

The Arena of Masculinity:
Ritual, Performance, and Gender Dynamics in Austrian Football.

By Sophie Salem

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Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of Arts in Gender Studies

Supervisor: Dr. Kris/Tina Országhová

Second reader: Dr. Hadley Renkin

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Abstract

This thesis explores how rituals within Austrian football culture serve as pillar of the construction, performance, and subversion of hegemonic masculinity. Drawing on ethnographic research—including interviews with players at Landstraßen Athletik Club, observations of SK Rapid Wien's fan culture, and digital analysis of social media—the study critically examines how masculinity is ritualized through, gesture, repetition, collective emotion and sound. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Connell's hegemonic masculinity, Butler's gender performativity, Durkheim's collective effervescence, and sound studies, the research reveals how football spaces construct, perform and legitimize dominant gender norms while occasionally allowing for moments of disruption. Through the lenses of sacrality, nationalism, and sonic performance, the thesis illustrates how masculinity in Austrian football is repeatedly staged and policed across physical and digital environments. It also looks at the often-invisible roles and exclusions of women in maintaining these masculine heteronormative structures. Ultimately, this work offers a multi-sensory, context-specific analysis of football as a powerful arena for reproducing gendered hierarchies and questioning their perceived innateness.

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List of abbreviations

LAC – Landstraßen Athletik Club

Rapid – SK Rapid Wien

LGBTQIA+ – Lesbian , Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex,

Asexual, and others

1. Introduction

This thesis explores how rituals in Austrian football culture, particularly those performed by players and fans, collectively function as a stage for constructing, maintaining, and occasionally subverting hegemonic masculinity. The analysis focuses on three co-constructive dimensions: the rituals of players at the amateur club Landstraßen Athletik Club (LAC); the performances of masculinity among fans of SK Rapid Wien (Rapid) ; and the often-overlooked roles of women, more specifically the ways in which they are perceived and positioned within these male-dominated environments. Drawing from interviews, ethnographic observation, and digital ethnography, the thesis examines how gender is performed through embodied, symbolic and sonic rituals in football culture.

The structure of the thesis is as follows: Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature on ritual theory, sport and masculinity, and identity construction in the German-speaking world. Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework, incorporating Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity¹, Butler's gender performativity², and Durkheim's notion of collective effervescence³ as expanded by contemporary scholars such as Serazio⁴. It also includes selected concepts from sound studies, such as Connor's "ventriloquism"⁵ and the concept of "sonic drag" which I develop, adapting Butler's⁶ theorization of drag to the domain of sound. Furthermore, I propose the term "sonic gender line" to build on Stoeve's⁷ notion of the "sonic color line", shifting the focus from race to the ways gender is mediated and policed through

¹ Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005).

² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10. anniversary ed (New York: Routledge, 1999).

³ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁴ Michael Serazio, "The Elementary Forms of Sports Fandom: A Durkheimian Exploration of Team Myths, Kinship, and Totemic Rituals," *Communication & Sport* 1, no. 4 (December 2013): 1–36.

⁵ Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990): 136-138.

⁷ Jennifer Lynn Stoeve, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*, Postmillennial Pop (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

sound. Chapter 4 presents the methodology, exploring the various approaches used to collect and analyze data. Chapters 5 through 7 constitute the empirical body of the thesis. Chapter 5 focuses on players, analyzing their private, collective and sonic rituals as performances of masculine identity. Chapter 6 examines the rituals of fans, particularly in the context of Rapid, and how sacrality, nationalism and sound reinforce hegemonic masculinity. Chapter 7 turns to women, considering their symbolic, material and digital contributions as well as their marginalization in football spaces. The final section offers a critical reflection on the findings and explores potential avenues for future research.

Through this structure, the thesis aims to dissect the complex interplay of masculinity, ritual, and performance in Austrian football, to demonstrate how seemingly trivial practices contribute to the reproduction of gendered hierarchies, while also showing moments of potential disruption.

This research builds on key theoretical concepts from sociology, gender studies, sport studies, and sound studies to analyze the ritualized construction of masculinity in football culture. At the core is Raewyn Connell's⁸ concept of hegemonic masculinity, understood not as a static identity but as a dominant ideal of gender practice that is legitimized through the subordination of alternative masculinities and of women. Judith Butler's⁹ notion of gender performativity further informs the analysis, framing masculinity as a set of repeated acts that are constructed, influenced by social dynamics and context dependent. These performances are not limited to bodily gestures or verbal assertions but extend to sound, movement, and emotional expression, all of which are central to football culture.

⁸ Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005).

⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10. anniversary ed (New York: Routledge, 1999).

Émile Durkheim's¹⁰ concept of collective effervescence provides a sociological lens for understanding the emotional and sacred dimensions of group rituals, particularly in the stadium setting. Football chants, intimacy, and synchronized performances are treated as emotionally charged acts through which group identity and dominant gender norms are reaffirmed. From sound studies, concepts such as sonic drag—drawing from Butler¹¹—and the sonic gender line—drawing from Stoeve¹²—help theorize how vocal performance and aural space can serve to both reproduce and challenge hegemonic masculinity.

Throughout the thesis, ritual is understood as a repeated, symbolic, and affectively charged performance that helps stabilize dominant ideologies, often masked as tradition or purely athletic conduct¹³. They function as a process that combines a system of symbols. According to Durkheim¹⁴, this system has three main components: First, there is the individual who belongs to a tribe or community; second is the community's moral framework (what is considered sacred), also called ideology; third is the symbol, which stands for the sacred and serves as a bridge between the individual and the moral values of the group¹⁵.

By integrating these concepts, the thesis develops a critical vocabulary for interpreting how masculinity is constructed, policed, and at times destabilized in Austrian football culture.

Positioned within current academic debates, this research engages with themes of gender, sound, and ritual in European sports contexts. Within masculinity studies, scholars such as

¹⁰ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10. anniversary ed (New York: Routledge, 1999).

¹² Jennifer Lynn Stoeve, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*, Postmillennial Pop (New York: New York University Press, 2016)

¹³ Susan Birrell, "Sport as Ritual: Interpretations from Durkheim to Goffman," *Social Forces* 60, no. 2 (December 1981): 354–76; Michael Serazio, "The Elementary Forms of Sports Fandom: A Durkheimian Exploration of Team Myths, Kinship, and Totemic Rituals," *Communication & Sport* 1, no. 4 (December 2013): 303–25.

¹⁴ Durkheim (1915) in Susan Birrell, "Sport as Ritual: Interpretations from Durkheim to Goffman," *Social Forces* 60, no. 2 (December 1981): 357.

¹⁵ Susan Birrell, "Sport as Ritual: Interpretations from Durkheim to Goffman," *Social Forces* 60, no. 2 (December 1981): 357.

Connell and Anderson¹⁶ have examined how dominant forms of masculinity are upheld or challenged through sport. However, while inclusive masculinity theory¹⁷ has highlighted shifts toward more flexible gender performances in some Western contexts, this thesis reveals that many masculine rituals in Austrian football continue to reproduce hegemonic norms, particularly within fan spaces marked by nationalism and militarized masculinity¹⁸.

Public discourse in Austria has also recently addressed issues of sexism, homophobia, and national identity in football. Initiatives by clubs such as Rapid to combat discrimination¹⁹ coincide with ongoing fan practices that reinforce traditional gender roles and exclusionary forms of belonging²⁰. This paradox reflects broader tensions in football cultures, where calls for inclusion often clash with deeply ingrained norms and emotional attachments to traditional forms of masculinity and national pride²¹.

In bridging ethnographic observation with theoretical engagement, this thesis contributes to both academic and public debates by showing how masculinity in football is not simply embodied but also sounded, ritualized, and symbolically reinforced through individual and collective performance. It places Austrian football within discussions of gender and sport,

¹⁶ Eric Anderson, *Inclusive Masculinity: The Changing Nature of Masculinities*, Routledge Research in Gender and Society 22 (London: Routledge, 2009); Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005).

¹⁷ Eric Anderson, *Inclusive Masculinity: The Changing Nature of Masculinities*, Routledge Research in Gender and Society 22 (London: Routledge, 2009).

¹⁸ Franziska Körner, "Fußball als moderner Zufluchtsort traditioneller Männlichkeit: Eine Analyse des sozialen Feldes Fußball unter dem Aspekt der Männlichkeit" (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2014); Stefan Heissenberger, "Männlichkeiten Im Fußball. Amateurspieler in Österreich Zwischen Leistung, Heterosexualität, Abgrenzung, Entgrenzung Und Inszenierung," *Zeitschrift Für Ethnologie* 141, no. 1 (2016): 41–59; Almut Sülzle, *Fussball, Frauen, Männlichkeiten: eine ethnographische Studie im Fanblock* (Frankfurt ; New York: Campus Verlag, 2011).

¹⁹ "Maßnahmenkatalog zur Bekämpfung von Homophobie und Sexismus," *Rapid* (blog), 2024.

²⁰ Gerald Gossmann, "Homophobie-Skandal: Gelingt Rapid Wien die Resozialisierung? | Wiener Zeitung," 2024.

²¹ Jamie Cleland, "Discussing Homosexuality on Association Football Fan Message Boards: A Changing Cultural Context," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 50, no. 2 (March 2015): 125–40; Ilse Hartmann-Tews, *Sport, Identity and Inclusion in Europe: The Experiences of LGBTQ People in Sport*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2022).

while also addressing local specificities such as Austria's political and Catholic history, and the power of clubs like Rapid²².

This thesis is relevant not only for scholars in gender studies but also for a wider audience concerned with how masculinity continues to shape public life in Europe. Football remains one of the most visible arenas in which gender is performed and contested, and understanding the rituals that sustain its masculine norms is key to addressing broader issues of inequality, exclusion, and identity formation. In the Austrian context, where football culture intersects with questions of nationalism, gender, and belonging, this study contributes to urgent conversations about how tradition and progress coexist in sporting life. By focusing on both amateur and professional contexts, and incorporating dimensions of players, fans, and the underexamined role of women, the thesis adds nuance to debates on the persistence and transformation of hegemonic masculinity.

Relatively little attention has been paid to masculinity as performed and ritualized in Austrian football, particularly within the specific cultural environments of amateur leagues and fan scenes. Furthermore, the sonic dimension of gendered ritual—how masculinity is sounded, heard, and regulated through collective vocal practices—remains under-theorized in sport studies. This thesis addresses that gap by asking: How do rituals among football players and fans in Austria both reinforce and challenge cultural and patriarchal understandings of hegemonic masculinity? To do this, I argue that sound, sacrality, and everyday rituals are central to how hegemonic masculinity is reproduced and challenged in football spaces in Austria.

²² Leopold R.G. Declodt, "Identität und Nationalstolz der Österreicher. Gesellschaftliche Ursachen und Funktionen. Herausbildung und Transformation seit 1945. Internationaler Vergleich," *Modern Austrian Literature* 31, no. 1 (1998): 150–52; Monika Szczepaniak, "Zwischen 'Kriegsgott' und 'Operettenfigur': Inszenierungen militärischer Männlichkeit in der österreichischen Literatur zum Ersten Weltkrieg," *Journal of Austrian Studies* 45, no. 3–4 (2012): 29–60.

Overall, this thesis contributes a layered, multi-sensory, and site-specific account of how masculinity operates in Austrian football culture. By combining ethnographic observation, interviews, and digital analysis, it provides an original empirical and theoretical exploration of how masculinity is produced through ritual, sound, and national symbolism. Importantly, it focusses on how male-dominated spaces are not only constructed by men but are also shaped by how women are perceived and excluded within them—offering a critical lens on gendered power beyond male performance.

2. Literature Review

This thesis is situated at the intersection of three key bodies of literature: Rituals, nation, and the sacred; sport and masculinity; and constructions of identity in a German-speaking context. Each area provides a lens through which to analyze the role of football rituals in shaping masculine norms in Austria.

2.1 Rituals, Nation, and the Sacred

At first glance, the intersection of rituals, nationalism, and the sacred within the context of football might be easily overlooked due to the secular nature of the sport. However, a vast body of literature has made important arguments about the cultural and symbolic significance rituals hold, and their intricate ties with nation and sacrality.

Drawing from sociological perspectives, scholars have argued that sport rituals closely mirror religious practices, serving similar social and symbolic functions²³. Birrell²⁴ positions sport explicitly within the framework of ritual theory, suggesting that sporting events reflect essential aspects of collective life, reinforcing communal bonds, producing social conflicts, and establishing shared values and beliefs. Similarly, Mazurkiewicz²⁵ emphasizes how rituals offer collective experiences and shared emotional reactions that unify communities, reinforcing a collective identity through structured, repeated symbolic practices.

²³ Susan Birrell, "Sport as Ritual: Interpretations from Durkheim to Goffman," *Social Forces* 60, no. 2 (December 1981): 354–76; Carole M. Cusack, "Sports: Quasi-Religious, Para- Religious, or Religious?" 49 (2023): 61–77; Michael Serazio, "The Elementary Forms of Sports Fandom: A Durkheimian Exploration of Team Myths, Kinship, and Totemic Rituals," *Communication & Sport* 1, no. 4 (December 2013): 1–36; Anthony M.J. Maranise, "Superstition & Religious Ritual: An Examination of Their Effects and Utilization in Sport," *The Sport Psychologist* 27, no. 1 (March 2013): 83–91.

²⁴ Susan Birrell, "Sport as Ritual: Interpretations from Durkheim to Goffman," *Social Forces* 60, no. 2 (December 1981): 354–76.

²⁵ Michal Mazurkiewicz, "Some Observations about Ritual in Sport," *Studies in physical culture and tourism*, 18, no. 4 (2011): 318.

This aligns with Durkheim's concept of "collective effervescence"²⁶, which refers to heightened moments of shared emotional intensity, during which individuals feel a deep sense of unity and communal purpose: routines and social roles fade away, as the sense of being part of something bigger takes over, turning the individual into a sacred whole.

While Durkheim's original work provides the theoretical foundation for understanding these affective phenomena, this thesis also draws on Serazio's²⁷ contemporary expansion of the concept. Serazio reinterprets collective effervescence in the context of modern sports fandom, framing it as emotional intensity, but also as a media-mediated, symbolic ritual that reaffirms group identity in an increasingly secular world²⁸. His work illustrates how team symbols operate as totems that unify individuals through shared narratives and embodied spectacle. This nuanced framing, rooted in both Durkheim's classical sociology and Serazio's contemporary take, allows for a balanced analysis of how football rituals function as emotionally charged performances of masculinity, belonging, and national identity.

Building on this framework, the religious parallel becomes particularly pronounced through the quasi-religious commitment observed in fandom rituals. Elliott²⁹ argues that football fandom goes beyond the mere role of the spectator, coming very close to the devotion and structured practices typically associated with organized religion. However, he also argues for a prudent approach to comparing football and religion, recommending to move away from the term 'religion' and instead conceptualizing fan devotion in broader terms, as a "sacred experience."³⁰ Elliott highlights that although fandom practices often resemble religious

²⁶ Émile Durkheim, Carol Cosman, and Mark Sydney Cladis, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²⁷ Michael Serazio, "The Elementary Forms of Sports Fandom: A Durkheimian Exploration of Team Myths, Kinship, and Totemic Rituals," *Communication & Sport* 1, no. 4 (December 2013): 1–36.

²⁸ Serazio, 2013: 3.

²⁹ Michael A. Elliott, "Fandom as Religion: A Social-Scientific Assessment." 9, no. 2 (2021): 107–22.

³⁰ Michael A. Elliott, 2021: 108.

rituals through chants, synchronized gestures, and communal gatherings, direct comparisons are difficult due to the complex and debated definitions of religion itself. Arranz Albó³¹, conversely, explicitly frames football as "a replacement for religion"³² and argues that "modern soccer has usurped the language from the world of the sacred and become a new religion"³³. While recognizing the crucial parallels drawn by Arranz Albó, I believe Elliott's approach to be more nuanced and cautious. Making comparisons between football and religion can indeed be useful if based on a broad, ambiguous definition of religion, since ritual practices are, indeed, shared across diverse belief systems. Therefore, rather than equating football directly with religion, these comparisons serve primarily to highlight reoccurring structural patterns in football which intersect with and reinforce patriarchal ideals also found in traditional religious systems.

Guttmann³⁴ notes how sport activities in primitive and ancient societies were intimately connected to religious cults. Although the secularization of sport began in ancient Greece and accelerated in Roman times, contemporary sport maintains a "quasi-religious meaning,"³⁵ functioning like a secular religion due to national participation and hero-worshipping of players. This illustrates how football rituals can simultaneously embody secularized and religious practices.

Football rituals also typically intersect with notions of national identity and pride, effectively becoming a medium through which nationalism is performed and reinforced. Giulianotti and Robertson's³⁶ concept of "glocalization" demonstrates how football allows local or national

³¹ Javier Arranz Albó, "Metaphorical Language in the World of Soccer," *Apunts Educación Física y Deportes*, no. 129 (September 30, 2017): 26–43.

³² Javier Arranz Albó, 2021: 26.

³³ Javier Arranz Albó, 2021: 41.

³⁴ Michał Mazurkiewicz, "Some Observations about Ritual in Sport," *Studies in physical culture and tourism*, 18, no. 4 (2011): 325

³⁵ Michał Mazurkiewicz, 2011: 325

³⁶ Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson, "The Globalization of Football: A Study in the Glocalization of the 'Serious Life,'" *The British Journal of Sociology* 55, no. 4 (December 2004): 545–68.

identities to gain global visibility, combining localized rituals and symbolisms with global sports culture. Rituals within football therefore become a crucial performative arena where nationalist sentiments are both expressed and intensified.

However, these rituals are not only affirming but also exclusionary due to socially and culturally constructed boundaries around national, ethnic, and gender identities. Herrera³⁷ explores Argentine football chants by determining how collective sonic rituals create hyper-masculinity and exclusionary nationalism, where "Chants do incite and even arouse violent sentiments, give shape to rivalries, and provide performative spaces where a discursively aggressive masculinity is being performed."³⁸ Such sonic practices can in fact reinforce homogenous national narratives that marginalize certain groups: particularly by excluding identities and expressions that fall outside the dominant framework of hegemonic masculinity.

The intersection of nationalism and football rituals also exist within a complex emotional landscape. Chiang et al. claim that "nationalism has typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope."³⁹ They elaborate on the emotional dimensions of sport rituals by highlighting that national pride and collective shame in sport contexts solidify group cohesion and nationalist sentiment. Moreover, Chiang et al. argue that nationalism and sport are "major sites for 'accomplishing' masculinity."⁴⁰ As such, football rituals become powerful tools through which emotional experiences are woven into narratives of nationhood and masculinity, shaping how identities are experienced, remembered, and reproduced.

³⁷ Eduardo Herrera, "Masculinity, Violence, and Deindividuation in Argentine Soccer Chants: The Sonic Potentials of Participatory Sounding-in-Synchrony," *Ethnomusicology* 62, no. 3 (October 1, 2018): 470–99.

³⁸ Eduardo Herrera, 2018: 487

³⁹ Ying Chiang et al., "Multiple Margins: Sport, Gender and Nationalism in Taiwan," *Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science* 4, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 21.

⁴⁰ Ying Chiang et al., 2015: 21.

The scholarly discourse underscores that football rituals are significant in ways that can only be explained by reaching beyond the sport itself. Through emotional rituals, football exists as a dynamic social site where collective identities, both inclusive and exclusionary, are negotiated, maintained, and challenged. This body of literature thus positions football as a cultural phenomenon as well as a ritualistic arena, one that is crucial to our understanding of the intersections of ritual practice, nationalism, and quasi-religious or sacred devotion.

2.2 Sport and Masculinity

The study of the relationship between sport and masculinity has a long history within sociological discourse, especially in the context of how sports reinforce, challenge, and reproduce dominant gender norms. Central to this discussion is the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which Connell defines as: "The configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women."⁴¹ Connell⁴² argues that contact team sports like football serve as important spaces for expressing and reinforcing hegemonic masculinity, both through the behavior of players and in the framing of men created by the media and embraced by fans.

Messner⁴³ builds upon this by analyzing how, during boyhood, organized sports serve as a training ground for constructing and reinforcing traditional masculine identities. Sports tend to socialize boys into competitive and aggressive roles while also stigmatizing vulnerability and non-normative sexual identities. This binary framing of masculine/feminine and

⁴¹ Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005): 77.

⁴² Raewyn Connell, "An Iron ManM: The Body and Some Contradictions of Hegemonic Masculinity," in *Sociological Perspectives on Sport* (Routledge, 2015).

⁴³ Michael Messner, "Boyhood, Organized Sports, and the Construction of Masculinities," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18, no. 4 (January 1990): 416–44.

heterosexual/homosexual becomes especially obvious in team sports, where homophobic attitudes often serve to shape the conditions of masculine acceptance.

However, the reality of masculinity in sport is changing. Anderson⁴⁴ provides a more optimistic perspective by highlighting a decline in what he terms "homohysteria", or "the fear of being 'homosexualized' or stripped of one's masculinity."⁴⁵ As this fear diminishes, space is made for a wider range of masculine expressions within sporting cultures. This decline, Anderson⁴⁶ argues, has led him to the theory of what he coins "inclusive masculinities", which tolerates and even embraces feminist values, supports LGBTQIA+ rights, and encourages emotional and physical connections between men. Cleland⁴⁷ adds empirical evidence to this theoretical framework through his analysis of online football fan message boards in the UK. After analyzing over 3000 posts, Cleland found that although traces of traditional, heteronormative masculinity remain, most fans actively reject homophobic discourse and emphasize the importance of athletic performance over identity. Cleland⁴⁸ supports Anderson's claim that masculinities are no longer structured strictly hierarchically but are increasingly co-existing in a more horizontal manner.

