How gay is football this year?

Tactics of intersubjectivity in a women’s varsity football team

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Fran: how gay is football this year=
Doris: =I don’t think it’s that gay
Josie: [I think it’s ve:ry gay]
Fluidity of sexual identity and context

- It is commonplace for speakers to talk about their own sexuality changing as they shift between contexts (both physical and socio-cultural).

- Compulsory schooling is often experienced by young lesbian, gay and bisexual people as restrictive, heteronormative and homophobic whilst university is experienced as a more open, tolerant and accepting environment. (McCormack 2011; McCormack and Anderson 2010; Sauntson 2007; O’Mara 1997; Weston 1998)

- Coming out narratives frequently mention higher education as being a key context for experimenting with the limits of tolerance, and with new senses of self (Morrish and Sauntson 2007).
Identity and desire

• Both gay and straight young women employ the discourses of sexual desire, but this is used not to differentiate their identities, but cooperatively, to both authenticate and interrogate boundaries of identity

• In this way, the team members subdue possibilities of difference, and cooperate to build a community of practice where they celebrate sexual discovery and denaturalise norms
Details of the study

• How is sexual identity played out in a community of practice centred on a women’s football (soccer) team?
• Participants - 8 young women, between the ages of 19 and 21, all played on the same football team at a UK university for at least two years
• As 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} year undergraduates they have prestige among younger team mates, and they see themselves as role models
• All identified as white and middle class, except one (Barbara) who identified as black and middle class
• Four of the women identified as straight (Emily, Lily, Betty and Coral) and four identified as gay (Fran, Josie, Barbara and Doris)
Communities of practice

‘an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavour’ (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992: 463-4)
Communities of practice

• Community is defined by:
  – mutual engagement
  – jointly negotiated enterprise/shared social practices
  – shared repertoire of symbolic resources (including ways of using language)

• ‘Central’ members and ‘peripheral’ members
  – peripheral members have social flexibility and can act as ‘brokers’ between different groups
Bucholtz and Hall (2004; 2005) – Intersubjective tactics

- Sociolinguistic analytical framework
- Analyses the language practices of a community of practice
- Enables an exploration of how the young people use language to construct and understand their own sexual identities, and those of others
- The framework recognises that identities emerge in context, that they may be temporary and multiple, and that they are negotiated with other social actors and in relation to structures of power
Tactics of Intersubjectivity

Adequation and Distinction

Social sameness and difference - the subject may attempt to highlight those practices which are consistent with the desired identity (adequation), and suppress those social practices which are not (distinction).
Tactics of Intersubjectivity

Authentication and Denaturalisation

‘Authentication concerns the construction of a true or veridical identity, denaturalisation foregrounds untruth, pretence, and imposture in identity positioning.’

(Bucholtz and Hall 2004: 498)
Tactics of Intersubjectivity

Authorisation and illegitimation

Authorisation denotes a state whereby a subject is afforded some degree of institutional recognition, and illegitimation denotes a state of structural marginalisation.
Key themes on intersubjectivity and sexual identity

• The authentication of gay identities
• The fluidity and contingency of sexual identities (especially in relation to the university context)
• The relationships between intersubjectivity, identity and desire
‘Acting and looking gay’ – authenticating gay identities

The speakers discuss whether it is possible to ‘tell’ whether someone is gay or straight from their appearance and behaviour.

Josie: Foghorn looks gay and most people don’t think she is but
Doris: yeah she’s straight
Barbara: but but she’s not gay is she she she doesn’t act gay
Authentication of identity via symbols

Doris: no no it’s [wearing a gilet] not meant to be a gay
Betty: cos like cos like ahh a labelled that a gay thing
Doris: YEAH OH YEAH OH people have just labelled it as
being gay
Betty: it is gay though in’t it

[Several lines later]
Josie: it’s not as gay as your beige one cos that has netting
inside
Denaturalisation of heterosexuality

Lily: [and even if t]hey are (1.0) and even if they are straight they’re really questionable (0.5) I wouldn’t have a clue if they were straight or not
Josie: [no no no it’s not its not its people who’ve got really] big personalities who are standing out as in the freshers that are loud are the gay ones=
Doris: = no cos you’ve got Foghorn (0.2) Filth Cum
Betty: [gay gay]
Emily: yeah=
Barbara: = nooo
Lily: no no no=
Coral: = questionable though
Betty: some are [questionable] though
Doris: [no n]o no
Josie: and
Fran: no=
Lily: = no but all of those normally normally I could pick straight out like but this year I’m like ermmm
Fluidity of sexual identities

Temporality of sexuality (Halberstam, 2005) and denaturalization of normative ‘straight’ sexuality.

