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Problematic Possibilities and Choosing between Courses of Action: Findings of an Ethnographic Study on the Parents of Pre-Adolescent, Non-Professional Soccer Players

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we examine the ways in which adult spectators of youth sports teams perceive, understand, and react to the actions and interactions of their children in the context of a soccer match. As the spectators consist primarily of parents, most of them will most likely be emotionally attached to their children as well as obliged to respecting the rules and codes of conduct of amateur youth soccer. We present a phenomenological framework in which these contradictory commitments constitute 'enclaves', small cognitive clusters within the province of meaning of everyday life. Within this framework, we discuss the results of an ethnographic study on the parents of players participating in youth soccer matches, especially concerning the way in which the conflicting logics of parenting and soccer are managed.

Keywords: soccer; parents; little league; life-world studies; ethnography; mundane phenomenology

On the Pitch Watching Little League¹

In the summer of 2018, we undertook an ethnographic study on the spectators of pre-adolescent soccer teams in the German *Ruhrgebiet*.² Maybe the most peculiar incident happened towards the end of our study when one of the research assistants, a young man in his early twenties, was addressed by an official of the home team's club. He introduced himself as George and came straight to the point: "Please tell me what you are doing here!"

This caught us somewhat by surprise. It was one of our last field trips and until now, we had not yet been approached by any of the people responsible for the teams we visited. We were used to being insignificant. It was one of the hottest summers one can remember, the sun burning down mercilessly on a pitch full of children and parents in shorts and t-shirts. If we had not been hot because of the weather, we surely would have started being so now from blushing.

"We are doing a study on the spectators of non-professional soccer teams."

"Okay..." George said, somewhat warily and unconvinced.

Suddenly, we expected protest, maybe even anger. The pitch is open to the public during match-days and most clubs even encourage visitors other than the players' parents to attend. But maybe this official was not fancying his players and their parents being the object of an ethnographic study.

"I don't really believe you..." Here it comes. "...you are watching the coaches, aren't you?"

"Well, not exactly."

"Then you are scouting the players?"

We gave him a look of surprise. This guy was thinking we were some kind of talent scout, maybe even with the Deutscher Fußball-Bund (DFB), the German governing body of soccer. We denied the charge and insisted on being mere academics. George

- 1 The authors are grateful for the helpful suggestions of the anonymous referees. Quite clearly, the revisions made for a better paper. Jochem Kotthaus wishes to thank Nicholas Wilson and Daniel Levy for introducing him to Bill Buford's *Among the Thugs* and for greatly clarifying the differences between the German and American way of writing ethnography.
- 2 All ethnographic episodes in this paper are based on field protocols written in the course of our study. They are translated from the original German by the authors and glossed over to increase readability. Names have been added and/or changed to preserve anonymity.

seemed satisfied and began to tell his story: how he came to be a club official and a little league coach, how the parents' attitude had changed over time to being overzealous and pushing their children towards developing unrealistic ambitions in soccer—making life hard for him as a coach. Not everybody is destined to make his living as a soccer professional. This went on for some time. He then saw the research assistant adjusting his notebook and his initial suspicions returned, connecting us again to another club, some talent agency or even the DFB. We left him and wondered what he was more conflicted over: the off-chance that we really were scouting players or the disappointment that we were not... Hindsight is 20/20, but why did we not talk to management earlier on? George knew things. He got into coaching as his own child started playing soccer and rose through the ranks of his club assuming management duties. He had seen the parents' attitude change. He complained about them abusing a fun game as either some sort of parenting scheme, wishing to install the apperceived qualities of soccer into their offspring, or hoping to discover some unexpected talent and more or less secretly aiming for a career in professional soccer. He reflected on a certain lack of parents just wishing for their children to have fun on the pitch. The love of the game—it has been swept away by ambition.

However, anecdotal George's account was, it corresponds with some of the basic lines of argument in academia concerning youth and soccer. The current perspective of social science deals with the importance of a commitment to sports for youth development.³ It is rather structural in nature, sometimes with pragmatic accents emphasising the virtue of social justice, other times embedded in social theory, e.g. stratification. Parents only recently have drifted into the focus, addressing them as a resource in civil society, especially in the context of conflict theory.⁴ The perception of parents as managers of their own children on their way to a professional career in soc-

- 3 Uwe Schimank/Nadine Schöneck: Sport im Inklusionsprofil der Bevölkerung Deutschlands: Ergebnisse einer differenzierungstheoretisch angelegten empirischen Untersuchung, in: *Sport und Gesellschaft – Sport and Society* 3:1 (2006), pp. 5–32; Wolfgang Schlicht/Ralf Brand: Körperliche Aktivität, Sport und Gesundheit: Eine interdisziplinäre Einführung, Weinheim 2007; Nicole Schmiade/Michael Mutz: Sportliche Eltern, sportliche Kinder: Die Sportbeteiligung von Vorschulkindern im Kontext sozialer Ungleichheit, in: *Sportwissenschaft* 42:2 (2012), pp. 115–125; Tim Bindel: Bedeutung und Bedeutsamkeit sportlichen Engagements in der Jugend, Aachen 2015; Minas Dimitriou: Sport zwischen Inklusion und Exklusion, Salzburg 2011.
- 4 Silvester Stahl: Gewaltprävention im Kinder- und Jugendfußball: Evaluationsbericht zu vier Projektmodulen des Berliner Fußball-Verbandes, Berlin 2015; Markus Hess/Christiane Weller/Herbert Scheithauer: Fairplayer.Sport: Soziale Kompetenz und Fairplay spielerisch fördern: Ein Programm für das Fußballtraining mit 9–13-Jährigen, Göttingen 2015; Nicolas Hourcade/Gunter A. Pilz/Silvester Stahl: Fußball und Gewaltprävention: Eine deutsch-französische Studie, Paris, Berlin 2015.

cer is a relatively new perspective.⁵ While theory of nuclear physics or biomechanics is understood only in the realms of the respective disciplines, the results of the academic and philosophical pursuit to study parenting or education have disseminated into the sphere of everyday-life. This ever-constant stream of advice literature or media coverage concerning every aspect of parenting, from basics in developmental psychology, to deviant behaviour (or rather its ‘treatment’), to sexual education, to counselling of problems in formal education and learning, now has established quasi-academic knowledge in the realm of everyday life.