However, other studies across different cultural contexts reveal that this progress is not by any means evenly distributed or universal. While acknowledging an overall decline in homohysteria in football culture, Scandurra et al.⁴⁹ highlight ongoing sexist and homophobic attitudes in their case study on Italian soccer teams. This reveals how sexual orientation and

⁴⁴ Eric Anderson, "Assessing the Sociology of Sport: On Changing Masculinities and Homophobia," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 50, no. 4–5 (June 1, 2015): 363–67.

⁴⁵ Eric Anderson, *Inclusive Masculinity: The Changing Nature of Masculinities*, Routledge Research in Gender and Society 22 (London: Routledge, 2009): 319.

⁴⁶ Eric Anderson, 2009: 319.

⁴⁷ Jamie Cleland, "Discussing Homosexuality on Association Football Fan Message Boards: A Changing Cultural Context," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 50, no. 2 (March 2015): 125–40.

⁴⁸ Cleland, 2015: 129.

⁴⁹ Cristiano Scandurra et al., "'Soccer Is a Matter of Real Men?' Sexist and Homophobic Attitudes in Three Italian Soccer Teams Differentiated by Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity," *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology* 17, no. 3 (May 4, 2019): 285–301.

gender identity continue to influence player's acceptance and integration in certain cultural contexts, despite some observed changes in the rigidity of orthodox masculinity.

With a focus on German football, Kaelberer⁵⁰ offers a critical and at times overlooked perspective on the changing dynamics discussed by many of the scholars mentioned thus far. He states: "[...] for me the key issue is not whether individual players or spectators have become more acceptant of homosexuality in society. That is certainly the case. Rather, from the perspective of my analysis, the persistence of homophobia in the game is structural."⁵¹

Thus, while personal attitudes may be changing, the deeper issue lies within institutional inaction. The lack of strong anti-homophobia advocacy from clubs, associations, media, and sponsors allows structural homophobia to prevail despite partial public acceptance.

While I find Kaelberer's argument useful, I would argue that the lack of advocacy for inclusivity, diversity, and alternative masculinities is not the root cause, but rather a symptom of an even deeper systemic issue. Patriarchy, sexism, and homophobia are embedded in the institutional fabric of football. Moreover, football does not exist as an isolated institution; it is entangled with broader systems of meaning and power—such as nationalism, sacrality, and militarism—all of which contribute to the sport's successful commodification.

Therefore, even when public attitudes toward gender and sexuality begin to shift, these changes often remain superficial. To truly address the source of the problem, we must turn our attention to the rituals and everyday practices within the sport. These rituals, while seemingly harmless and routine—simply part of the culture—do not adapt to wider social change and tend to go unquestioned. Yet they function as expressions of the broader systemic

⁵⁰ Matthias Kaelberer, "Inclusive Masculinities, Homosexuality and Homophobia in German Professional Soccer," *Sexuality & Culture* 24, no. 3 (June 2020): 796-808.

⁵¹ Kaelberer, 2020: 806.

problem, subtly reinforcing exclusionary norms. It is precisely because they appear trivial that they must be critically examined.

Hartmann-Tews⁵² argues that, in a broader European context, sport can either entrench exclusionary practices or serve as a platform for identity negotiation and social inclusion, depending on institutional and cultural milieux. It is important to keep the latter in mind, as well as social and political backdrops of the sport, as this heavily influences the institution of football and its impact on masculinity.

In summary, the literature highlights sport as both a site of masculine hegemony and a potential arena for reimagining gender norms. While hegemonic masculinity continues to shape expectations in sport, increasing visibility and acceptance of diverse masculinities point to the possibility of transformation, although this seems to be a slow and painful process. However, the interplay of embodiment, cultural context, and changing attitudes toward sexuality remains central to understanding how masculinity is constructed and negotiated in contemporary sport.

2.3 Constructions of masculinity in a German-speaking context

Contemporary scholarship on identity and masculinity in German-speaking contexts shows the entanglement of football with traditional gender norms, heteronormativity, and shifting types of self-performance: how individuals express, enact, or perform their identities, through behavior, appearance, speech, and social interactions. As Butler points out: "There is no

⁵² Ilse Hartmann-Tews, *Sport, Identity and Inclusion in Europe: The Experiences of LGBTQ People in Sport*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2022).

gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results."⁵³

Heissenberger⁵⁴ provides an ethnographic exploration of amateur football players in Austria, highlighting how masculinity is constantly negotiated through performances of athletic competence, heterosexuality, boundary-drawing and boundary-blurring. Referring to Bourdieu⁵⁵, he describes men's football as a distinct social subfield: connected to society but operating according to its own internal rules and logic. Within this space, traditional masculinity is upheld and protected, making football a kind of retreat for conventional gender norms. Because of this, Heissenberger⁵⁶ argues that men's football is more likely to exhibit sexism and homophobia than broader society, as social change tends to happen more slowly or with less effect in this context.

Körner⁵⁷ further solidifies Heissenberger's argument by framing football as a modern refuge for traditional masculinity, arguing that despite increasing liberalization in society, the sport preserves and reproduces certain gender ideals: "Exclusively male communities support the preservation of hegemonic masculinity by offering their members the opportunity to live out the traditional image of manhood in ways that are no longer fully possible in other modern social spheres."⁵⁸ Körner identifies that football culture—where physical aggression, emotional restraint, and male bonding are celebrated—operates within a kind of compensation mechanism to reject any potential feminization. This 'sanctuary' status reinforces gender

⁵³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990): 25.

⁵⁴ Stefan Heissenberger, "Männlichkeiten Im Fußball. Amateurspieler in Österreich Zwischen Leistung, Heterosexualität, Abgrenzung, Entgrenzung Und Inszenierung," *Zeitschrift Für Ethnologie* 141, no. 1 (2016): 41–59.

⁵⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, "Männliche Herrschaft revisited," *Feministische Studien* 15, no. 2 (November 1, 1997): 88–99 in Stefan Heissenberger, "Männlichkeiten Im Fußball. Amateurspieler in Österreich Zwischen Leistung, Heterosexualität, Abgrenzung, Entgrenzung Und Inszenierung," *Zeitschrift Für Ethnologie* 141, no. 1 (2016): 41–59.

⁵⁶ Heissenberger, 2016: 48.

⁵⁷ Franziska Körner, "Fußball als moderner Zufluchtsort traditioneller Männlichkeit: Eine Analyse des sozialen Feldes Fußball unter dem Aspekt der Männlichkeit" (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2014).

⁵⁸ Körner, 2014: 143-144.

hierarchies under the guise of tradition, thereby protecting players and fans from the transgressive impact of gender equality and queer visibility⁵⁹.

Fan culture also plays a pivotal role in constructing and contesting masculinities. Sülzle's⁶⁰ ethnographic study of women in football fan blocks at Kickers Offenbach examines how gender performances are co-constructed within male-dominated spaces in the German context. Sülzle highlights how female fans are both shaped by and actively engage in the "masculine grammar"⁶¹ of the fan block. While women are often positioned as outsiders through labels like the "Begleiterin" (female companion), they also develop their own strategies of participation, distancing, or subversion that challenge these labels. Her research adds depth to simplistic binaries by exploring how women in fan culture are not merely conforming to or rejecting masculine norms but are involved in a continuous and dynamic negotiation of their own identities. This supports theories of gender as performance and aligns with perspectives on sonic and embodied rituals⁶², where practices like chanting, movement and vocality become crucial in the construction and policing of gendered belonging.

Still, identity construction within Austrian football is not static. The discourse is slowly evolving under the pressure of social debates around inclusivity and LGBTQIA+ rights. The "Fußball für Alle" ombudsstelle⁶³ (ombudsman service) provides institutional support for addressing discrimination in Austrian football, which demonstrates a certain commitment to inclusivity.

⁵⁹ Körner, 2014.

⁶⁰ Almut Sülzle, *Fussball, Frauen, Männlichkeiten: eine ethnographische Studie im Fanblock* (Frankfurt ; New York: Campus Verlag, 2011).

⁶¹ Sülzle, 2011: 17.

⁶² Jennifer Lynn Stoeber, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*, Postmillennial Pop (New York: New York University Press, 2016); Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Marie Thompson, *Beyond Unwanted Sound: Noise, Affect and Aesthetic Moralism* (New York, [New York] London Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury publishing Inc, 2017).

⁶³ "Fußball für Alle | Ombudsstelle," accessed November 5, 2024.

However, reports and public reactions reveal some resistance. For example, in 2022, Statista data from Germany⁶⁴ showed that 68% of football fans who identify as LGBTQIA+ allies predicted negative consequences following a professional player's coming out. While such data provides valuable insight, there remains a notable gap in comparable research in Austria. The absence of studies on the intersections of football, masculinity, and/or sexuality in the Austrian context makes it difficult to assess how these dynamics shift locally. This lack of empirical data limits scholarly understanding while also holding back the development of informed advocacy and policy within Austrian football culture.

While the previously mentioned ombudsman service seems like a positive move towards listening to and including marginalized masculinities, I wonder about its effectiveness, as there is no data on its usage nor on how reported issues are addressed or enforced in practice.

The recent homophobia scandal surrounding Rapid —Austria's most prominent football club—reflects the tension within institutional efforts toward inclusivity. The scandal involved top players and the CEO of Rapid, Steffen Hofmann, participating in homophobic chants after a derby win⁶⁵. This was most likely not a one-time incident, but a culmination of normalized behaviors within the club. Although the club responded with a 10-point plan promoting inclusivity⁶⁶—featuring diversity training, symbolic gestures, a diversity prize and small reforms—its implementation has been criticized as performative⁶⁷. The lack of immediate sanctions against key figures like Hofmann (who claims his comments were not "meant for the public") makes the plan seem all the more insincere. Additionally, fan resistance, mocking the "linksversifften Kurs" (leftist course) and booing during public

⁶⁴ "Profifußball: Konsequenzen bei einem Coming-Out," Statista, accessed November 5, 2024.

⁶⁵ Gerald Gossmann, "Homophobie-Skandal: Gelingt RAPIDdie Resozialisierung? | Wiener Zeitung," 2024.

⁶⁶ "Maßnahmenkatalog zur Bekämpfung von Homophobie und Sexismus," *Rapid*, 2024.

⁶⁷ Gerald Gossmann, 2024.

apologies⁶⁸, demonstrates the ongoing difficulty of challenging entrenched gender norms in the sport.

To conclude, this chapter has explored the complex relationship between ritual, masculinity, and identity in football, with a focus on German-speaking contexts. Drawing from interdisciplinary perspectives, it has shown that football functions as a ritualized space of belonging as well as an arena where hegemonic masculinity is both reinforced and potentially challenged, whether intentionally or not. While sport continues to embody a powerful mechanism for reproducing patriarchal norms, emerging literature points to shifting gender dynamics and the slow emergence of more inclusive masculinities. However, in the Austrian context, these transformations remain under-researched, and institutional responses to discrimination can appear superficial and tokenistic. This stresses the urgent need for more empirical insights and critical engagement with the everyday practices and rituals that shape football culture, particularly in relation to the construction and performance of gender.

⁶⁸ Gerald Gossmann, 2024.

3. Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework outlines the lens through which the thesis examines masculinity, identity, and sound in Austrian football culture. Drawing on gender theory, sociology, and sound studies, it explores how masculinities are constructed and performed across players, fans, and how women contribute to and sustain these constructions. The section begins by introducing the core theories, then defines key concepts, and concludes by situating the research question within this framework.

3.1 Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical discussion is divided into three strands. First, it examines the concept of hegemonic masculinity, particularly through the works of Connell⁶⁹, to contextualize how dominant gender norms operate. Second, it engages with Butler's theory of gender performativity⁷⁰, supported by concepts such as drag and Durkheim's notion of collective effervescence⁷¹—revisited in contemporary scholarship by Serazio⁷²—to explore how masculinity manifests in collective spaces. Finally, it turns to sound theory—specifically sonic drag, the sonic gender line, and ventriloquism—to understand how masculinity is produced, communicated, and received through an aural medium. These theoretical perspectives intersect and are co-constructive, revealing the complex interplay of gender, identity and sound in the lived experience of football culture.

⁶⁹ R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (December 2005): 829–59; Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005); Raewyn Connell, "An Iron ManM: The Body and Some Contradictions of Hegemonic Masculinity," in *Sociological Perspectives on Sport* (Routledge, 2015).

⁷⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10. anniversary ed (New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁷¹ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁷² Michael Serazio, "The Elementary Forms of Sports Fandom: A Durkheimian Exploration of Team Myths, Kinship, and Totemic Rituals," *Communication & Sport* 1, no. 4 (December 2013): 1–36.

3.1.a Hegemonic masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity, as conceptualized by Connell⁷³, provides a crucial lens for understanding the rituals and performances of masculinity within Austrian football culture. Connell borrows from Gramsci's theorization in a class context to discuss the concept of hegemony: "[...] the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life."⁷⁴ Importantly, Connell stresses that hegemonic masculinity is not a static or universal archetype: rather, it is "the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable"⁷⁵. Within the context of football, this hegemonic masculinity is continuously constructed and reinforced through ritual practice, but we must keep in mind its fluidity: hegemonic masculinity, per Connell's understanding, is ever-changing. In fact, only a minority of men may fully embody this abstract ideal. Still, many gain from it via the "patriarchal dividend"⁷⁶—the structural advantages that men benefit from by virtue of the subordination of women and the marginalization of non-dominant masculinities. Connell and Messerschmidt⁷⁷ further deepen this concept by emphasizing its layered nature: hegemonic masculinity functions differently at global, regional, and local levels. This is particularly relevant to Austrian football, where rituals on and off the pitch reflect locally specific yet broadly recognizable scripts of masculine dominance. The thesis takes into account this relational and context-dependent understanding of hegemony to critically examine how masculinity is performed, solidified, and institutionalized through repetition, control, and collective experiences, such as those seen in both the amateur league of LAC and the fan culture of Rapid .

⁷³ Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005).

⁷⁴ Connell, 2005: 77.

⁷⁵ Connell, 2005: 76.

⁷⁶ Connell, 2005: 79.

⁷⁷ R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (December 2005): 849.

3.1.b Sacrality and Nationalism

This thesis theorizes sacrality and nationalism in football through Durkheim's concept of "collective effervescence", which he defines as a powerful emotional state arising from ritual gatherings that temporarily "transport[s] individuals beyond themselves"⁷⁸, therefore suspending individuality and fostering a unique sense of unity. As Durkheim writes, "the very act of congregating is an exceptionally powerful stimulant," producing "a sort of electricity" that "launches [individuals] to an extraordinary height of exaltation"⁷⁹. These emotionally drowning gatherings, in which "each one echoes the others,"⁸⁰ allow participants to experience something greater than the individual self. This framework is useful for understanding football stadiums not only as reproductions of social norms, but as spaces where national belonging and a certain sacrality of masculine identity are performed. Through my analysis of symbolic, material and sonic rituals among football fans (chapter 6), I argue that collective effervescence produces a sacred emotional intensity through which hegemonic masculinity becomes synonymous with national identity—gender norms grow into an integral part of the rituals and lift dominant masculine ideals to the status of collective quasi-religious belief. National identity, then, acts as a masculinized reality constituted through movement, repetition and sound. In the Austrian context, where football traditions intersect with cultural nationalism, these effervescent rituals actively uphold national values. By applying Durkheim's theory, this thesis interprets football fandom as a site of sacralized nationalism—where nationhood is ritually embodied and emotionally affirmed.

⁷⁸ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995): xli.

⁷⁹ Émile Durkheim, 1995 :217-218.

⁸⁰ Émile Durkheim, 1995 :218.

3.1.c Gender performativity

Central to this thesis is Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, which challenges the idea of gender as a stable identity. Butler argues that gender is not something one is, but something one does. They describe it as a series of acts, gestures, and performances that collectively contribute to the illusion of a fixed identity⁸¹. As they put it, "there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results"⁸². Masculinity, then, is not an innate truth embodied by football players or fans: "As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established [...]"⁸³ This understanding is crucial to analyzing masculinity within Austrian football, where gender norms are legitimized and instrumentalized through rituals and collective behavior.

In this context, drag is a key element whereby the mechanisms of performativity become visible. Drag, for Butler, is "an example that is meant to establish that "reality" is not as fixed as we generally assume it to be."⁸⁴ It represents an exaggerated repetition that exposes gender as "an imitation without origin"⁸⁵. Within football, players and fans similarly perform an imitated masculinity that mirrors drag, however it clearly lacks the subversive self-awareness. The difference lies in intention: drag seeks to parody or disrupt gender norms, while football reifies them. As seen in my fieldwork at LAC and Rapid, masculinity in football is consistently ritualized and staged. Though framed as authentic, this performance of masculinity is rehearsed—revealing gender as constructed. Butler's theory helps uncover how

⁸¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10. anniversary ed (New York: Routledge, 1999): 179.

⁸² Judith Butler, 1999: 33.

⁸³ Judith Butler, 1999: 178.

⁸⁴ Judith Butler, 1999: xxiii-xxiv.

⁸⁵ Judith Butler, 1999: 175.

masculinity in football is less of a truth and more of a process: an ironically fragile thing, based on a construct sustained by the repetition of an act.

3.1.d Sound

This thesis approaches sound not merely as background noise in football culture, but as a performative and ideological tool. I conceptualize sound and the act of listening as gendered practices through which identity is forged, policed, and occasionally subverted. Sonic drag—a concept inspired by Butler's⁸⁶ theorization of drag—refers to vocal performances that exaggerate or parody dominant gender norms, often exposing, ever so subtly, the constructedness of masculinity. In football culture, ironic commentary or hyper-masculine vocal exaggeration mirror theatrical drag, showing how masculinity is merely a performance rather than an innate quality. Still, such sonic performances are typically framed as humor rather than intentional subversion. These acts represent fleeting moments of reflectivity in hegemonic gender performance, where players play with, rather than follow, dominant norms.

The sonic color line, originally theorized by Stoever⁸⁷ in relation to race and ethnicity, describes how sound reproduces social hierarchies by labeling certain voices and styles of vocalization as normative while marginalizing others. Building on Stoever's framework, this thesis proposes the concept of a sonic gender line to analyze how a similar apparatus manifests in a gendered context. In football, this manifests in the privileging of loud, aggressive, and male-coded sound—such as chanting, shouting, and militaristic rhythms—while delegitimizing feminine or queer sonic expressions. Silence, softness, or high pitch are often perceived as out of place within this aural arena.

⁸⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990): 136-138.

⁸⁷ Jennifer Lynn Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*, Postmillennial Pop (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

Finally, ventriloquism—drawing on Connor's theory⁸⁸—helps frame how collective chants and ritualized vocal practices displace individuality. In football soundscapes, individual identity blurs into a shared voice, through which hegemonic norms can 'speak'. This collective voicing abstracts responsibility while reinforcing dominant ideologies. Thus, football's sonic practices are deeply gendered, ideological performances that simultaneously produce and normalize the various expressions of gendered and national belonging.

3.2 Conceptual framework

This section outlines the key concepts that frame the analysis of masculinity, sound, and identity in Austrian football culture. By grounding the thesis in culturally distinct understandings of national masculinity and gendered sound, these definitions clarify how meaning is constructed through ritualized performance.

3.2.a Constructing the Austrian Male Ideal

This thesis understands football as a meaning-making space where masculinity is constructed through cultural norms and rituals of belonging (to Austrian masculinity) are shaped by a complex web of factors, some of which can be identified as national identity, collective memory, and socio-political values. As Connell notes, "the interplay of gender with other structures such as class and race creates further relationships between masculinities"⁸⁹. In Austria, masculinity has historically been associated with working-class values, emotional restraint, discipline, and loyalty—qualities that are in line with Catholic morality⁹⁰, militaristic symbolism rooted in the mythologized heroism of World War I⁹¹, and a nationalist

⁸⁸ Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁸⁹ Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005): 80.

⁹⁰ Leopold R.G. Decloedt, "Identität und Nationalstolz der Österreicher. Gesellschaftliche Ursachen und Funktionen. Herausbildung und Transformation seit 1945. Internationaler Vergleich," *Modern Austrian Literature* 31, no. 1 (1998): 152.

⁹¹ Monika Szczepaniak, "Zwischen 'Kriegsgott' und 'Operettenfigur': Inszenierungen militärischer Männlichkeit in der österreichischen Literatur zum Ersten Weltkrieg," *Journal of Austrian Studies* 45, no. 3–4 (2012): 53.

sentiment characterized by pride in social order and the perceived superiority of Austrian traditions⁹².

This is portrayed in the performance of masculinity in football spaces, where discipline and unity are ritualized. Therefore, masculinity is not a one-size-fits-all, universal phenomenon; it is continuously shaped by dynamic national histories, belief systems, and social expectations that differ across contexts.

While various ethnic backgrounds (Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian) are present among interviewees, the thesis does not examine ethnicity as a primary structuring factor. According to the interviewees, their cultural background did not prominently shape their understandings or expressions of self within the football context. Thus, in this research, national identity seemed more relevant than ethnic differentiation.

