FEMALE STYLE VS. MALE STYLE OR

SOMETHING IN BETWEEN?

A case study on gendered communication on the

Humans of New York Facebook page

Master's thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Sosiaalinen media on viime vuosikymmenen aikana mullistanut internetin avulla tapahtuvaa viestintää ja sen tuomia uusia mullistuksia onkin tutkittu tieteellisesti paljon viime aikoina. Sukupuolen ja kielen roolia sosiaalisen median myllerryksessä ei viestinnällisestä näkökulmasta kuitenkaan ole tutkittu kovin paljon ja siksi tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli kartoittaa, millaista naisten ja miesten kielenkäyttö on nykyään internetissä ja miten se peilautuu aiempien tutkimustulosten valossa.

Tutkimuksen aineisto koostui 170 tavallisten ihmisten kirjoittamista kommenteista, jotka valittiin suositulta Humans of New York Facebook-sivulta tammikuun 2015 aikana. Nämä kommentit jaettiin laadullisten sisällönanalyysimetodien avulla neljään eri kategoriaan: 1) Miesten kielenkäyttöä ilmentävät kommentit, 2) Naisten kielenkäyttöä ilmentävät kommentit, 3) Näitä kahta tyyliä yhdistävät kommentit ja 4) Kommentit, joista ei löytynyt merkittäviä sukupuoleen viittaavia piirteitä. Myös tietokonevälitteisen viestinnän tutkimiseen tarkoitettua diskurssianalyysiä käytettiin näiden piirteiden analysointiin.

Tutkimuksessa havaittiin, että miesten ja naisten viestinnässä on eroja, mutta nämä erot eivät ole yhtä suuria kuin aiemmat tutkimustulokset ovat osoittaneet. Miesten kielenkäyttö ei ole niin aggressiivista kuin on väitetty ja naisten viestinnässä myös vakuuttavat ja jämäkät keinot omien mielipiteiden esille tuomiseen ovat arkipäivää. Lisäksi sekä miehet että naiset yhdistelivät paljon eri piirteitä tyypillisten sukupuoleen viittaavien kategorioiden ulkopuolelta, minkä nähtiin osoittavan, että kielenkäytössä (kuten myös sen tutkimuksessa) ollaan siirtymässä tiukasta vastakkainasettelusta kohti vapaampaa viestintää, jossa piirteitä voi yhdistellä sukupuoleen katsomatta. Nämä tutkimustulokset heijastavat kuitenkin vain vapaamielisen ja avoimen Humans of New York Facebook-sivun realiteettia ja sillä tapahtuvaa viestintää, minkä vuoksi laajempi otos useammalta sivulta olisi suotavaa aihepiirin laajempaa käsittelyä varten.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

Men are from Mars and women are from Venus, or are they? And if they are, is it also reflected in the way women and men communicate? There are numerous studies that have proved the existence of gendered communication styles and differences between genders both in offline and online settings (cf. Coates 2004; Tannen 1990; Herring 1993, 1996b, 2000). After the global launch, the internet was expected to redeem the optimism of more levelled communication, in which it did not matter whether the writer was male, female, black, white, Asian, young, old etc. as the communication online was seen to lack the visual cues of one's social status (Herring 1993). However, the internet failed to meet the high expectations of the time and especially during the 1990's various studies problematizing the neutralising effect of the internet started to appear, in which, contrary to the early optimism in the field of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and gender, vast gender differences were recorded also in the online settings with an observation that often these differences seemed to follow the patterns found in face-to-face interactions: women's language tended to be more tentative and women were often overshadowed by men's more aggressive and assertive language use (ibid.). Particularly during the past decade, the internet and consequently, also the communication taking place online has, however, experienced a great shift from interactions taking place on language-heavy modes, such as mailing lists, newsgroups and Internet Relay Chat (IRC) into a whole different reality of the participatory Web (also referred to as Web 2.0) where anyone can draw on the rich infrastructure provided by blogs, social network sites, media-sharing sites and wikis to both produce and consume (or prosume) digital content (Androutsopoulos 2014: 76). The present study is, thus, dedicated to researching gendered communication of the 2015's in the environment of social network sites to investigate whether the differences between genders can still be observed or has something changed from those early (and also more contemporary) studies in the field.

One of the most popular phenomena of our time is Facebook, a social network site, which ever since its launch has attracted millions of users, many of which have also included this site as a part of their daily practices (boyd & Ellison 2007). On Facebook, there are currently (as of March 31, 2015) 1.44 billion monthly active users (Facebook Newsroom: Company Info 2015) making it the largest social network site of our time. The vast popularity of these types of sites has, consequently, resulted into enormous growth on the amount of people communicating online. boyd & Ellison (2007) define these popular social network sites as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system". They further explain that even though the term "social networking sites" also appears in public discourse, they prefer to use social *network* sites, as the term is more proper to describe the actions on these websites; it is not so much about networking, as it is about articulating and making visible users' own networks (boyd & Ellison 2007). Therefore, also in the present study the term 'social network site' is used when referring to these sites.

As Facebook is currently highly popular around the world, it is also a subject of numerous studies. Nonetheless, studies on gendered communication on Facebook that focus closely on discursive level phenomena seem to be less frequent. There are several studies seeking to investigate how men and women behave on Facebook from a variety of perspectives, but very few of them focus on discursive differences between genders on Facebook. Lee (2011), for example, studied text making practices on Facebook, focusing on status updates, whereas Thompson and Lougheed (2012) examined gender differences in social network communication among undergraduate men and women, but their focus was on time (in minutes) spent on social media sites, on Facebook in particular, and what genders reported doing while on Facebook. Tang et al. (2011) also state that they studied how males and females behave on Facebook.

They, for instance, found that females and males manifest contrasting behaviour while hiding some of their attributes, such as gender, age and sexual preference, and that women were more conscious about their online privacy on Facebook. In addition, Joiner et al. (2014) examined gender differences in language use on Facebook by analysing males' and females' responses (e.g. 'liking') to two status updates but as their study was published late 2014, during the time of writing up the present study, new sources were no longer accepted for this study.

Studies like these are indeed part of the gendered behaviour on Facebook but gendered language use, which is in the focus of the present study, differs from these studies as it concentrates on the differences (or similarities) on a discursive level, namely on what kind of language features are used when communicating and whether these features signal masculinity or femininity. Thus, the current study seeks to create results that depict clearly the actuality of gendered communication online and contribute to the field of 'CMC and gender', as well as 'language and gender'. The present study, hence, examines whether there are notable differences in the ways how men and women communicate on Facebook, on the Humans of New York (HONY) Facebook page in particular, where stories with photos on the lives of New Yorkers are presented. The Humans of New York Facebook page was chosen for its popularity and suitability for providing the present study sufficient amount of data. In consequence, 170 comments were collected on three consecutive days from three different threats of discussion posted on the Humans of New York Facebook page in January 2015. The data, however, was collected from the comments posted in relation to the stories shared by the HONY Facebook page, not the HONY stories themselves. These comments will be analysed in the present study by using a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, with the emphasis on the former. Accordingly, Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) and Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) will be deployed to categorise comments under *female style, male style, mixed style* (containing elements from both aforementioned styles) and *neutral*, a

residual category for comments that do not belong to any of the three first categories. With the help of this categorisation then language use online will be analysed further and differences between genders will be assessed to investigate whether social media sites, such as Facebook, has redeemed the early optimism and democratised language use on the internet, or can the same patterns of gendered communication be still observed in the 2010's. With these key questions I attempt to answer in this study, it is noteworthy to assess whether women's and men's communication online is indeed influenced with offline gender norms and communication patterns and vice versa. Although for some computer-mediated interaction might differ from "real life" and hence, some people might perceive "virtual realities" and "material realities" as separate things, on the basis of many studies on the matter it can, nonetheless, be argued that CMC is as "real" as anything else (Jones 2004: 24). In fact, according to Jones (2004: 24), almost all research focusing on the topic shows that majority of people who participate in computer-mediated communication consider it as an extension of their "real-life" social interactions rather than perceiving it as a separate thing. Therefore, investigating gendered communicational features online will not only be limited to the reality of computer-mediated communication, but also increases our comprehension on differences (or similarities) between genders also in a wider social context.

