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Gender-Based Violence and Organizational Silence in Voluntary Sports Organizations

Abstract There is growing international research that documents the life histories of survivors and victims who experienced gender-based violence in sports and, in particular, being silenced by coaches, members of the sports organization, and even parents and siblings. In contrast, this chapter develops insights into organizational silence as a collective-level phenomenon of sports organizations. The theoretical perspective of a recursive social process of agency and social structures, in which social structures act as social frames that mold social action and the options of voice and silence, is used as a heuristic tool. It enables to discern systemic, structural elements that evoke organizational blindness toward gender-based violence in sports or inhibit voice and facilitate silence on critical issues to be addressed. Against this backdrop, the relevance of specific evaluative and cognitive mindsets, formal and informal normative structures, and constellations structures that mold paths to silence is shown.

Keywords Social structures, sexual violence, sport organizations, trust, voice and silence

1 Introduction

Gender-based violence in sports has long been taboo. Only when media covered prominent cases of sexual harassment and abuse of Olympic and other elite-level coaches in the early 1990s did the topic enter the research agenda (Brackenridge and Fasting 2002). However, the first empirical study on violence against girls and women in Germany on behalf of the Ministry of Women, Youth, Family and Health of North-Rhine-Westphalia (Klein and Palzkill 1998) was discredited and rejected by sports organizations, who accused the authors of fowling the nest and damaging the reputation of organized sports. Research on gender-based violence in sports and sports organizations has recently gained more attention due to a growing number of mediated cases inside and outside of sports (Lang and Hartill 2015). There is a considerable scientific discourse on the definition of sexualized violence based on the World Health Organisation's (WHO) report on violence and health. Alexander et al. (2011) define sexual violence in sport as a

“behaviour towards an individual or group that involves sexualised verbal, nonverbal or physical behaviour, whether intended or unintended, legal or illegal, that is based upon an abuse of power and trust and that is considered by the victim or a bystander to be unwanted or coerced” (p. 61).

Sexual violence is often not about sexual acts but violence performed sexually based on the abuse of power or hierarchical gender relations. More recently, the generic term of gender-based violence is used to cover several forms of violence related to a person's gender or sexuality (Rulofs 2015). Consistent with the IOC Consensus Statement (Mountjoy et al. 2016) and its denotation of “non-accidental violence”, the terms sexual violence, sexualized violence, and gender-based violence make explicit the intentional nature of the behavior of an agent, and are used equally in the chapter.

Gender-based violence occurs in many forms including activities without body contact (e.g., sexist jokes, sexual harassment) and activities with body contact (e.g., groomed or coerced sexual abuse and rape). The frequency of these acts in the context of sports is the focus of many qualitative and quantitative studies with heterogeneous study designs. Consequently, there is a considerable variation in the identified prevalence rates of sexualized violence, varying between 1% to 63% of the surveyed population (Bjørnseth and Szabo 2018). In Germany, the “Safe Sport” project assessed the frequency of sexual violence in a comprehensive sample of elite German athletes within (Allroggen et al. 2016; Ohlert et al. 2018). Overall, 1,529 elite German athletes over 16 years of age from 128 different sports took part in the online survey. The results showed that 37.6% of the athletes had experienced at least one act of sexual violence in organized sports. On average, the affected athletes were 17 years old at the time of the first act of sexual violence; however, two-thirds were under the age of 17. There are two subgroups with significantly higher frequen-

cy. First, females, who had more frequently experienced at least one act of sexual violence in organized sports (48.1% females compared to 24.3% males). This finding confirms previous results in the systematic review by Bjørnseth and Szabo (2018). Second, non-heterosexual athletes, who are more vulnerable compared to heterosexual athletes (47.6% vs 37.3%). This level of vulnerability is consistent with other research (e.g., Smith et al. 2012; Vertommen et al. 2016). The perpetrators were predominantly male (91%), adult (81%) and in functional roles such as a coach, physiotherapist or staff member. The research also addressed the locations at which the sexual violence took place. The affected athletes indicated that sports clubs (62%) were the most common location, followed by training camps and competitions (22%) of national or regional sports federations (Allroggen et al. 2016; Ohlert et al. 2018).

Against the backdrop of 38% of elite German athletes having been subjected to sexual violence, the representative “Safe Sport” project survey of incidents in German sports clubs revealed a striking contrast. Only 2% of all sports clubs reported any knowledge of incidents that had occurred over the last five years (Hartmann-Tews et al. 2017). The comparison of two different surveys—elite athletes and sports clubs—implies a number of serious methodological constraints and reservations. However, the discrepancy between the findings is striking, and supports the proposition that sports clubs are either not aware of the incidents of sexualized violence or are reluctant to report wrongdoing.

The “Safe Sport” project comprised a systematic analysis of prevention policy of sexualized violence in organized German sports (see section 3 for the research design). This paper builds upon this focus and the results of a baseline study to review the implementation of prevention measures and identify structural and attitudinal correlates of more or fewer engagement ways to strengthen child protection and the prevention of sexual violence. This multilevel and mixed-method research allows us to explore assumptions about the systemic and organizational factors that contribute to the silence of sports organizations reflected in the statements of the Commission for the Prevention of Sexualised Violence. Against this backdrop, systemic conditions and organizational factors contributing to silence and their underlying social processes become visible.