Drawing on Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence, the thesis explores how rituals legitimize and uphold a shared Austrian masculinity. However, national identity in Austria is not monolithic. As Lehner and Rheindorf observe⁹³, national symbols like the anthem often create deep divisions between those who celebrate traditional values and those who feel excluded by them, highlighting the tension between national pride and shame. Masculinity is thus both a stage of performance and divide—ritualized, emotional, and constantly negotiated within the fabric of nationhood.

⁹² Jürgen Fleiß, Franz Höllinger, and Helmut Kuzmics, "Nationalstolz zwischen Patriotismus und Nationalismus?," *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 3 (2009): 428.

⁹³ "Töchtereröhne und nationale Identität/en," in *Österreichische Identitäten im Wandel*, by Sabine Lehner and Markus Rheindorf (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2020), 244-246.

3.2.b Masculinity Through Voice

In this research, sound is conceptualized not merely as a medium to convey language but as a performance through which gendered and national identities are constructed and recognized.

In the Austrian football context, sounding masculinity is a key ritual—often utilizing volume, force, and rhythm, rather than just verbal meaning. Chants, songs, and ritualized vocalizations are not exclusively about content but also about affective force: it is not just *what* is said, but how loudly, how forcefully, and by *whom*. Here, the male body acts as an instrument of legitimacy, producing 'proper' sounds that fall in line with expected norms of masculine expression. Drawing on concepts already discussed, such as sonic drag, and the notion of the sonic gender line, sound is shown to abide by gendered hierarchies, where certain pitches and tones are valued, while others are marginalized. Sound, then, is not neutral: it is constructed, embodied, and policed. In football, sound negotiates belonging, hierarchy, and emotion—identifying who can speak, who is heard, and who is sidelined.

3.3 Research Question within the Theoretical Context and Hypothesis

This thesis asks how rituals in Austrian football both reinforce and challenge cultural and patriarchal understandings of hegemonic masculinity. The analysis draws on Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity⁹⁴ to examine how dominant gender norms are ritualized and reproduced. Butler's theory of gender performativity⁹⁵ offers a lens to view masculinity as a repeated act rather than a fixed identity, while Durkheim's concept of collective effervescence⁹⁶ helps understand how emotional intensity and group rituals create a shared masculine ideal. Additionally, theories from sound studies—particularly sonic drag, the sonic

⁹⁴ Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005).

⁹⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10. anniversary ed (New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁹⁶ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

gender line, and ventriloquism⁹⁷—reveal how sound acts as a medium through which masculinity is produced, policed, and occasionally destabilized.

Bringing these frameworks together, this thesis hypothesizes that ritual practices in football simultaneously solidify hegemonic masculinity and expose its performative fragility. While dominant norms are reinforced through physical and sonic repetition, certain ironic or exaggerated expressions can briefly disrupt the structure of masculinity. These moments unveil masculinity as a product of ritual, repetition, and affect rather than a natural, unquestionable truth.

⁹⁷ Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

4. Research design and Methodology.

In order to address my central research question, I adopted a qualitative research design informed by interpretive methodologies and guided by a multi-sensory ethnographic approach. This approach considers both the visual and the aural dimensions of masculinity as they are performed, embodied, and experienced. This chapter outlines the various methods I used, combining semi-structured interviews, ethnographic observation, and digital ethnography. These methods were chosen to unpack the nuanced and negotiated performances of masculinity across different areas: on the field, in the stands, and online. The chapter begins by discussing the interview process with football players, before moving on to ethnographic observations in two contrasting environments. It then explores how digital practices on Instagram act as an extension of masculine performance, to then conclude with a reflection on methodological limitations and my researcher positionality.

4.1 Interviews

Interviews formed the core of my empirical data collection, allowing for a dialogic exploration of how masculinity is experienced, performed, and narrated by football players in Austria. I conducted seven semi-structured interviews with players from LAC, all of whom identify as heterosexual men aged 20–24. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling: I gained access to the team through a friend currently playing at LAC, and selected interviewees based on their willingness to participate and their active involvement in the club. Three of them had Serbian, Croatian and/or Bosnian backgrounds, though ethnic identity did not emerge as a dominant theme—still keeping in mind Connell's claim that masculinity is shaped in contextually specific ways across intersecting identities⁹⁸. I chose to focus on one club rather than multiple teams to ensure a relatively consistent environment while also taking advantage of my access at LAC. The interviews were conducted in a project room that I had

⁹⁸ Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005): 80.

booked at the Wirtschafts Universität campus, which provided both public visibility, privacy and a certain academic formality. This environment allowed for a semi-private space in which both participant and researcher felt safe yet free to conduct a transparent dialogue.

Audio was recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed using TurboScribe, an end-to-end encrypted transcription service⁹⁹. I then translated the German transcripts (six out of seven, one interview was conducted in English) myself to preserve the meaning and tone of the original statements. These interviews were subsequently coded to identify recurring patterns and themes—particularly around ritual, sound, and identity. All participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Following Riessman's¹⁰⁰ approach to narrative as a performative and socially situated practice, I treated the interviews not merely as data but as a co-constructed accounts shaped by interaction, memory, and cultural dynamics. As Pink et al.¹⁰¹ note, reflexivity is central to ethnographic practice, particularly in environments where research relationships are built on trust. My positionality as a woman and non-football player introduced a distance between myself and the male athletes, which shaped the dynamics of our conversations. Rather than a limitation, this distance was in fact analytically useful: it may have driven participants to perform their masculinity more consciously or in exaggerated ways, revealing how gender is constructed in interaction: an observation central to this study's focus on the performativity of male identity.

4.2 Ethnographic observation

To add nuance to the narratives shared in interviews, I extended my fieldwork to live sporting settings to observe how masculinity is performed in real time. I conducted ethnographic

⁹⁹ Leif Foged, "Security and Privacy: Frequently Asked Questions," transcription service, Turboscribe, 2024.

¹⁰⁰ Riessman (1993) in Pertti Alasuutari, Leonard Bickman, and Julia Brannen, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Social Research Methods* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2008).

¹⁰¹ Sarah Pink et al., eds., *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2016).

observations at four LAC matches and two Rapid games—specifically within the "Block West", the home of the Ultras—focusing on the embodied, sonic, and ritualistic dimensions of masculinity in football culture. At LAC, I sat in the middle of the stands to fully immerse myself in the fan environment. As a woman in a male-dominated space, I was often overlooked by male fans. Ironically, this invisibility was quite valuable: it allowed me to become a fly on the wall while men spoke and behaved unfiltered, exposing their everyday performances of masculinity. As Coombs and Osborne¹⁰² note, occupying the position of a female outsider in hypermasculine sport environments can grant a unique access, precisely because one is not perceived as a threat.

By contrast, Rapid 's Ultras culture was louder, more aggressive, and more ritualized. Alcohol flowed heavily and emotions were heightened. I attended with male companions, which provided a feeling of safety and legitimacy. However, recording or obvious note-taking was frowned upon. I decided to use discreet digital ethnographic strategies: texting myself notes via WhatsApp and using a privacy screen to moderate visibility. This allowed me to preserve my impressions while respecting the norms of the space.

As Pavlidis and Olive¹⁰³ argue, feminist ethnography benefits from critically reflecting on insider-outsider status. I did not share the passion for football nor did I participate in the ritual practices of the male fans I studied. However, my gendered outsider status, rather than being a limitation, revealed the performative nature of masculine rituals. This positionality enabled an ethnographic reading of more than behaviors: it also allowed for a clear view of the symbolic and performative layers within broader structures of gender and power in sports.

¹⁰² Danielle Sarver Coombs and Anne C. Osborne, "Negotiating Insider–Outsider Status in Ethnographic Sports Research," *Sport in Society* 21, no. 2 (February 2018): 253.

¹⁰³ Adele Pavlidis and Rebecca Olive, "On the Track/in the Bleachers: Authenticity and Feminist Ethnographic Research in Sport and Physical Cultural Studies," *Sport in Society* 17, no. 2 (February 7, 2014): 218–32.

4.3 Digital ethnography

Digital ethnography was conducted in this project through an analysis of LAC's Instagram account, including visual content, comment threads, and insights shared by the account owner (subchapter 7.3). Instagram was chosen not only because of its overall prominence among the player age group but also due to its function as a curated space where identity is constructed through images, captions, and interactions. In contrast to the more spontaneous nature of player narratives and fan behavior, the platform allowed me to examine how masculinity is intentionally staged through repeated digital practices.

This approach positions social media as a performative site where masculinity, group identity, and ritual are actively produced, enacted and shared in semi-public forms. As Pink et al.¹⁰⁴ argue, digital ethnography goes beyond capturing online interaction—it is a flexible, reflexive practice entangled in the "digital, material and sensory environment"¹⁰⁵ of contemporary life and co-produces meaning with offline experience.

Instagram acts as a stage for footballers and their club to perform an idealized masculinity through reels, hashtags, participation in trends, and interactions with fans. The caption choices and comment sections around popular posts often echo the real-life performances I observed in the stands and in interviews. With the account owner's consent, I also analyzed the Instagram Insights¹⁰⁶, which revealed patterns in audience engagement: which content received the most interaction and from whom. All visual and textual content analyzed was public, and the account owner shared analytics voluntarily, allowing me to ethically explore how digital visibility interacts with broader social performance.

¹⁰⁴ Sarah Pink et al., eds., *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2016)

¹⁰⁵ Sarah Pink et al. 2016: 20.

¹⁰⁶ Instagram Insights are in-app analytics tools that provide data on audience engagement, reach, impressions, follower demographics, and content performance.

These findings support my core research question: how rituals in Austrian football reinforce and sometimes complicate hegemonic masculinity. Instagram offered a parallel arena where masculinity was negotiated through aesthetics and engagement with others. Observing this digital layer added depth to my understanding of how gendered identities are constructed through physical presence and sound but also through digitally shaped displays of self and a collective online masculinity.

4.4. Use of AI

In the development of this thesis, I utilized ChatGPT¹⁰⁷ to assist in the early stages of research and writing. Specifically, I employed the tool to generate preliminary outlines, brainstorm ideas, and explore alternative phrasings for complex concepts. These interactions were intended to improve my understanding of the subject matter. All outputs from ChatGPT were carefully reviewed, fact-checked, and integrated into the thesis in my own words, ensuring the originality and integrity of the work. This approach aligns with Newcastle University's¹⁰⁸ emphasis on transparent and critical engagement with AI technologies in academic work.

4.5 Limitations

One limitation of this research lies in my initial concern about interviewing male athletes on a subject, namely masculinity, that I approach from both a gendered and academic outsider perspective. I was cautious not to make participants feel overly observed, particularly given the potential sensitivity in such topics. Fortunately, the interviewees met my questions with openness and ease. In the ethnographic observation, the intensity of the Ultras' space required careful adaptation: I blended in visually and minimized note-taking visibility to respect the

¹⁰⁷ <https://chat.openai.com/>

¹⁰⁸ "Acknowledging Use of AI Advice to Help You Transparently Acknowledge Artificial Intelligence in Your Academic Work.," Newcastle University, accessed May 27, 2025.

setting's norms. However, observations in such spaces rely on interpretation and assumption rather than direct dialogue, introducing a degree of subjectivity—although this will be present in any methodology one may choose. On Instagram, while the content is relevant, it is also curated and dependent on an algorithm, making it difficult to determine how authentically this can reflect identities, if much of it is indeed shaped by audience expectations. Overall, across methods, I have aimed to remain critically reflexive and transparent in how I interpret and present my data.

5. The Players.

The Individual, the Collective and Sound: Ritual and Masculinity at Landstraßen-Athletik-Club.

The players are central to the world of football and are typically socialized into the sport from a very young age. As they get older, football becomes more than a hobby, it becomes a passion, sometimes a career, and most importantly: a part of who they are. This chapter will dissect the mechanisms and rituals that contribute to the construction of men's identity in football, specifically how a distinct kind of masculinity is performed and strived toward. Hegemonic masculinity, as Connell aptly argues, does not exist in a fixed or essential form¹⁰⁹. It is an ever-changing process, an ultimate male identity which can never be authentically embodied due to the "changing structure of relationships"¹¹⁰ that constitutes it. This is where I turn to Butler's conceptualization of drag¹¹¹ to uncover how this masculinity is forged, as it is never copied perfectly. In fact, what it attempts to copy is not an original or 'true' version of masculinity, but a mimicry of something already mimicked: A clone of a clone, mirroring its social and cultural surroundings, always remaining a construct.

This chapter examines the role of the player as one of three dimensions—alongside the fans and the women explored in the following chapters—in an attempt to reach some core of what football represents in the quest for a hegemonic masculine ideal. First, this chapter will analyze the player on his own—the rituals he performs to maintain his identity as a man in the sport through private acts of control and power. Next, collective rituals and homosociality

¹⁰⁹ R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (December 2005): 829–59.

¹¹⁰ Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005): 81.

¹¹¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990): 136-138.

will be explored to understand the importance of collective male identity. Finally, a recurring theme—sound—will provide an often-overlooked layer to the broader discussion of ritualized masculinity.

5.1 Ritualized Control and Private Performances of Power

This subchapter explores how male footballers at LAC engage in individualized rituals that function as mechanisms for stabilizing and performing a controlled masculine identity. Drawing on interviews with players, it becomes clear that these rituals—ranging from consistently wearing the same gear, punitive practices, or assigning symbolic meaning to clothing and numbers—are not rooted in spiritual belief, but in the need for consistency. Through repetition, these acts offer a sense of stability and control in a world defined by athletic (and gender) performance. As Messner reminds us, "gender identity, rather than being viewed as a thing that people have, is thus conceptualized as a process of construction[...]"¹¹² In this sense, private rituals, largely performed without an audience, reflect a deeply internalized need to "sich seinem Mann zu stehen"¹¹³—a German expression used by one of the players in an interview that literally translates to "stand as one's man", but is idiomatically understood as "to stand one's ground." The phrase refers to ideals of discipline, duty, and readiness to fight in battle—historically rooted in military tradition.

Viewed through this lens, such rituals can be interpreted as private forms of Butlerian drag—mimicked performances that seek to replicate an imagined, idealized masculinity, not because it is authentic, but because it is expected. Football, for these men, reflects life, but more significantly, it structures how they perform identity within life itself.

¹¹² Michael Messner, "Boyhood, Organized Sports, and the Construction of Masculinities," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18, no. 4 (January 1990): 419.

¹¹³ Anonymous interviewee n°2, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 10, 2025.

Daniel (24) explains the logic behind ritual practice plainly: "It's human nature to repeat something that is good or that has gone well in the past."¹¹⁴ This thought process may seem straightforward and simple, but I argue that there exists a more complex system of meaning-making and ideological undertones that contextualize rituals.

I argue that a repeated act—regardless of whether it is done with logical, rational intention—can have a powerful effect on players' sense of stability in their gendered selves. It is not about superstition in the traditional sense, but about asserting a form of control in an otherwise unpredictable environment. Paul (21) elaborated:

I had a friend who was wearing the same underwear for, like... five days when we played in a tournament. It was ridiculous, but I understood why. Once you have that mindset where you connect it to the outcome, then it's very hard to look at it from a rational perspective and very hard to stop doing the ritual that you're doing.¹¹⁵

Daniel (24) supported this idea by acknowledging the irrationality of his own actions:

Logically speaking, it's complete nonsense. We all know none of it really has an impact on winning a game. But it's always been done like that.¹¹⁶

It was quickly established in the process of the interviews that players generally did not believe that the successful completion of a ritual was rationally tied to match outcomes. This contradicts Mazurkiewicz's claim that "each ritual has some goal"¹¹⁷—at least if we assume that said goal must be a direct athletic result. Subsequently, this begs the question: Why are such rituals performed? The aim, in this context, seems to be symbolic rather than material: to feel secure in one's sense of self, to maintain control, and to reduce internal uncertainty. Something that stood out across interviews was the recurring use of language tied to stability. Repetition was central in all the player's accounts of pre- and post-match rituals. This is especially evident in the statements of two goalkeepers. Daniel (24) explained:

¹¹⁴ Anonymous interviewee n°2, 2025.

¹¹⁵ Anonymous interviewee n°3, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 14, 2025.

¹¹⁶ Anonymous interviewee n°2, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 10, 2025.

¹¹⁷ Michał Mazurkiewicz, "Some Observations about Ritual in Sport," *Studies in physical culture and tourism*, 18, no. 4 (2011): 319.

I place a lot of value on my equipment. My equipment is my gloves. I always prepare them the day before—before the game or before training.¹¹⁸

David (23) echoed this:

Throughout my entire career, I've always worn the same gloves. The same brand—it gives me a sense of security.¹¹⁹

For other players, numbers or dressing routines were important: "For years I've been playing with the number 17. That's my lucky number."¹²⁰ And "I've always put on my left shoe first, I couldn't perform if I didn't do this."¹²¹

For Max (23), post-game punitive practice is a way for him to maintain control over his body:

If we win, I get to take a warm shower. But if we lose a game, I can't let myself. It has to be ice cold.¹²²

When I inquired further, he continued:

It's hard to explain why I do it, but it makes me feel like what happens on the field does not determine everything I do. I stay in charge of my environment this way."¹²³

Such ritualized acts help athletes reclaim a sense of control over their own bodies. Max (23) can regulate the temperature of the water, even when he cannot dictate the outcome of a match. The masculine urge to be in charge, to dominate is, to some extent, sacrificed when a player sets foot on the field—he becomes dependent on others, as he becomes part of a collective.

The football field, thus, is a performative space. Butler's theory of performativity is useful here—more specifically their example of drag—in unpacking the ways in which gender is constituted through repeated acts. Butler argues that all gender is a form of drag: "an imitation

¹¹⁸ Anonymous interviewee n°2, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 10, 2025.

¹¹⁹ Anonymous interviewee n°1, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 4, 2025.

¹²⁰ Anonymous interviewee n°6, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 12, 2025.

¹²¹ Anonymous interviewee n°5, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 21, 2025.

¹²² Anonymous interviewee n°6, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 12, 2025.

¹²³ Anonymous interviewee n°6, 2025.

without an origin"¹²⁴, meaning that what *appears* as natural masculinity is itself a performance based on a construct. From this perspective, the rituals in football can be seen as masculinized repetitions of acts, gestures, and attire that construct the illusion of a fixed gender. Certain aspects of football mirror theatrical drag, where the field becomes a space for enacting masculinity as spectacle.

The parallels between football and drag are compelling, but they rest on a crucial distinction: drag is self-aware, it recognizes and embraces its performative nature to reveal gender as a constructed identity, whereas football expresses masculinity through repeated acts so routinely that it refuses to acknowledge it is performing at all. This refusal is precisely what gives football its power: it presents gender expression as natural and unquestionable, reinforcing hegemonic norms under the illusion of undisputable fact. As Mazurkiewicz puts it, its rituals are "regarded to be irrefutable and inviolable and fully justified and right."¹²⁵

Still, when we look closely, football shares certain theatricalities with drag: The elaborate costume in the latter can be found in the football jersey, tight shorts, and cleats; choreography emerges in football's pre-game rituals, goal celebrations, and coordinated plays; the stage of the drag show is mirrored by the football field, a space where identity is performed; and the audience plays a crucial role in both.

I am well aware of the irony in pairing football with drag. Football routinely stages and restages patriarchy, heteronormativity, and rigid scripts of traditional masculinity. Drag, by contrast, attempts- to rewrite those scripts: it queers the stage, it is aware of its own pretend

¹²⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990): 138.

¹²⁵ Michał Mazurkiewicz, "Some Observations about Ritual in Sport," *Studies in physical culture and tourism*, 18, no. 4 (2011): 318.

and offers a space where gender norms can be forgotten. My aim, however, is not to compare the two in terms of their intention. I use drag simply as a lens through which to expose football's claim to natural, innate masculinity. Football players, therefore, are not embodying a truth, but rather participating in what Butler calls "the myth of originality itself"¹²⁶

These rituals—deeply personal yet often shared in structure—point toward a common framework: masculinity as achievable through control, consistency, and stability. Whether through gear, clothing, or routines, these performances reflect an internalized script of masculinity as something that must be maintained and performed. This way, masculinity—specifically a hegemonic understanding of it—is affirmed not for others, but for the self.

While these individual rituals serve to stabilize personal identity, they do not occur in complete isolation. To fully understand the performance of masculinity in football, we now turn to the collective rituals on the field of LAC—acts that connect players through shared codes of homosociality and masculine solidarity.

5.2 Collective Ritual Performance: The shield of Homosociality and Masculine Solidarity

This subchapter examines the broader social fabric within which masculine identity is constructed: a collective of men who share performances, expectations and rituals. From childhood to professional locker rooms, boys are socialized into football as a training ground for athletic—as well as gender performance. From early childhood, boys mimic older players, demonstrating the internalized idea that to play football is to perform masculinity. This process is about acquiring certain competitive skills, yes, but it is also about learning gender.

¹²⁶ Butler, 1990: 138.

Collective rituals in football serve a dual function. On the one hand, they offer a space of homosocial bonding—a safe emotional closeness between men¹²⁷, where gestures like a slap on the behind or a group hug are normalized rather than scrutinized. In these small moments, players may show unfiltered emotion, shielded by the implicit understanding that the emotional display is legitimized by its competitive, undeniably masculine context. Football becomes a unique stage where vulnerability is possible, but only under specific conditions.