2. BACKGROUND

In this chapter, I will clarify the key concepts pivotal to the current study and present the relevant previous research relating to gendered communication styles. First, I will briefly introduce the concepts and some of the terms that will be used in this study, after which a summary of relevant previous research in the field will be presented.

2.1 Definition of key concepts

In this section, the key concepts that are relevant to the present study will be explained and clarified. I will start by defining gender (and language) and the gendered discourse patterns that have been reported e.g. by Coates (2004) and Cameron (2010) and then move on to discussing Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC) and gender. I will end this section by exploring the concept around a social network site, Facebook, as the data for the present study has been collected from the Humans of New York Facebook page.

2.1.1 Gender and language

According to Coates (2004: 4), it has not been until quite recently that gender has become in the focus in sociolinguistics. Coates (2004: 4-5) exemplifies this by explaining that when sociolinguistics started to establish itself as a discipline, there was a shift in emphasis from standard to non-standard varieties, as a reaction towards mainstream linguistics. Thus, all sorts of minority groups became under scrutiny, however, women were never viewed as belonging to these groups (ibid.). The reason why the matter of gender was not salient in the society until relatively recently is the perceived male dominance, i.e. men were automatically seen as the heart of the society as, for instance, the most important people in the Law as well as in the Church were male, whereas women were seen as peripheral or even invisible (ibid.). As Coates (2004: 5) explicates, it was not until 1970's when the issue of gender equity arose to

become a public matter. For example, in Britain both the Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act came into effect in 1975 (ibid.). In the same year Lakoff published her classic but yet controversial book, *Language and Woman's Place* (1975), a piece of work that can be considered as a pioneer of the discussion on gender and language (ibid.), discussion which is still on-going nowadays.

To explain the most pivotal concept in the field of language and gender, namely *gender*, Coates (2004: 4) clarifies that 'sex' refers to biological distinction whereas 'gender' refers to socially constructed categories based on sex. Cameron (2010: 733) supports this by explaining that for the purposes of linguistic and sociolinguistic studies, gender has often been defined not as biological maleness or femaleness, but rather as social differentiation of men and women in particular communities. Thus, gender-linked patterns of language use stem not only from men and women being naturally different, but from the way that difference is made significant in the organization of social life and social relations (ibid.).

Coates (2004: vi) further explains that the definitions in sociolinguistic work in the field has changed a great deal from the concepts of 'language' and 'gender' of the early 1990's which at that time seemed clear-cut and unproblematic. Currently, gender is rather seen as something that we 'do', instead of seen as given (ibid.). According to Cameron (2010: 733), therefore, in sociolinguistic studies on gender, language can be seen as one resource with which social actors build various kinds of masculinities and femininities, positioning themselves towards some gender and differentiating from another.

Coates (2004: 4) also brings forth that most societies operate on the basis of two genders, masculine and feminine and hence, it would be tempting to treat gender simply as a binary opposition, which, until fair recently, has often been the case in the field of gender and language. However, more recent theorising has challenged this binary thinking, and consequently, more current

conceptualisation of gender offers a view of gender as plural, with a range of femininities and masculinities that are available to speakers at any time (ibid.). Hence, nowadays the emphasis in the 'gender and language' studies falls rather on diversity and on plural masculinities and femininities, than on simple binary divide between 'men' and 'women' (Coates 2004: vi). Consequently, nowadays there is a clear shift from clarity and fixity towards complexity and fluidity (ibid.). Furthermore, Cameron (2010: 733) explains that language use is also a part of the process where gender is not only produced but also reproduced as prominent feature of the social landscape. Hence, according to her, study of language and gender often aims to illuminate both linguistic and social processes, but for many researchers its goal is also political; from a feminist perspective, gender is seen not as a neutral difference but as a socially constructed inequality (Cameron 2010: 733).

2.1.2 Gendered discourse

Over the years researchers have identified certain linguistic features that signal masculinity or often more commonly, femininity. These linguistic markers of gendered discourse styles are seen to have a functional link to the traits and roles of men and women in the society. (Cameron 2010: 737.) Coates (2004: 5-7) introduces four different perspectives that are widely used by researchers in the field when examining these linguistic features, i.e. deficit, dominance, difference and dynamic/social constructionist approaches; more than one approach, however, can be applied at the same time as these approaches do not have any rigid boundaries. In the following, I will briefly explain the essence of each approach whilst also going through some of the characteristics of the feminine and masculine styles of communication perceived to be typical in our society.

The 'deficit approach', in which women's behaviour is compared (often even negatively) against the explicit or implicit male norm (Cameron 2010: 737), entails most common characteristics of so called Women's Language (Coates

2004: 6). WL, a term first introduced by Lakoff in 1973, includes a preference for milder expletives, exaggerated politeness, use of an elaborative colour vocabulary, empty adjectives (such as 'lovely' and 'divine') and intensifiers ('*so nice*'), hedging to decrease the force of an utterance and phrasing statements as questions and use of tag questions (Cameron 2010: 737). Lakoff (1975) argued that these features communicate insecurity, i.e. a lack of confidence in one's own opinion and a need to seek approval from others, which is seen also to be linked to women's subordinate status. From Lakoff's perspective, this language style was a display of women's culturally-imposed powerlessness in a male-dominated and sexist society. (Cameron 2010: 737.) There has been, however, criticism towards the deficit approach, for instance, due to its implication that there is something wrong with the way women use language and if to be taken seriously, women should learn to speak like a man (Coates 2004: 6). The deficit approach is now perceived as out-dated by researchers but not by the general public since, for instance, according to Coates (2004: 7), it is acceptable to organise assertiveness training for women, which advocates a world view where women should learn to be more like men.

The 'dominance approach' on the other hand, also adopted by Lakoff and many other feminists in the 1970's (Cameron 2010: 737), views women as an oppressed group and interprets all linguistic difference from the viewpoint of men's dominance and women's subordination (Coates 2004: 6). Researchers implementing this model are aiming to show how male dominance is reinforced through linguistic practice. Furthermore, all participants in discourse, both men and women, are seen to sustain and perpetuate this male dominance and female oppression. (Coates 2004: 6.)

In the 80's, nevertheless, the gender and language studies experienced a new wave of examining gendered discourse, namely 'difference approach', which emphasises the notion of women and men belonging to different subcultures (Coates 2004: 6). According to this approach, women and men, like members of

different ethnic or national groups, behave differently because they have unconsciously internalized contrasting norms for the performance of communicative acts (Cameron 2010: 738). These norms relate to the gender-differentiated behaviour that stems all way from children's peer groups and reflects and reproduces differences in men's and women's general orientation to the world (ibid.). According to Cameron (2010: 738), it has been suggested, for example, that women typically orient to people and relationships whereas men are more oriented to objects and information, which, consequently, affects many aspects of discourse performance, such as topics that men and women prefer to talk about, how they address others, how they manage the floor, how polite they are, how frequently they use questions and minimal responses etc. The difference approach, thus, arose from this discovery of men and women behaving differently and belonging to their own different subcultures (Coates 2004: 6). Women also started to resist being treated as a subordinate group and began questioning the conflation of culture with male culture and declaring that they have 'a different voice', 'a different psychology' etc. (ibid.). This approach succeeded in terms of giving researchers an opportunity to examine language and gender issues outside a framework of oppression or powerlessness, thus, creating an ability to show the strengths of linguistic strategies utilised by women, but when applied to analysis of mixed talks, however, Coates (2004: 6) argues that the issue of power cannot be ignored, which tends to be one of the shortcomings of the difference approach.