2 Theoretical perspectives

There is a significant amount of research on *voice* and *silence* in organizations, particularly about for-profit organizations and their employees. Many authors refer to Hirschman's (1970) original model of *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*. Hirschman described *exit* and *voice* as central behavioral alternatives for people when they are dissatisfied with the social system (e.g., society in general, unions or political parties, and even marriage). People are either moving away from the social system (*exit*), thus being active but not constructive in the system, or staying and attempting to improve it

(*voice*). Instead, *loyalty* may express itself as active or passive and encompass attitudinal or behavioral components aimed at improving a situation or setting. Hirschman's framework was extended with a fourth characteristic: the concept of *neglect* (e.g., Rusbult and Zembrodt 1983). This means people have the option to accept a dissatisfying situation and remain passive and non-constructive (e.g., by withholding information).

To understand why critical issues in an organization are silenced, a functional approach allows consideration of several causes related to the model of *Exit, Voice, Loyalty and Neglect* (Knoll et al. 2016). The framework they use places the four elements of dissatisfaction into a framework of two axes: passive—active and constructive—not constructive. *Voice* (active/constructive), *Loyalty* (passive/constructive), *Neglect* (passive/not constructive), and *Exit* (active/not constructive) represent the quadrants. Against this perspective, Knoll et al. explain that “voice and silence are (results of) complex social processes” (2016, p. 167), with silence being a potential outcome of the phenomena of *exit, neglect, and loyalty*.

Research defined silence in organizations as “the collective-level phenomena of doing or saying very little in response to significant problems or issues facing an organisation” (Henriksen and Dayton 2006, p. 1539). This definition has two points of focus. The first is organizational silence, starting with the collective perceptions of voice-inhibiting social structures. The second is employee silence with a focus on individual behaviors and motivations. Comparatively fewer researchers have analyzed organizational antecedents of *silence* and covering wrongdoing compared to individual factors. This is in line with research on non-accidental violence in sport, as there are only few studies considering organizational factors that may underpin psychological, physical or sexual violence in sport (Roberts et al. 2020).

This chapter is about organizational silence and the voice-inhibiting and silence-facilitating social structures of organized sports and its organizational units. The concept of social structures is a central, multifaceted, and highly debated reference point of discussion in sociology. Schimank (2010) distinguishes three dimensions and kinds of social structures: (a) expectancy structures, (b) mindsets, and (c) structural constellations. Expectancy structures include both formal norms and informal norms that serve to ensure an expectable agency. Formal norms include the statutes of a sports club or the requirement for a police record check for coaches involved in children's and adolescents' sports. Informal norms encompass any kind of non-codified social rules (e.g., fair play in sports or volunteer work in sports clubs). Mindsets are interpretative schemes that provide generalized orientations for the agency. They show as evaluative mindsets, representing generalized values, such as sociability and communality in sports clubs. Closely connected to these values are cognitive mindsets, which reflect popular knowledge and common sense, for example, “the winner takes all” or the “natural gender order.” Structural constellations are the third kind of social structures and represent any kind of well-balanced pattern of relationship between (elements of) the systems. Examples are the coach-athlete constellation, reflecting a power imbalance, and the con-

stellation of the voluntary sport sector based on umbrella organizations and clubs at grass-root level. These three dimensions of social structures are interconnected and inform each other in real situations. At the same time, they frame and mold the agency in different ways. Mindsets mold the will and desire of an agency, normative structures influence the “must and should do” of organizations, and constellations frame the capability and ability to realize norms and mindsets (Schimank 2010).

The theoretical perspectives of a recursive social process of agency and social structures, in which social structures act as social frames that mold social action, is a heuristic tool to discern systemic, structural elements that evoke organizational blindness toward gender-based violence in sports or inhibit voice and facilitate silence on critical issues to be addressed.

3 Research design

Organized sports in Germany is a merger of voluntary organizations characterized by a complex structure. The German Olympic and Sport Confederation (DOSB) is the national umbrella organization that oversees 62 National Sport Federations (NSF) for specific sports, 16 Regional Sport Associations (RSA) in the federal states, and approximately 90,000 sports clubs at grass-root level. Overall, the DOSB represents more than 27 million members. The empirical studies in the “Safe Sport”¹ project were designed to collect information on policies for the prevention of sexual violence in the sports organizations. The research design proposes a mixed-method approach using online surveys and semi-structured interviews focusing on three levels of organized sports: national, regional, and grass-root local-level volunteer sports clubs.²

3.1 Quantitative approach and data analysis

The data on sports club prevention policies were collected via an online survey of all sports clubs as an integral (small additional) part of the bi-annual Sport Development Survey. The final sample size was $n = 20.546$ participating clubs, represent-

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- 1 Financed by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF, 2014–2017)
 - 2 All research components were approved by the ethics committee of the German Sport University Cologne. Participants in both the online survey and the interviews were assured anonymity concerning all data collected. Pseudonyms were used for the NSFs, participants in the studies, and all potential identifying features in the transcripts. The original data were stored in a separate, secure device.

ing a return rate of 26%. Since not all participants were willing or able to answer the questions about the prevention of sexual violence, the number of valid cases was reduced to $n = 8,571$, or 42% of all valid cases. This dropout may have led to selection bias; it is possible that the responding clubs were more likely to be engaged in child protection.

The data on prevention policies of the National Sports Federations (NSF) and Regional Sport Associations (RSA) was collected via two online surveys. All 62 NSFs and all 16 RSAs were invited to take part in the survey that included 150 questions about policies about sexualized violence and case management. Ultimately, the response rate was 67.8% ($n = 42$) for the NSFs and 100% ($n = 22$) for the RSAs.