At the same time, these rituals reproduce and reinforce hegemonic masculinity. Group settings in football can act as spaces of surveillance, where any deviation from the norm—dyed hair, a 'feminine' accessory, or non-conforming behavior—is policed through jokes or subtle exclusion. The locker room can indeed provide friendship and comfort, but it also requires conformity. Homosocial solidarity thus functions as both a shield and a weapon: it protects those who play by its rules and targets the 'other(ed)'.

This section explores the function of collective rituals within football teams, asking not only how they are performed, but why they persist. I argue that such repeated acts work to sustain the structure of hegemonic masculinity, serving as powerful ideological tools that shape belonging among men. In this collective arena, identity is surrendered and proven—an endless negotiation between bonding and competition, control and loss of it.

From a young age, boys are socialized to perceive sport—especially football—as a natural, innate part of their identity. Rather than simply learning how to play a game, they are learning how to embody a socially constructed and approved form of masculinity. Football becomes embedded in everyday routines as a gendered coming-of-age, so to speak. As Paul (21) reflected: "In first year of elementary school, I started playing football and I think it was just

¹²⁷ Michael Messner, "Boyhood, Organized Sports, and the Construction of Masculinities," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18, no. 4 (January 1990): 416–44.

because like everyone around me was playing football."¹²⁸ Participation is framed as a social inevitability—it is just part of being a boy among other boys. This early induction is reinforced by the belief that young players are particularly easy to shape. Daniel (24) expressed his perception of senior players as a child:

When I was little and I would hear that one of the older players or even professional players on TV were doing something, I would try to copy that.¹²⁹

Elias (20) highlighted the role of senior players in shaping team culture. He explained:

It's super important for us older players to be loyal to the club and certainly to younger players. Young players are still malleable.¹³⁰

Children are seen as blank slates, still being molded—athletically, of course, but ideologically as well. Messner¹³¹ builds on this by analyzing how organized sports during boyhood serve as a training ground for constructing and reinforcing traditional masculine identities. Not only does sport socialize boys into competitive and aggressive roles but it also stigmatizes vulnerability and non-normative sexual identities. Through training, repetition, and imitation, boys learn how to conform to football's unspoken codes of behavior, expression, and appearance. The field becomes a classroom and stage, a space where boys are collectively educated on acceptable displays of masculinity.

As boys progress into adolescence, they become more self-conscious in their performances.

The presence of older players strengthens the need to prove oneself as masculine enough.

Jonathan (21) described the pressure of being moved into a higher age group:

¹²⁸ Anonymous interviewee n°3, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 14, 2025.

¹²⁹ Anonymous interviewee n°2, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 10, 2025.

¹³⁰ Anonymous interviewee n°5, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 21, 2025.

¹³¹ Michael Messner, "Boyhood, Organized Sports, and the Construction of Masculinities," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18, no. 4 (January 1990): 416–44.

At the first matches where I got moved up to play with the older guys, I was much more nervous, because I kept thinking, 'Can I keep up? Am I even good enough?'¹³²

Later, Jonathan (21) elaborated:

It's not just about being a good enough footballer, you know? There's a certain hierarchy in a team: the captain, the ones who've played there for ages, and then it's your turn to show them you're man enough to be one of them, I guess.¹³³

Here, the fear is not just about athletic inadequacy but about a deeper anxiety of not being worthy enough within a masculine hierarchy.

Still, homosocial environments like these can create a space where certain behaviors—typically labeled as unmasculine—become temporarily permissible. Within the emotional intensity of the game, acts like intimate hugging, slapping the behind of a fellow player, even crying—are not only accepted but sometimes expected. This opens a brief window for men to express vulnerability and emotion in ways that are otherwise criticized in everyday life.

However, such expressions remain regulated by unspoken rules and are context dependent. As Messner notes, "the rule-bound, competitive, hierarchical world of sport offers boys an attractive means of establishing an emotionally distant (and thus 'safe') connection with others."¹³⁴ This distance, produced and negotiated within the competitive nature of the sport, allows moments of tenderness to occur without risking one's masculine credibility. Paul (21) reflected on this phenomenon, stating: "This level of ten people hugging each other... yeah, that doesn't happen in real life."¹³⁵ His words seem to mean that such emotional expression is restricted to the field, possible only behind the shield of the game's structure. Max (23) elaborated further:

¹³² Anonymous interviewee n°4, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 18, 2025.

¹³³ Anonymous interviewee n°4, 2025.

¹³⁴ Michael Messner, "Boyhood, Organized Sports, and the Construction of Masculinities," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18, no. 4 (January 1990): 439.

¹³⁵ Anonymous interviewee n°3, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 14, 2025.

Football is important from the perspective that it allows you to relieve your frustrations, you know. And maybe in some situations, somebody cries because they lost the game, but he's crying because, I don't know, a girl left him two months ago, and he now has a stage where he can cry, and it's accepted¹³⁶

Football thus becomes a site of emotional displacement—a stage where feelings that are not socially acceptable elsewhere can be expressed freely masked as 'part of the sport'. Paul (21) confirmed this distinction:

If you have personal problems off the field, you should not cry. You should toughen up, stuff like that. So, it depends where you are.¹³⁷

These player narratives highlight how football permits a temporary suspension of gender norms, especially those that stigmatize emotional openness in men. David (23) noted:

In the moment, you don't really think about it. If you get a slap on the butt during a celebration, it's just a motivational thing. But outside of sport, it would obviously be weird—even with the same people. Like, at uni or wherever, it would just be strange.¹³⁸

Jonathan (21) interpreted these acts as emotional overflow:

I think it's just this kind of over-emotionality. And it has to be released somewhere. And that slap on the butt, sometimes it's just a thing: 'you get a slap, good job.'¹³⁹

These examples illustrate how football offers a controlled space within which physical and emotional expressions among men are normalized—but only in specific, codified forms. The locker room and the pitch operate as liminal zones where emotion can be temporarily expressed without threatening the structure of hegemonic masculinity. As Sterchele and Saint-Blancat¹⁴⁰ argue, liminality blurs social boundaries and enables interactions that disregard dominant categorizations.

¹³⁶ Anonymous interviewee n°6, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 12, 2025.

¹³⁷ Anonymous interviewee n°3, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 14, 2025.

¹³⁸ Anonymous interviewee n°1, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 4, 2025.

¹³⁹ Anonymous interviewee n°4, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 18, 2025.

¹⁴⁰ David (23) Sterchele and Chantal Saint-Blancat, "Keeping It Liminal. The Mondiali Antirazzisti (Anti-Racist World Cup) as a Multifocal Interaction Ritual," *Leisure Studies* 34, no. 2 (March 4, 2015): 182–96.

Yet this expression remains conditional upon one crucial factor: heteronormativity. Kraß reminds us that "Männliche Homosozialität wird durch Heterosexualität gestützt."¹⁴¹ Adding to this, Heissenberger makes an important argument: "Wie durch eine unsichtbare Zauberhand ist ein als Fußballer identifizierter Mann von vornherein mit einer heterosexuellen bullet-proof-Männlichkeit ausgestattet, der eben auch Tränen und gleichgeschlechtliche Zärtlichkeiten weniger bis nichts anhaben können."¹⁴²

Despite this flexibility, men in football are still teased or disciplined when they surpass the threshold of the accepted liminal space. As boys are initiated into a "fiercely heterosexual world"¹⁴³ of toughness that marginalizes femininity and gay men, any deviation from the expected masculine script is noticed: even small aesthetic choices, Jonathan (21) explained: "If someone shows up to training with a Flinslerl (men's earring), then they'll probably get a comment."¹⁴⁴ Paul (21) shared a similar experience: "I've had situations when someone would dress up or dye their hair or something like that, then they would be mocked."¹⁴⁵ When asked what the "safe" uniform would be to avoid ridicule, Paul (21) responded:

I mean just like basic clothes and basic outfits. I wouldn't say there's something specific, but just like a masculine outfit.¹⁴⁶

Elias (20) noted, specifically relating this to sexuality:

¹⁴¹ Translation: "Masculine homosociality is supported by heterosexuality" From Andreas Kraß, 2007:142 in Stefan Heissenberger, "Männlichkeiten Im Fußball. Amateurspieler in Österreich Zwischen Leistung, Heterosexualität, Abgrenzung, Entgrenzung Und Inszenierung," *Zeitschrift Für Ethnologie* 141, no. 1 (2016): 52.

¹⁴² Translation: "As if by an invisible magic hand, a man identified as a footballer is automatically equipped with a bulletproof heterosexual masculinity—one that even tears or same-sex affection can hardly damage, if at all" From Stefan Heissenberger, 2012: 222 in Stefan Heissenberger, "Männlichkeiten Im Fußball. Amateurspieler in Österreich Zwischen Leistung, Heterosexualität, Abgrenzung, Entgrenzung Und Inszenierung," *Zeitschrift Für Ethnologie* 141, no. 1 (2016): 52.

¹⁴³ Hargreaves, 1994; Foley, 1990; Messner and Sabo, 1990; and Pronger, 1990, cited in D. Stanley Eitzen "Social Control and Sport," in *Handbook of Sports Studies*, ed. Jay J. Coakley and Eric Dunning (London: SAGE Publications, 2006), 374.

¹⁴⁴ Anonymous interviewee n°4, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 18, 2025.

¹⁴⁵ Anonymous interviewee n°3, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 14, 2025.

¹⁴⁶ Anonymous interviewee n°3, 2025.

I don't think it's the safest environment to say you're openly gay, for example, to your team players. I think you would do it in every other environment before doing it in the locker room in front of your teammates.¹⁴⁷

These accounts demonstrate how masculinity in football is constantly surveilled. Even within the liminal zone that permits some degree of emotional expressions, anything coded as feminine or non-heteronormative is met with resistance. Football can offer space for emotional release, but only to a certain degree, and only for those who conform to its unspoken rules of appearance and conduct. As Eitzen observes, "Sport serves to control persons ideologically by reinforcing society's values among the participants."¹⁴⁸ Football, then, consistently attempts to uphold standards of hegemonic masculinity while actively disciplining and reproducing said standards through rituals of conformity and exclusion.

Building on the embodied and visual rituals explored so far, the next section shifts focus to an equally powerful sense: the aural. While physical gestures and appearances in individual and group rituals certainly maintain masculine norms, the sonic lens introduces an intriguing medium through which to assess how norms are reinforced and disrupted.

5.3 Sounding Masculinity: Ritual Practices and Disruptive Potential

Sound—particularly music and voice—plays a crucial but often overlooked role in the ritual construction of masculinity in football. From pre-match playlists to ironic commentary on the pitch, players use sound to stabilize identity and belonging. This subchapter turns to the soundscape of football—particularly the music players listen to before matches and the vocal performances that occur on the pitch—to understand how sound functions as a gendered ritual and a potentially subversive apparatus.

¹⁴⁷ Anonymous interviewee n°6, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 12, 2025.

¹⁴⁸ Stanley Eitzen "Social Control and Sport," in *Handbook of Sports Studies*, ed. Jay J. Coakley and Eric Dunning (London: SAGE Publications, 2006), 373.

Sound can serve as a tool of power and control but also parody, irony, and resistance. Here, I introduce the concept of sonic drag: vocal acts that mimic, exaggerate, and at times subvert—whether intentionally or not—dominant masculine norms. These performances exaggerate masculine codes and scripts to expose their constructed nature. The concept builds on Butler's conceptualization of drag¹⁴⁹—not as an imitation of something that is believed to be innate (such as gender), but as a performance that reveals the very artificiality of gender norms. Though brief and humorous, such moments open space for critique, maybe even reflexivity, within a deeply gendered environment.

For many players, listening to specific music before a game becomes a ritual of emotional control—a strategy to create consistency in a relatively unpredictable environment. David (23) noted:

It's always the same music. Before a match, I listen almost exclusively to ex-Yugoslavian music. It's a way to tap into that part of my identity: the angry Serbian. I feel stronger when that guy comes out.¹⁵⁰

Daniel (24) explained:

Because the playlist always stays the same, I think it's something I'm used to in that situation—it's something I can control before the match."¹⁵¹

These statements reflect how sonic repetition functions as a stabilizing instrument. Just like with the individual rituals described earlier, these sonic routines offer players a way to ground themselves by asserting control over their own emotional state. Music provides familiarity and thus solidifies a performative masculine identity that is ready for competition. David (23) specifically connects his pre-match music—ex-Yugoslavian songs—to his personal Serbian identity. Interestingly, he frames this not an overall expression of self, but as a way of summoning an alter ego, who he calls "the angry Serbian." In doing so, he strategically

¹⁴⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990): 136-138.

¹⁵⁰ Anonymous interviewee n°1, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 4, 2025.

¹⁵¹ Anonymous interviewee n°2, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 10, 2025.

detaches from his everyday identity, accessing a specific emotional state through sensory aggression. This transformation suggests that national identity can serve as a way of 'activating' masculinity: toughness, control and emotional hardness can be weaponized for competitive advantage.

Music also operates as a tool for simulating collective strength through national or cultural membership. Paul (21) spoke about listening to nationalist music—specifically traditional Croatian songs, explaining:

Before a game I enjoy it and it hypes me up... maybe it's because of that feeling of team spirit and feeling that you belong to a certain group.¹⁵²

Similarly, Jonathan (21), an Austrian player, described how "at Austria matches, occasionally there'll be a bit of Austropop," and noted that "'I am from Austria was played often last summer during the Euros. That's for sure."¹⁵³

When asked about a song he finds particularly motivating before a match, David (23) mentioned "Igraj i Pobedi"¹⁵⁴("Play and Win"), a track written for the Serbian national basketball team. The song is laden with patriotic sentiment:

"Svi smo uz tebe, Srbija cela
Zastava crveno, plavo, bela
Za ovo si rođen, straha nema"¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Anonymous interviewee n°3, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 14, 2025.

¹⁵³ Anonymous interviewee n°4, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 18, 2025.

¹⁵⁴ *Igraj i Pobedi*, performed by THCF, written for the Serbian national basketball team, 2017.

¹⁵⁵ Translation: "We're all with you, all of Serbia, The flag red, blue, and white, You were born for this, there is no fear"

"Igraj i pobedi i ponosno se vrati

Srbija čeka da dođeš iz daleka

Da naša zemlja bude opet prvak sveta"¹⁵⁶

"Nisi ti bitan, Srbija zove"¹⁵⁷

"Hoćemo slogu, hoćemo borbu"¹⁵⁸

This song exemplifies how sound reinforces hegemonic masculinity through collective emotion and national pride. With lyrics like "You were born for this, there is no fear" and "You don't matter—Serbia is calling," the song calls for the erasure of the individual in favor of loyalty, strength, and emotional control. This aligns with Paul (21)'s understanding of what it takes to be a successful athlete: "You have to be very consistent and reliable and also be ready to give up a lot of stuff in your life in order to sacrifice it for football."¹⁵⁹

The song's almost militaristic marching rhythm and intense, base-heavy chorus fall into what Durkheim calls "collective effervescence"¹⁶⁰: a heightened emotional energy that melts individuals into a unified whole.

David (23)'s instrumentalization of "the angry Serbian," aligns with Connor's notion of sonic ventriloquism¹⁶¹, where the voice—disembodied through music—allows for an alternative self to appear. Through this ritual, national identity becomes a sonic mask and a sonic

¹⁵⁶ Translation: "Play and win, and come back with pride, Serbia is waiting for you to return from afar, so our country can be world champion again"

¹⁵⁷ Translation: "You don't matter—Serbia is calling!"

¹⁵⁸ Translation: "We want unity, we want a fight"

¹⁵⁹ Anonymous interviewee n°3, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 14, 2025.

¹⁶⁰ Émile Durkheim, Carol Cosman, and Mark Sydney Cladis, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁶¹ Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

weapon. Songs like "Igraj i Pobedi" reinforce and encourage a sense of a fearless collective masculinity through the instrumentalization of national pride.

The musical choices here are not random. Many of the songs in players' pre-match playlists include aggressive lyrics or heavy bass—sonic characteristics that, as Elias (20) put it, "help you get into the right mindset—angry and hungry for victory."¹⁶² Here, national and cultural music turns into a sonic performance of strength, control and dominance. Sound therefore reinforces identity, weaponizes specific emotions, and weaves individual players into a larger collective whole.

However, there exists an alternative interpretation of extreme masculine sonic performance: Resistance through parody. This resistance can take the form of ironic or exaggerated performances of masculinity, what I describe as sonic drag. For instance, a player simulating hyper-macho commentary and demeanour in a *sarcastic* tone, creates a kind of critical distance from the dominant structure of masculinity. A field note demonstrates this:

Late in the second half, with the score still 0–0, one of the players on the bench begins to commentate on the game in an exaggerated, deepened voice: 'Look at this man... pure testosterone. A real man doesn't pass the ball' He continues in a similar tone, mimicking the kind of sports talk that is often heard on broadcasts: 'No pain, no feelings—just goals.'¹⁶³

His tone is clearly ironic, his phrases are too theatrical to be serious. It is a parody of masculine football clichés—almost like holding up a mirror to the norms of this space. For a moment, the usual codes of speech are mocked and made visible. It does not challenge the structure directly, but it opens a small space of distance, a way to play with the role of the 'masculine man' without fully stepping outside of it. Although these kinds of performances

¹⁶² Anonymous interviewee n°5, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 21, 2025.

¹⁶³ Salem, Sophie. *Field Notes*. Vienna. April 25, 2025.

can be interpreted as a challenge to the fixity of gender norms through voice, they are rare and do not change the exclusivity of the space as a masculine one.

Masculinity in football is not fixed but ritualized—carefully performed, repeated, and policed. At LAC, individual and group rituals serve as tools for emotional control, conformity, and self-discipline. Whether through pre-match habits, team celebrations, or music, players maintain a gendered identity rooted in stability and homosocial unity. While moments of parody and sonic drag hint at reflexivity, the broader structure continues to reproduce hegemonic masculinity as natural and obligatory.

Yet players represent only one layer of this ritual system. To fully understand how masculinity is reproduced and performed through football, we must turn away from the pitch and look toward the stands. The next chapter shifts attention to the Ultras of Rapid, where sacrality, nationalism, and sound produce a collective performance of masculinity—one staged in devotion.

6. The Fans

Faith, Flags and Sound: Ritual and Masculinity at Rapid

This chapter explores the overlapping layers of sacrality, nationalism, and sonic ritual in the construction of masculinity within Austrian football culture. Building on the previous discussion of private, collective and sonic ritual performance, this section examines more public forms of masculine expression that emerge in football stadiums and extreme fan sub-cultures. These rituals—chants, choreographed movements, flags, and uniforms—function as structured performances that combine emotional expression with the reinforcement of certain ideologies.

This analysis is informed by two matches at Rapid , Austria's most popular and historically significant football club, focusing specifically on "Block West." This is a sector of the stadium where the club's most intense supporters, known as the "Ultras Rapid"¹⁶⁴ stand—a fan group established in 1899¹⁶⁵. Watching the games among the Ultras, who are notorious for their extreme dedication and highly organized choreographies, offered the ideal setting for ethnographic observation of football's ritual practices and masculine performances. In addition to my field notes, I include theoretical insights into hegemonic masculinity and sonic

¹⁶⁴ Ultras Rapid is the principal ultra group supporting SK Rapid Wien, Austria's most historically significant football club. Founded in 1988, they are known for their strict internal hierarchy, intense loyalty, and self-managed fan culture. The group organizes choreographies, away travel, and political messaging, often promoting anti-commercial, anti-modern football stances aligned with leftist ideologies. While they emphasize solidarity, tradition, and community, their membership remains predominantly male, and their space—especially in Block West—is coded as masculine and often exclusionary. The group plays a central role in shaping stadium atmosphere and in mediating the relationship between fans and club management.

¹⁶⁵ Ultras Rapid, accessed May 7, 2025.

performance to examine how nationalistic behaviors, sound and spectacle come together to create an unconditional devotion in a ritualistic, exclusionary masculine domain.

These gendered performances are significant because they actively work to police boundaries—reaffirming who gets to be seen, heard, and included in the national and cultural imagination of football, and who is silenced or erased in the process.

6.1 The Stadium as a Sacred Space: Football and the Cult(ure) of Masculinity.

"Für viele unserer Fans bedeutet Rapid so viel mehr als nur das rein sportliche Geschehen auf dem Platz - es reicht bis in den Alltag hinein, wird zu einer Lebenseinstellung, quasi auch: Einer Religion." ¹⁶⁶

The stadium is more than a physical space of athletic competition; it is an arena of worship, identity, and belonging. In this subchapter, I examine how football fandom, particularly in the context of Rapid, mirrors religious structures and glorifies masculine performance through ritual.

Building on Durkheim's understanding of collective effervescence¹⁶⁷, I argue that the emotional intensity experienced during these group rituals temporarily melts individual identities together, merging fans into a unified, collective consciousness. While more recent theories of affect see it as relational and circulating ¹⁶⁸, Durkheim's model remains valuable here due to its emphasis on ritual structure and its capacity to create temporary social cohesion through emotional synchrony.

¹⁶⁶ Translation: "For many of our fans, Rapid means so much more than just the purely athletic events on the field – it extends into everyday life, becomes a way of life, almost like: a religion." From "Der Rapid - mehr als ein Verein," football club official website, Rapid, 2016.