Betty: yeah but then yeahh yeahhh I understand that but when we were freshers like Suki Lube Twiz all the big characters we looked up to were all straight
Coral: yeah but Suki was gay in her second year
Betty: unnn yeah I suppose
Emily: =yeah she came up to me and (0.2) like and she was like ah I was always straight when I was at uni three years and then she went
Betty: [yeah she had a boyfriend]
Emily: =and and and
now I’ve left uni seven years later and I’ve got a girlfriend=
Fluidity of sexual identities

Temporality of sexuality and social context via **authorisation**.

Emily: that night when we went to that laserquest last year we was talking about it and and erm Vom Vom was like oh before I came to uni she went I’d have never told anyone that I was gay she was like none of my mates know she was like it’s only that now that I’ve come to uni that I’ve actually told people

Lily: this is what I was gonna say until uni a lot of people just like like in my school there’s no way in hell I’d have even been put like in a situation where there was a lot of lesbian people do ya=

Betty: [lesbian yeah]

Lily: =know no I wouldn’t have even known if I’d have liked girls so when you come to uni it’s like the opportunity everyone goes wild cos it’s finally like acceptable more like there’s lots of people and like an ok sort of thing so I think it’ll be the next few weeks we’ll see
Fluidity of sexual identities

*Intersubjective processes of adequation have potential to destabilise sexual identity categories*

Betty: [people p]eople try and fit in and like they let them mould d’ya know what I mean like if you go into a new environment=
Fluidity of sexual identities

Fran deploys **authentication** as well as **authorisation**:

Fran: [y]eah do you know why that is though cos when you come to uni and you realize you’re gay you can create your own identity and like become your actual own like person rather than=
Fluidity of sexual identities

Josie: people suppress things as well so you might think oh she’s never been gay she’s never shown any gay er er er all of a sudden then they say they’re gay

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Fran: but there’s always some chance that you could fall in love with someone you wouldn’t expect to
The women discuss whether a new player can be ‘turned’ into a lesbian. This illustrates belief in ‘authentic’ identity.

Barbara: =I don’t think you can turn somebody
Josie: yeah and
Doris: I think you can=
Josie: no but when people say like oh they’ve turned the freshers and the freshers cos they’re freshers do it I’m not being funny but you can’t do: tha:t if you don’t want to= [I’m n]ot being funny but you can’t lick a fanny if you don’t wanna do it=
‘Turning’ – Intersubjectivity, identity and desire

There is some discussion about whether straight women can be ‘turned’, after sufficient exposure to gay women peers:

Lily: no you can make something like available that wasn’t before. I don’t think you can turn someone I don’t think you can turn someone but I think you can open their eyes to=

Fran: if they’re not gay they want turning
Lily: they want you yeah they want yeah you
Lily: = and like literally like it might just be the excitement that it’s there and you’ve never had it before
Conclusions

• Analysis understood within a queer theoretical perspective (Butler 1990) where the assumption is that identity is not fixed, but permeable. This community of practice seems to embrace what Halberstam (2005) terms a ‘queer temporality’.

• In a community of practice where sexual difference is highly salient, binaries of desire and object choice become the vehicle for the signalling of adequation, authentication and authorisation.

• The speakers in this community of practice recognise that questioning and ambiguity are ordinary at this life stage and that they are contingent on being in the university context.


Image references

• [www.sportsbyte.sunderland.ac.uk](http://www.sportsbyte.sunderland.ac.uk) (Title slide)
• [www.nouse.co.uk](http://www.nouse.co.uk) (Slide 6)
• [love-chari-tea.blogspot.com](http://love-chari-tea.blogspot.com) (Slide 7)
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