Statistical analysis of the survey data was conducted using SPSS 23 for Windows. A data-screening procedure following the recommendations of Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) was applied. Frequencies (percentages), means, and standard deviation (SD) were used, and correlation analyses were conducted after a positive assessment of the statistical requirements.

3.2 Qualitative approach and data analysis

The qualitative approach encompassed structured telephone-based expert interviews with Commissioners of the Prevention of Sexualised Violence in both the NSFs and RSAs. The interviews were designed to obtain additional insight into the role of the commissioners and the kind of social structures (i.e., formal/informal norms, evaluative/cognitive mindsets and constellations) that frame the implementation of prevention policies. All interviews were conducted by telephone and audio recorded. A total of 47 NSF Commissioners agreed to be interviewed, reflecting a response rate of 75.8% (22 male, 25 female). All of the RSA Commissioners ($n = 22$) agreed to participate. The average length of the telephone interviews was 23 minutes (min: 10 min, max: 63 min).

In addition, five NSFs were identified for semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews about their prevention policies that focused more on the process of self-governance related to the prevention policies. Five commissioners and three members of boards of directors took part in the interviews, with a mean duration of 104 minutes (min: 77 min, max: 167 min). Because the survey on the frequency of sexual violence in athletes focused on elite and high-performance sports, the same kind of semi-structured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with six experts from three Olympic Centres. Although they are not immediate members of the DOSB, they are a relevant setting for high-performance athletes within their career (mean duration of 53 min, min: 18 min, max: 95 min).³

3 Quotes are documented using the acronym of the organisation, the reference number of the interview, and line in the transcript. Organizational acronyms are NSF = Na-

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The data were subjected to deductive and inductive thematic analysis following Mayring and Fenzl (2014). That analysis involved reading and re-reading the text to understand general patterns, themes, and their interrelationships. Through this process, themes were increasingly refined (Hartmann-Tews et al. 2020).

4 The social structures of organized sports as constraints on *voice* and conditions of *silence*

The first significant step toward the prevention of gender-based violence in organized sports in Germany was the adoption of the Munich Declaration of Protection against Sexualized Violence in Sport at the 2010 DOSB general assembly. The declaration included 15 multidimensional actions to address sexualized violence in sport which all member organizations committed to the task of preventing (DOSB 2010). Examples of the actions include the commitment to designate a commissioner for the prevention of sexualized violence, to develop procedures for responding to complaints, allegations and cases, to sensitize staff through a code of ethics, and to develop educational material about the prevention of sexualized violence.

Due to the constitutional characteristics of voluntary organizations, the adoption of the Munich Declaration was preceded by a lengthy consultation of the member organizations. The German Sport Youth is an integral element of the DOSB representing the interests of children, adolescents, and young people up to 26 years of age. The organization has been a driving force in the process of raising awareness and developing prevention policies. The Munich Declaration represents a consensus on a normative frame for all member organizations, in particular the NSFs and RSAs, who represent 90,000 sports clubs. However, the constitutional framework of the voluntary sector means that the member organizations must follow the policies of the DOSB. As a result, there is no means of enforcing decisions made at the top.

4.1 Restrained prevention policy as antecedents of *silence*

The quantitative data for the surveys of sport clubs, the RSAs, and NSFs indicated a slow top-down process for implementing prevention policies within the sports system. Six years after the Munich Declaration, 38% of the sports clubs had not implemented a single measure. Only two of 14 measures were implemented. The number

tional Sport Federation, RSA = Regional Sport Association; OC = Olympic Centre. For the NSFs and RSAs, the additional notation "a" refers to the telephone expert interviews and "b" to the in-depth, face-to-face interviews.

of clubs that implemented individual measures varied between 7% (prevention of sexualized violence is an integral part of their statutes) and 34% (incidents of suspicion are passed over to other helpdesks) (Hartman-Tews et al. 2017). Regarding the evaluative mindset of intent and willingness to implement further measures, the data indicates low interest, varying between 8% and 15% of sports clubs that intended to implement specific measures in the near future. At the level of collective agents (NSFs and RSAs), the implementation rate and the commitment to take further actions is higher. The RSAs had a mean of eight out of 13 implemented measures, whereas the NSFs had an average of three implemented measures (Rulofs, Wagner, and Hartmann-Tews 2016).

The commitment to designate a commissioner for the prevention of sexualized violence is an essential part of the Munich Declaration (DOSB 2010). In 2016, every RSA had created this position, compared to 80% of the NSFs (only 54% made the designation public). The varying level of compliance with the Munich Declaration likely reflects the associations' different tasks and mindsets. The NSFs represent the interests of specific sports disciplines (e.g., gymnastics, soccer, and track and field) and have specific responsibilities for (Olympic) competitive and performance sports. In contrast, the RSAs represent the general interests of all sports clubs beyond any specific discipline and are more engaged in general issues of sports development.

At grass-root level, only 12% of the sports clubs had established and made public a contact person for the prevention of sexualized violence or child protection. This low level of commitment means that a large majority of sports clubs have not created a clear normative structure and, in particular, no institutionalized option for *voice*. Hence, there are no official means for individuals to turn to an authority and expose perceptions of wrong-doing, regardless of whether he/she is personally affected, a bystander or potential whistle-blower who wants to report activities within the club that are deemed illegal or unethical.