The same is true for soccer only on some level with huge limitations. In social science, dealing with soccer is relegated to a niche—at least in a quantitative perspective. A categorical distinction must be made between soccer as an activity and watching or experiencing the game from the side-lines. For the latter, studies cover a huge variety of topics, from soccer fans and “glocalization”⁶ to special sections of the audience.⁷ The dissemination of academic theory into common knowledge is hardly a factor, yet it goes without saying that as an effect of its mediatisation and commercialisation, soccer has become omnipresent.

So while we connect the omnipresence of knowledge regarding soccer to it being a global business, we attribute the change in parents’ attitude towards parenting to this dissemination of academic knowledge into the realm of everyday life. We argue that this has fundamentally changed parenting as such. For Michael Winkler parenting or education⁸ is “invisible”.⁹ While being talked about or objectivated as an ‘it’ or even a physical entity, it rather has to be understood as action undertaken in certain institutional contexts. In a phenomenological framework, Winkler is to be understood as talking about parenting as part of the mundane knowledge of “everyday life”.¹⁰ Mundane everyday life is to be considered the only sphere of the life-world where (a) one can interact in we-relations by (b) physically engaging with the “real” world under the premise that (c) both ego and alter ego understand each other. The everyday world is the “paramount reality” of human beings. Whereas the knowledge of all sub-worlds

5 Michael Köllner/Stephanie Pennekamp: *Dein Weg zum Fußballprofi: Ein Ratgeber für junge Talente, Eltern und Trainer*, Aachen 2016.

6 Richard Giulianiotti/Roland Robertson: *Globalization and Football*, London 2009.

7 Sven Kathöfer/Jochem Kotthaus: *Unter Ultras: Ergebnisse einer Studie über die Lebenswelt Ultra in Westdeutschland*, Weinheim 2013; Martin Winands: *Interaktionen von Fußballfans: Das Spiel am Rande des Spiels*, Wiesbaden 2015; for a comprehensive overview in an international perspective cf. Richard Guilianotti/Andreas Grau: *Soziologische Forschung zur Fußballfankultur im Vereinigten Königreich: Einige kritische Beobachtungen und Einblicke für internationale Wissenschaftler*, in: Andreas Grau et al. (eds.): *Sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven der Fußballfanforschung*, Weinheim 2017, pp. 7–29.

8 Winkler speaks of “Erziehung”.

9 Michael Winkler: *Kritik der Pädagogik: Der Sinn der Erziehung*, Stuttgart 2006, p. 48.

10 Alfred Schütz: *Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality*, The Hague 1962.

is highly specialised and rooted in the division of labour, the everyday world remains generally available and relevant.¹¹ It is taken for granted, unproblematic and “natural”.¹² This is the special and unique “cognitive style”, a distinct form of experience.¹³ In other words, for Winkler, parenting is part of the knowledge of everyday life. It just happens, without thinking about or even conceptualising it as ‘parenting’, like falling in love or making an enemy.

As such, parenting is of fleeting character, to be talked about only in hindsight and reflection. But with it being intensely researched, argued and contested by academics, experts, pundits, professionals, the media and lastly parents and thus constantly being reflected upon, parenting has changed. So, two different, yet interwoven, arguments can be made: (a) Education has become a reification, and (b) this reification has shifted from academia to everyday life, while still retaining a distinct cognitive accent. Within the province of meaning of everyday life, there are continuous intrusions from other cognitive styles. Alfred Schütz argues that there can be “contemplative thinking” within everyday life: if “performed for practical purposes and ends”, it constitutes an “enclave” within “the world of working rather than a finite province of meaning”.¹⁴

We would like to broaden and tweak this concept slightly and adapt an argument made by Michael McDuffie. He argues that the importance or “relevance of art to life is best appreciated when the work of art is intended as an enclave of the life-world”.¹⁵ Art develops its full effect, if it is perceived not within the cognitive style of an artist but from the perspective of the everyday “man in the street”.¹⁶ This is because, within the framework of art, one would *expect* art to be provocative or consternating; as an enclave within everyday life, it can be more unsettling or disturbing. We adapt this thought and understand enclaves as a certain stock of knowledge within everyday life that could constitute a finite province of meaning with a certain cognitive style, if constituted by an expert. Perceived by the man in the street, it cannot be called an intrusion of a cognitive style into everyday life, but rather a cluster of knowledge that is associated with a certain cognitive style within common sense. This holds true for parenting—and it does so as well for sports, and soccer in particular.

- 11 Peter L. Berger/Thomas Luckmann: *The Social Construction of Reality*, London 1991, pp. 157–160.
- 12 Alfred Schütz/Thomas Luckmann: *The Structures of the Life-World*, London 1973, pp. 3–20; Peter L. Berger/Thomas Luckmann: *The Social Construction of Reality*, pp. 33–38.
- 13 Alfred Schütz: *Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality*, p. 244.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 245; Alfred Schütz: *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*, The Hague 1964, pp. 125 ff.; see also Daniel Bischur: *Wissenschaftliche Praxis und die Welt des Wirkens*, in: Michael Staudigl (ed.): *Alfred Schütz und die Hermeneutik*, Konstanz 2010, pp. 253–284.
- 15 Michael F. McDuffie: *Art as an Enclave of Meaning*, in: Steven G. Crowell (ed.): *The Prism of the Self*, Dordrecht 1995, pp. 205–220, p. 217.
- 16 Alfred Schütz: *Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality*, p. 345.