According to Cameron (2010: 738, 743) many scholars have, nevertheless, criticized these approaches for the lack in taking into consideration intra-gender diversity; sometimes the differences among women or men can be bigger than between genders. People are never just men or women but they are always men and women of particular ages, classes, occupations, social roles and statuses and so forth who all perform identity, such as femininity and masculinity, differently (ibid.). In addition, as people cannot be labelled only belonging to one particular group, they can be discriminated against based on their intersectional identities, for example, as Crenshaw (1991: 1242-1244) explains;

race and gender (as well as many other prevailing identity categories) often interact to shape the experiences of those facing discrimination of some kind, such as women of colour in the U.S. These women may not solely be discriminated based on their race or gender but as a sum of the intersecting identities of Black women (ibid.). (For further examination on intersectionality, see e.g. Crenshaw 1991). As noted afore, as a contrary approach to looking at gender and language through the binary categorisation, many researchers today have thus shifted their preoccupation of gender differences into gender diversity (Cameron 2010: 738, 743).

Consequently, the most recent approach to language and gender is 'dynamic approach', also known as 'social constructionist perspective' in which gender identity is viewed as a social construct rather than as a 'given' social category, i.e. it is something that is *accomplished* in talk every time we communicate (Coates 2004: 6-7). Speakers are seen as 'doing gender' rather than merely 'being' a particular gender (ibid.), which leads us to exploring gender differences from a view point of performativity. Gender can hence be seen as performative, in other words, not given in advance but created when people act (or communicate) in ways that are culturally coded as masculine or feminine (Cameron 2010: 738). The scholar who introduced the notion of gender being performative, Butler (1990: 25) explicates that gender is always a doing, constituting the identity it is purported to be and consequently, there is no actual gender identity behind the expression of gender as the identity is performatively established by the precise "expressions" said to be its results. Performativity is also always based on repetition of acts that reenact and re-experience a set of gendered meanings that are already socially established (Butler 1990: 140). Following the idea of performing a gender, it can thus be argued that social actors in any situation can construct a range of gendered personae (not just one each) and these performances may include unusual, artificial or even deviant one (Cameron 2010: 738). This provides an opportunity for interlocutors also online to *perform* certain gender identity, be it stereotypical male or female in accordance with their biological sex, or

something else, since for instance, according to Hine (2000: 117), also the internet (as the offline world) is simultaneously a performative space and a performed space. That is to say that the internet is performative as people attempt to behave appropriately within it, and performed since it is shaped and sustained by the social practices through which people both interpret and use it (ibid.).

2.1.3 Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) and gender

One of the recent areas in sociolinguistic research is computer-mediated communication (CMC) that covers both private and public communication via digital media such as emails, texting, social network sites and discussion forums (Androutsopoulos 2014: 75.) As the focus of the present study is on gendered discourse on a social network site, i.e. on the Humans of New York Facebook page, I will examine the concepts of CMC and gender intertwined more in detail in this section.

The act of human-to-human communication via computer networks is a fairly recent phenomenon; the first programs designed for that emerged in the late 1960's in the USA, but it was only in the 80's when the global network internet was launched, and 1990's saw the vast explosion of internet usage (Herring 2001: 612-613). The study of computer-mediated discourse developed together with interactive networking itself and it was already the mid-80's as the first studies on Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) began to appear (ibid.). Sociolinguistic research on CMC, generally, focuses on language and language use in computer networked environments by using methods of discourse analysis to address that focus (Herring 2001: 612). Still 2001 Herring estimated that most CMC was text-based but also visually presented language was being used to get the message across (ibid.). More current trend of communication, as Kress (2003: 140) points out, is a clear shift from "world told to a world shown", which also applies to the communication online. More and more visual components are being used also in CMC and social network sites are filled with

emoticons, memes, images, videos and many other resourceful semiotic means. As Androutsopoulos (2014: 76) brings forth, during the last 25 years digital media has developed from a little set of text-only communication modes into an abundant repertoire of multimodal and multimedia choices that are nearly omnipresent in the most parts of the world. He continues by explaining that during the early years of CMC, linguistic scholarship was studying phenomena of the pre-Web era that was heavily restricted to interpersonal exchanges taking place on language-heavy modes, such as mailing lists, newsgroups and Internet Relay Chat (IRC) (ibid.). The more current scholarship, however, deals with the era of the participatory Web (also referred to as Web 2.0) which enables anyone to draw on the rich infrastructure provided by blogs, social network sites, media-sharing sites and wikis to both produce and consume (or prosume) digital content (Androutsopoulos 2014: 76). This is what is currently perceived as typical language on the internet (ibid.) and what the data in the present study consists of. However, the focus in this study falls rather on text-based CMC, although in a very multimodal context, i.e. on the Humans of New York Facebook page.

At the beginning of gender studies in the field of CMC, which also took place in the 1980's together with the vast expansion of the World Wide Web, it was suggested that new technologies, such as the internet, can provide more neutralized and more democratic medium for communication as CMC interactions lack the social status cues (such as appearance, accent, race) that are normally present in face-to-face interactions (Herring 1993). Those normally perceived to be inferior in the society could present themselves online in a more equalised setting and be heard, regardless of one's gender, race, ethnicity etc. since the emphasis falls rather on content and not on the form of the message or the sender. Many scholars claimed that this social decontextualization in CMC could provide the opportunity also for more balanced gender interactions (see e.g. Herring 1993). In addition, CMC was seen promoting more equal accessibility as more and more people were able to gain access to computer networks to search for information, connect and communicate with others and

express one's own views, and it was also seen as 'democratic' i.e. having potential to contribute to the breakdown of traditional hierarchical patterns of communication (ibid.).

However, this view was contrasted in the early 1990's as more women began to use the internet infiltrating to a domain that had previously been considered almost exclusively male. At that time also studies of gender and CMC started appearing with larger frequency. As opposed to the optimism in the 80's, the findings of these studies had tendency to problematize claims of gender-free equality on the internet. (Herring 2000.) For example, Herring (1996b) proved that there are, in fact, gender differences in public discourse also on the internet and that these differences are not randomly distributed across the individuals but rather follow systematic patterns of distribution with males tending toward more adversarial behaviour and females toward more attenuated and supportive behaviours (Herring 1996b: 137).

Nevertheless, Yates (1997: 289) concludes that although the realities of inequalities based around gender and computing are real and should not be ignored, CMC technologies also provide the possibility of creating gender identities which can escape from those fixed forms of 'real life'. However, as it has been noted before, CMC is as real as 'real life' (cf. Jones 2004), which can lead to CMC technologies providing a setting that can influence and change perceived gender norms, online as well as offline. The current study attempts to investigate if this takes place online, more precisely on social media; can women and men can free themselves online from the constructed gender norms that tend to govern their behaviour not only in face-to-face settings but also online or do they still replicate the same patterns that are said to rule the differences in communication between the genders. It is also noteworthy to study whether there are notable differences in the way men and women communicate online in the first place, or is the more current theorising in the

field of language and gender that challenges this binary thinking closer to the present-day reality online.