The action of not following the commitment of the Munich Declaration is in sharp contrast to the empirical evidence of the benefits of channels of *Voice*. Research indicates that people are more likely to take action and voice their concerns about unethical behavior within an organization if there are complaint systems that provide confidentiality (Rowe 1993). Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008) concluded that employees' perceived opportunity for *voice* is a central contextual moderator of the relationship between *voice* and *silence*. Their finding on the lack of opportunity for *voice* may explain, in part, the discrepancy of a large number of athletes (38%) who experienced sexualized violence in organized sports and the small number of sports clubs (6%) that know of potential cases. Apart from this missing institutionalized option of *voice*, the question remains, what is behind the discrepancy? Or, to reframe the question from the theoretical perspective, what is or might be the contribution of (additional) social structures to the complex social processes of *voice* and *silence* and the various paths to silencing wrong-doing?

It is important to note that this was not the original research question of the “Safe Sport” project, but has evolved based on various findings of this research. Thus, the following sections present theoretically informed and empirically supported descriptions of social structures that have the potential to frame perception and mold behavior of individual members toward *silence*.

4.2 The positive image of sports—cognitive and evaluative mindsets as an institutional shield of *silence*

Many commissioners of the NSFs reported that the prevention of sexualized violence has no priority within their organization and is generally considered as “irrelevant” (NSFa 09, 15). Concerning potential incidents of sexualized violence, there is a general attitude in the organizations that these are “rather not imaginable for our sports” (NSFa 02, 15), “do not happen with us” (NSFa 15, 30–34) or that they happen in different milieus as “We are academics, it does not exist here” (NSFb 02, 248).

It is a widely shared cognitive map that this specific sports (organization) or its (specific) membership are not affected by sexualized violence. At first glance, it appears naïve to share this interpretation because, in recent years, the media has reported a growing number of incidents and cases of gender-based violence in a variety of social settings (e.g., church, boarding schools, youth welfare centres and sports). However, this mindset must be examined in the context of the image of organized sports in general and their specific organizational subcultures, in particular.

Beginning in the 1970s, organized sports launched many programs to foster the development of integration and inclusive programs accessible to everyone. Against this backdrop, there was broad consent that organized sports produces public benefits such as social integration, community, education, crime prevention, and democratic decision-making (Hartmann-Tews 2017). Due to these ascribed positive externalities of sports, the DOSB successfully developed the image of a welfare organization—immune from any kind of wrongdoing. In this sense, the development of organized sports in Germany is a success story that is mirrored by the increase in membership from 10 million in 1970 to 27 million in 2019. The positive image of sports and the unchallenged cognitive mindset of its benefits are linked with an organizational culture that, in the pursuit of joint volunteering, is often referred to as “we” and the “sports family” (Lepke 2020; Netzathleten 2018). It can be assumed that this culture of affective attachment and identification is conducive to value consensus and loyalty more than an open airing of doubts and alternative views.

The interviews showed that it is part of a systemic culture to assign organized sports a normative charging as part of welfare production steered by a family-like community, and to make sexualized violence a taboo topic, consequently making prevention measures irrelevant. In doing so, the organizations developed an “in-

stitutional shield of silence,” (Heitmeyer 2012, p. 29) which is central to constraining *voice* and enabling collective *silence*.

This assumption is confirmed by many commissioners, who are aware that the topic of sexual violence is considered a “taboo issue” (NSFa 33, 24) and “no-go topic” (NSFa 15, 17). Several commissioners from RSAs enforce the impression of the shared informal expectations, not to talk about such issues, with the perception that sports organizations try to “keep the incident under wraps as long as possible” (RSAa 02, 84–90), “sweep topics under the carpet” (RSAa 17, 53), and “tend to take it as a taboo topic and prefer to brush it under the table” (RSAb 04, 348). In this context of cognitive and evaluative mindsets that inhibit *voice*, commissioners describe their role as a challenging one: “It is a big problem to introduce the topic of prevention because you are immediately accused of waking sleeping dogs” (NSFa 16, 5–9). Hence, there is a kind of hidden awareness on the part of both of the commissioners and the (board) members at grass-root level that organized sports is not immune to sexualized violence. The commissioners’ perception that sports organizations’ fear to speak up, to give voice to worries, presumptions or suspicions, is prevalent in almost all interviews. A commissioner even identified a general fear “to open Pandora’s box” (NSFo4, 35), and many experienced an explicit rejection from sports managers “who then say to me, don’t act up and make a fuss” (NSFa 20, 44).

4.3 Lack of normative structures and uncertainty as constraints to *voice*

Yet, there is another important characteristic of organized sports that makes a significant difference in the available research on *voice* and *silence* that focuses on for-profit organizations. Sports clubs are voluntary, non-profit organizations with democratic decision-making structures designed “to furnish activities for members as an end in itself” (Gordon and Babchuk 1959, p. 25). Research literature characterizes sports clubs as inward-oriented associations that are predominantly run by volunteer personnel with limited resources. Typical features of the self-governing of sports organizations are vague purposes, informal strategic programmes, and diffuse communication channels (Borggrefe, Cachay, and Thiel 2012). There is agreement in literature that these characteristics point to slow and discontinuous communication as well as diffuse responsibilities (Fahrner 2008). The dark side of this organizational framework of voluntary sports clubs shows in a variety of the “Safe Sport” project findings.

