–312; Jocelyn H. Hollander: The Social Contexts of Focus Groups, in: *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 33 (2004), pp. 602–637, p. 605.

58 Christiana Schallhorn/Anne Hempel: Media Coverage of Thomas Hitzlsperger's Coming out in German Newspapers; Jamie Cleland/Rory Magrath/Edward Kian: The Internet as a Site of Decreasing Cultural Homophobia in Association Football: An Online Response by Fans to the Coming Out of Thomas Hitzlsperger.

communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group.”<sup>59</sup> In this journal, the player’s homosexuality remained unmarked. This occurred in obvious contrast to tabloid media. The chief editor Jeremy was not surprised that most criticism was voiced by colleagues. To him, the most positive reactions were uttered by athletes. Several gay male and female athletes appreciated the reserved media coverage.

From a theoretical perspective, this kind of ‘doing nothing’ has agency. In this case, not mentioning Hitzlsperger’s coming out has triggered messages. However, in the world of media, importance and newsworthiness coincide. Due to overwhelming media resonance in public, Hitzlsperger’s coming out could not be ignored. Since it is the content that counts, the content cannot be separated from normative substance: Does non-naming homosexuality mean homosexuality is seen as a matter of course or does it mean ignorance? Does not naming mean: taken for granted, not worth mentioning? Given that the media and football related discussants often avoided this subject in group discussions, is homosexuality still tabooed?

The range of meanings and evaluations is common ground shared by journalists as well as by discussants. Looking at the effects, negative and positive outcomes are potentially connected to naming and not naming homosexuality: On the one hand, naming homosexuality in terms of sensation seeking could violate gay players’ privacy and reproduce homophobia. But keeping homosexuality silent could have the same effects. On the other hand, naming homosexuality constructs a reality taken for granted and could remove such a taboo. One step further, keeping silent could demonstrate that there is no more need to make something a subject of reporting: homosexuality is taken for granted. For Jeremy, for example, media is not to blame for homophobia: “For a long time, I had a feeling that there was nothing more important to win the sports journalist prize in order to find out who is gay”. Since football players’ private lives should not have to be of interest to sports journals, he was fed up by the media having jumped on the bandwagon. For him, it was the wrong approach. He admits that there is still homophobia in society. However, today, for Jeremy, there is no need to report anything about gay football players. Remarkably, the journalist observes social change towards growing openness, but he does not see any need to adapt the attitude of his journal: A football player’s privacy remains tabooed. In terms of social change, according to his perspective, the significance of keeping homosexuality silent would have changed from ‘reproducing taboos’ to ‘taken for granted, no need of making it a topic’. However, homosexuality as being tabooed could be stabilised just as well. In another case, a journalist’s ambivalence becomes very obvious:

59 Derald Wing Sue: *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender, and Sexual Orientation*, Hoboken 2010, p. 5. An example could be saying “You are a credit to your race” to an African American.

Interviewer: Last question: How long do you expect 'gay' in football to still have news value?

Hubertus: For me none at all.

Interviewer: Aha.

Hubertus: Let's say: Let's say until the first case.

Interviewer: So, an active player?

Hubertus: I'd like to revise that. Certainly, until the first case has occurred.

To sum up: Most sports journalists are positioned ambiguously. They see a growing openness towards gay football players, adhere to principles of political correctness, and are not involved in explicit exclusion. However, when it comes to football, they do not report on homosexuality in an unbiased way. Instead, they communicate a subliminal feeling that being gay is not normal. In terms of praxeology, content and practice match.

## Conclusion

I will draw three conclusions, which cover issue-related as well as methodological consequences. Firstly, it is the context and the public sphere that counts. In terms of an open climate, being gay in football should be mentioned as long as it has news value. Obviously, this is the only way towards testing acceptance empirically.

Secondly, the ambivalent situation between mentioning and not mentioning homosexuality in football marks a difference between tolerance and acceptance. Take the metaphor of 'confession': "He admitted his homosexuality". This confessional metaphor appears in numerous interviews (Helena, Ole, Volker, Lars, Konrad). Taken seriously, the metaphor of a confession ('he admits') is connected to sinful behaviour.<sup>60</sup> Such practice demonstrates that homosexuality is not yet taken as a matter of course. The confession metaphor demonstrates a form of tolerance rather than acceptance. Tolerance is based on superficial trust in spoken words rather than referring to underlying meaning. It goes without saying that interviews produce expectations and reactions which result in demonstrations of tolerance—more than in group discussions. Moreover, it must be taken into consideration that being interviewed by a sociologist and/or gender researcher creates awareness. The interviewees adapt themselves to the

60 Only Ivo and Thea, without being asked, call the confession metaphor a no-go in the coverage. Maybe this is not coincidence that Ivo is gay: "What I mean to say: There are so ... little things that simply express that it is not yet self-evident". Thea mentions 'admitting' as an example of bad language and unreflected style, which must no longer be used in her medium anymore. In other media, this is not taken for granted.

researcher's assumed expectations, which ultimately results in a form of tolerance. In group discussions, such behaviour could be observed to a lesser extent.<sup>61</sup>

As a third result, reflection and a loss of spontaneity can be observed: There is no more 'innocent' dealing with gay football players. Some journalists think about this dilemma explicitly, they even demonstrate their inner/internal fight with some degree of indecision up to a sort of desperation. Vadim talks about his own experience with minorities and exclusion: "just terms may be hurtful, and nobody here around thinks about it as being hurtful". As a positive effect, knowledge and awareness create sensitivity, which may stay unnoticed by the majority of people.<sup>62</sup> This could be part of social change: naming privileges and becoming increasingly aware of the majority as an excluding power. Consequently, social change does not work linearly. The pendulum between acceptance and exclusion is swinging back and forth.

So far, Hitzlspergers's coming out has not encouraged other gay players to imitate him, yet. As far as grassroots players, fans and spectators are concerned, there is still a lot of work to be done to change the public perception of gay football players beyond homosexuality as being tabooed. In a methodological sense, subtleties/nuances of journalists' reports offer a deeper understanding of socially accepted ways of talking taboos. Their utterances offer insights into reflected thinking, which can work as an analytical tool to identify limits of acceptance. What they leave unspoken does not demonstrate a relaxed attitude but rather discomfort with discussion of homosexuality in football. Non-professional players, fans and people who are interested in football discussed the topic in less controlled surroundings (which was intended). Often, they did not talk in a politically correct fashion (even though they did so to a limited extent due to the artificial setting of group discussions). Language professionals like journalists are trained in using words consciously. However, professionals as well as non-professionals are part of producing ambivalent meanings—because gay football players still challenge heteronormativity in football.

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61 Nina Degele: *Fußball verbindet – durch Ausgrenzung*, p. 67.

62 In this sense, Derald Wing Sue achieves his goal to educate people, not punish or shame them, if they engage in microaggressions. Fernanda Zamudio-Suaréz: *What Happens when Your Research is Featured on 'Fox & Friends'*, 29 June 2016, at: *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/What-Happens-When-Your/236949> (accessed on 28 August 2018).