¹⁶⁷ Émile Durkheim, Carol Cosman, and Mark Sydney Cladis, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁶⁸ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins," *Critical Inquiry* 21, no. 2 (January 1995): 496–522; Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

Within Rapid's Block West, this collective energy transcends social divisions, similar to religious congregations, where ritual has the potential to temporarily flatten hierarchies. As Schober notes, "Bei einem Rapid-Spiel und besonders im Block West stehen der Anwalt und der Arbeiter nebeneinander, da prostet der Busfahrer dem Wissenschaftler zu. Grün-Weiß nivelliert die Klassenunterschiede"¹⁶⁹. This exemplifies how football, much like religion, creates a sacred space where distinctions of class and status are—for that 90-minute time-period—forgotten in shared emotional experience, or effervescence¹⁷⁰.

I would like to begin with a personal reflection on what it meant to attend these games as a female researcher—someone who is not an active Rapid fan and does not take part in the group's rituals. Before even arriving at the stadium, a male friend who was accompanying me offered a word of advice, although it felt more like a warning: "Just be careful when you're taking notes. You should try to be subtle and not let people notice that you're observing them. And don't take pictures!" Of course, I took note of this immediately and found myself wondering: why was a seemingly ordinary football game being framed as a secretive, closed-circle space requiring such extreme discretion? At the time, the description of Block West struck me as slightly exaggerated, even cult-like. I was not even certain that these games would provide any valuable data for my research. It soon became clear that my initial scepticism was enormously misplaced.

Instantly as I walked into the stadium, I was greeted with a large sign of a crossed-out camera, the caption reading "weg damit" meaning "away with it".

¹⁶⁹ Translation: "At a Rapid match, and especially in the Block West, the lawyer stands next to the working-class man, and the bus driver toasts with the scientist. Green and white¹⁶⁹ levels out class differences." From Timo Schober, "Rapid-Fans: Die Macht der Ultras," December 20, 2018.

¹⁷⁰ Émile Durkheim, Carol Cosman, and Mark Sydney Cladis, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).



1. "Away with it" sign¹⁷¹

What surprised me most was the noticeable absence of smartphone use overall. Usually, at large gatherings for games or performances, it is hard to see past the sea of screens as people record and take photos. But in this case, there was a general consensus that using devices to capture the moment was frowned upon. Initially, one might assume this to be a positive thing. A retrospectively naive field note from my first impression of the lack of phones demonstrates this:

Finally, a place where people live in the now rather than glued to their mobile devices. Is this to enjoy the atmosphere to its fullest extent? Why isn't this the case at concerts?¹⁷²

While there may be some intention of wanting to 'disconnect' or 'log off' at a game, I later reflected on this and started doubting my initial impression. I now believe there to be another, more worrisome factor at play. It turned out that my own original fear of being 'found out' as a researcher mirrored a deeper, collective anxiety within the Ultras themselves: a fear of being exposed, infiltrated, or disrupted by the outside world, which could threaten the sacred space this fanbase has built for itself, where traditional ideals of manhood have gone unquestioned since 1899: a time when emerging football institutions were crucial in broader national and

¹⁷¹ Salem Sophie, "Away with it", photograph, Vienna, April 27, 2025, in author's personal collection.

¹⁷² Salem, Sophie. *Field Notes*. Vienna. April 27, 2025.

imperial projects to promote militarized, disciplined, and heteronormative masculinity in young men.¹⁷³

This arena has become a safe haven for extreme expressions of loyalty, emotional investment, and material dedication. While this might appear to be directed solely toward a football club, I argue that the underlying object of devotion is not football itself, but a ritualized and ideological version of masculinity. Football here acts as a visible surface of a deeper structure. What is truly being performed and reproduced is the cult of masculinity¹⁷⁴. As Serazio and Cusack¹⁷⁵ note, stadiums act like modern cathedrals, where affect and symbolic boundaries reinforce a shared belief system. Rapid becomes a masculine temple, where sound, repetition, and emotion create a dominant gender order.

This masculine ideology is framed and sold through ideas of loyalty, tradition, and emotion. It offers a promise of stability: a brotherhood immune to socioeconomic divisions, sociopolitical distractions, driven by ancient, immortal values. Figure 2 illustrates the front cover of the first fan magazine published by the club's Ultras in 1993. It reads: "Marmorstein und Eisen bricht, aber unsre Rapid nicht. Alles, alles geht vorbei, aber wir bleiben treu."¹⁷⁶ This motto mythologizes the club's survival over the years as omnipresent, existential almost—lifting masculine loyalty up towards the status of immortality.

¹⁷³ Hans Bonde, "The Great Male Cycle: Sport, Politics and European Masculinity Today," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 10 (August 2009): 1540–54; Monika Szczepaniak, "Zwischen 'Kriegsgott' und 'Operettenfigur': Inszenierungen militärischer Männlichkeit in der österreichischen Literatur zum Ersten Weltkrieg," *Journal of Austrian Studies* 45, no. 3–4 (2012): 29–60.

¹⁷⁴ Hans Bonde, "The Great Male Cycle: Sport, Politics and European Masculinity Today," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, no. 10 (August 2009): 1541.

¹⁷⁵ Carole M. Cusack, "Sports: Quasi-Religious, Para-Religious, or Religious?" 49 (2023): 61–77; Michael Serazio, "The Elementary Forms of Sports Fandom: A Durkheimian Exploration of Team Myths, Kinship, and Totemic Rituals," *Communication & Sport* 1, no. 4 (December 2013): 303–25.

¹⁷⁶ First Fan magazine 1993 "Marmorstein und Eisen bricht, aber unsre Rapid nicht. Alles, alles geht vorbei, aber wir bleiben treu." ("Marble and iron break, but our Rapid does not. Everything, everything passes, but we remain loyal.")



2. First Fan magazine 1993 "Marmorstein und Eisen bricht, aber unsre Rapid nicht. Alles, alles geht vorbei, aber wir bleiben treu."¹⁷⁷

In this context, the smartphone clearly represents an unwanted intrusion from the outside world: a world that could destabilize the internal structures of Block West. Thus, digital connection to 'external forces' threatens the sacred aura of Rapid.

Within this framework, sacrality is performative and material. The songs are an important element, and "[...] even though the lyrics are sometimes obscene, they parallel the hymnals of religion."¹⁷⁸ Arranz-Albo even speaks of the "conversion of stadiums into temples."¹⁷⁹

Additionally, the green-and-white uniform mirrors religious dress, and choreographed movements mimic communal worship practices, as seen on Figures 3 and 4. As Durkheim¹⁸⁰ argues, sacred spaces intensify group cohesion by distinguishing ritual from the everyday. In football, this strengthens emotional bonds and reinforces masculine norms masked as tradition.

¹⁷⁷ "Block West Echo," Ultras Rapid, n.d.

¹⁷⁸ Javier Arranz Albó, "Metaphorical Language in the World of Soccer," *Apunts Educación Física y Deportes*, no. 129 (September 30, 2017): 34.

¹⁷⁹ Arranz Albó, 2017: 27.

¹⁸⁰ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).



3. Block West at the 2023 European Conference League performing choreographed movements to signify their dedication to Rapid¹⁸¹



4. 30-year anniversary celebration of the Rapid Ultras. Fans seem to be partaking in some worship ritual.¹⁸²

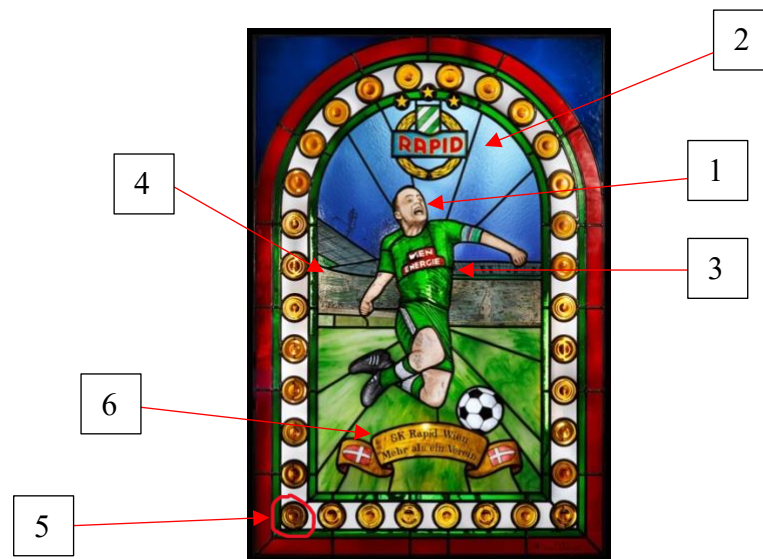
Figure 5 shows a particularly illustrative object—the *Kirchenfenster* (church window) designed in 2016 by Rapid. The parallels between football fandom and the sacred could not be more clear. The window combines six visual themes: (1) the "football god" Steffen Hofmann¹⁸³, (2) the Allianz Stadion as "home," or arguably the church itself, (3) the sacred

¹⁸¹ "Europa Conference League, Play Off," *Brucki Blogspot* (blog), 2023.

¹⁸² "30 Jahre Ultras Rapid Feier," Ultras Rapid, 2018.

¹⁸³ Steffen Hofmann, a former star player and current CEO of Rapid, was recently involved in a homophobia scandal at the club, as discussed in the literature review. His symbolic status as a "football god" underscores the tensions between idolization and institutional failures regarding inclusivity.

team jersey, (4) the "magical" Block West, (5) the 32 championship titles, and (6) the slogan "Rapid – *mehr als ein Verein*" ("more than a club")¹⁸⁴. The symbolic vocabulary unmistakably carries religious connotations, reinforcing the notion of football fandom as sacred.



5. Church window- Rapid¹⁸⁵

To deepen this analysis of sacrality within Block West, I draw on Elliott's¹⁸⁶ framework, which reconceptualizes fandom as a sacred experience. Using insights from Durkheim, Laderman, Lynch, Pickering, and Smith¹⁸⁷, Elliott outlines seven dimensions through which sacrality can be observed in secular settings such as the football stadium. This model provides a useful framework for interpreting how Rapid fans construct a space where devotion, ritual, and masculine ideals come together. The table below utilizes these dimensions as a categorical system through which to understand the fan experience as a structured, ideological and sacred performance.

¹⁸⁴ "Der Rapid - mehr als ein Verein," football club official website, Rapid, 2016.

¹⁸⁵ "Der Rapid - mehr als ein Verein," football club official website, Rapid, 2016.

¹⁸⁶ Michael A. Elliott, "Fandom as Religion: A Social-Scientific Assessment," *Journal of Fandom Studies* 9, no. 2 (2021).

¹⁸⁷ Michael A. Elliott, "Fandom as Religion: A Social-Scientific Assessment," *Journal of Fandom Studies* 9, no. 2 (2021): 117, drawing on Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* ([1912] 1995); Gary Laderman, *Sacred Matters* (New York: New Press, 2009); Gordon Lynch, *On the Sacred* (Durham: Acumen, 2012) and *The Sacred in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); W. S. F. Pickering, *Durkheim's Sociology of Religion* (London: Routledge, 1984); and Christian Smith, *The Sacred Project of American Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) and *Religion: What It Is, How It Works, and Why It Matters* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Description</i>
Special	Block West is perceived as unique and untouchable, only for the "true" fan.
Holy	The rituals, space, and symbols are protected and not to be desecrated (e.g the hostility toward photos.)
Powerful	The collective presence of the Ultras produces awe, fear, and respect.
Transcendent/absolute	The experience shifts individuals from the mundane into an all-consuming collective purpose. (collective effervescence)
Inspiring	The space motivates acts of devotion, from songs to various club-led initiatives.
Meaning	Fandom becomes a source of value, tradition, and morality.
Identity	Affiliation with Rapid, especially within Block West, defines both group and personal identity.

Table 1. Seven Dimensions of the Sacred. Adapted from Elliott (2021), drawing on Durkheim ([1912] 1995), Laderman (2009), Lynch (2012a, 2012b), Pickering (1984), and Smith (2014, 2017).

While this subchapter has shown how the stadium operates as a sacred space for performing and upholding a ritualized form of masculinity, the next section turns to the ways these same rituals can project explicitly political ideas. In Block West, choreographed performances and lyrical expressions often reference themes of militarized masculinity and hint towards a deeper connection with Austrian national identity—revealing, yet again, how fan devotion can operate as a platform for ideological meaning-making.

6.2 Ritualizing the Nation: Football, Nationalism, and Militarized Masculinity

"Gemeinsam. Kämpfen. Siegen"¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Translation: "Together. Fight. Conquer." From "Unsere Wurzeln," football club official website, Rapid, n.d.



6. Bronze statue of Dionys Schöneck, a work by Thomas Rydval. It was unveiled during the opening of the Rapid Museum "Rapideum" on December 14th/15th, 2011. "Gemeinsam. Kämpfen. Siegen."¹⁸⁹

Since 1911, when Dionys Schöneck first coined the motto "Gemeinsam. Kämpfen. Siegen.", the phrase has been branded into the collective consciousness of Rapid fans, read like scripture, and taken like an order from officer to soldier. This subchapter explores how ritual practices within Block West reflect underlying political and ideological themes, many of which are rooted in militarism and nationalism. I argue that the use of military language, uniforms, and choreographed group movements, as well as the "Austrian working-class man" as a singular, heroic identity—construct and weaponize a form of masculinity aligned with hegemonic patriarchal values. In this context, football fandom becomes more than a symbolic performance: it is a site of ideological production.

One of the most obvious—and frankly outrageous—symbols of militarized identity is the official mascot of the Ultras, referred to by the latter as "the Indian": an image of a native American figure in a feathered war bonnet.

¹⁸⁹ "135 Jahre Mr. Rapid: In Gedenken an Dionys Schöneck," football club official website, Rapid, April 29, 2023.



7. *Ultras Rapid Mascot*¹⁹⁰

While Rapid has no historical or cultural ties to Indigenous peoples, the adoption of this figure reflects a broader European colonial fantasy, in which the warrior becomes a symbolic representation of white masculine projection. As William¹⁹¹ argues, the appropriation of Native American iconography is "motivated by a masculinity crisis and American mythmaking as a settler-colonialist society." But this fantasy is not exclusively American—it is shared by European nations like Austria, where colonial ambition is less direct but still deeply intertwined with imperial and racial imaginaries. The image of the warrior—proud, dangerous—becomes a lens through which white, working-class masculinity can see itself as both threatened and heroic.

The war bonnet itself, as noted by Killback, was traditionally worn by "mámãa'éstse" (warriors), " [...] and only when going to war against worthy adversaries or in ceremony."¹⁹² Thus, its use by the Ultras at Rapid is less about cultural connection and more about attempting to relate to an idealized, romanticized warrior identity—aggressive, honorable, and male. It is a clear yet shockingly inappropriate metaphor for the fan group itself: the Ultras as

¹⁹⁰ "Ultras Rapid Block West," Ultras Rapid, 2017.

¹⁹¹ Dana M. Williams, "The Appropriation of Native American Culture for Sports Logos, Mascots, and Nicknames," *Sociology Compass* 19, no. 2 (February 2025): 1.

¹⁹² Leo Killback, "Crowns of Honor: Sacred Laws of Eagle-Feather War Bonnets and Repatriating the Icon of the Great Plains," 33, no. 1 (2013): 1–23.

soldiers, their Block West sector as the battlefield, and the opposing team and its fans as the enemy. As Eriksen observes, "sport is a benign reproduction of war,"¹⁹³ and in this case, the symbolism used by the Ultras turns fandom into a dramatized combat zone where masculinity is performed through militarized ritual.

This warrior identity is reinforced through slogans and clothing that emphasize 'brotherhood'. This term can be found on shirts, bags, caps and cups, suggesting a close-knit unit of men aligned in a shared struggle that is football. One female-branded "Brotherhood" t-shirt (figure 8) paradoxically underscores the masculine exclusivity of the term: even Rapid women must subscribe to the identity of one of the 'brothers' to be included.



8. Brotherhood/Rapid top advertised as a women's t-shirt.¹⁹⁴

Kossakowski argues that the spaces occupied by the most extreme fans "are a reservoir for the traditional brotherhood culture where members of the fan community can find a bastion of hegemonic patterns of masculinity."¹⁹⁵ The homogeneity and masculine loyalty to the club

¹⁹³ Thomas Hylland Eriksen (1993) quoted in Ying Chiang et al., "Multiple Margins: Sport, Gender and Nationalism in Taiwan," *Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science* 4, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 21.

¹⁹⁴ "Rapid Indianer," online shop, PPAP fanshop, n.d.

¹⁹⁵ Radosław Kossakowski, Dominik Antonowicz, and Honorata Jakubowska, "'Partners', 'Mothers', and 'Tomboys'. Female Football Fans in the Structural Trap of Assigned Roles in Poland," *Soccer & Society* 23, no. 3 (April 3, 2022): 271.

therefore mirror hegemonic ideals of unity through strength, subordination of the individual to the collective, and fabricated loyalty in imaginary combat.

Statements made by the official Ultras website like "Zeigt Respekt gegenüber dem Indianer, unserem Schal und anderen Rapidlern."¹⁹⁶ sacralize both the mascot and the uniform of fandom. As previously discussed in the context of Block West as a sacred space, these symbols have a quasi-religious meaning—with connotations of loyalty and devotion. The scarf, in particular, represents not only a marker of identity but a ritual object: it is a symbol of belonging, duty, and pride, collectively understood as something sacred through repeated performance. A reflection from my field notes paints a picture:

Right before the game started, there's a moment in Block West that gave me chills. Every single person lifts their Rapid scarf high into the air. It's done with real pride, like the scarf means everything. Then the hymn starts. They treat it like a national anthem. Every word is sung loud and clear, like it's part of who they are. There's something powerful yet terrifying about it. The scarves stay up the whole time, stretched out like flags, and the entire block turns into this wall of sound and color (green of course).¹⁹⁷



9. Rapid fans at Villa Park, Birmingham, during the Europa League play-off against Aston Villa —August 27, 2009.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Translation: "Show respect for the Indian, our scarf, and other Rapid supporters" From "Mitgliedschaft," Ultras Rapid, accessed May 7, 2025.

¹⁹⁷ Salem, Sophie. *Field Notes*. April 27, 2025.

¹⁹⁸ "Aston Villa – Rapid," Ultras Rapid, 2009.

Last verse of the Rapid hymn:

"Rapid, Rapid, wir san a Einheit,

Rapid, Rapid, wir hoidn z'samm!

Egal was kummt im Leb'n,

Rapid wird's immer geb'n,

Mei Herz is stoiz, a Greana z'sein!"¹⁹⁹

These lyrics reinforce the ritualistic construction of masculine, nationalist identity by utilizing themes of unity, loyalty, and pride. The line "we are one unit" signals a collective identity, where the individual dissolves into group cohesion, mirroring the kind of performative brotherhood often associated with hegemonic masculinity. "We stand together" further emphasizes this sense of solidarity, where to stand is to be ready, active, and loyal. Meanwhile, "My heart is proud to be green" expresses a certain ideological pride rooted in color, adopting the green of Rapid as a physiological part of the fan's identity. Through these lyrics, the hymn acts as a ritual chant that interconnects emotion, masculinity, and national belonging into one performative whole. As Tervo rightly points out, "large-scale sports movements could not exist as they do today without nation states and the ideology of nationalism."²⁰⁰

Yet this collective identity is not only shaped by class, masculinity, and nationalism—it is also racialized. While Block West draws heavily on working-class pride, the composition of the crowd suggests a very homogenous space. During fieldwork, I noted an obvious absence of visibly non-white individuals in the stands. While fans of various ethnic backgrounds may be present, whiteness seems to be the unspoken norm. The masculinity that is ritualized and

¹⁹⁹ Salem, Sophie. *Field Notes*. April, 2025. Translation: "Rapid, Rapid, we are one unit, Rapid, Rapid, we stick together! No matter what life brings, Rapid will always exist, my heart is proud to be a Greenie!"

²⁰⁰ Mervi Tervo (2001) in Ying Chiang et al., "Multiple Margins: Sport, Gender and Nationalism in Taiwan," *Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science* 4, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 21.

celebrated in chants, gestures, and uniforms is not just working-class, but white working-class—stemming from a fantasy of unity that excludes those who fall outside its racialized boundaries.

Rapid's birth, as documented in the "Neues Wiener Abendblatt" (New Vienna Evening Paper) of 1898, was explicitly tied to the Austrian working man: "ernstlich sportgesinnten Arbeitern"²⁰¹ were called to join. Dionys Schönecker stressed this, declaring: "Mein Herren, wir sind Arbeiter, und als Arbeiter müssen wir arbeiten!"²⁰². This motto labeled masculinity as working-class, as disciplined. Rapid fans were even called "geistige Arbeiter"²⁰³, emphasizing that all men, regardless of background, could be part of the Rapid brotherhood. Kossakowski²⁰⁴ insists that football fandom cannot be assessed without considering the impact of the working-class culture. He reveals that the former maintains a strong connection with the latter through "[...] numerous social practices and match rituals."²⁰⁵

Postwar acknowledgments of the club's contribution to the "fatherland"—such as Felix Hurdes's praise for Rapid's "Dienst am Vaterlande"²⁰⁶ in the club's 50th anniversary publication²⁰⁷—show the complex entanglement of football, masculinity, and national identity.²⁰⁸

²⁰¹ Translation: "seriously sport-minded workers" From "Unsere Wurzeln," football club official website, Rapid, n.d.

²⁰² Translation: "Gentlemen, we are workers, and as workers we must work!" From "135 Jahre Mr. Rapid: In Gedenken an Dionys Schönecker," football club official website, Rapid, April 29, 2023.