First, responsibilities for tasks and functions of volunteers are rarely formalized and documented. In particular, there is a missing normative structure for the duties of the commissioner on the prevention of sexualized violence. Of the National Sport Federations that have a commissioner, 82% reported that there is no description of that person’s role, or responsibilities, regardless of their formal status as a volunteer or employee. Many commissioners are aware of this situation, as the following examples illustrate:

"You want to know about my responsibilities? I would say...well...hm..., as I said, I really thought about this—what in fact is my role here? At the moment, it is merely on paper, because nothing is really done." (NSFb 05, 113)

A similar perception is shared by another commissioner of an NSF, who turned to his board of directors and asked:

"Actually, what are my tasks? Well, nobody knew, but it was necessary [for the organization] to have the position, you had to have it." (NSFb 01, 3)

The missing description of the role and responsibilities of many commissioners can be traced back to two factors. On the one hand, there is the typical organizational structure of voluntary sports organizations and, on the other hand, the lack of interest in and low priority given to the prevention of sexualized violence.

Second, because of the low number of prevention measures and the lack of normative framing of the role of the commissioner, there is a widespread uncertainty in the organizations about "the definition of the situation." Without open discourse about potential unethical behavior in sports, members are in danger of losing their way and making valid decisions in critical situations. This lack of moral framing is omnipresent in the sports clubs, in particular. Members and volunteers are often not aware of sensitive situations, and they don't have a clear understanding of what is wrong or right, what is acceptable behavior in a sports context or what behaviors must be sanctioned.

The following quote of an NSF commissioner illustrates the dilemma:

"I think there are many incidents on the way to the locker room, in showers and contact in the swimming pool that are still not described as intrusive or harassment (by volunteer staff), but are probably perceived differently by the person concerned." (NSFa 33, 21)

Another RSA commissioner described his difficulty in evaluating "incidents" that are forwarded to him with a specific example, in which many stakeholders were involved and in which he felt insecure or uncertain as to what was wrong or (still) acceptable and how to give advice:

"...precisely because it is not really not certain, was not certain determined,...is as yet unknown whether something had happened or not. Right, it is really an assumption,...although it was quite clear, for me. Well, yes, that is always a matter of opinion." (RSAa 11, 29)

The findings about missing or vague standards on the prevention of sexualized violence provide important insight into the social processes and paths to the silence of sports organizations. The positive effects of clear normative expectations are documented in the survey of sports clubs and indirectly confirm the downside of missing rules. The results indicate that those volunteer sports clubs designated as

a youth aid organization under public welfare regulations have implemented far more measures for the prevention of sexualized violence than those without recognition. Being accepted and registered as part of the Youth Welfare System requires compliance with public regulations, and the data show a higher awareness of the relevance (prevention) of gender-based violence in those organizations (Hartmann-Tews et al. 2017).

Diffuse responsibilities, discontinuous communication, and normative uncertainty are typical characteristics of sports organizations. Conviviality and membership trust are further factors that explain the social processes of silencing in sports and can be identified as a specific mechanism to absorb uncertainty.

4.4 Membership trust as a systemic constraint to realize and speak up against wrongdoing

The majority of sports clubs in Germany are small; almost half have 100 members or less. An additional one-quarter have memberships between 101 and 300 (Breuer, Feiler, and Wicker 2018). The most important resource in the sports clubs is the voluntary involvement of their members, who work free of charge in a spirit of solidarity. Similar to other civic associations (e.g., hobby clubs or music groups), volunteer sports clubs have frequent face-to-face interactions among members and a high degree of conviviality, which in turn created a sense of belonging by the members and of being part of the community.

These characteristics are reflected in findings on the production of social capital that members of sports clubs and other civic associations are distinct from non-members in significantly higher in-group trust, or trust in a person's circle of family, friends, and acquaintances (Burrmann, Braun, and Mutz 2018). Moreover, the level of in-group trust in sports club members is only slightly higher than membership trust, or trust in the sports club members. The results indicate that sports club members are more likely to be regarded as acquaintances than strangers, confirming the popular metaphor of belonging to a "sports family." With regard to the demographics of vulnerability and perpetrators, it is a notable finding that men have a significantly higher level of membership trust than women.

Against this backdrop, one of the commissioners reflects on the dispositions and sentiments of the members of a typical small club in the countryside; the discussion is about introducing a police record check for instructors and coaches:

"Virtually you know each other. (...) Most of the board members know the persons in charge, the coaches...for twenty, thirty, forty years. The same people who have been running the club forever. You would not mistrust them!" (RSAb 04, 89)

"Well, yes it is a taboo (author's remark: *talking about police record check*) insofar as you know the people for many, many years. They are youth coaches for many, many years.

Nothing happens. The people would personally take it as an offence, too, if you ask them to provide a policerecord check because we do not trust you any more or because it is required." (RSAb 04, 96)

This quote reveals at least two aspects relevant to the social processes that lead to silence. First, there is a high level of membership trust and confidence; nothing wrong will happen because people have known each other for many years. Our data, as well as research evidence, suggests that this kind of trust and confidence is not only an individual, personal trust but a generalized membership trust. Within the scope of membership trust, references to or indications of transgressive behavior may not even be perceived as such and not marked as sensitive information within the social system of sports clubs. The effect is that dangerous or unethical behavior may be underestimated.