Furthermore, at the end of this chapter it is necessary to explain two minor concepts that relate to this study, i.e. to the language typical to male vs. female style of communication online, namely *flaming* and *netiquette*. The term *flaming* refers to an act of using derogative, obscene or inappropriate language to express strong or negative opinion or to offend someone on the internet (Herring 1996a: 149). Typically, men are said to flame more than women and the reason for this, according to Herring (1996a), might lay on different communication ethics, i.e. men and women have different ideas on what constitutes appropriate behaviour online and flaming seems to be more compatible with male ethical ideas (ibid.). In addition to this, Herring (1996a: 150) discovered that flaming may also relate to different value systems in terms of communication: women are said to value consideration for the wants and needs of others, whereas men are said to value freedom from censorship, open expression and agonistic debate in pursuit of knowledge. In this study, I will also assess whether there is aggressive language present in the data and which gender may or may not responsible for it. I will also pay attention to whether there appears to be a *netiquette*, a form of written or often even unwritten rules of network etiquette, hence netiquette, which is often available on many public sites (Herring 1996a: 151). In her studies in the 1990's, Herring found out that the netiquette of many of those discussion lists that she was studying was often compatible with male values and male adversarial style consistent with the behaviour that was reported intimidating by many women (cf. Herring 1996a). It might be, nevertheless, that in the internet discussion of the day, especially on social network sites, there is no apparent netiquette but certain behaviour might still be favoured over another.

2.1.4 Facebook - the largest social network site of our time

As the data obtained for this study was collected on the Humans of New York Facebook page, it is necessary to explore the concept around one of the most popular phenomenon of our time, Facebook. Founded 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook is currently the largest and most popular social network site, mission of which is to "give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected" (Facebook Newsroom: Company Info 2015). Originally, the site was created for students in the Harvard University, later it was expanded to other North-American colleges and eventually in 2006, it was launched worldwide to anyone claiming to be above the age of 13 (ibid.). Nowadays, there are about 1.44 billion monthly active Facebook users as of March 31, 2015 (Facebook Newsroom: Company Info 2015) and the site still continues to grow.

In order to be able to use Facebook, e.g. form a profile, share status updates, pictures, life events etc. and to be able to contact other people on Facebook, users are required to register. Once registered, users can then create a personal profile, add other users as friends and start sharing content, send messages and comment on what other users have shared such as status updates, life events, pictures and so forth. One's profile on Facebook normally features with personal 'timeline' of events one chooses to include to this timeline. Events can include e.g. all status updates, pictures, places one has visited, life events by both the person or organisation in question and other Facebook users, as user's friends and public profiles can be 'tagged' in virtually everything that is shared on Facebook. These taggings can, however, be deleted from one's own timeline.

Personal profiles can also be public if one chooses so, in which case anyone can see what happens on that particular Facebook timeline, be it personal or, for instance, an organisational account. In other words, public profiles can be accessed without being registered as a user and having an account on Facebook.

In addition to these features, pages can be created on Facebook e.g. for companies, celebrities, musicians, organisations, entertainment and much more. These pages can be followed by 'liking', and consequently some of the content shared (e.g. top posts) on the timeline of that page will appear in one's own News Feed section on Facebook, in which most of the content by one's friends and pages liked will feature. It is also possible to form groups on Facebook on the basis of shared interest, location, entertainment etc. These groups can either be open or closed depending on the security settings set for that group. Open groups are usually public (accessible generally by all), whereas in closed groups content can only be viewed and commented by members of that group.

As a part of Facebook's safety protocol, everyone on Facebook is asked to use their authentic name on their profile (Facebook Safety 2015). This is the ideal goal, although in 2012 it was reported that about 8.7 percent of the Facebook profiles are fake (USA Today 2012). In addition to fake profiles, there can be profiles with nicknames or other aliases as profile names. The identification, however, is rather crucial to this study, as I mainly rely on names and profile pictures when attempting to determine the sex of the interlocutors in case. Nonetheless, it is to be noted that as it is possible to be ambiguous about one's name or sex in one's Facebook profile, it can generate some uncertainty and slightly distort my findings. Nevertheless, as gender is socially constructed (as discussed in the previous section) it is still possible to study gendered features of language use also on Facebook.

To analytically balance between the matter of the biological sex of the commentators and socially constructed gender, hence, I have chosen to first divide the commentators based on their sex to categories of men, women and ambiguous (if it is not clear which sex the persons represents), and then through this categorisation proceed to examining the most essential aspects of this study, i.e. discursive differences and characteristics of language use that are perceived typical to male style and female style.

2.2 Previous research

In this section, I will present the relevant research relating to the topic of the current study. I will go through the main characters of female and male discursive styles found in computer-mediated communication and discuss what has been analysed on the basis of the differences found. Here I draw rather heavily on the works of Susan C. Herring as she has studied gendered online communication intensively for over 20 years and thus, can be considered the most significant researcher in the field. Later, I will also include other studies that either reinforce or contradict some of the findings by Herring and bring more insight on the current situation in the field of gendered communication on the internet.

In contrast with the early optimism in the field of CMC studies, Hall (1996: 167) suggests that CMC, rather than neutralizing gender, in fact encourages its intensification. As absence of physical clues, network users exaggerate societal notions of femininity and masculinity in order to gender themselves (ibid). They may not even be consciously aware of such process themselves or be able to change it easily as users give off information about their gender unconsciously in interaction, information which does not depend in any way on visual or auditory channels of communication; text alone is sufficient. Consequently, also gender is often visible on the internet on the basis of features of a participant's discourse style. (Herring 2000.) Thus, it is justified to assume that there are similarities in, for example, online and face-to-face communication patterns. For instance, Herring's findings mainly suggest that the linguistic features relating to the ways genders communicate in computer-mediated interaction are similar to those that have been previously described for face-to-face interaction. (Herring 2003: 207.) Also Yates (1997: 287) reported that communication online reflects the set of gendered identities and practices of face-to-face interactions. Men and women seem to repeat also online those discursive patterns learned in face-to-face communication.

2.2.1 Typical characteristics of women's and men's discursive styles

Often the linguistic features that are found to be common for women and men are repeated in many different settings online. For instance, Herring (2003: 207) describes some of the female and male characteristics in CMC based on her studies of gender in asynchronous[1] CMC that she studied on discussion lists and newsgroups on the internet and Usenet. Herring (2003: 207) found that males are more likely to post longer messages, start and end discussions in mixed-sex groups, impose opinions strongly as "facts", use crude language (such as insults and profanities), and in general, manifest an adversarial orientation towards others. Females, however, are more likely to post shorter messages, they are more likely to qualify and justify their assertions, apologies, express support and, in general, manifest an "aligned" orientation towards others (ibid.) In addition, women are said to be more polite in asynchronous CMC. They are also more likely to thank, appreciate and apologize, and be upset about violations of politeness. (Herring 2003: 207.) As the focus of the current study is on the differences regarding gendered communication on Facebook, I am wondering whether characteristics mentioned here are also valid when looking at more current form of CMC, i.e. social network sites, in 2010's.

In addition to the characteristics mentioned above, Herring (1996a) also discovered that the styles used in LINGUISTIC discussion list she was studying were recognizably, even stereotypically gendered. As noted afore, the male style tends to be adversarial: men use putdowns, strong, often contentious assertions, lengthy and/or frequent postings, self-promotion and sarcasm (Herring 1996a: 146). Men are also more likely than women to take an authoritative and self-confident stance in which they represent themselves as experts, and to flame (Herring 1996a: 146, 149). The female style, in contrast, has typically two features: supportiveness and attenuation. Supportiveness is

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[1] Asynchronous CMC: communication online in which participants need not to be online at the same time vs. synchronous CMC where all participants are online the same time, e.g. chatrooms.

characterized by expressions of appreciation, thanking and activities that make other participants feel accepted and welcome. (Herring 1996a: 147.) Attenuation includes e.g. hedging and expressing doubt, asking questions, apologizing and introducing ideas in the form of suggestions (ibid.).