²⁰³ Translation: "spiritual workers"

²⁰⁴ Radosław Kossakowski, Dominik Antonowicz, and Honorata Jakubowska, "'Partners', 'Mothers', and 'Tomboys'. Female Football Fans in the Structural Trap of Assigned Roles in Poland," *Soccer & Society* 23, no. 3 (April 3, 2022)

²⁰⁵ Kossakowski, 2022: 273.

²⁰⁶ Translation: "service to the fatherland"

²⁰⁷ "50 Jahre Sportklub 'Rapid'" (Austria Verlags Gesellschaft M.B.H, 1949).

²⁰⁸ This working-class masculinity reflects a broader historical trend in which sport was used to promote national solidarity among men of different social backgrounds. Nationalism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries increasingly appealed to the working class through shared rituals, symbols, and myths of sacrifice, duty, and national pride. Football became a space where masculinity was performed and aligned with national service rather than socialist internationalism. In Austria, this development aligned with increasing pressure to unify class identities under a single idea of the "Austrian man": a disciplined, loyal, and physically fit citizen. Clubs like Rapid, while rooted in the working class, became arenas for national belonging. See George L Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford University Press New York, NY, 1996)

Tattoos offer a visual and bodily expression of the identification with Rapid, masculinity, and nationalist ideology. A submission posted on a Facebook page titled "Fussball Tattoos"²⁰⁹ depicts a fan's upper-arm tattoo (figure 10) decorated with Rapid's emblem and the Austrian imperial eagle, a symbol historically associated with national sovereignty, militarism, and state power. Bringing together club and state and branding this on one's body demonstrates a permanent, irreversible sense of loyalty to Rapid and its connection to masculine national pride.



10. Picture posted in a public Facebook group titled "Fussball Tattoos" ("Football Tattoos"). The tattoo depicts the Rapid emblem as well as the Austrian imperial eagle²¹⁰

This strong identification with nationalism and masculinity also appears in fan chants, where similarly militant themes are expressed. The lyrics sung by Ultras at Block West refer directly to themes of war and military: "Panzer rollen durch Afghanistan, [...] Wien, seht euch diese

²⁰⁹ "Fussball Tattoos," Social media group, Facebook, March 14, 2013.

²¹⁰ "Fussball Tattoos," Social media group, Facebook, March 14, 2013.

Green-Army an, alles zittert vor Rapid"²¹¹. The lyrics reveal a bold comparison of the fans' power with tanks rolling into enemy territory, and global warfare with local football rivalry.²¹² Similarly, "[...] Rapid ist unser Leben, dann gewinnen wir gemeinsam jeden Krieg"²¹³ equates matches to national conflicts, where masculinity is proven through loyalty, violence, and symbolic victory.

Through these ritualistic practices, Block West becomes a stage where militarized masculinity and national pride are continually performed. The Austrian working man assumes the identity of a soldier on the pitch, dressed in his green uniform, standing with his fellow brothers, under one command—to serve as a nostalgic symbol of past struggle and a lasting figure of the ultimate Ultra. Football, in this context, turns into a dangerous cause for which to fight and to conquer, with weapons of masculinity.

The imagery and language examined throughout this chapter have demonstrated that football fandom at Rapid is a deeply embodied ritual of masculine and nationalist expression. Yet beyond what is seen or read, the culture of Block West is also fundamentally shaped by what is heard. Sound—through its intensity, rhythm, and force—adds yet another layer to these ideologies in ways that the visual alone cannot. The next section turns to the sonic realm, where masculinity is performed through voice, vibration, and volume.

²¹¹ Translation: "Tanks roll through Afghanistan [...] look at this Green-Army, everyone trembles before Rapid." From "Magischer SCR - Fangesänge Des Block West," 2019.

²¹² The line "Tanks roll through Afghanistan" likely references the U.S.-led military intervention in Afghanistan following 9/11, which dominated global media. Though Austria was not a participant in the invasion, this lyric aligns the fans with a broader Western military mindset—one in which masculine power is exercised through occupation and fear.

²¹³ Translation: "Rapid is our life, and together we'll win every war" From "Magischer SCR - Fangesänge Des Block West," 2019.

6.3 Echoes of Hegemony: Masculine Sound and Ritual among Rapid Fans

"Das Geschrei wird aggressiver, die Männer ballen die Fäuste, strecken die Mittelfinger in die Höhe, schlagen mit den Händen auf die Brust, da, wo das Herz ist. Wo für sie Rapid ist. Bumm, bumm, bumm." ²¹⁴

Sound, contrary to my own first impression, is not merely a background element or a secondary detail to the visual spectacle of football fandom—it is a ritual in itself. It is one of the core pillars holding up the structure within which masculine identities are constructed, policed, and performed. In the acoustic environment of Block West, choreographed vocalizations function as collective performances of hegemonic masculinity, transforming male bodies into instruments of ideological production. Drawing on Herrera's²¹⁵ analysis of Argentine football chants—particularly his theorization of "aguante", a masculine honor code based on endurance, bravery, and collective commitment—as well as Kong's concept of "sonic resonance"²¹⁶, this section argues that sound in the stadium is not neutral. It is powerful, structured, and deeply gendered. In her study on feminist protest soundscapes, Kong²¹⁷ defines sonic resonance as the interplay between rationality, meaning, affect, and emotion within sonic performances, a process that contributes to the construction of collective identity. This theoretical lens illustrates how the acoustic environment of Block West represents a dynamic, emotionally and ideologically laden space where masculinity is aurally reinforced. Through practices such as synchronized chanting and drumming, Ultras engage in

²¹⁴ Translation: "The shouting grows more aggressive, the men clench their fists, raise their middle fingers in the air, beat their chests with their hands—right where the heart is. Where Rapid is for them. Boom, boom, boom." From Timo Schober, "Rapid-Fans: Die Macht der Ultras," December 20, 2018.

²¹⁵ Eduardo Herrera, "Masculinity, Violence, and Deindividuation in Argentine Soccer Chants: The Sonic Potentials of Participatory Sounding-in-Synchrony," *Ethnomusicology* 62, no. 3 (October 1, 2018): 470–99.

²¹⁶ Fuk Yin Jessica Kong, "Soundscapes of Feminist Protests in London: Collective Identity Construction through Sonic Resonance." (PhD Thesis, London, London School of Economics and Political Science., 2021).

²¹⁷ Kong, 2021.

what Kong calls a "resonating experience" that merges the individual into a coherent affective collective.

The sonic practices of Rapid's Ultras—characterized by aggressive shouting, clapping, stomping, whistling and ritualistic hymns—embody hegemonic masculinity: a collective expression that prioritizes dominance, control, and emotion, coded as male. In this context, sound becomes a weapon, and silence—or deviation from the expected sonic norms—draws the line of exclusion. Similar to sacred or militarized performances, these rituals construct a shared reality, a shared identity, reinforcing belonging through an aggressive, unified soundscape. As Herrera argues, the "ritual-like practice of moving together in the stadium is a powerful source of emotion and, added to sounding together, becomes a crucial factor in producing a collective—and embodied—sense of masculinity [...]"²¹⁸ Thus, an affective, masculine form of loyalty is communicated through sound, movement, and togetherness.

In this sonic theatre of masculinity—Block West—the figures holding megaphones at the foot of the sector (Figure 11) act as the conductors of a disciplined orchestra. Just as a conductor guides a symphony with gesture, these men orchestrate the tempo of the crowd—raising, quieting, and redirecting its sonic performance.

²¹⁸ Eduardo Herrera, "Masculinity, Violence, and Deindividuation in Argentine Soccer Chants: The Sonic Potentials of Participatory Sounding-in-Synchrony," *Ethnomusicology* 62, no. 3 (October 1, 2018): 483.



11. Rapid Ultras in Block West during the 1:1 draw against FK Borac Banja Luka in the Round of 16 at Gradski Stadion, March 6, 2025²¹⁹

Each chant is a rehearsed sequence, delivered with intention. The Ultras, following the conductor's cues, use their bodies as instruments: Mouths shout and whistle, hands clap, feet stomp, and drums pound, all in synchrony, like a metronome that maintains tempo. What is produced is not noise, but a constructed masculine heartbeat: consistent, aggressive, vital.

Unlike the other seated areas of the Allianz Stadion, Block West has no chairs—only space to stand. Its architecture is not designed for passive presence, but for embodied participation. The absence of seats is common in Ultra football culture²²⁰ and therefore significant: one must be ready to act, to show commitment, and most importantly: to perform. In aguante terms, to sit would be to fail to endure, fail to be a *true fan*²²¹. In a Butlerian way of thinking, this is a literal stage for gender performativity. Masculinity here is not an individual innate trait, but a collectively produced and ritualised identity, crafted through rhythmic gestures and performed sonically for an audience.

²¹⁹ "FK Borac Banja Luka – Rapid," football club official website, FK Rapid, 2025.

²²⁰ Radosław Kossakowski, Dominik Antonowicz, and Honorata Jakubowska, "'Partners', 'Mothers', and 'Tomboys'. Female Football Fans in the Structural Trap of Assigned Roles in Poland," *Soccer & Society* 23, no. 3 (April 3, 2022): 273.

²²¹ Eduardo Herrera, "Masculinity, Violence, and Deindividuation in Argentine Soccer Chants: The Sonic Potentials of Participatory Sounding-in-Synchrony," *Ethnomusicology* 62, no. 3 (October 1, 2018): 485.

The Ultras, at first glance, would appear to be the audience of a football game. However, I argue—as would Butler—that this interpretation is backwards: they are, in fact, active performers, enacting a complex ritual of identity, loyalty, and masculinity. The question, then, is not whether they are performing, but *for whom*—and *to what end*?

Weinstein explains that "loudness is meant to overwhelm, to sweep the listener into the sound, and then to lend the listener the sense of power that the sound provides."²²² In the context of Block West, this performance is intentional, directed at the Rapid players on the field.

Through volume, rhythm, and intensity, the Ultras attempt to lend their sonic power to the team, sharing their emotional momentum to help them succeed. Similarly, Marra and Trotta²²³ suggest that sound can be a transformative medium: physical, emotional, and sonic energies become one—allowing fans to influence the player's focus, mood, and performance through collective sonic intensity. Here, the stadium becomes an echo of resonance²²⁴: players and fans perform for one another in a co-dependent ritual where affect, collectivity, and ideology vibrate together, all to serve a shared goal—"Siegen"²²⁵, per the club's motto.

This complex, emotionally demanding collective set of rituals re-contextualizes metaphors of war and nationhood: not as nonsensical exaggerations, but as structural, culturally learned logics of performance. While I personally maintain my view that these parallels are exaggerated, they begin to make sense when one considers the layers of meaning that constitute ritual practice at Rapid.

²²² Deena Weinstein quoted in Colin A. McKinnon, "Louder than Hell: Power, Volume and the Brain," in *Heavy Fundamentals: Music, Metal and Politics* (Brill, 2010), 112.

²²³ Pedro Silva Marra and Felipe Trotta, "Sound, Music and Magic in Football Stadiums," *Popular Music* 38, no. 01 (January 2019): 82,83.

²²⁴ Fuk Yin Jessica Kong, "Soundscapes of Feminist Protests in London: Collective Identity Construction through Sonic Resonance." (PhD Thesis, London, London School of Economics and Political Science., 2021).

²²⁵ Translation: "To conquer"

The players are, however, not the only audience. The Ultras perform for themselves, too. Their chants act as testimonies of belonging. As Herrera notes, "chanting becomes a strong force for social bonding, of identification with the team, and, most important, of identification with the other fans."²²⁶ In this sense, football embodies the stage for something far bigger, which goes beyond a 90-minute spectacle. The performance is for the institution of football, yes—but beneath this lies a more powerful, symbolic institution: masculinity. It is this identity and its ideology that is being rehearsed and reaffirmed through sonic ritual. Furthermore, this is shaped and sustained by the presence, absence, and labor of women. The next chapter turns to those on the margins of ritual, asking what roles women play in upholding, resisting, or being excluded from football's masculine arena.

²²⁶ Eduardo Herrera, "Masculinity, Violence, and Deindividuation in Argentine Soccer Chants: The Sonic Potentials of Participatory Sounding-in-Synchrony," *Ethnomusicology* 62, no. 3 (October 1, 2018): 483.

7. The Women.

The Invisible Labor of Women in Men's Football Spaces

This chapter critically examines women's often invisible labor and peripheral positioning within Austrian football spaces, analyzing their sonic marginalization, material and symbolic contributions, and digital roles in reinforcing or challenging hegemonic masculinity. It shifts the lens from men's performances to the gendered exclusions that enable these performances. In other words, it asks: How are women perceived and instrumentalized in the construction of a hegemonic hypermasculine arena?

7.1 Heard or Silenced? Women's Voices in Football Soundscapes

This subchapter starts by examining the aural dimension of exclusion in football. While women's labor is often overlooked in more visible ways, it is equally revealing to ask how their presence is shaped or erased through sound.

Football's soundscape functions as a gendered arena, where chants, silences, and vocal expression determine who belongs, who is heard, and who is systematically silenced.

Drawing on ethnographic observations from both amateur and professional games in Vienna, I examine how hegemonic masculinity is given voice through sound, and how women's sonic presence is perceived within this acoustic space.

I will analyze moments when women's voices appear on the pitch, in the stands, or behind the scenes, and consider how they are filtered through structures that privilege masculine vocality by drawing on Ehrick's "sonic patriarchy"²²⁷. I will pay particular attention to the chants sung

²²⁷ Christine Ehrick, *Radio and the Gendered Soundscape: Women and Broadcasting in Argentina and Uruguay, 1930–1950*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

by fans of Rapid, some of which depict women in upsettingly violent, hypersexualized, and dehumanizing terms. These chants mirror a broader sonic structure that reinforces gender hierarchies and heteronormativity. To further contextualize this soundscape, I draw on theoretical frameworks from Butler, Stoever, and LaBelle²²⁸, alongside insights from my observations in the field.

This section's aim is to listen for more than just voice, volume, or vibration; it listens for power. Who gets to shout, and who must whisper? Whose voice is legitimate, and whose becomes mere noise? In football culture, are women ever heard, or are they assigned sonic absence in ways that reinforce their social exclusion? By examining football's gendered acoustic arena, I will show how sound itself can shape identity, exclusion, and resistance.

I argue that sound in Austrian football is a complex structure of power—a ritualized performance of belonging and dominance that continually reinforces hegemonic masculinity. At both amateur matches at LAC and professional Rapid games, I observed how the sonic landscape includes, excludes, and polices gendered behavior. As Herrera argues:

By producing and reproducing ideas about fandom, group identity, and manhood in general, chanting as collective action acts as a type of mass ritual that, through repetitive and redundant performances, elicits peer-group validation of behaviors that can be homophobic, racist, and violent.²²⁹

Through this process, fans and players are able to embody a collective voice—one that abstracts the individual and becomes a performance of group identity.

²²⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Jennifer Lynn Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*, Postmillennial Pop (New York: New York University Press, 2016); Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

²²⁹ Eduardo Herrera, "Masculinity, Violence, and Deindividuation in Argentine Soccer Chants: The Sonic Potentials of Participatory Sounding-in-Synchrony," *Ethnomusicology* 62, no. 3 (October 1, 2018): 472.

Central to Herrera's analysis is the concept of *aguante*, a philosophy developed by scholars Pablo Alabarces, José Garriga Zucal, María Verónica Moreira, and Javier Sebastian Bundio²³⁰. *Aguante* can be defined as "an honor code and prestige system that distinguishes fans by emphasizing courage, bravado, endurance, stoicism, and fearlessness [...]. It is fundamentally a masculine narrative [...]"²³¹.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the chants of Rapid, which rely on misogyny and hypersexuality to embody masculine unity:

"Ja wir sind Wiener, asoziale Wiener, schlafen unter Brücken, schicken unsere Weiber auf den Strich..."²³²

These lyrics openly embrace marginalization ("antisocial"), poverty or homelessness ("sleep under bridges"), and extreme misogyny through the commodification of women ("send our women to work the streets," i.e., into sex work). Another chant relies on pornographic imagery and alcohol as sonic emblems of masculinity:

"Wir lieben Riesentitten und den Suff, wir gehen drei mal täglich in das Puff"²³³

Finally:

"Oh Austrianer Hurensöhne aus Wien 10, eure Mütter haben wir gefickt die ganze Nacht, Sie stöhnten schon beim Anblick unser grünen Farbenpracht..."²³⁴

²³⁰ Pablo Alabarces, José Garriga Zucal, and María Verónica Moreira, "El 'aguante' y las hinchadas argentinas: una relación violenta," *Horizontes Antropológicos* 14, no. 30 (December 2008): 113–36.

²³¹ Eduardo Herrera, "Masculinity, Violence, and Deindividuation in Argentine Soccer Chants: The Sonic Potentials of Participatory Sounding-in-Synchrony," *Ethnomusicology* 62, no. 3 (October 1, 2018): 473.

²³² Translation: "Yes, we are Viennese, antisocial Viennese, we sleep under bridges, we send our women to work the streets" From Salem, Sophie. *Field Notes*. Vienna. April 27, 2025.

²³³ Translation: "We love huge tits and getting wasted, we go to the brothel three times a day" in Salem, Sophie. *Field Notes*. Vienna. April 27, 2025.

²³⁴ Translation: "Oh Austrianer, sons of prostitutes from Vienna's 10th district, we spent the entire night with your mothers—they were moaning at the mere sight of our green colors."—"Austrianer" refers to supporters of FK Austria Wien, Rapid's main rival football club, whose fans are often targeted in hostile and gendered vocal rituals.

This chant exemplifies hypermasculine bravado, as the concept of aguante suggests, by celebrating excessive sexuality. The vulgar lyrics reinforce a collective identity rooted in misogyny, objectification, and a performance of exaggerated masculinity.

These chants, while outrageous, are not spontaneous, but codified rituals that sonically establish football as a space for a particular kind of masculinity: one that is loud, aggressive, heteronormative, and deeply exclusionary. They exemplify what I propose as the sonic gender line: an aural boundary that reinforces gendered hierarchies by privileging certain masculinized vocal practices while marginalizing feminine and queer sonic expressions. Similarly, in Austrian football, sonic practices establish and maintain boundaries around hegemonic masculinity, deciding what is acceptable and what is not within the football community. These sonic boundaries reinforce traditional gender hierarchies and ensure that masculinity is performed and perceived consistently within prescribed norms.

Within these sonic rituals, women's voices are not just excluded: they are absorbed into the very structure of masculine performance. They are reduced to symbols to be dominated, ventriloquized, or silenced. Connor's analysis of ventriloquism as a cultural metaphor²³⁵ helps to uncover how these chants can be projections of deeper, collective anxieties rather than merely direct expressions of individual or group emotion. Within the ritualized context of football, sound becomes a ventriloquial act: power, shame and pride are woven into the sonic space, where they are abstracted, yet laden with cultural meaning. For Connor, ventriloquism illustrates how the voice is never singular or isolated—it is split, always partially elsewhere. He conceptualizes voice not as a fixed trait but as something dynamic and performative: "A voice is not a condition, nor yet an attribute, but an event. It is less something that exists than

²³⁵ Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

something which occurs."²³⁶ This split allows dominant frameworks to speak through collective voices, anonymizing the individual while exposing the social scripts hidden underneath the surface of masculine performance. Collective chanting, therefore, acts as a form of vocal ventriloquism, where individual fans disappear as they merge into a collective sound that, by extension, abstracts and anonymizes women within the values of hegemonic masculinity.

In observations of amateur football games at LAC, the sonic dimension of women's identity was apparent not only through words, but in the voice—or lack thereof. My impression during the game was that male players and spectators do not just participate in sound, they vocally dominate the space. These performances are more than ways of expressing frustration or joy; they are weaponized to establish authority and police belonging.

From an early age, boys are socialized into this sonic dominance. As recorded in my field notes, young boys mimic their fathers and coaches—in the content of what is shouted onto the pitch, but also in the volume and tone. Loudness becomes a learned embodiment of power, of the sonic patriarchy²³⁷.

The girls on the field are usually sisters or daughters. They mostly stick close to their moms, speaking quietly or not at all. Some just stand around, watching, but not really taking part. Their voices are barely heard over the noise of the boys and men. You get the sense they already know this space isn't really for them.²³⁸

This contrast in who gets to be loud and who stays quiet is not just social—it is sonic. It reflects the sonic gender line: the way certain kinds of vocal presence, whether loud, assertive, or masculine, are treated as natural, while others are sidelined or made to feel out of place.

²³⁶ Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck* (Oxford University Press, 2000): 4.

²³⁷ Christine Ehrick, *Radio and the Gendered Soundscape: Women and Broadcasting in Argentina and Uruguay, 1930–1950*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²³⁸ Salem, Sophie. *Field Notes*. Vienna. April 4, 2025.

This division helps maintain a soundscape where power is quite literally heard, and silence becomes a form of exclusion.

As these boys become players and men, this dominance solidifies. Any deviation from the script is policed. One such instance occurred when a player wearing an earring was mocked: "Did you make sure it wasn't the right ear?"²³⁹ The comment refers to a homophobic stereotype which claims that wearing an earring in the right ear is a marker of homosexuality, whereas wearing it in the left ear is considered heterosexual. Though framed as a joke, these kinds of remarks function as sonic micro-aggressions, drawing clear boundaries around acceptable gender performance. Slurs like "Schwuchtel"²⁴⁰, yelled across the field in moments of frustration, further show how homophobia is tolerated and even normalized through sound. These auditory borders shame queerness and reinforce heteronormative masculinity. In this system, pitch, volume, and timing matter as much as content.