Our survey data indicates that small clubs and clubs focusing on traditional values, i.e. setting a high focus on tradition, conviviality, and non-sport offerings, have significantly lower general self-assessments concerning the prevention of sexual violence and fewer prevention measures compared to big clubs and those focussing on values like diversity, service or youth/performance sports (Rulofs et al. 2019). These characteristics indicate that clubs that place a high value on traditional values of sport clubs and are small in size, give ground on generalized membership trust. Thus, they are more likely to ignore the topic of sexual violence prevention.

In addition, the sense of conviviality, belonging, and membership trust are morally elevated. Against this backdrop, rational arguments for adopting preventive measures may be immediately labelled as mistrust, thus suppressing any kind of discourse and reflections. This situation reveals the importance of implicit voice theories or taken-for-granted beliefs about when speaking up is inappropriate. This was demonstrated in the previous quote in which the police record check was considered to be "taboo" The measures were marked as untrustworthy even before it was proposed. Research on large corporations points out the impact of widely shared implicit theories on workplace silence (Detert and Edmondson 2011).

An essential feature of volunteer sports clubs is their volunteers as an integral part of implicit voice theory. In other words, the fear that volunteers may quit if they were asked to provide a police record check. As the commissioner of a RSAs put it, "They would say 'hey, you are crazy', you can do your stuff alone" (RSAb 04, 98). The commissioner of an NSF explained about typical reactions from clubs:

"Well, I have always been slowed down with 'don't ruin it,' 'delicate plantlet,' 'if there are coaches to train at least women, we should be happy, don't scare them.'" (NSFb 01, 211).

Because gaining and retaining volunteers is one of the significant challenges for volunteer sports organizations, the belief that speaking up would be inappropriate, and risk termination might be a moderating contextual factor for silencing as well. Another commissioner even reported that pressure was put on him to convince the

family of a sexual violence victim to step back from their accusations based on the reason that it was impossible to substitute the coach:

“Yes, yes, yes, protection of the offender according to the principle. ‘listen, he has been doing a good job and if we have to do without him, we have no clue how to continue the work...’” (NSFa 25, 106–118)

There are many examples from inside and outside sports of volunteers who make themselves indispensable for the organization and consequently immune to any suspicions (Bundschuh 2010). This phenomenon suggests that the idealization of voluntary work and altruistic engagement might make people blind to further (egoistic) motives and wrongdoing of volunteers.

4.5 Conformity to the master narrative of male dominance as *voice*-inhibiting structure

The most vulnerable groups concerning sexualized violence in sports are female athletes and non-heterosexual athletes. At the same time, perpetrators are predominantly male staff and volunteers (Allroggen et al. 2016; Bjørnseth et al. 2018; Vertommen et al. 2016). Both findings blend in the traditional gender order and indicate the necessity to consider the hierarchical gender order and the concept of hegemonic masculinity in the field of sports concerning the topic of gender-based violence (Hartmann-Tews, Menzel, and Braumüller 2020).

There is a cultural master narrative of male dominance in sports that is deeply rooted in the socially constructed concept of natural hierarchical gender order and compulsory order of the biological sex, that is associated to the corresponding gender and attraction to opposite-sex individuals (Butler 2006; Krane 2019). Against this background, girls and women have long been denied access to physical activity and sports, and there has been a long-lasting hesitance and reluctance to give girls and women access to competitive sports at grass-root level and include them in the Olympic program (Hartmann-Tews and Pfister 2003). Even today, girls and women still face challenges in a social system, in which masculine characteristics (e.g., well-defined muscles, playing hard, and being aggressive) are taken as the reference for being an athlete, reflecting a “hegemonic notion of athleticism as a masculine trait” (Griffin 2012, p. 101). This gender hierarchy is omnipresent in sports culture, e.g. in the representation of women in leading positions of the sports system.

In Germany, gender distribution in sports club membership is about 60% male and 40% female. In contrast, the gender ratio on the boards of the NSFs, RSA, and sports clubs is 80% men and 20% women, and the same gender ratio can be identified about the number of coaches, referees, and umpires which is about 80% males and 20% females (Hartmann-Tews 2016). The characteristics of voluntary sports organizations and the construction of sports as a male domain appear to generate

a tendency towards homosocial recruitment, which in turn confirm and strengthen male dominance (Elling, Hovden, and Knoppers 2019). This culture of male dominance, hegemonic masculinity, and heteronormativity is framed by respective societal values and norms, re-produced by the sports media, and enacted by sports organizations and individual agency (Fink 2015; Krane 2019).

A female commissioner of an NSF, who was a referee in a sport with a strong connotation as a male sport, describes elements of the culture of male dominance she experienced during her career as a referee:

"...that was a tight male alliance. Those, those, the one who did not want me. Where I was knocking against again and again, that was such a tight men's squad who were refereeing for years and they have clinged together very tight." (NSFb 01, 132, 24)

"I have always been in the focus, as woman in particular, I received everything. Everything was discussed, my appearance, my shape. Well, if we want to talk about verbal gaffes, I had to take everything. Even the size of my buttocks was discussed..." (NSFb 01, 24)

There are cultural and social scripts of gender hierarchy through which discourses operate in powerful ways to silence victims. Victims cannot count on being heard and treated with sympathy. These discourses even frame the work of (female) commissioners as a quote of a female commissioner of an NSF about the acceptance of the topic of prevention and her role as a commissioner illustrates:

"...because the topic is not wanted, you know. There are men thinking 'What is she doing here?' She only wants to aggrandise herself! We do not have a problem with it (*sexualised violence*), that costs us a pretty penny and that is absolutely useless." (NSFa 16, 31)

Research reveals that this cultural master narrative is important to understand incidents of gender-based violence and the fear and reluctance of victims and bystanders to speak out (Sanderson et al. 2019). The impact of gender and gender composition of the governing board on the discourses about the relevance or irrelevance of gender-based violence in organized sports is documented in the "Safe Sport" survey of sports clubs. The number of women on the board has a positive and significant effect on the awareness of sexualized violence in organized sports, the need to talk about the risks of sexualized violence and the number of measures implemented by the sports club (Hartmann-Tews et al. 2017). This finding suggests two interpretations. On the one hand, women might have qualifications that add to a club's ability to engage in child protection. On the other hand, a club's general management culture, being supportive of female leadership, is decisive in confronting sexual violence in sports clubs. However, the most recent evidence from longitudinal research confirms that women on the boards have some positive effects on the governance of sports clubs (Wicker, Feiler, and Breuer 2020).

4.6 High-performance sports: greedy institution as a constraint to *voice* and path to *silence*

Because the survey on the frequency of sexualized violence in organized sports in Germany documents the responses of squad athletes (high-level performers in their respective sports), it is worthwhile to review this sub-system of organized sports. Essential for high-performance sports is an evaluative mindset of winning—reflected in the Olympic Code of “*altius, citius, fortius*.” The respective binary code of victory/defeat is the generalized scheme of all people involved in high-performance sport (Stichweh 1990). This mindset has a strong impact on social structures and agency, as one of the commissioners put it:

“...in performance sports, they have blinkers, practically. They run through their world, you know. The long jumper only sees the pit and nothing else right or left.” (RSA 04b, 404)

The focus on winning and the impact of this basic mindset are supported by a variety of informal normative structures, which give way to silencing incidents of gender-based violence.

First, the binary code of victory or defeat, of winning or losing is elevated to a far-reaching ethic, if not ideology. Research shows that there is a coherent “culture of risk” communicated to athletes. That culture is closely entangled with the norms and values of being the best, seeking distinction, challenging limits, taking risks, and sacrificing for the sport (Hughes and Coakley 1991; Nixon 1993). Squad athletes have been socialized into the social structures of elite sports with this kind of “hidden curriculum.” These informal norms are broadly shared and generate an organizational culture that may condone, encourage or even reward transgressive behavior, as one of the commissioners put it: there is “generally a tough tone, breaching the limits and crossing the lines is taken as granted” by everyone (OSC 03, 263).

Within this culture, the behavior of coaches and other staff may move beyond ethical limits that are set and accepted outside of performance sports. However, widely shared values, along with the binary code in this kind of microcosm, have the power to alter the boundaries of what is right and wrong. Within this sub-system, there are different standards of normality, and this kind of “breaching the limits” is generally not perceived as unethical and, consequently, no real cause for *voice*.

Second, growing into the role of a high performer implies an inevitable path to hyperinclusion. This path entails a complete and entire dedication of the athlete towards his/her sport on a factual, temporal, and social dimension to serve the final goal of winning competitions at regional, national, and international level (Bette and Schimank 1995). Given this significant individual investment of the athlete, increasing inclusion goes along with decreasing options of *exit*. Moreover, as the binary code of winning or losing is essential for performance sports, all members, coaches, instructors, physiotherapists, and parents invest substantial time, money, and energy and want to see a return through victories of their athletes, their sons,

and daughters. This commitment creates interdependencies in the sense that they “are all in one boat,” a situation and climate that, on the one hand, condones transgressive behavior for the ultimate goal and, on the other hand, evokes attitudinal and behavioral *loyalty* to the system. The consequence is to silence wrongdoing.

At first glance, high-performance sports appear to be characterized by elements of Goffmann’s concept of a “total institution” (Goffmann 1961). He describes a total institution as a place of residence where a number of similarly situated people, isolated from the wider community, lead an enclosed, formally administered public life without any chance of self-governance, e.g., jail, psychiatric clinic. This situation may apply to specific institutions in high-performance sports, such as sports-related boarding schools, where different spheres of life (school, training, leisure, peer group relations, sleeping, and eating) are integrated and organized as a closed system. However, high-performance sports may be better understood by the concept of the “greedy institution” (Coser 1974) because it focuses on the normative integration of individuals in the organization without institutionalizing them. Within high-performance sports, social processes of elevating the ultimate goal and hyperinclusion of athletes on a social, time, and factual dimension are omnipresent (Bette and Schimank 1995). These features generate a high level of loyalty to the systems, which in turn may develop into several sports-specific closed systems inhibiting *voice* (Bundschuh 2010).

Key to a deeper understanding of the paths of silence in performance sports is another element of the social structure: the social constellation of coaches and athletes which is characterized by power imbalance. During their career, high-performance athletes frequently undergo screening processes, internal competitions, and selections processes. In contrast, coaches face the challenge and have the power to select. Successful coaches are appreciated, and very successful coaches are even more appreciated. They enjoy great respect and develop a kind of immunity against critiques. This kind of economic rationality within the system, in combination with the elevation of the binary code, inhibits victims and bystanders from speaking out, as one of the commissioners put it:

“And if a top coach is involved, they wouldn’t risk the system. They would rather put a male or female athlete to the sword, I tell you. I tell you very clearly right away as a coach. That is my experience. That is always the same.” (OSC 02, 96f)

This quote reveals the specific type of constellation structure in competitive sports in general, and in high-performance sports in particular. On the individual level, it is a power constellation between coach/instructor and athlete, based on expertise, age and (often) the gender-order. On the other hand, on the system level, it is a constellation structure of dependency on professional/volunteer engagement. Against the background of high interdependencies in a greedy institution, *silence* is the result of social processes of *neglect* and *loyalty*.