The Theoretical Framework

The concept of ‘enclaves’ remains somewhat underdeveloped by Alfred Schütz. Yet, it provides a powerful explanation for the dynamics, uncertainties, and contradictions in the actions we perceived in our study. To fully define the importance of enclaves for our research, we first must elucidate, at least briefly, the principles of the constitution of the life-world. Contrary to popular misconception, the life-world cannot be ‘controlled’ or changed at will. Dialectically, the life-world is an individual’s all-encompassing, even on a bodily level, mode of “world perception”, as at the same time, this world-perception constitutes the experiences of the individual, thus constructing the life-world.¹⁷ Most of the time, our perception of the world is characterised by what Schütz calls “natural attitude”.¹⁸ For Schütz, the life-world, and therefore the sphere of the mundane, is constituted by the individual. Yet, this is not arbitrary or accidental. What we know about the world—the qualities of objects around us—is imposed on us by others, mainly our parents, with whom we enter into intersubjective relations. This is what Berger and Luckmann call “primary socialization”.¹⁹ Schütz states that all the knowledge existing in the world, regardless of whether it is common-sense or belongs to another province of meaning, is linked to different forms of constructs, abstractions, generalisations, and formalisations. These different ways of structuring knowledge are dependent on the respective level of organisation of thought from a subjective point of view. Therefore, there are indisputable social facts that can be determined empirically, a “robust reality that can be discovered regardless of our wishes”.²⁰ Yet we only perceive particular aspects of the universal context of an object. In addition, these particular aspects are filtered by the activity of our consciousness. For our study these aspects are quite important. We politely object to Michael Winkler’s assumption of parenting as “invisible” and attribute this to intersubjectively confirmed knowledge taking the upbringing of a child to consciousness and making it the object of constant reflection. Here, we provide a theoretical framework, proposing that the individual actor’s perception of soccer or little league, as well as his or her apperceptions of the child, derive from intersubjectively confirmed knowledge.

Consequently, what parents ‘see’ or rather apperceive in the child, what the child and its actions ‘signal to’, is a product of the social. Schütz relies on Husserl’s notion of “apperception” and “appresentation” in his concept of perception. Appresentation

17 Stephanie Stadelbacher: *Die körperliche Konstruktion des Sozialen: Zum Verhältnis von Körper, Wissen und Interaktion*, Bielefeld 2016, pp. 64–66.

18 Alfred Schütz: *Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality*, p. 209.

19 Peter L. Berger/Thomas Luckmann: *The Social Construction of Reality*, p. 157.

20 Peter L. Berger: *Adventures of an Accidental Sociologist: How to Explain the World Without Becoming a Bore*, New York 2011, p. 95.

is the process of consciousness that connects raw-data material to an early experience. We never see an object in its 'material' form; we always add some form of information to it. Every piece of data we perceive, therefore, has the function of referring to another layer of meaning. Aron Gurwitsch states that sensory data never "play the role of the carriers of meaning at all".²¹ They are instead signs in the truest sense of the word, as they point towards something that is not present. Our consciousness thus does not perceive the front of a house, but rather a three-dimensional structure that can be called a 'building'. Through the process of apperception, we unconsciously bind more information to the raw image. This process is hardwired in our consciousness; we cannot renounce it. This operation of connecting the seen image with the stock of experiences is called the "passive synthesis" of "appresentative pairing", or "accouplement".²²

However, we do not only perceive objects as endowed with meaning, but also human beings, or their actions, e.g. children on the pitch playing soccer. Actions are intentional performances of an actor. There is a particular meaning in the actor's actions. This meaning can be understood only by the actor him- or herself, yet it is transmitted by, or seems to be embedded in, the visible action. This is perfectly 'normal' to us: when we see 22 men running around on a field of grass chasing a ball,²³ we know that everyone aims to kick the ball into the goal. They are *not* moving erratically without reason or at random. We perceive their actions as endowed with meaning, and this meaning is ultimately to score a goal and win the game. Thus, in the process of appresentative pairing, we are trying to predict the actions that these people are going to perform.²⁴ To further explain the perception of the world, Schütz relies on Edmund Husserl's theory of open and problematic possibilities, which investigates the modalisations of judgement in the pre-predictive sphere.²⁵ This pre-predictive sphere contains all kinds of perceptual processes. For Husserl, perceived objects are not always or 'by nature' coupled distinctly, they indicate "open possibilities". These possibilities are of course an aspect of the perception's "open horizon of anticipation", the fact that appresentative pairing is formed by subjective experience of objective knowledge. Open possibilities initially do not have different "weights" and are not inconsistent with one another, they are merely feasible. They are believed to be of empirical or presumptive validity until proven wrong. In some cases, perception is not as unproblematic as one wishes. Whether or not perceived data is unclear in its interpretation depends on our

21 Aron Gurwitsch: The collected Works of Aron Gurwitsch (1901–1973), vol. III: The Field of Consciousness: Phenomenology of Theme, Thematic Field, and Marginal Consciousness, Dordrecht 2010, p. 260.

22 Alfred Schütz: Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality, p. 166.

23 In little league, it is rather eighteen children playing on astro turf.

24 Alfred Schütz: Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality, pp. 123–125.

25 Edmund Husserl: *Erfahrung und Urteil: Untersuchungen zur Genealogie der Logik*, Prag 1939, p. 401.

stock of knowledge. The already experienced information is coupled in the process of the passive synthesis of the appresentative pairing. This selection is determined by our biographical situation. It transforms the open, unproblematic possibilities into problematic ones. Whatever does not comply with the expectations of our knowledge of appresentative pairings must be considered problematic.