At times, however, this audible homophobia is interrupted by gestures that reveal an alternative relation to masculinity, whether intentionally or not. A notable moment was observed during an LAC game, when a player comforted his teammate after a mistake, offering words of reassurance instead of the expected public slap on the wrist or shame-filled silence²⁴¹. The tenderness of this interaction, though subtle, had a disruptive connotation to it. In a field where loudness, aggression and heteronormativity are encouraged, softness itself became an almost rebellious sound. This supports LaBelle's²⁴² argument that the voice is not only a tool for projecting power but also for creating intimacy and vulnerability.

²³⁹ Salem, Sophie. *Field Notes*. Vienna, April 2025.

²⁴⁰ Translation of *Schwuchtel*: Derogatory term for a homosexual man.

²⁴¹ Salem, Sophie. *Field Notes*. Vienna. April 4, 2025.

²⁴² Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014).

While men can allow themselves vulnerability without threatening their place in the masculine structure, the same flexibility does not extend to women. The gendered policing of sound continues to be mirrored in the silence of women. Female spectators—girlfriends, mothers, wives—rarely raise their voices:

During today's match, a 'bad call' from the ref sparked much disapproval from the stands. A group of men stood up, arms waving, voices blasting. A woman beside them flinched slightly but stayed quiet. She exchanged a glance with another woman that said 'typical', then looked back down at her phone. Neither of them reacted out loud. The contrast was clear: loud frustration belonged to the men, quiet composure to the women²⁴³.

Women's presence is mostly noted through unpaid labor, rather than vocal participation.

When they do speak, their voices are seen as supportive, secondary, or even disruptive if they fail to fit into the dominant masculine rhythm. This sonic marginalization enforces a patriarchal aural order: women's voices are systematically backgrounded, functioning as quiet spectators for the spectacle of masculine sound.

Therefore, noise in Austrian football is not a neutral acoustic phenomenon; it is a socio-political performance. Who is heard, and how they are heard, is shaped by ideologically constructed norms that reflect and reinforce broader structures of power, producing and maintaining gender hierarchies through the seemingly simple, innocent act of sound.

However, these hierarchies are not limited to the auditory realm. They also manifest in the visual, spatial, and symbolic dimensions of football culture.

7.2 Seen and Unseen: Women's Material and Symbolic Contributions to Football

Spaces

In the predominantly masculine environment of Austrian amateur football, women's physical presence travels between visibility and invisibility, essential yet systematically overlooked

²⁴³ Salem, Sophie. *Field Notes*. Vienna. April 4, 2025.

and actively marginalized. Ethnographic observations at amateur matches reveal how women's labor as mothers, caregivers, and supportive partners continuously shapes player's experiences both on and off the pitch. Despite this, women remain excluded from core team-building rituals, initiation ceremonies, and player's perceptions of women's labor. Women are perceived as distractions, mere entertainment, or supporting figures rather than integral contributors to football careers. This dynamic is captured in Carrigan et al.'s claim that "hegemony closely involves the division of labor, the social definition of tasks as either 'men's work' or 'women's work.'"²⁴⁴ Field observations, such as mothers managing children or carrying club-gear, and interactions where men jokingly express annoyance at parental responsibilities, underscore how football spaces heavily perpetuate traditional gender roles. Interviews with players further reflect this paradoxical dynamic; even though mothers and girlfriends visibly and materially support them, players explicitly claim that women play little to no meaningful role in their football experiences. This section explores these contradictions, drawing on ethnographic field notes, player narratives, and theoretical perspectives on gendered labor to demonstrate how, on the one hand, women's roles are essentialized, while on the other, they are marginalized and forgotten.

From early childhood on, women's symbolic and material labor shapes footballer's experiences and environments, a role consistently dismissed by players themselves. David (23)'s recollection shows this early foundational labor clearly:

My mom often came to watch the games when I was young; she drove me to practice and so forth, but primarily my dad, my coaches, and my role models like Oliver Kahn had the greatest influence on my football career.²⁴⁵

Despite acknowledging his mother's regular support, David (23) downplayed its impact, prioritizing male role models that had more formal and recognized roles in football instead.

²⁴⁴ Tim Carrigan, Bob Connell, and John Lee, "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity," *Theory and Society* 14, no. 5 (1985): 594.

²⁴⁵ Anonymous interviewee n°1, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 4, 2025.

Paul (21) expressed a similar sentiment. Responding to a question about his parent's impact on his football career, he said: "My mom didn't have any role I would say in terms of football for me, yeah." After a follow-up question in which I inquired about her attendance at football games, Paul (21) elaborated:

Yeah, yeah, she was coming to watch, but I wouldn't speak to her a lot about it, like she would come to support me and that's it... But like after a game I wouldn't talk to her about how I played or how the game was.²⁴⁶

Another interviewee, Jonathan (21), mirrored these responses: "I think the main person behind all sports activities has always been my dad."²⁴⁷ Again, the mother figure was only mentioned once explicitly asked about:

As a motivator, she definitely played a role. She always supported me. The one who was more about the emotional side of things and how it might affect me, I'd say, was my mom. And the one who really sparked my interest in sports, that was my dad.²⁴⁸

Daniel (24) had a more straightforward response when asked about whether women had any influence on his football career: "None." When prompted further, he added:

No. At the games, as a child, sometimes my mom was there. Later on, occasionally a girlfriend would show up, but only now and then. It didn't matter to me. I blocked it out.²⁴⁹

Elias (20) recognized his mother's labor to a certain degree:

I think my mom was there in ways my dad was not. When I got hurt, she'd take care of me. She packed the food, drove me and waited for me during practice. She did sacrifice a lot for football. But at the end of the day, she was a stay-at-home mom and my dad was working, making money so we could afford shoes and gear in the first place, so I don't know... It's hard²⁵⁰.

While Elias (20) acknowledges his mother's presence and effort and highlights acts of care, he frames them as secondary to his father's financial contributions. Even as he uses the word "sacrifice," his reflection reveals an internalized hierarchy of value: emotional and symbolic

²⁴⁶ Anonymous interviewee n°3, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 14, 2025.

²⁴⁷ Anonymous interviewee n°4, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 18, 2025.

²⁴⁸ Anonymous interviewee n°4, 2025.

²⁴⁹ Anonymous interviewee n°2, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 10, 2025.

²⁵⁰ Anonymous interviewee n°5, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 21, 2025.

unpaid labor is recognized, but the economic role his father played still overshadows it. This comparison shows how gendered labor in football is differently valued. Care work is typically morally appreciated by players but not framed as indispensable. Women are there to "support"²⁵¹ "motivate"²⁵² "care"²⁵³ and even "sacrifice"²⁵⁴, but in the end, this labor rarely earns more than an honorable mention, a brief recognition, and is at times entirely forgotten, dismissed, or simply "blocked out."²⁵⁵ Women's investment and encouragement are sidelined, treated as peripheral to the athlete's lived football experiences and seemingly taken for granted.

My observations on the field, however, provide added depth to these narratives. I was watching a Sunday game between two amateur football clubs in Vienna:

Many women and children are present, since weekend games tend to overlap with the club's junior league practice. Women's tasks are visible, yet they go largely unnoticed: mothers and girlfriends handle childcare, carry backpacks and gear, as well as sell tickets, food, and beer. Women seem to take on this labor to ensure that their partners can fully immerse themselves in the game without being bothered.²⁵⁶

This field note captures just one of many moments where women's symbolic and material labor goes unacknowledged—an ongoing pattern that sustains the gendered hierarchy of football culture. For instance, when a spectator briefly engaged in childcare, his (male) friends humorously pressured him back toward the pitch: "So, did you get rid of the stroller?"²⁵⁷ The stroller, in this instance, was intended to personify both the child and the mother, explicitly framing familial duties as interruptions or distractions. On multiple occasions, when children approached their fathers with questions, they were brushed off with classic phrases like: "Go

²⁵¹ Anonymous interviewee n°3, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 14, 2025.

²⁵² Anonymous interviewee n°4, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 18, 2025.

²⁵³ Anonymous interviewee n°5, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 21, 2025.

²⁵⁴ Anonymous interviewee n°5, 2025.

²⁵⁵ Anonymous interviewee n°2, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 10, 2025.

²⁵⁶ Salem, Sophie. *Field Notes*. Vienna. April 13, 2025.

²⁵⁷ Salem, Sophie. *Field Notes*. Vienna, April 13, 2025.

ask your mom" or "daddy's busy, where's mom?"²⁵⁸ beer in hand, eyes fixed on the pitch, in between shouts like "Ref, open your eyes! That was a clear foul!"²⁵⁹

As players grow older, the exclusion of women intensifies; their role transitions from involved caregivers to supporters whose labor happens mainly behind the scenes.

Ethnographic observations from another game, where no children from the junior league were present, revealed a drastic decline in female presence. Only a few girlfriends and wives were spotted, although they typically sat alone, unlike the men, who liked forming groups, drinking, and eating together, as they gossiped about the game. The sense of solidarity and community that seemed integral to the male audience was largely—if not entirely—absent from the women's experience. In many cases, women in football are not seen as genuine supporters of the sport. According to Sülzle²⁶⁰, women involved in football fandom are typically presumed to be there not because they enjoy football themselves, but because they are interested in the men who do: they are seen as "attachments" rather than genuine fans²⁶¹. Kossakowski makes a similar argument: "The narrative that dominates in football culture maintains that the presence of women in the stands is not caused by passion but by their dutiful attitude towards the partner. Thus, their role is to keep company to their men and try not to interfere with the rituals."²⁶²

This stereotypical perception denies women full recognition within fan communities and excludes them from community rituals. Despite the unwelcoming atmosphere of football

²⁵⁸ Salem, Sophie. 2025.

²⁵⁹ Salem, Sophie. 2025.

²⁶⁰ Almut Sülzle, *Fussball, Frauen, Männlichkeiten: eine ethnographische Studie im Fanblock* (Frankfurt ; New York: Campus Verlag, 2011)

²⁶¹ Almut Sülzle, 2011: 17.

²⁶² Radosław Kossakowski, Dominik Antonowicz, and Honorata Jakubowska, "'Partners', 'Mothers', and 'Tomboys'. Female Football Fans in the Structural Trap of Assigned Roles in Poland," *Soccer & Society* 23, no. 3 (April 3, 2022): 277.

matches for women, reflected in their limited presence, interviews suggest that their presence on the pitch holds significantly more importance than players were initially willing to admit.

In an interview, Paul (21) reflected on what originally drew him to the sport:

Girls liked football players. You wanted to be better and improve also because of that aspect of being more likable to girls.²⁶³

Similarly, Max (23) revealed:

I hate to admit it, and I usually *am* completely focused on the game, but if I spot a cutie in the crowd, you might be able to tell I'm performing differently. Even better I'd argue.²⁶⁴

This mindset echoes findings from Heissenberger's ethnographic study on Austrian amateur football, where one of the players describes the field as a performative space: "It's a stage. All the girls are standing around outside. It's a constant proving ground for oneself."²⁶⁵

In her work on cricket in the Black Atlantic, Joseph²⁶⁶ touches on women's presence in sport and claims that "women contribute to men's gender performances in sport communities, even if they are relegated to the area outside the playing field." While women seem to be unwanted, unappreciated and at times openly rejected by the male football community, they are vital to the construction of the myth of masculinity. After all, masculinity cannot exist without femininity. Connell and Messerschmidt²⁶⁷ support this claim in their re-examination of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, encouraging the reintroduction of femininity into the model. As they argue, "gender is always relational, and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from some model (whether real or imaginary) of femininity."²⁶⁸

²⁶³ Anonymous interviewee n°3, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 14, 2025.

²⁶⁴ Anonymous interviewee n°6, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 12, 2025.

²⁶⁵ Stefan Heissenberger, "Männlichkeiten Im Fußball. Amateurspieler in Österreich Zwischen Leistung, Heterosexualität, Abgrenzung, Entgrenzung Und Inszenierung," *Zeitschrift Für Ethnologie* 141, no. 1 (2016): 55.

²⁶⁶ Janelle Joseph, *Sport in the Black Atlantic: Cricket, Canada and the Caribbean Diaspora* (Manchester University Press, 2017).

²⁶⁷ R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (December 2005): 829-859.

²⁶⁸ Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 848.

Still, football players continue to distinguish between spaces where women are welcome and the homosocial, exclusively male domains. During team-building events or initiation rituals, players do not consider women to be essential. In an interview with Paul (21), he notes:

The dinner part should be just for players, coaches, and everyone who is part of the football club—so no girlfriends, wives, and stuff like that. Afterwards, when we go out partying, girls are welcome... more like for the fun part.²⁶⁹

Jonathan (21) expressed something similar:

If the idea is to meet and, say, spend the first part of the evening talking tactics or other team matters, something more serious than just having a laugh, then I'd suggest agreeing to meet earlier with the team alone, cover the business portion, and only afterward open it up so girls can drop in if they like.²⁷⁰

David (23) and Daniel (24) further affirm this view, explicitly stating that women's presence at team events or ritual spaces is generally "very unusual"²⁷¹ or "simply not done,"²⁷² reinforcing the notion that women's labor and presence are important in football's masculine mythology yet selectively included. They are valued as spectators, caretakers, or "fun" accessories, but banned from the inner circles where masculinity is actively constructed and affirmed.

Another important aspect of women's involvement in the preservation of masculinity is their instrumental role in the broader quest to legitimize heteronormativity. Rather than actively legitimizing it themselves, women often function as symbolic figures through which heteronormative ideals are reinforced. Joseph argues:

In order to disavow homosexuality, it is imperative that there are some women – girlfriends, wives and mistresses – present who can bolster the men's heterosexual identities. [Cricket and] social spaces are places for the performance of dominant [Afro-Caribbean] masculinities, which depend upon homosociality laced with homophobic jokes and banter that

²⁶⁹ Anonymous interviewee n°3, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 14, 2025.

²⁷⁰ Anonymous interviewee n°4, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 18, 2025.

²⁷¹ Anonymous interviewee n°1, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 4, 2025.

²⁷² Anonymous interviewee n°3, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 14, 2025.

denigrate gays and transsexuals, and exclude or marginalise women while relying on their labour.²⁷³

In Austrian football, as in Joseph's analysis of cricket, masculinity is maintained through homosocial bonding that depends on women to solidify heteronormativity while paradoxically excluding them. Paul (21) illustrates the dynamic as he recalls locker room conversations:

The jokes in the locker room are for sure more homophobic and sexist than outside. And in that space, you laugh more at the jokes and maybe you adjust more to the environment than you would outside of football.²⁷⁴

Thus, even as women's labor supports the masculine spectacle of Austrian football, it remains largely invisible and unacknowledged. Yet marginalization does not end once the physical boundaries of the pitch are surpassed. The next section turns to football's digital arenas—specifically social media—where women's visibility takes an intriguing turn. Can these virtual arenas offer empowerment, or do they merely extend women's marginal status?

7.3 Virtual Cheerleading: Women's Marginal Presence Online

While women are often excluded from football's physical and sonic spaces, their presence in the digital world—particularly on social media—reveals new forms of visibility and marginalization. This subchapter explores LAC's Instagram page (@lacinter1911), focusing on its viral "Frage der Woche"²⁷⁵ videos, where players answer weekly questions. Though at times football-related, many of these questions are centered around women: "Are you taken?"²⁷⁶, "Blondes or brunettes?"²⁷⁷, "Champions League final or holiday with your girlfriend?"²⁷⁸, or "who would plan the best date?"²⁷⁹ This format positions women as

²⁷³ Janelle Joseph, *Sport in the Black Atlantic: Cricket, Canada and the Caribbean Diaspora* (Manchester University Press, 2017): 182.

²⁷⁴ Anonymous interviewee n°3, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 14, 2025.

²⁷⁵ *Frage der Woche*: Question of the week

²⁷⁶ @lacinter1911. "Wärst du gerne vergeben?" *Instagram*, Video, January 31, 2025.

²⁷⁷ @lacinter1911. "Team blond oder Team brünett?" *Instagram*, Video, April 12, 2024.

²⁷⁸ @lacinter1911. „Freundin oder Championsleague?" *instagram*, Video, March 7, 2025.

²⁷⁹ @lacinter1911. „Die besten Dates plant..." *Instagram*, Video, August 23, 2024.

accessories, or supporting cast in male bonding rituals, reinforcing masculine and heteronormative standards. Notably, the videos that center around women consistently receive the highest view counts and engagement, suggesting that femininity is instrumentalized to boost visibility while remaining excluded.

Despite the club's heavy reliance on female followers to boost engagement, women are not addressed as football fans, but rather as spectators of masculinity. Their presence is essential to the club's online success, yet structurally marginalized—a form of virtual cheerleading where support and visibility does not mean inclusion. As Cleland notes, "Men are continuously looking at ways of reconfiguring their own notions of masculinity, and the Internet is one place where this is being found."²⁸⁰ LAC's content exemplifies this: the pitch becomes a digital stage where masculinity is performed for a female audience that remains just outside the frame.

In fact, the account's analytics I have acquired from the owner further underscore this dynamic. With 12.3k followers, 43% of those engaging with the content are women²⁸¹—a surprisingly high proportion for a football-focused page. Most active users fall within the 18–24 age range (39%)²⁸², suggesting that the account plays a certain role in shaping perceptions of football and gender among younger audiences. However, a look at who the club follows tells a different story: out of 216 followed accounts, only six belong to women, four of whom are known to be player's mothers or girlfriends. This contrast shows that while women are essential to the account's engagement metrics, they remain excluded from its mutual social

²⁸⁰ Jamie Cleland, "Discussing Homosexuality on Association Football Fan Message Boards: A Changing Cultural Context," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 50, no. 2 (March 2015): 126.

²⁸¹ LAC Instagram account owner. Personal communication. April 2025.

²⁸² LAC Instagram account owner. Personal communication. April 2025.

connections. In this space, women are both central and invisible, used to generate reach and relevance. Social media does not disrupt football's gender hierarchies; it digitizes them.

On LAC's Instagram page, football content increasingly adapts to gender performance, where masculinity is staged not only through sport, but also through social media rituals.

Unsurprisingly, the videos that use hashtags like #girlfriend, #love, #boys and #flirting consistently outperform others in terms of views, likes and comments. The video asking whether players are "taken" has reached 1.9 million views, followed by "Champions League or holiday with your girlfriend?" with 746k views, and "Blondes or brunettes?" with 197k. Most comment sections are dominated by young girls, filled with playful objectification: "I'll take all of them"; "Number 17 is hot"²⁸³ or, more humorously, "Dear Tinder, if the girlfriends of the players see this, then the boys will need a free account with you"²⁸⁴—suggesting that if the player's girlfriends watch these videos or read the comments, breakups might follow. Some commenters seem content embracing the role of virtual and physical supporters, with remarks like: "Girls, let's go watch them at practice."²⁸⁵

Still, within the flirtation and admiration, a few voices raise critique, questioning the predictable nature of the questions. One reads: "Of course footballers are heterosexual and have a girlfriend... Why don't you ask: Girlfriend *or* boyfriend?"²⁸⁶ The sarcasm in "of course" criticizes the assumption of heterosexuality, exposing how the format reinforces a heteronormative script. While women are key to the popularity of these videos, they are framed as accessories to heterosexual male identity rather than full participants.

²⁸³ @lacinter1911. „Freundin oder Championsleague?" *instagram*, Comments, March 7, 2025.

²⁸⁴ @lacinter1911. „Freundin oder Championsleague?" *instagram*, Comments, March 7, 2025.

²⁸⁵ @lacinter1911. "Wärs du gerne vergeben?" *Instagram*, Comments, January 31, 2025.

²⁸⁶ @lacinter1911. „Freundin oder Championsleague?" *instagram*, Comments, March 7, 2025.

This dynamic of exclusion extends beyond public content into more private digital spaces. Conversations with two of the players, Elias (20) and Max (23), reveal that football group chats can serve as digital extensions of the locker room, spaces where masculinity is performed in a more extreme, unfiltered way. Both interviewees distanced themselves from actively participating, but they acknowledged that the group chat often became a platform for deeply objectifying and inappropriate discussions. Elias (20) remarked:

I mean, some of the stuff you'll find in that group chat I'd say is borderline incriminating. I wouldn't want to show that to my girlfriend for sure.²⁸⁷

This demonstrates how the boundaries of what is acceptable in private, exclusively male spaces versus public or mixed-gender environments shift in the digital realm. Max (23) initially deflected when asked about the nature of the group chat, saying: "Well, I guess I wouldn't describe our football group chat as necessarily only football related... if you know what I mean"²⁸⁸ After pressing for clarification, he admitted, still carefully:

I just think that the videos and photos and maybe also some of the jokes could be taken out of context and could be interpreted as pretty...I guess vulgar and inappropriate.²⁸⁹

When questioned further about who might find the content offensive, he replied frankly:

Ok so let's put it this way: I think *you* might get offended by what's being sent around in there. I mean, they're all idiots in that chat, but they *are* really decent guys in real life so making assumptions about their personalities based on that chat would not be fair to them, you know?²⁹⁰

My positionality as a female researcher was what made Max (23) noticeably hesitant, revealing how my inquiry and gender identity directly confronted the norms of hegemonic masculinity that typically go unchallenged within these male-dominated spaces. Moreover, his defense of the other players reveals an important tension: the chat is seen as a private

²⁸⁷ Anonymous interviewee n°5, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 21, 2025.

