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On the Interpretation, Appropriation, and Processing of Fairness Norms in Success- and Performance-Oriented Soccer—a Qualitative Study

(Cumulative dissertation)

The published articles:

Wahnschaffe-Waldhoff, K. & Mutz, M. (2021). Aneignung und Auslegung von Fairnessnormen im Fußball: eine qualitative Studie mit Profifußballspielern (Adoption and interpretation of fair play norms in soccer: a qualitative study with professional soccer players). *Zeitschrift für Soziologie der Erziehung und Sozialisation*, 41, 144-164.

Wahnschaffe-Waldhoff, K. & Mutz, M. (2020). „Unter der Woche Konkurrenten, am Wochenende ein Team“ – Zur Ambivalenz von Konkurrenz und Kooperation im professionellen Fußball („Rivals on weekdays, on weekends one team“ – The ambivalence of competition and cooperation in professional football). *Soziale Welt*, 71, 342-373.

Wahnschaffe, K. (2016). Zur Wirkmächtigkeit von schuld- und schambesetzten Schlüsselereignissen innerhalb einer sportbezogenen Sozialisation. Eine qualitative Fallstudie zum Konflikt von Erfolgs- und Fairnessnormen im Fußball (The impact of key experiences associated with guilt and shame on sports socialization). *Sport und Gesellschaft* 13(3), 281 - 306.

Outline:

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 - 2.1 The history and changing meaning of fairness in sports and soccer
 - 2.2 Of values and norms
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Summary

In performance-oriented soccer, norms of fairness and success can conflict in many situations. This is why individual actors must constantly weigh one against the other. In professional soccer in particular, these actors are under extreme pressure to succeed, which frequently leads them to deviate from norms of fairness. At the same time, fairness is viewed as desirable in this context and is not questioned as a general, abstract value. This apparent discrepancy raises the question of what success- and performance-oriented actors actually mean when they speak of fairness and how they interpret fairness norms. Yet little systematic empirical research has been conducted so far not only on the interpretation of fairness norms but also on their appropriation and processing, whether in sports in general or in soccer in particular. This stands in clear contrast to the generally great significance attributed to fairness as a value in sports as well as to the importance of success- and performance-oriented soccer for sports and society.

Against this backdrop, the first publication of this cumulative dissertation (Wahnschaffe-Waldhoff and Mutz 2021) investigates how soccer players interpret and appropriate fairness norms. Drawing on work in socialization and systems theory and based on qualitative interviews with professional soccer players, the analysis shows that, compared to success norms, fairness plays only a marginal role in soccer and fair behavior is likely only to the extent that it entails no far-reaching, negative consequences for athletic success. This publication traces processes of socialization and considers the conflicting conditions under which the players interpret, appropriate and process fairness norms and shape their actions. In so doing, it demonstrates that players interpret fairness in much broader terms than what has been represented in sports science discourse thus far.

The second publication (Wahnschaffe-Waldhoff and Mutz 2020) addresses the question of how actors in professional soccer perceive and deal with the particular interplay between competition and cooperation in their sport. With reference to work from the fields of figuration sociology, systems theory, and practice theory and on the basis of qualitative interviews with performance-oriented soccer players, the study shows the extent to which competition is highly relevant to the action orientation of players and that it involves not only the obvious competition with opposing teams but specifically also the competition among teammates on one's own team for playing time, positions on the field, and remaining in the line-up. The study further raises the question of what relating to and dealing with others means in competitive sports when, depending on the situation, relationships are interpreted and shaped more along the lines of being competitive or cooperative.

The third publication (Wahnschaffe 2016) is devoted to sports socialization yet addresses the topic by focusing on an aspect that has hitherto received far less consideration in socialization research, namely, that sometimes key onetime events can have a socializing impact. Drawing on work in socialization and learning theory, the study asks what form such key events must take to potentially induce an autonomous reorientation of previous patterns of behavior and what consequences one can expect. The analysis shows that key events associated with guilt and shame can be an essential element of sports socialization - and one that is capable of decisively forming and changing an individual's understanding of fairness. The systematic case study demonstrates how an event associated with guilt and shame in combination with an individual violating a norm can create a turning point in a soccer player's biography and thus contribute decisively to that person's understanding of fairness.

All in all, the results demonstrate that players interpret fairness in much broader terms than what has been represented in sports science discourse so far. What they also show is that individual key events can be very impactful and unsettle the long-term process of sports socialization and that this can lead to the appropriation of norms that are in conflict with previously internalized premises. The study further makes clear that players experience the ambivalent relationships of cooperation and competition within a team as being extremely demanding and that some players compete by deliberately "eliminating" their competitor.