It is important to understand that it is not only the data of objects we perceive that are influenced by the problematic possibilities, but action is as well. The passive synthesis, however, is an achievement of the consciousness that does not discriminate between different 'types' of data. As mentioned above, action is always an intentional performance of an individual actor. We do not just use our stock of knowledge trying to predict actions performed by another alter ego; we also use it to predict the reactions that follow our own intentional actions. So every time we contemplate action, we anticipate the reactions of an alter ego, which are determined by its state of consciousness, beyond our control and therefore always an uncertain variable or 'open'. This means that every action contains problematic possibilities that depend on our stock of knowledge.²⁶ To enable any sort of social order, the consciousness needs a method to predict the outcome of and subsequent reaction to every action in our daily lives. Thus, conditioned by our stock of knowledge, we create typologies which allow us, in an idealised way, to anticipate the actions and reactions of our fellow human beings. These typologies provide security and assertiveness for performing actions in the social world and are therefore vital for our existence. Since the social world has different dimensions of proximity and distance, and also of intimacy and anonymity, for every province of meaning we need various different typologies. These typologies are specifically connected to our experiential styles and our stocks of knowledge.²⁷

Turning to our study, we see two common features: all of the persons we studied are parents and they all have children who participate in little league in one way or another. These parents therefore all rely on at least two identical stocks of knowledge: the one about parenting and the other about soccer. Both are also aspects of the everyday world.²⁸ For Hans-Georg Soeffner, each province of meaning is connected to idiosyncratic perspectives in perceiving the world. Soeffner calls these perspectives "cognitive styles". In most cases, we perceive the world through our mundane and everyday knowledge, a highly functional perspective.²⁹ In contrast, the cognitive style of the province of meaning of soccer is discipline and the willingness to do everything for winning, the idiosyncratic form of experience of parenting is one of unconditional

26 Alfred Schütz: *Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality*, pp. 82–84.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 148.

28 Alfred Schütz/Thomas Luckmann: *The Structures of the Life-World*, pp. 99–181.

29 Hans-Georg Soeffner: *Auslegung des Alltags – Der Alltag der Auslegung: Zur wissenschaftlichen Konzeption einer sozialwissenschaftlichen Hermeneutik*, Frankfurt/M. 1989, pp. 14–16.

love, caring and providing a successful future for the child. It is important to understand that the concept of appresentative pairing also holds true for parents perceiving their children during a soccer event. Thus, the parents connect, in the process of the passive synthesis of appresentative pairings, the data of what is observed to their stocks of knowledge. For the parents, the situation of their child taking part in a soccer match appears to be an everyday life situation. Yet because the cognitive enclaves of parenting and of soccer with their respective idiosyncratic forms of experience are embedded in everyday life, there are different points of reference for the individual actor to interpret the raw data he or she observes. This is a result of our analysis and our study. It provides a theoretical framework why parents, during soccer matches, act in different and sometimes unexpected ways. Our typology systematises ways in which these problematic possibilities come about and are solved.

Referring to two different enclaves in everyday life might lead to the conclusion that there is a clear distinction between them. That is not true. In our everyday knowledge, we rely heavily on different stocks of knowledge which are intermingled, and influence each other, and slide into one another. Recognising this allows us as researchers to formulate different idealised types. Thus, we developed a typology of parents who accompany their children to little league matches.

Going Back in Time: Methodology and Scope of the Field Study

What did we hope to ascertain in our study that brought us to meet George and the conflicted ways he talked about the parents of his youth players? We started out by just being interested in the actions of the participants of match-days, youth players, parents, referees, managers, the mothers and fathers selling French fries, waffles, coffee and a Coke. Working in a framework of phenomenologically founded ethnography based on a sociology of knowledge, we aimed at “the understanding of the (typical) subjective meaning that people attach to their actions rather than at the reconstruction of the so-called *a tergo* causes of what people do, or refrain from doing”.³⁰ Methodological scrutiny was directed towards the process of data generation and analysis. As such, our initial approach was directed to the entire grounds, even going so far as to take into account how the construction and design of the facilities, the arrangements of the clubhouses, the stands or lack of such, the fencing, as well as the periphery,

30 Ronald Hitzler/Anne Honer: Life-World-Analytical Ethnography: A Phenomenology-Based Research Approach, in: Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 44:5 (2015), pp. 544–562, p. 545; see also Ronald Hitzler/Paul Eisewicht: Lebensweltanalytische Ethnographie: Im Anschluss an Anne Honer, Weinheim 2016.

affected the action on the pitch. We gradually concentrated on the spectators on the side-lines. Thus, over the course of the research process, the unsystematic observations gradually were systematised and emerged as a concrete research focus through an iterative process.³¹ This approach of alternation and integration of data generation and data analysis is most typical for a study within the framework of a hermeneutic sociology of knowledge.³² This process also encompasses our theoretical sampling. Our sampling was not deductively oriented towards pre-existing categories (age, sex of the parent or the child, social status etc.). It rather concentrated on said alternation of data generation and analysis, an emerging topic of interest and an increasing understanding of the individual actors' perception of the world.

Accordingly, it was only as the research progressed that the problem of parental and soccer knowledge as part of everyday knowledge became a focus of the study. Yet, strictly speaking, this is not a classic hermeneutic sociological evaluation of knowledge—a fact mainly to be attributed to financial and time constraints.³³ Although we would have been pleased to further be with George, neither were we able to observe the same persons over a longer period of time nor did we carry out any case work.³⁴

Thus, a lot of material was obtained over a relatively short period of time in the field. The main method of data collection was to observe the participants on the grounds. These experiences were documented in field protocols and later enriched in theoretical memos. Some special precautions were adopted in an effort to counter-balance the fact that some researchers had prior experience in soccer and parenting: The field studies were carried out with multiple researchers at the same time, hence we were able to obtain a multi-perspective approach towards every situation. Furthermore, the researchers' own universes of meaning³⁵ and presuppositions that appear

31 Ronald Hitzler/Miriam Gothe: Zur Einleitung; Methodologisch-methodische Aspekte ethnographischer Forschungsprojekte, in: Ronald Hitzler/Miriam Gothe (eds.): *Ethnographische Erkundungen: Methodische Aspekte aktueller Forschungsprojekte*, Wiesbaden 2015, pp. 9–16, p. 11.