This was not the first time, however, when Herring found notable differences when investigating the LINGUIST discussion list. In 1993, she found several differences in the manner in which women or men wrote. She reported that even though the stylistic register analysed in the study composed of academic discourse, there were, nonetheless, significant sex-based differences, on the basis of which it was often possible to tell whether a certain message was written by a man or a woman, merely by paying attention to the rhetorical and linguistic strategies employed. (Herring 1993.)

Consequently, she identified a set of features that are typically seen to characterize a stylistic variety that is conventionally recognizable as 'women's language' as opposed to 'men's language' on the LINGUIST discussion list. The summarisation of these features can be seen below.

Herring 1993, Table 1[2]: Features of women's and men's language online

WOMEN'S LANGUAGE	MEN'S LANGUAGE
attenuated assertions	strong assertions
apologies	self-promotion
explicit justifications	presuppositions
questions	rhetorical questions
personal orientation	authoritative orientation
supports others	challenges others
	humor/sarcasm

These features are in line with other research results on gendered communication styles (cf. Tannen 1990), which further proves that gender differences do exist also in the online environments, i.e. gender-based

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[2] Table 1 is coincidentally Table 1 both in Herring (1993) and in the present study.

communication styles and the power dynamics associated with these styles change over to electronic environments, in spite of the lack of clear face-to-face clues on gender (Herring 1993).

One question, though, still remains; can these differences Herring noted in 1990's be still found in communication online in 2010's, over 20 years later, or are these categorisations already outdated? In the following, I will go through some of the more current studies that contribute to the debate on (prevailing) gender differences in online environments.

In her PhD dissertation Amakye (2010) examined language and gender from the perspective of online communication and the reactions that Kenyan women received. She analysed gendered American online communication and its implications in reaction to a news story on a Sex Strike by women in Kenya. Amakye's focus was on the differences between the ways genders communicate in traditional face-to-face communication, reported by many scholars in the field, and whether this is replicated in computer-mediated communication. (Amakye 2010: viii). Amakye's study mainly confirmed what other researchers (see e.g. Coates 2004 and Tannen 1990) have concluded previously about differences in gendered communication in traditional face-to-face interactions, i.e. women use more empathy, women express more linguistic solidarity, women use more language that maintain or strengthen the group solidarity (cohesive language) than men, and women seek support vs. men seek status (Amakye 2010: 127-139).

However, in terms of stylistic features, Amakye (2010) reached a conclusion that women use more variety in their language styles than men, i.e. they used both report language (style typically ascribed to men), and rapport language (style typically ascribed to women), and in addition, combination of both. As men's use of style was mainly limited to report language, she suggested this brings power for women in terms of flexibility. (Amakye 2010: 139). According

to her, this supports the sociolinguistic tendency highlighted by Holmes (1998), who reported that women are stylistically more flexible than men. Moreover, even though women have been labelled powerless in some previous studies (see e.g. Lakoff 1975), Amakye (2010: 139) argues that it may not be the case in online setting. Her overall conclusion suggests that instead of categorising women's language powerless, women's capability of knowing what style of language to use in order to engage in communication more efficiently should rather be seen as proficiency (Amakye 2010: 142).

Furthermore, Guiller & Durndell (2007), who studied the existence of gender-related patterns in language use and interaction style in educational, mixed-gender, online discussion groups (p. 2244), reinforced the notion of gendered styles of communication online. Guiller & Durndell (2007) found that from the 197 participants in total (149 females, 48 males) it was indeed stylistic variables that produced significant results. Guiller & Durndell (2007: 2248-2249) discovered that considerably more females made contributions containing empathic utterances, personal experience, self-disclosure, references to own emotion and references to own feelings, than males. Conversely, a greater proportion of males sent postings that contained controversial statements, humour, strong assertions and presuppositions. (Guiller & Durndell 2007: 2248-2249.) Moreover, as they examined use of combinations of language and interaction styles, their results displayed that females were more likely to make attenuated contributions and use only traditional female language features in their postings. Conversely, males were more likely to send authoritative postings and use only male language feature. (Guiller & Durndell 2007: 2249.) However, even though these findings support the communication styles identified previously e.g. by Herring (1993, 2003) to some extent, Guiller & Durndell (2007: 2249) noticed that the male style that Herring (ibid.) described was a substantially more extreme authoritative and adversarial style that included, for instance, sarcasm and flaming, which was not often present in their study. Nonetheless, in conclusion, their results support the notion of gendered styles of communication online and showcases that CMC does not

guarantee a gender-free environment (Guiller & Durndell 2007: 2251), as also suggested earlier by other scholars such as Yates (1997).

It has also been suggested that public CMC is predominantly a male preserve, similarly to interactions taking place face-to-face, in which men control public discourse and women communicate more often in private settings (see e.g. Coates 2004, Herring 2000). However, nowadays, with greater variety of ways of communicating online and with the vast expansion of different social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr etc. this may no longer be the case and women may be involved to the same degree as men in public and semi-public discourses online. Herring (2011) has an interesting viewpoint on public discussion on the internet and in particular, on recently appeared social network sites. Previously she has noted that the internet often favours a more masculine style of communication, which decreases women's participation as women tend to be more intimidated by the tone of the discussion (ibid.). She suggests that this still applies to communication taking place online, as e.g. in 2011 it was estimated that 91 percent of Wikipedia editors are male (Editor Survey Report - April 2011), but she also adds that "yet plenty of women participate in public Internet communication. Many women blog, for example, and more than half of users of social network sites are female" (Herring 2011). She explains that this is most likely due to the ability provided by social network sites and alike to control the communication; unwelcoming comments can be deleted as the model on which e.g. Facebook is based permits women and men to choose who can read and contribute and thus, any flamers and harassers can be filtered out (ibid.). In this light, it seems that social network sites are able to create surroundings where "as nowhere previously online, women share information, but they also socialize and support one another" (Herring 2011). This is highly relevant to the current study that focuses on presently the most popular social network site, Facebook, as it predicts results that might be contradictory with most of the previous 'CMC and gender' studies.

This might also be reflected to language use as it could also predict more levelled discursive styles, when it comes to communicating on these social network sites. For instance, Thelwall (2008) found that there was no significant gender difference in the UK for swearing, which he saw as a valid evidence of gender equality in strong swearing frequency in any informal English-language context. Nevertheless, he reported that in the US, male MySpaces[3] contained considerably more 'strong swearing' than those of female MySpaces (ibid.). Thelwall (2008) suggests that this result interacts with gender roles in the American vs. British society. In light of this result, it could be likely that my findings correlate with what he concluded on US MySpaces, as the Facebook page from which the data for the present study has been collected is US-based, although anyone from around the world can access and comment content visible on the page. Hence, as this page is accessible by all nationalities and cultures, I however, do not want to label the data in this study primary as a manifestation of an American culture.

2.2.2 "Not all men flame" - contradictory ideas on gendered discourse

Saying that the characteristics mentioned in the previous section apply to all women and men who use internet is far from truth. Herring (2000) notes that although there might be an overall tendency for some of the behaviours to correlate more with females on the internet, and for others to correlate more with males, it does not mean that each and every woman and man manifests these behaviours; exceptions to the tendencies can be found. What it does mean, however, is that gender predicts certain online behaviours with greater than chance frequency as considered over large number of users (Herring 2000).

Furthermore, Herring (1996b: 120) reported the same tendencies in communication styles in public forums on the internet: men tend to be

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[3] In this context MySpaces (in plural) refer to profiles on this particular social network site, which, similarly to Facebook, can be created by users themselves.

adversarial and women tend to be attenuated/supportive. However, already then she also noted that not all men post this way online, in many cases a small male minority dominates the discussion by posting a lot and by conducting the adversarial behaviour, while other men can be relatively neutral and even supportive or attenuated in their posting style (Herring 1996b: 120). Similarly, not all women demonstrate supportive and attenuated style; many can also be informative and even adversarial, especially on men-dominated forums (ibid.). Her findings, however, suggest that the two styles (adversarial and supportive/attenuated) are in fact gendered in that the extremes of each are manifested almost exclusively by one gender and not the other (Herring 1996b: 120). Regardless of this strong tendency, however, often it may also be the case that men and women are not "separate species" online as many of the posts fall into a middle category, i.e. mixing male- and female-gendered features or the absence of either (ibid.)