²⁸⁸ Anonymous interviewee n°6, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 25, 2025.

²⁸⁹ Anonymous interviewee n°6, 2025.

²⁹⁰ Anonymous interviewee n°6, 2025.

space where otherwise "decent guys" feel compelled to participate, if not silently tolerate, misogynistic, homophobic, and hypersexualized behavior that would most likely be unacceptable elsewhere.

In addition to this, a certain solidarity and loyalty seems to emerge out of extreme male-only environments. Many interviewees emphasized that loyalty to one another and to the club was among the most valued traits in football culture. In this sense, the group chat functions much like a "portable locker room"²⁹¹—a ritual space where hegemonic masculinity can be safely performed and reinforced through humor, vulgarity, and the exclusion of women. As Wilson²⁹² argues in his study of rugby pre-match interactions, such spaces are actively constructed through ritualized communication practices that strengthen team identity and solidarity. In the digital sphere, the football group chat becomes a portable space of masculine bonding, where the values of loyalty, masculinity, and camaraderie are constantly performed. Unfortunately, misogynistic and homophobic discourse seems to play a key role in maintaining these values, as tools through which hegemonic masculinity defines itself in opposition to both femininities and non-dominant masculinities. These exclusions are central to how masculine solidarity is constructed, policed, and reinforced in spaces like the group chat.

This dynamic highlights how the digitalization of masculine spaces does not minimize the culture of misogyny and objectification in the slightest. On the contrary, it nourishes it. Protected by the apparent safety and privacy of the group chat, players feel empowered to cross boundaries that would be enforced in any other social or virtual setting. Much like the locker room, the football group chat becomes a safe place for hegemonic masculinity: a

²⁹¹Nick Wilson, "The Portable Locker Room: Language, Space, and Place in Rugby Pre-Match Interaction," *Communication & Sport* 6, no. 5 (October 2018): 547.

²⁹² Nick Wilson, "The Portable Locker Room: Language, Space, and Place in Rugby Pre-Match Interaction," *Communication & Sport* 6, no. 5 (October 2018): 547–69.

private theater where vulgar jokes, pornographic imagery, and sexist banter circulate without consequences. It mirrors a broader cultural dynamic where masculine solidarity depends on the normalization, legitimization and invisibilization of behaviors that, outside of these spaces, would be faced with serious criticism. The group chat, therefore, is a mechanism through which gendered hierarchies are reaffirmed, and the casual oppression of women and non-normative masculinities is practiced freely, disguised as humor, camaraderie, and the idea of 'boys just being boys.'

While digital spaces like Instagram and group chats offer new arenas for community and visibility in football culture, they tend to reinforce hegemonic masculinity. Women are simultaneously central and peripheral: they are crucial to boosting online engagement, their support appreciated, yet conditional to the amount of engagement they can foster through digital cheerleading. They are excluded from true participation, reduced to objects of flirtation or silent audiences for performances of masculinity. Comparably, the group chat serves as a portable locker room where solidarity is fueled by exclusion, vulgarity, and the ritual reinforcement of gender hierarchies. This analysis serves as a reminder that digitalization does not destabilize football culture; it simply creates new spaces for old structures to thrive. The Internet becomes yet another stage where masculinity can be safely performed, without accountability. In these digital rituals, women's labor, presence, and identity are instrumentalized without being given the credit they deserve.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined how rituals in Austrian football serve as a performative tool for constructing and sustaining hegemonic masculinity. Through a multi-sensory ethnographic lens—focusing on the interplay of the visual and the aural—this thesis has examined how masculinity is not innate but ritualized, repeated, and policed through symbols, sound, and collective behavior. Interviews, participant observation, and digital ethnography served as the primary methods for gathering data across these sensory dimensions.

From the individualized pre-match routines of LAC players, to the sacralized, nationalistic rituals of Rapid's Block West, masculinity acts as a cultural script, continuously performed and affirmed through ritual. At the heart of this script lies a specific ideal: white, working-class, heteronormative masculinity. This identity is upheld by collective practices coded as tradition, loyalty, and emotional control. Even when brief moments of irony or sonic drag hint at reflexivity or even subversion, they remain safe within a broader structure that resists social change. Meanwhile, women's labor—material, emotional, and digital—is instrumental yet undervalued, reinforcing the masculine stage without challenging it.

While the thesis centers on ritual and gender performance, it also uncovers silences that need further investigation: for example, the role of ethnicity in shaping masculine identity. Several players interviewed identified as ex-Yugoslav, yet this aspect was rarely addressed in their reflections on masculinity. Future research could explore how masculinity is constructed, negotiated, or contested along ethnic lines, particularly within Austrian football where Balkan masculinities often intersect or clash with dominant Austrian gender norms. Understanding how national identity, cultural histories and memory shape football masculinities could offer deeper insights into the various forms of hegemonic masculinity.

In sum, this thesis contributes to masculinity studies by demonstrating that masculinity in football is not a fixed attribute but a fluctuating, negotiable and performative identity—what Connell terms hegemonic masculinity²⁹³—an idealized form of masculinity that is constantly strived toward but ultimately unattainable. This ideal is maintained through embodied ritual, repetition, and exclusion, producing hierarchies not only between men and women but also among men themselves.

It also enriches sound studies by extending Stoevers's²⁹⁴ concept of the sonic color line into what I term the sonic gender line, thereby highlighting how football soundscapes reinforce gendered hierarchies through vocal norms, affective rituals, and aural boundaries. By shifting the focus from race to gender, this adaptation highlights how sonic practices—such as who is heard, how loudly, and how this is labeled—become central to the construction of masculinity and the marginalization of feminine or queer vocality. In doing so, the thesis aligns with the growing emphasis in sound studies on listening as a site of power rather than merely a sensory phenomenon. As Bull and Back assert, "Sound makes us rethink the meaning, nature and significance of our social experiences. [...] Sound makes us rethink our relationship to power."²⁹⁵, bringing into focus how aural structures can define social inclusion and exclusion.

In addition, the thesis contributes to sound studies by introducing the concept of sonic drag, adapted from Butler's theorization of gender drag²⁹⁶. This framing analyzes moments when vocal performance disrupts normative logics of voice, body, and gender identity, revealing

²⁹³ Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd ed (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2005); R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender & Society* 19, no. 6 (December 2005): 829–59.

²⁹⁴ Jennifer Lynn Stoevers, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*, Postmillennial Pop (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

²⁹⁵ Michael Bull and Les Back, *The Auditory Culture Reader*, 2nd edition, Sensory Formations Series (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016): 4.

²⁹⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990): 136–138.

how football's acoustic arena can serve not only to discipline but occasionally to subvert hegemonic masculinity through irony or exaggeration.

Within sport studies, this thesis contributes to a growing body of literature that conceptualizes sport as more than leisure or athletic performance, but as a ritualized site of identity formation and ideological reproduction. Building on Birrell's²⁹⁷ Durkheimian reading of sport as ritual, the thesis demonstrates how football rituals in Austria police gendered behavior and sustain hegemonic masculinities through symbolic practices, repetition, and sound. Birrell's²⁹⁸ conceptualization of sport as ritual and Serazio's²⁹⁹ analysis of fandom as a site of collective effervescence inform this study's framing of football as a space where ideological norms are reproduced through various sensory experiences and symbolic practice. The thesis also aligns with and builds on ideas from scholars like Heissenberger and Körner³⁰⁰, who examine Austrian football's entanglement with traditional male norms, by offering a multi-sensory approach that reveals how gender is produced visually, but also sonically and affectively.

In tracing how masculinity is chanted, staged, and sustained in Austrian football, this thesis makes clear that the pitch and stands are not just a space of play, but a battleground of belonging—where voices compete for authenticity, bodies are disciplined into ideals, and the rituals of the everyday echo far beyond the stadium. As one interviewee put it, "Fußball ist Leben"³⁰¹. This is not just a statement of devotion, but a reminder that football both mirrors and molds everyday life: it reflects who we are and shapes who we can be. If football rituals

²⁹⁷ Birrell, Susan. "Sport as Ritual: Interpretations from Durkheim to Goffman." *Social Forces* 60, no. 2 (December 1981): 354–76.

²⁹⁸ Birrell, 1981.

²⁹⁹ Michael Serazio, "The Elementary Forms of Sports Fandom: A Durkheimian Exploration of Team Myths, Kinship, and Totemic Rituals," *Communication & Sport* 1, no. 4 (December 2013): 1–36.

³⁰⁰ Stefan Heissenberger, "Männlichkeiten Im Fußball. Amateurspieler in Österreich Zwischen Leistung, Heterosexualität, Abgrenzung Und Inszenierung," *Zeitschrift Für Ethnologie* 141, no. 1 (2016): 41–59; Franziska Körner, "Fußball als moderner Zufluchtsort traditioneller Männlichkeit: Eine Analyse des sozialen Feldes Fußball unter dem Aspekt der Männlichkeit" (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2014).

³⁰¹ Translation: "Football is life" from Anonymous interviewee n°2, interviewed by Sophie Salem, Vienna, April 10, 2025.

can reproduce exclusion, then they can also be reimagined—destabilizing the very hierarchies they are currently upholding.

Appendices

Appendix A - Consent Form

The Arena of Masculinity:

Ritual, Performance, and Gender Dynamics in Austrian Football.

Sophie Salem, Masters Candidate
Department of Gender Studies, Central European University

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

This is to certify that I, _____, agree to participate in the research being conducted by Sophie Salem of the Gender Studies Department at Central European University. The extent of my involvement in this project will be to participate in one or more interviews with Sophie Salem, the primary investigator, in which I will be asked to speak about my own life and my experiences. My participation in this project is voluntary, and I may refuse to participate, withdraw at any time, and/or decline to answer any questions without negative consequences.

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of this research is to gain a broader understanding of ritual, performance and gender dynamics in Austrian football. The interviews will be combined with critical analysis to produce a master's thesis and may potentially be used for future publications. This research is being performed under the tutelage of Dr. Kris/Tina Országhová, professor of gender studies at Central European University.

B. PROCEDURES

This component of the research consists of a series of interviews conducted between the researcher, Sophie Salem, and the interviewee. The interview will be recorded on the personal cell phone of the researcher and the audio from the interview will remain in the private care of the researcher for transcription purposes. Written transcripts will be included in the final publication of the research, unless otherwise indicated by the interviewee, and all files of the audio recordings will be erased at the conclusion of the research process. Interviewees will be provided with a copy of the written transcript and/or audio files if so desired. In the resulting papers and publications, the interviewee will not be identified by name. A pseudonym will be used in place of their real name.

C. RISKS

There are **minimal risks** to participation in this interview. However, the interviewee can withdraw their participation from the interview at any time without prejudice. During the interview the interviewee may request to stop the recording at any time to discuss or clarify how they wish to respond to a question or topic before proceeding. In the event that the interviewee chooses to withdraw their participation entirely from the project during the

interview, any tape made of that particular interview and any previous interviews will either be given to the participant or destroyed, along with any transcripts made from previous interviews.

If so desired, the researcher will provide the interviewee with copies of the recorded interviews, written transcripts, and any/all related papers and publications written by the researcher.

Upon completion of the interview, the tape and content of the interview belong to the researcher, Sophie Salem, and the information in the interview can be used by Sophie Salem for the purposes of the master's research, and in any further publication or presentation of research.

D. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION (please initial to give consent)

_____ I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue participation at any time without negative consequences.

_____ I agree to have my interview(s) recorded

_____ I agree to be quoted directly **OR** _____ I agree to be quoted anonymously in the presentation of the research

_____ I agree to the release of the transcript(s) of my interview(s) for the purpose of publication

_____ I request copies of _____ all recorded interviews, _____ written transcripts,

_____ the final publication of the research
To be sent to me at the following email address:

_____ I request to be informed of any future attempts the researcher pursues to publish the research following submission of the master's thesis

E. INTERVIEWEE'S COMMENTS

Please identify below any desired restrictions related to the collection and publication of information from your interview.

I HAVE CAREFULLY READ THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I
FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS
STUDY.

Interview Name:

Interviewee Signature:

Date: _____

Interviewer Signature:

Date: _____

Should you have any questions or concerns about this project or your rights as a participant, please contact Sophie Salem, salem_sophie@student.ceu.edu or

I WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR MY OWN RECORDS.

Appendix B - Interview questionnaire, original (German)

Persönlicher Hintergrund

- Wie alt bist du und seit wann spielst du Fußball?
- Auf welcher Position spielst du hauptsächlich und warum?
- Kannst du mir kurz erzählen, wie du zum Fußball gekommen bist?

Allgemeine Bedeutung von Fußball und Ritualen

- Welche Rolle spielt Fußball in deinem persönlichen Leben?
- Glaubst du wärst du jetzt anders als Mensch, hättest du nie mit Fußball angefangen?
- Gibt es spezielle Rituale, die du persönlich vor oder nach einem Spiel durchführst? (z.B. bestimmte Abläufe, Routinen, Glücksbringer) bzw gibt es Sachen, auf die du vor einem Match zb immer verzichtest?
- Hörst du bestimmte Musik vor einem Match, oder nach einem Sieg oder nach einer Niederlage?
- Welche Rolle spielen gemeinsame Rituale (z.B. Gesänge, Einstandsfeiern/gruppenrituale, Mannschaftssessen, Musik) in deiner Mannschaft?
- Gibt es zwischen Spielern eine gewisse Solidarität, Loyalität im Sinne von 'was in der Kabine besprochen wird, oder was bei der Einstandsfeier passiert, das bleibt unter uns'?
- Wie steht zu weiblicher Präsenz bei diesen Ritualen?
- Wie wichtig sind die Zuschauer für dich? Wie würdest du die Beziehung zwischen Spielern und Zuschauern beschreiben?

Fußball und Männlichkeit

- Welche Verhaltensweisen oder Eigenschaften werden deiner Meinung nach im Fußball besonders wertgeschätzt?
- Hast du schon erlebt, dass ein Spieler kritisiert oder ausgeschlossen wurde, weil er nicht bestimmten (männlichen) Erwartungen entsprochen hat? Kannst du dir vorstellen, dass das passieren könnte?
- Wie gehen Spieler und Mannschaften mit Niederlagen um? Gibt es bestimmte Rituale oder Erwartungen im Umgang mit Niederlagen?

- Wie reagieren Spieler auf Verletzungen oder Schwäche? Gibt es Erwartungen, wie man mit Schmerzen umgehen soll? Was hältst du persönlich davon, wenn Spieler eine Verletzung vortäuschen oder übertreiben, um einen Freistoß oder eine Karte für den Gegner zu provozieren? Siehst du es eher als cleveres Mittel oder als unsportlich?
- Wie sieht deiner Meinung nach die Kultur in der Kabine aus? Gibt es dort Verhaltensweisen, die nur in diesem geschützten Raum möglich oder akzeptiert sind?
- Wie erlebst du körperliche Berührungen unter Spielern, z.B. Klapse auf den Po oder Umarmungen? Welche Bedeutung haben solche Gesten für dich?
- Denkst du, dass bestimmte körperliche oder emotionale Ausdrücke unter Männern am Fußballfeld akzeptabler sind als außerhalb?

Nationalismus und Religion im Fußball

- Gibt es Rituale in deiner Mannschaft, die mit Nationalstolz oder kultureller Identität zusammenhängen?
- Haben religiöse oder abergläubische Rituale eine Bedeutung für dich oder deine Teamkollegen? Wenn ja, welche?
- Wie bewertest du den Einfluss solcher Rituale auf den Zusammenhalt oder die Dynamik innerhalb der Mannschaft?
- Hast du das Gefühl, dass manche Rituale im Fußball, egal ob von Spielern oder Zuschauern bzw. Fans, eine besondere Bedeutung haben, die über das Spiel hinaus geht?
- Glaubst du, dass Fans durch ihr Verhalten, vor allem die extremen Fans, bestimmte Vorstellungen von Männlichkeit fördern?
- Was hältst du von folgender Aussage: „das Stadion ist ein Rückzugsort und Zufluchtsraum für eine altmodische und veraltete Vorstellung von Männlichkeit.“ (Kaelberer 2020)
- Das ist eine Aussage vom deutschen Torwart Toni Schumacher: "Während wichtiger Turniere wie Weltmeisterschaften brauche ich meine Frau überhaupt nicht. In dieser Zeit verzichte ich auf Sex. Schließlich bin ich kein Gorilla. In dieser Phase stelle ich das erotische Leben beiseite und denke nur an eines: Champion zu werden, der beste Torwart der Welt zu werden. Ich habe in diesem Zeitraum nicht einmal einen Moment für Vergnügen und Erregung."

Abschluss: Gibt es noch etwas, das du zum Thema Fußball, Rituale oder Männlichkeit hinzufügen möchtest?

Interview questionnaire, translated (English)

Personal Background

- How old are you and since when have you been playing football?
- What position do you primarily play and why?
- Can you briefly tell me how you got into football?

General Meaning of Football and Rituals

- What role does football play in your personal life?
- Do you think you would be a different person now if you had never started playing football?
- Are there specific rituals that you personally perform before or after a game? (e.g. certain routines, habits, lucky charms) or are there things you always avoid before a match?
- Do you listen to specific music before a match, or after a win or a loss?
- What role do shared rituals (e.g. chants, initiation celebrations/group rituals, team dinners, music) play in your team?
- Is there a kind of solidarity or loyalty among players in the sense of "what happens in the locker room or during the initiation stays among us"?
- How is female presence viewed in these rituals?
- How important are the spectators to you? How would you describe the relationship between players and spectators?

Football and Masculinity

- Which behaviors or traits do you think are particularly valued in football?
- Have you ever experienced a player being criticized or excluded because he didn't meet certain (masculine) expectations? Can you imagine that happening?
- How do players and teams deal with losses? Are there specific rituals or expectations regarding how to handle defeat?

- How do players react to injuries or weakness? Are there expectations for how to deal with pain? What is your personal opinion when players fake or exaggerate injuries to provoke a free kick or a card for the opponent? Do you see it as clever or unsportsmanlike?
- What is the culture like in the locker room, in your opinion? Are there behaviors that are only possible or accepted in that protected space?
- How do you experience physical contact between players, e.g. slaps on the butt or hugs? What do these gestures mean to you?
- Do you think certain physical or emotional expressions are more acceptable among men on the football field than outside of it?

Nationalism and Religion in Football

- Are there rituals in your team that are connected to national pride or cultural identity?
- Do religious or superstitious rituals matter to you or your teammates? If yes, which ones?
- How do you evaluate the influence of such rituals on the cohesion or dynamic within the team?
- Do you feel that some rituals in football—whether by players or fans—have a special meaning that goes beyond the game itself?
- Do you believe fans, especially extreme fans, promote certain ideas of masculinity through their behavior?
- What do you think of the following statement: *"The stadium is a retreat and refuge for an old-fashioned and outdated idea of masculinity."* (Kaelberer 2020)
- This is a quote from German goalkeeper Toni Schumacher:
"During important tournaments like the World Cup, I don't need my wife at all. During that time, I abstain from sex. After all, I'm not a gorilla. During this phase, I put erotic life aside and focus on one thing: becoming a champion, becoming the best goalkeeper in the world. I don't have a single moment for pleasure or arousal during that period."

Closing

- Is there anything else you'd like to add on the topic of football, rituals, or masculinity?

Glossary

- **Aguante** – A masculine honor code in Argentine football culture emphasizing endurance, bravery, and collective loyalty. Used in this thesis to understand how emotional and physical resilience are gendered in fan culture.
- **Block West** – The most active and ritualized fan section at SK Rapid Wien's stadium, serving as the ethnographic focus for fan-based masculinity in this thesis.
- **Collective effervescence** – A concept by Émile Durkheim referring to the heightened emotional energy in group rituals that produces a sense of unity and sacredness.
- **Drag (Butlerian)** – A performative act that parodies or exposes the artificiality of gender norms. In this thesis, used both in its theatrical sense and metaphorically (e.g., "sonic drag").
- **Gender performativity** – A concept by Judith Butler describing gender as an effect of repeated acts rather than an innate identity.
- **Hegemonic masculinity** – A dominant form of masculinity that legitimizes male dominance and the subordination of women and non-hegemonic masculinities. Developed by Raewyn Connell.
- **LAC (Landstraßen Athletik Club)** – The amateur football club in Vienna where ethnographic interviews and observations were conducted for this study.
- **Nationalism (in football)** – The performance and reinforcement of national identity through symbols, rituals, and sound within football culture.
- **Ritual** – Repeated, symbolic acts that help establish and reinforce social structures and identities, especially related to masculinity and football in this thesis.
- **Sacrality** – The condition of being regarded as sacred or holy. In this thesis, applied to football stadiums and fan rituals that resemble religious practices.
- **Sonic drag** – A term adapted from Butler's concept of drag to describe vocal performances that parody or exaggerate masculine norms.
- **Sonic ventriloquism** – A term from Steven Connor referring to the projection of identity through disembodied voice, where the speaker distances themselves from what is spoken.
- **Soundscape** – The acoustic environment, particularly as it relates to gendered expression and identity in football settings.
- **Ultras** – Organized groups of extreme football fans known for their choreographed chants, symbolic rituals, and intense loyalty to their club.

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