32 Hans-Georg Soeffner: *Auslegung des Alltags – Der Alltag der Auslegung: Zur wissenschaftlichen Konzeption einer sozialwissenschaftlichen Hermeneutik*; Ronald Hitzler/Jo Reichertz/Norbert Schröer (eds.): *Hermeneutische Wissenssoziologie: Standpunkte zur Theorie der Interpretation*, Konstanz 1999.

33 While we generated rich data, we did not observe any aggression, conflict or even violence. We therefore must omit these topics from our typology and our theoretical framework and hope to concentrate on this more at a later time.

34 Jo Reichertz: *Hermeneutische Wissenssoziologie*, in: Renate Buber/Hartmut H. Holzmüller (eds.): *Qualitative Marktforschung*, Wiesbaden 2009, pp. 111–126; Norbert Schröer: *Wissenssoziologische Hermeneutik*, in: Ronald Hitzler/Anne Honer (eds.): *Sozialwissenschaftliche Hermeneutik: Eine Einführung*, Opladen 1997, pp. 109–129.

35 One research assistant is the mother of a child involved in the sport but with no interest in it at all, another the parent of two adult children with a keen interest in soccer, one is an avid sports fan, and one identifies as ignorant of soccer and parenting.

in the field protocols were systematically turned into objects of analytical reflection. In order to increase the pressure to keep what is taken for granted as concrete and explicit as possible, some members of the research team at times were systematically excluded from data collection and participated only in the analytical process. By visiting different clubs and game situations, it was possible to observe the diversity of the spectators and their behaviour. We observed several match days in the eastern part of the *Ruhrgebiet*, both urban and rural, in the summer of 2018. Most match-days were played on the weekend, usually two games at the same time. In games during the week, fewer spectators were present. We also went to two large tournaments. Here, up to three games took place simultaneously. Missing from ordinary match-days here we also observed a colourful fringe programme, some offers at leisure and catering. The number of spectators was significantly higher than on normal match days and created the sense of an 'event'. Thus, despite the relatively short survey period we aimed for a comprehensive overview of the field.

The results presented here grasp the 'typical' in the subjective experience. In order to maintain the order of the social world and to be able to act, individual actors rely on typologies predicting the actions of alter egos. They are an auxiliary means for orientation and for the extension of characteristic values, and thus both enable people to recognise one another and make them recognisable. Thus, typifications are categories of perception and, according to Schütz and Husserl, are based on the concept of apperception and appresentation as basic elements of cognition.³⁶ With our observations we were able to identify two different cognitive styles, two different logics of apperception that form the basis of the parents' actions. As mentioned before: The first cognitive style is the logic of soccer, which requires from the children a willingness to sacrifice and to suffer for a greater good, winning the game. The second cognitive style is the logic of parenting. Here, the upbringing of the child, its well-being and encouragement are more prominent. These two styles form the basis of our typology, in which the individual actor must 'negotiate' between different logics of experience: of everyday life, of parenting and of soccer. These different cognitive styles of experience prove to constitute "problematic possibilities", as raw data can be experienced, i. e. interpreted and understood, from different points of reference. All these points of reference are based in intersubjective, shared, socially confirmed knowledge, thus making them all a valid base for possible actions.³⁷

36 Alfred Schütz/Thomas Luckmann: *The Structures of the Life-World*, pp. 92–98.

37 Paul Eisewicht: *Schreibtischarbeit: Varianten interpretativer Typenbildung*, in: Ronald Hitzler/Nicole Burzan (eds.): *Typologische Konstruktionen: Prinzipien und Forschungspraxis*, Wiesbaden 2018, pp. 13–32.

Beside the Pitch: Experiencing One's Own Child

We now have firmly established that parenting and soccer are to be considered two enclaves in mundane, everyday knowledge. We propose that there are two distinct types of experiencing one's own child on the pitch, mediating the cognitive enclaves with everyday life. For the *diachronic type*, one enclave, sport or parenting, is used as a point of reference, interpretation of experience of sensory data in the vein of another cognitive style postponed or averted. The *synchronic type*, however, manages to balance soccer and parenting in somewhat creative ways of action. Both types have several subtypes that we will introduce in following.

The Diachronic Type

We encountered the *restrainer*, the first of two subtypes of the *diachronic type*, on one of our field trips when the goalkeeper of the home-team, a young boy called Ben, got injured during one of the little league matches. He went 'all pro', grabbed his leg and pulled a wry face. He looked over at the audience while he hobbled around a little bit and noticed that his display of injury and pain was successful: The majority of the audience, including his parents, came to notice him.

"Carry on, Ben! There are only a few minutes left," a man said, half to himself, half across the pitch. Rachel, his mother, looked worried: "He's really spent. I'll take care of this later and massage the leg."