This mixing of male- and female-gendered features was also supported by the findings of Hall (1996: 159-160) who discovered that in women-only email list (SAPPHO) other participants made sure that the subscribers are, in fact, all women. All subscribers went through a tough online screening process so that others could determine if they have the ability to meet the list's discursive standards, i.e. to be able to perform discursive femininity that includes, for example, avoiding any behaviour that could be perceived adversarial, such as flaming. This screening led sometimes also to an incorrect gender analysis as there are also women who flame or use more adversarial language than the 'norm' suggests. Consequently, some women were wrongly accused of being men because they used more male-like communication techniques. (Hall 1996: 161.) In one particular case the suspicion around his/her gender only receded after the person in question was seen in person (Hall 1996: 162). Perhaps in order to avoid such mistrust, participants on that list quickly adopted to the rules of a supportive and respectful cyberfeminist discourse that was also emphasized in the first and foremost rule of the list's female-gendered netiquette *Respect your e-neighbor as your self* (sic) (ibid.).

Eisenchlas (2012) also criticises the stereotypically binary characterisation of gendered language use online. She studied whether there is a relationship between gender and language use in a particular type of speech act online, in this case dispensing advice (in Spanish), and whether it is instrumental in the construction of gender identities and can, thus, reflect gendered discursive practice (Eisenchlas 2012: 335, 337). She concluded that certain expectations of female versus male behaviour were not met (ibid.). She argues that findings that emerged from her analysis of the data (260 posts from 185 contributors Eisenchlas (2012: 339)) point to a more complex picture than the stereotypically binary characterization of gender and language use, and that if gendered differentiation is reflected in differences in language use online by males and females, as identified in previous research e.g. by Herring (1993), it should also have been visible in her results, but on the contrary, it was not (Eisenchlas 2012: 343). Eisenchlas, however, was aware of a few factors that may explain the disparity of her findings, such as the cultural differences between the Spanish and English speaking worlds (ibid.), but, nevertheless, I find her results intriguing as they further support the contradictory notion of gender and language use in an online setting.

Similarly, Brown (1998) very strongly challenges the validity of the concept of gendered communication styles. The findings of her study of fourteen women gender switching online, i.e. using "a gendered name on-line that reflects the opposite of the person's actual gender" (Brown 1998: 2), and its implications of perceived gendered communication styles were rather staggering. The finding that no gender switches were detected suggests, in her opinion, that not only are gender differences in communication cultural constructions, but they may also be as much a perception as an actual difference (Brown 1998: 80). This led her into conclusion that "if women and men can gender switch on-line without being detected, gendered communication styles may be more of a cultural myth than an actual practice" (Brown 1998: 4), and that in fact, gendered

communication styles are more of an expectation of someone's gender than actual gender difference (ibid.). She continues by stating that gendered communication seems to be a matter of perception, i.e. seeing a difference instead of seeing a similarity and that communication styles are indeed fluid and flexible, allowing rather diversity instead of rigid communication standards and differences (Brown 1998: 4). From this perspective, she sees that the on-going pursuit in some academic arenas to "uncover" gender differences may often result in a re-packaging of traditional gender stereotypes (Brown 1998: 80). However, some of her participants reported that they had not only switched their online names, but alongside also their behaviour; they were toying with the cultural expectations of male behaviour (Brown 1998: 90), which to me indicates that they were replicating also the male norm of communication style and hence, were not detected as being women. The actual gender switching also lasted no longer than 10 hours, a more extensive period of time may have produced different results (Brown 1998: 40). In addition, Brown's study is only limited to women and it would be interesting to see that if also men's gender switching was studied, would the data result into similar findings? Nevertheless, her study further creates an interesting angle on the matter whether the actual differences between the communication styles of males and females do exist online.

Nonetheless, according to Herring (1996a: 148), the existence of gendered styles has important implications for those claims that CMC is anonymous, "gender blind" and thus, inherently democratic. If our communication styles online possibly reveal our gender, then gender differences, alongside with their social consequences, are likely to be present online as well (ibid.). The question, however, prevails whether social network sites and such alike still manifest these large gender differences or is it possible that the internet is more levelled these days and the communicational patterns of males and females are indeed rather similar than different from each other? Nielsen (2009), who studied participation inequality in social media and online communities, provided an interesting insight into looking at behaviour of general public on Facebook. He,

for instance, concluded that the finding that Facebook users were not inclined to give donations to non-profit organisations although it was made relatively easy, does not come as a big surprise since "despite the hype, Facebook is just another form of collaborative environment, meaning that long-established laws for online communities should hold. Maybe with small modifications, but the basics are due to human nature and don't change when moving to a new platform" Nielsen (2009). If Nielsen is right, aforementioned stereotypical gendered discursive patterns online could also be found on Facebook.

This notion is further supported by findings of Wang, Burke and Kraut (2013: 31, 34) who studied user-generated content on Facebook focusing on gender, topic and audience response. They found that women tend to share more personal topics on Facebook, such as family matters, whereas men discuss more public topics, e.g. politics and sports. Their findings, therefore, are in line with most of the previous studies stating that women manifest more personal orientation towards others and make contributions containing empathic utterances and personal experience online (see e.g. Herring 1993 and Guiller & Durndell 2007) whereas men tend to be more information oriented (see e.g. Cameron 2010).

In the light of these findings, the aim of the present study is to find out if this study produces parallel results confirming the tendencies of gendered communication styles and patterns on Facebook. Nonetheless, the critique towards binary characterisation of gendered language use online as contradicted, for instance, by Eisenchlas (2012) and Brown (1998) indicates a more complex reality of men and women communicating online. Furthermore, as mentioned in section 2.1.1, the more current theorising also in the field of language and gender on a more general level challenges this binary thinking, thus, viewing gender plural, with a range of femininities and masculinities that are available to speakers at any time (Coates 2004: 4). Consequently, from this perspective the results of this particular study that examines the reality of

gendered communication of 2010's on Facebook could be expected to be in line with the more current view on the language use on the internet.

3. SET-UP OF THE CURRENT STUDY

The aim for this research is to study whether similar patterns in women's and men's communication styles on Facebook can be found nowadays as has been recorded previously mainly in other online settings. Facebook, as being a highly popular phenomenon currently, is also a subject of numerous studies, but nonetheless, it seems that studies on gendered language use on Facebook that focuses precisely on discursive level phenomena are less frequent. Although these types of discourse-focused studies of individual sites, such as Facebook, Flickr and Twitter, are starting to appear (Herring 2013), the matter of gendered discourse on Facebook is still rather unresearched topic in the field of CMC studies since, for example, Facebook is a relatively new phenomenon on the internet, and the popularity of these types of social media sites has grown exponentially only during the last 7 or 8 years. Thus, the present study aims to build a bridge between the studies on gendered communication in CMC, conducted before the vast expansion of currently popular and growing social network sites, and the present-day reality online on Facebook.

For this reason in the present study gendered differences in communication patterns on the Humans of New York Facebook page are examined and the implications of these differences (or similarities) are contemplated. Hence, the research questions are as follows:

1. Are there differences in how males and females communicate on this page on Facebook?
2. If so, are the communicational features similar or different from what researchers have concluded previously on gender differences in CMC or in face-to-face interaction?
3. How are these features similar or different from what has been suggested previously, and what implications does this have?