Conclusions

There is growing international research that documents the life histories of survivors and victims who experienced gender-based violence in sports and, in particular, being silenced by coaches, members of the sports organization and even parents, and siblings (Rulofs and Hartill 2018; Sanderson and Weathers 2019). The results show a low level of awareness of sport organizations of gender-based violence in sports, and the general experience of survivors and victims documents an overwhelming reluctance of individuals and organizations to hear, accept or act on concerns about incidents of gender-based violence.

There are two general strands to explain sexualized violence in sport. One that considers it to be caused by individual factors, such as personality or psychopathological characteristics of the perpetrator, and the other that considers the sport environment as a relevant frame that enables gender-based violence. As there are only few studies considering organizational factors that may underpin psychological, physical or sexual violence in sport (Roberts et al. 2019), this chapter has sought to develop insights into organizational silence as a collective-level phenomenon of sports organizations. The theoretical background of the analysis is informed by a functionalistic view of Hirschman's expanded model of *Voice and Exit*, describing *silence* as the result of complex social processes with a focus on underlying organizational logic and framing social structures that inhibit voice and promote silence in specific evaluative and normative mindsets, informal and formal normative structures, and constellation structures.

The systematic analysis of social structures shows a range of interconnected organizational factors as antecedents of *silence* and inhibiting structures of *voice*. The key features identified in the survey and the expert interviews are multifaceted and interconnected. The dimension of expectancy structures shows a formal commitment of the DOSB and its member organization to the Munich Declaration and the protection of athletes against sexualized violence (DOSB 2010). At the same time, there is evidence that only a low number of prevention measures have been implemented, in particular at grass-root level of voluntary sports clubs. The low level of real commitment to the prevention of sexualized violence is framed by a variety of mindsets and constellation structures of voluntary sports organizations. Some crucial antecedents of *silence* and constraints to *voice* were identified with regard to the cognitive and evaluative mindsets as there are: the positive image of sport, a naïve conviction that gender-based violence is not imaginable and does not happen in sports and a cultural- and sport-specific narrative of male dominance and traditional stereotypical masculine values such as dominance and toughness. A further general factor within the dimension of shared beliefs and values that constrains *voice* is membership trust and the popular metaphor and cognitive mindset of belonging to a family. It can be assumed that this affective attachment is conducive to value trust and consensus more than an open airing of doubts and alternative views, thus giving way to *loyalty* as a path to *silence*. This combination of social

structures may evoke organizational blindness against wrongdoing. It confirms the notion of Brackenridge (2001) that the reputation of the organization is more cared about than child protection. Focusing on high performance sport, there are further constraints to *voice and frames for silence*: the elevated binary code of high performance in connection with the “winner-take-all” reward system, and the normative integration of all individuals to this mindset; hyperinclusion of athletes and the constellation of a power imbalance between coach and athletes.

The combination and intersection of mindsets and constellations explain the low pace and reluctance to implement prevention measures against sexualized violence in sport. These social structures frame a climate that avoids talking about risks of transgressive behavior and measures to prevent gender-based violence. This avoidance, in turn, leads to missing or weak normative structures about the prevention of sexualized violence and a high level of normative uncertainty and ambiguity about standards of acceptable or unacceptable behavior. A vast majority of sports clubs have no institutionalized option for *voice*. There is no nominated commissioner, no binding rules on how to interact with children and youth (e.g., concerning body contact, changing, and training camps), and no guidelines or procedures for dealing with allegations of sexualized violence. Only few measures are adopted, leaving the critical issue of the risk of sexualized violence in sports untouched and thus contributing to collective silence.

In this article, an organizational lens to silence of gender-based violence in organized sport was presented based on the “Safe Sport” project, i.e. a survey with sport organizations and interviews with commissioners of the prevention of sexualized violence in sport. The findings add to the evidence Roberts et al. (2019) presented in their systematic review of 43 qualitative studies investigating psychological, physical, and sexual abuse of athletes. They highlight two factors that help to explain these types of abuse: on the one hand, organizational tolerance for abuse and on the other hand, conformity to dominant values within sports. Failure to implement the measures of the Munich Declaration, to establish and enforce formal standards of acceptable conduct, and to institutionalize opportunities for voice facilitate bystander inaction and organizational silence.

The results demonstrate that organizational mindsets, normative structures, and power constellation are interconnected and altogether mold complex social processes of *voice* and/or *silence*. Against this backdrop, a systemic or “whole-of-system” approach (Roberts et al. 2020) seems to be the most promising strategy to promote safe sport and underpin social processes of voice. Recent international studies and the EU funded VOICE project in particular developed a good practice guide for sport organizations (Hartill et al. 2020). Informed by the life histories of “survivors” who have been subjected to sexualized violence in a sports context, most of the recommendations refer to the implementation and strengthening of social structures in order to facilitate *voice* for victims and bystanders.

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