It is quite obvious that Rachel is conflicted. There are indications that she wants to take care of her child immediately. But in the end, even though she is explicitly realising signs of discomfort or even injury on the part of her son, she meets the requirements of soccer and lets the child play on. While there are obvious sympathies, these are, at least temporarily, subordinated to the expectations that she knows soccer places on its players. This becomes even clearer with the man encouraging Ben to hang in since there are only a few minutes left on the clock. Sympathy for the boy on account of his pain is subordinated to the expectation of a continuous performance: The team needs its goalkeeper. In other words: this subtype restrains him- or herself from action in the logic of parenting. In order to solve the challenge posed by the divergent interests of the enclaves of parenting and soccer, *restrainers* increasingly focus their interest solely on one of the two options. They succeed in expanding their scope of action without major problems and conflicts.³⁸ The *restrainer* takes into account that, as parents of children playing soccer, they have different roles to fulfil. Parents solve

38 Alfred Schütz: Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory, pp. 123–126.

this problem by working diachronically on these commitments. This means that the *restrainer* relies on one logic during the match: either the logic of soccer, in which the child is expected to put the team first, or the logic of parenting, which mostly includes aspects of taking care of the child. Concerning this subtype in our research, we never actually encountered a parent putting parenting before soccer. A *restrainer* acting in such a logic would interrupt the game, storm to his or her child, nursing and comforting him or her right on the field. This course of action would highly contradict the logic of the sport and therefore is not as socially accepted: A parent is expected to encourage the child to pipe down, swallow the pain and continue to play on.³⁹ Only after the game is over there is a time for closeness and affection.

The *avoider* is unable to do exactly this: postponing the cognitive style of one enclave of meaning in favour of another. Thus, he or she is neither able to react with the short-term suspension of parental knowledge, nor to ignore the logic of soccer and be a parent altogether. We met the paragon of this subtype during a game, when Kira, a young girl playing in a boys' team, ran into the referee named Martin, stumbled and fell to the ground. A spectator shouted: "Come on, Kira, get up! You can do it!" Toni, the girl's father, was outraged and screamed at the referee: "Martin, you kicked my daughter! What kind of referee are you?" The spectator, who had tried to cheer up the girl and encourage her to keep playing, turned to her father and tried to calm him down: "Toni, she tripped over Martin." "I don't fucking care. Why can't he be more careful?" Toni could not calm down. He walked up and down the side-lines a few times and then shouted: "This is bullshit, I'm leaving!" He left the pitch in rage, leaving his daughter and a group of somewhat stunned spectators behind.

This brief sequence is so impressive because it directly contrasts the subtype of the *restrainer* with the *avoider*. The spectator trying to cheer up the little girl clearly belongs to the subtype of the *restrainer*. He knows her by name and, however distantly, is obviously attached to her, wanting to make her get up and continue the game. He suspends the logic of parenting in favour of the cognitive style of soccer—which obviously is a lot less troublesome since she is not his daughter. Toni on the other hand is unable to ignore his feelings as a father. Yet, he does not charge onto the pitch, he visibly is in conflict about how to interpret the sensory data of his daughter falling to the ground. He paces the side-lines a few times, but for him there is no way to act in accordance with socially confirmed knowledge. Hence, his solution to having no solution is to flee the situation, walking away and avoiding conflict by *not* trying to manage the different cognitive styles of the enclaves of parenting and soccer. Thus, he finds a socially acceptable way of resolving his conflict and avoids further escalation.

We assume that the *avoider* might be seen as emotional and hence unprofessional. Yet, this emotionality stems from conflict. Within the framework of sociology of

39 Of course we are not talking about major injuries here.

knowledge, we propose that for the *avoider* those institutions that provide a solution to conflicting options for action are insufficient. Thus, what might be understood as a form of excessive affect could be considered as one of those rare moments when the universal validity of a problem-solving institution is doubtful, at least on a certain level.⁴⁰ We presume that Toni knows very well what is expected of him as a father and as a parent of a player in a little league team. For him, it would be much easier to fall in line. As our data is limited in this regard, we cannot say what exactly it is that makes existing institutions of actions unbearable for Toni. These are situations that lead to change in institutions. So, analytically it would be enriching if Toni's emotionality is understood as a failed form of "externalization" and "objectivation". For Berger and Luckmann, these two moments along with the "internalization" of objectivated knowledge are the building material all institutions are made of.⁴¹ Yet, all externalization and objectivation need a second layer of communication—a system of objectivated experiences that both the individual actor and alter ego can catch hold of and use intersubjectively. If those objectivations, a shared language with shared knowledge of terms, categories, types, are missing, one is unable to objectivate. This is what we perceive as emotionality: a very subjective way to externalise conflict. This emotionality seems to lack any apperceptive meaning, it exists solely for itself. We assume that over time, more parents will avoid the logic of both enclaves of meaning, and thus new appresentative pairings and new institutions will be objectivated.

The Synchronic Type

Synchronous problem-solvers pass on the enclaves of parenting and soccer by integrating them into everyday life. Exactly how this integration or consideration of idiosyncratic logics of experience and thus action comes about constitutes the 'core' of the three different subtypes: the *soccer expert*, the *parental fan*, and the *flâneur*. These three subtypes are essentially an adaptation of the functions and stereotypical roles of professional soccer. Curiously, they reflect the three levels of 'depth' of knowledge described by Schütz. The *expert* possesses a certain amount of special knowledge; in our case, this means a parent with special knowledge about the sport, therefore, a *soccer expert*. The *parental fan* possesses a solid knowledge of the game akin to the

40 Peter L. Berger/Thomas Luckmann: *The Social Construction of Reality*, pp. 43–49.

41 *Ibid.*, pp. 78–80.

“well-informed citizen”.⁴² The third subtype is the *flâneur*, a man in the street, who has a casual knowledge of soccer and is more interested in making acquaintances.⁴³

The *soccer expert* emulates functions found in professional soccer. We encountered this type multiple times, most significantly right before the start of a match or a half-time. On the edge of the grandstand, the team sat with their coach and four fathers. Frank, one of the fathers, suddenly turned to the children and began to feed them basic soccer strategy: “The opponents have adapted to you, not the other way round!” Frank then left suddenly and came back with a can full of meticulously cut apples. He gave each player a piece and proclaimed: “Now you’ve got to pour some water on top of it, then you’re full of energy—at least half a litre!”