4. DATA SELECTION AND COLLECTION

In this chapter, I will examine some of the questions surrounding the data selection and collection processes when dealing with CMC data. I will also present the rationale behind my own choices concerning these processes in the present study and, in addition, at the end of this chapter the questions of research ethics will be addressed.

4.1 Data selection – Humans of New York (HONY) Facebook page

According to Androutsopoulos (2014: 75), the data in CMC normally consists of written language in close relation to semiotic resources such as typography, image and layout. In addition, their ecological conditions challenge traditional linguistic units of analysis such as clause or turn and hence, in CMC research also categories such as 'message' or 'post' must be taken into account when collecting and analysing online data (ibid.). In the present study, the particular focus will be on comments posted in relation to what has been "shared" by the page in question on Facebook, and hence, the main emphasis will be given to the text itself in the comments. Nowadays, the internet is increasingly multimodal but, nonetheless, the focus in the current study is on text-based CMC (although in a highly multimodal context). Androutsopoulos (2014: 75) also points out that often CMC offers access to overwhelming amount of data, which is also the case in the current study. I am solving this problem by carefully choosing data and using at least two data sampling techniques (see section 4.2 for more detailed account on these techniques) to ensure a logical, but yet reasonable way of dealing with an enormous amount of possible data.

Androutsopoulos (2014: 77) also brings forth that there are mainly two approaches to CMC research online; 'CMC as text' and 'CMC as place'. A 'CMC as text' view approaches the internet as a massive archive of written language, whereas 'CMC as place' perspective views the digital communication as a social

process that progresses in discursively created spaces of human interaction. Generally these spaces are dynamically related to offline activities, e.g. 'Twitter as place' approach would study how particular social actors use this medium to engage in social activities in the context of particular event and thus, shaping the course and social meaning of that event. (Androutsopoulos 2014: 77.) Grint and Woolgar (1997), as quoted in Hine (2000: 35), also introduce a metaphor that views technology as text and is close to 'CMC as place' approach. This technology as text metaphor emphasises notion on the contingency of practices through which the internet is made meaningful both in its production and use (Hine 2000: 35). This is to say that although developers of the internet embed their notions of what users are like, it is precisely the consumption of users, which involves processes of negotiation and interpretation that determines qualities of the users (ibid.).

Furthermore, when considering techniques of data collection, 'CMC as text' may entail a tendency toward screen-based data and a preference for *etic* (researcher-oriented) rather than *emic* (participant oriented) categories, whereas 'CMC as place' approach is likely to prefer ethnographic observations and blended data collection that takes into account the digital literacy practices in which they are created (Androutsopoulos 2014: 77). The current study will be more of 'CMC as text', because the focus of the analysis will be on the comments on the Facebook page in question, although the aim is not merely to record gender differences in terms of communication patters, but also to examine the wider social context and offline social activities/worldview in the present day that influences the way we use language also in the online setting. As Hine (2000: 31) puts it, the internet can "be viewed as shaped by the social context", which is a pivotal view of the internet also in the present study.

For obtaining a sufficient amount of data for the current study, 170 comments were collected on three consecutive days from three different threats of discussion posted on the Humans of New York Facebook page (Humans of

New York Facebook page 2015a) where Facebook users can comment on the postings by the page by using their own (Facebook) profiles. The data, thus, is taken from the comments posted in relation to the stories shared by Humans of New York on its timeline, not the stories themselves. (For more detailed discussion on the features of Facebook, see section 2.1.4). In the following, I will introduce both the Humans of New York Facebook page and the rationale behind my choice for collecting data from this particular webpage.

Figure 1: Humans of New York Facebook cover photo and profile picture in January 2015 (copyright Brandon Stanton)

Humans of New York (HONY) is originally a blog created by Brandon Stanton in 2010 which features pictures of New York City inhabitants coupled with short stories of their lives (Humans of New York 2015). Stanton is on a mission to photograph 10,000 New Yorkers and to "provide a worldwide audience with daily glimpses into the lives of strangers in New York City" (ibid.). His pictures feature with people from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds and both men and women are in focus. The blog, together with HONY's other social media sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Tumblr, is widely followed. Currently, only in Facebook HONY has over 13 million followers (as of June 2015) and the numbers are growing rapidly. (More essential facts and technical details about the Humans of New York Facebook page are presented in Table 2.) The Facebook page itself is linked to the HONY blog and its Instagram and Twitter accounts as well as to a page selling the HONY

hardcover book published in 2013. Furthermore, a second HONY book, which more thoroughly represents what the page has evolved to over the past few years, 'Humans of New York: Stories', was published in October 2015 (Humans of New York Facebook page 2015a).

Table 2: The most relevant facts and technical details about the Humans of New York Facebook page

Name	Humans of New York
Creator	Brandon Stanton
What and why?	To provide a worldwide audience with daily glimpses into the lives of strangers in New York City.
Facebook URL	www.facebook.com/humansofnewyork
Likes on Facebook	13,205,524 (as of 2 June 2015)
Posts per week	From 14 to 21 posts per week
Own website URL	www.humansofnewyork.com

The key perspective on what would provide this study suitable data came from the research questions. It was necessary to find a website (preferably on Facebook) that would generate enough comments for the purposes of creating a comparison on gendered patterns of communication online, but would not be too biased in any way. As I started following HONY on Facebook, soon I discovered that there are countless fruitful discussions taking place on this page daily, which spurred me into deciding in favour of this particular webpage. In addition to providing good discussions, it can also be argued that this page represents a certain boom of the 2010's as it is more popular now than ever. To put things in perspective, a story shared on its Facebook page on 6 January 2014 received about 114 000 likes, 1920 comments and 1364 shares (Humans of New York Facebook page 2015a). To compare, a story shared on the very same Facebook page exactly a year later, 6 January 2015, received about 244 000 likes, 3 500 comments and 5031 shares (ibid.). Moreover, the concept of photographing regular people of a large city has given birth to hundreds of spinoffs of the page. One reason behind this vast popularity can be explained

by the interesting and approachable stories shared by the persons whose pictures are taken. For others, New York itself might represents something quite exotic.

When taking into consideration the popularity of the blog (also on Facebook), it can, thus, be argued that its Facebook page provides the current study a good setting for data collection as there are thousands of comments posted on its Facebook page daily and, as far as I know, this particular webpage has not been in the focus of any of the studies in the field of gender and language previously. Furthermore, both genders are represented in the pictures posted by the page, which is a crucial premise for this study attempting to create a (three-day) snapshot of gendered features of communication taking place on this popular Facebook page at this particular time, so to speak a slice of life in 2015. Thus eventually, for this purpose, 170 comments from three consecutive days from three different threats of discussion were selected from HONY Facebook page. The topics in the three discussions included e.g. finding happiness, discussing one's desire to become a porn star, and a suicide of a troubled family member. More detailed description of topics and themes will follow later at the beginning of the analysis, in Chapter 6.

In addition to providing this study a good setting for collecting suitable data, HONY Facebook page can also be considered a public webpage on the internet. Although for creating content on Facebook, e.g. posting on HONY's page, one has to be logged into Facebook and have a Facebook profile, this particular Facebook page, nonetheless, is made public by its creator, i.e. it can be accessed without being logged into Facebook or without being registered as a Facebook user. This entails any sociolinguistic research material to be gathered from this page without asking for consent from the Facebook users whose comments will be added to the present study. However, the anonymity of the commentators will be protected as none of the profile names or pictures of the users posting

the comments will be revealed in this study (see section 4.3 for the question of research ethics).