Obviously, it is always good advice to not enter into a soccer match fluid-depleted, be it in little league or the *Bundesliga*. But Frank makes the most out of this piece of common knowledge. He acts as a *soccer expert* by linking his knowledge of efficient nutrition for sports-related purposes to soccer strategy. While it is highly doubtful whether eating or not eating a piece of apple will effectively influence the outcome of the game, Frank charges eating behaviour emotionally, psyching up the team. The logic of the *soccer expert* is close to the logic of coaching, without being identical to it. The *soccer expert* takes over complementary duties. For them, parenting on a match day more or less means supporting their child in excelling at sport. The parent’s own knowledge about the sport, perceived to be superior to that of the man in the street, is key to the child’s success. As an expert, he or she is convinced that they possess a clearly definable knowledge to be communicated to the child or their teammates. The solution to the problematic situation here lies in interpreting parenting as supporting the child in its ‘sporting’ self-actualisation. Soccer clearly functions as one of many ways of creating an active educational environment and experiencing it as an occasion for the transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next. *Soccer experts* combine an educational mission with their role as experts. Most of the time, the *soccer expert* will be found on the side-lines commenting upon the game, judging their own child’s performance (mostly overly critical) and the team (mostly quite favourably). At times, the *soccer expert* will shout instructions and more or less helpful comments to his or her own child, or the whole team, directing their path, their playing style or the level of aggressiveness.

Occasionally, we found the *soccer expert* to go one step further and to directly interfere with the coach’s authority: Karen, a mother deeply involved in her son Luke’s performance, stood on the side-line and watched the game. We could see that she was

42 Alfred Schütz: The Well-Informed Citizen: An Essay on the Social Distribution of Knowledge, in: *Social Research* 13:4 (1946), pp. 463–472.

43 Winfried Gebhardt/Ronald Hitzler/Bernt Schnettler: *Unterwegs-Sein – Zur Einführung*, in: Winfried Gebhardt/Ronald Hitzler (eds.): *Nomaden, Flaneure, Vagabunden: Wissensformen und Denkstile der Gegenwart*, Wiesbaden 2006, pp. 9–22.

agitated. Maybe during other matches she was a supportive person, but this was not one of those times.

Karen was unhappy with her son's performance, shouting "Concentrate!" every once in a while. Suddenly she charged onto the pitch and ran straight up to the team's coach, standing by the halfway line. She planted herself in front of him. Obviously, Karen was quite unhappy with him as well, giving him explicit instructions on how to improve his coaching. Still standing there, she turned to the pitch and yelled: "Luke, you've got to stand in front of Marcus! Don't you run around back here, get in front of Marcus!"

This manifestation of the *soccer expert* can only marginally be distinguished from the *restrainer*. The *restrainer* appresents the child on the pitch in accordance with the cognitive style of one enclave. Another logic takes effect at a later point in time. Rachel, Ben's mother, even explicitly stated that once the match was over, she was going to take good care of her injured son. These are exactly the markings of a *diachronic* type. We find no indications in our data that Karen would change her demeanour at a later point in time. Again, this could be due to the formerly discussed limitations of our data. But we interpret the situation differently. Karen does not suspend her knowledge of being a mother in favour of being a *soccer expert*. Rather, she even goes so far as to enter into a direct confrontation with the coach and to run the risk of being perceived as socially unpleasant. Instead, we presume that, for Karen, being aggressive and impeding in some situations are the bearings of a good mother, thus synchronously mediating between different enclaves of meaning.

This level of involvement is not to found with the *parental fan*. The *soccer expert*, more often than not, can be found watching the game and commenting on it, occasionally shouting instructions onto the pitch. The *parental fan* is far more restrained, unobtrusive and ordinary. We found a typical example to be three women who stood left of the entrance at a distance from the pitch. They watched the game with keen interest while at the same time talking about their children's schools and upcoming tests. The whole conversation was about their children, their problems, successes, their obligations and hardships. Whenever a goal was scored, they nodded or clapped, only to continue their conversation.

Parental fans are like all fans: they want to have fun in the context of a soccer match. They do not take the game too seriously, yet they are involved. They are present for their children and know when and how to respond to the game. They show a general knowledge of practices in soccer as well as routines of everyday life. They comply with their parental interests and obligations and can act in relation to others within the context of little league.

During our field trips, we could locate the *parental fan* most frequently. Compared to the other types, they dominate the descriptions in our field protocols, being the most common type in our study. The *parental fan* is truly a well-informed citizen. She or he possesses knowledge that does not compare to that of the expert. The *parental*

fan is a father or mother who can easily access their knowledge of parenting and soccer at any time. They select a frame of reference and, at the same time, are able to change it if the situation requires them to. They often position themselves to one side of the pitch and follow their child's game (and that of the team) with more or less emotional sympathy.

We met Kristen and Thomas, two quintessential examples of the *flâneur*, shortly before the end of our study, standing near an improvised vendor stall. Many clubs sell beverages and fast food during their little league games, mostly of quite fine, sometimes of questionable quality. Fortunately, this was one of the former. Business was good. Kristen and Thomas talked to three women, laughing, having a good time. Their children were nowhere to be seen. In fact, we failed to see the couple ever look for their sons, Sam and Marvin. After chatting a little while they left and took their large dog for a walk.

We spotted Kristen and Thomas returning with their dog during the second half of the game. They again joined the three women at the vendor stall and talked to them. After a few moments, Thomas seemed to become annoyed by the small talk and walked over to the stand with the dog to sit down and watch the game. Some moments later, a young girl approached the dog joyfully: "Well, are you a beautiful dog!" She turned to Thomas and asked: "May I pet him?" Thomas replied: "Yes, of course!" The girl petted the dog for some time, she and Thomas engaged in a spirited talk about dogs. At that time, Kristen left the women at the vendor stall and came over to the stands: "I'm going to drive home with Sam." Thomas, still occupied by talking about the beauty of large dogs, replied: "Okay, I'll be coming once Marvin's game is over."

The *flâneur* visits the game without being stressed out or responsible for anything specific. Kristen and Thomas do whatever they feel like doing, engaging in small talk, walking the dog, coming and going as they please. They follow their interests, barely paying attention to their children on the pitch. If the *flâneur* meets someone of interest, they get involved. Otherwise, the *flâneur* walks around, always looking for the next thing that might catch their attention or interest.

Nevertheless, this is not to disqualify them as parents. They are aware that they are attending a game involving their child. They got their child to the match and know that the coach will take good care of it. What could happen to the child in the hour and a half of a soccer match? The *flâneur* often just uses the opportunities that present themselves to network with others and to exchange interests. These parents are guided by "feelings and passions. They solve "diverging interests" best by knowing how they "can achieve typical results in typical situations by typical means".⁴⁴ Richard Guilianotti already established the *flâneur* as a spectator who is without any prefer-

44 Alfred Schütz: Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory, pp. 122–123.

ence or emotional attachment to a certain club, who rather talks about than supports during the game.⁴⁵ In meeting people at random, such parents find opportunities to discuss everyday life and talk about its routines without losing sight of their children. The presence of the dog is an example *par excellence* of these everyday routines. The self-conception of taking the dog for a walk during the game allows the assumption that Kristen's and Thomas's actions are to be understood through the cognitive accent of everyday life. Accompanying the child to the match is not determined by the exclusivity of 'being a fan'. Rather, personal interests are the first priority. The attention is not exclusively devoted to the game.

Of course, not every *flâneur* takes his or her dog to their child's soccer game. Kristen or Thomas must be considered a paragon. Other parents of this subtype accompany their child to the game, and just focus on the chance to meet and mingle with other parents. It is important to understand that this is not a general disinterest in the child's activities, rather, in this specific situation, other things have a higher relevance for the *flâneur*.

The End of the Game

In our research, we were able to systematically demonstrate the 'problematic possibilities' that spectators are faced with when interpreting their perception of children playing soccer in little league. Phenomenologically speaking, the child and its actions are perceived within the logic of different enclaves of meaning, embedded in everyday life. In our theoretical framework, the child participating in a soccer match appears as an object of perception to the parents in an unclear frame of reference. What is apperceived and how the parents act based on these apperceptions remains 'problematic'. A child on the pitch thus is experienced within a field of perception containing multidimensional possibilities of interpretation. In discussing the derivation of the problematic possibilities, we have already established the percolation of relevance within the respective enclaves. They provide a cognitive accent in the conscious-theoretical process of framing.⁴⁶ Based on passive synthesis, the parental interpretation of the child differs depending on knowledge and interests. As such, interpretation is the basis of all actions.

45 Richard Giulianotti: Supporters, Followers, Fans, and Flaneurs: A Taxonomy of Spectator Identities, in: *Football, Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 26:1 (2002), pp. 25–46.

46 Thus one can distinguish between the cognitive style of parents and the one of the coaches. Coaches do not have to worry about educational matters because they apperceive the world in the cognitive style of the sub-world of soccer and not the enclave of soccer embedded in everyday life. They are guided by other sources of relevance due to their perceptual frame of reference.

We provide a typology of apperception and action that bridges the sensory data and their interpretation and understanding. This is necessarily a reconstruction and not the subjective meaning of the individual actor themselves. Within this typology, we describe two major types and five subtypes of parent-spectator. We call these ideal types *diachronic* and *synchronic*. They diverge according to the solution found to the problem of experience. These distinctions refer to the possibilities of a specific temporal negotiation of both sets of knowledge. What we formulate as ‘types’ and their respective ‘subtypes’ are socially confirmed ways of understanding the child in a specific context. Thus, perception is deeply embedded in a socio-historical *a priori*. It should be emphasised again that the parents’ actions we researched on the pitch, for them, were the best possible way of dealing with the problem they faced. From the actor’s point of view, this simultaneously makes any discussion of whether certain actions should be preferred to others, e.g. any normative implications, superfluous. Parental action always is a consequence of the subjective experiences of everyday life interwoven with the socially distributed knowledge.

What parents perceive from the side-lines on match days, and how they see their own children in little league is more than their child and their team playing soccer with other children of a similar age. The parents’ interest in attending the game is ultimately not a commitment to a club or enthusiasm for a team, but their attachment to their child. This marks a huge difference between them and spectators of professional sports. What parents are looking for in soccer matches is not the beauty of the game or the fulfilling experience of watching an exciting match-up, but means of educating their child. Thus, parents experience everyday education of their child in little league. By watching their child, parents also realise their responsibility and duty to care for them—in some way or another. Whether it is sympathy, a sense of justice, knowledge about nutrition, cheering or encouragement, commenting on the game, or just being present, all these examples show that the focus is on the child. They perceive more than just the actual events: their apperception is deeply embedded in their understanding of the meaning of being a parent. Parents’ motives may vary depending on their knowledge of parenting and soccer. But irrespective of how parents act on the side-lines of the pitch, they do everything possible to keep the game situation and the surrounding situations intact and to foster their understanding of good parenting. In their everyday experience of the world, they are competent and, according to subjective, socio-historical structures of relevance, do what is most appropriate in their eyes. Far from making pedagogical interventions, this opens up the possibility of reconstructing the parents’ perspective. Such a perspective could also offer exciting results in the future, making it worthwhile to pursue it further. The question of what remains undiscovered behind an observation in mundane phenomenology remains; this should be addressed in further empirical studies.

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