Moreover, even though Humans of New York is US-based, anyone, regardless of their nationality, race etc. can follow this page on Facebook and comment on what is being shared on its timeline. The blog itself does not enable readers to post comments on the blog posts themselves, but rather guides the reader to its social media sites, e.g. by urging them to 'join the conversation on Facebook' or to 'Follow @humansofny' or to reblog the postings. This offers visitors of the blog multiple affordances for interaction on social media sites, hence making it prosumptive. People not only consume but also produce content on the various HONY social media sites including its Facebook page, thus, shaping the internet and reality.

4.2 Data collection – CMC data

On the internet one can find an enormous amount of data and for this reason, CMDA (Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis) researchers are often forced to select a sample from the totality of the data available (Herring 2004: 350). However, this is rarely done randomly, since random sampling will sacrifice context which is, nonetheless, always important in interpreting discourse analysis results (ibid.). For this reason, Herring (2004: 350-351) introduces six CMDA data sampling techniques: sampling by theme, by time, by phenomenon, by individual or group, convenience, and also random sampling. She discusses the advantages and disadvantages of all the six techniques, and according to her, sampling by time seems to be the one that preserves the richest context since, for instance, the sample will most likely include more coherent discussions (ibid.). I have also chosen to apply sampling by time technique as it provides this study the most logical and coherent data. Consequently, when collecting the comments from HONY Facebook page, I chose to take comments from three consecutive days. In addition, I have also applied sampling by theme technique as I collected the comments from one

thread of discussion per day in order to keep the data the most coherent as possible. Thus, in total, 170 comments from three consecutive days from three different threads of discussion were selected from HONY Facebook page to provide this study sufficient amount of data.

When considering the practicalities of collecting data in CMC environments, Androutsopoulos (2014: 76, 78) introduces a concept of screen data, which refers to digital written language produced by interlocutors online that is also collected online, and provides some guidelines for collecting screen data for CMDA or CMC research purposes. For instance, content from social network sites can be collected by saving it in HTML format, as a PDF file, or as a screen shot, the latter, however, being the least favoured option since it does not allow exporting the language data (ibid). When collecting the data, I have saved the comments both as a jpg-file (as pictures) and doc-file (as text), the latter enabling the text itself to be exported. Nevertheless, as noted afore, names, profile pictures or any other information on the persons posting the comments that comprise the data for the present study will not be revealed.

4.3 Research ethics

Lastly, I would like to address a few aspects of research ethics relevant to this study. Respecting and protecting the privacy of informants is a basic legal and ethical requirement in social-scientific field work, which must also be taken into account in all research projects, but how to define the boundaries between privacy and publicness is still a tricky question (Androutsopoulos 2014: 87). The data for this study has been collected from a *public* website in that sense that anyone with internet access can find and read the comments posted on this site, not only those who are logged into Facebook. From this viewpoint, it can be argued that this data is indeed public and I am not obliged to protect the anonymity of my informants, as what they have been posting to this website - generally and of themselves - is public in nature. However, Androutsopoulos (2014: 88) points out that sometimes the researcher's (technical) definition of

what constitutes publicness might not be in consensus with what the participants themselves think, resulting in conflicting opinions on what data can be treated as "public domain". Hence, I choose to protect the individual privacy of informants and will not give off any names or profile pictures of the persons whose comments I have decided to include into my analysis. Protecting the anonymity of informants also entails avoiding publishing any clues that can lead to their identification (Androutsopoulos 2014: 87-88). Sometimes nevertheless, even when the screen names are anonymised, literal quotations from publicly accessible material can also lead back to original post via web search (ibid.). Consequently, Androutsopoulos (2014: 88) argues that in this case, an absolute anonymisation of CMC data may even be technically impossible. Manipulating the linguistic screen data to disable future verbatim searches, however, is not an option for this study as it may falsify otherwise valid data.

Moreover, some of the topics featuring in the data of the present study can be considered to be quite sensitive in nature as, for instance, one of the postings by Humans of New York (on its Facebook page) included in the analysis covers a suicide of a family member addicted to drugs. Some of the comments posted in relation to this particular posting will, thus, feature also in the analysis of the present study, but as the name and the profile picture of the commentator in question are excluded from the analysis, the relative anonymisation to some extend ensures the privacy of that person. Furthermore, as I already previously noted the data is taken from a *public* website which is technically open to all and hence, also the sensitive data can be included into the analysis to enable as comprehensive results as possible.

5. METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Methods for this study are a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, the emphasis on the former. In the very core of the methods used in this study, is the underlying notion within *discourse analysis* that language not only represents reality but that it also contributes to the construction of reality, and in particular, to the construction of *social* reality (Schreier 2012: 45). For studying gender-related patterns in online content, thus, I will use Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA), a term first introduced by Herring (see e.g. Herring 2004: 339), and when categorising comments collected under four different categories, namely under female style, male style, mixed containing features from both styles, or neutral containing no particular features of neither of the styles, I will use Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), a method developed for describing the meaning of qualitative data in a systematic way (Schreier 2012: 1). In the following, the essence of the two methods in question will be briefly explained.

5.1 Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA)

An approach designed particularly for researching online interactive behaviour known as Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) was firstly introduced by Herring (see e.g. Herring 2004: 339). The term *CMDA* was initially coined in 1995, although similar research had been carried out already since the mid-1980's (Herring 2004: 340). CMDA applies methods from language-focused disciplines such as linguistics, communication and rhetoric to the analysis of computer-mediated communication (CMC) (ibid.). CMDA might involve both qualitative and quantitative analysis and variety of methods, such as interviews, surveys, ethnographic observations etc. but, according to Herring (2004: 329), what really defines CMDA at its core, is the analysis of logs of verbal interactions (characters, words, utterances, messages, etc.). This particular approach is shaped by a linguistic perspective, i.e. it examines online behaviour through the lens of language, and its roots are in methodological

paradigms that originated in the study of spoken and written language, for instance, conversational analysis and interactional sociolinguistics (ibid.). CMDA can be used not only for studying micro-level linguistic phenomena, such as sentence structure, but also to address macro-level phenomena, such as gender equity and identity, as these are also expressed through discourse (Herring 2004: 340). This is particularly useful in the current study as this study does not merely focus on micro-level phenomena, but rather seeks to address issues also on macro-level. Moreover, CMDA is not a single "theory" or "method", but rather an approach that allows diverse theories about discourse and CMC to be entertained and tested (Herring 2004: 342). Consequently, CMDA is rather a set of methods or a methodological toolkit from which the researcher selects the ones that suit her/his data and research questions the best to make observations and interpret the results of empirical analysis (ibid.).

In addition to discussing CMDA as an approach, Herring (2004: 342-343) presents three interesting theoretical assumptions that underlie CMDA and that are derived from linguistic discourse analysis. The first assumption is that discourse exhibits recurrent patterns that may be produced consciously or unconsciously (Herring 2004: 342). Thus, gender-linked patterns are most likely those that are produced unconsciously, as gender is socially constructed and often interlocutors themselves are unaware of the persisting gendered patterns of language use. Secondly, discourse involves speaker choices that often reflect cognitive and social factors (Herring 2004: 342-343) (cf. gender roles) and thirdly, computer-mediated discourse may be shaped by the technological features of computer-mediated communication systems, however, this is not inevitably so (ibid.). Such an extreme view could also be criticised as technological determinism, so Herring (2004: 343) argues that it is rather a matter of empirical investigation in what ways and under what circumstances CMC technologies shape the communication that takes place through them. (For more detailed description on technological determinism, see e.g. Smith & Marx 1994.)

However, computer-mediated communication (or nowadays sometimes also referred to as digitally mediated communication) has undergone a great shift over the years of CMDA research as some of the phenomena on the internet have emerged only fairly recently and the already existing platforms might have changed as well (Herring 2013). There are, for example, new types of content (such as Facebook comments) that can be analysed (Herring 2013: 6). As a consequence, also a review of the CMDA as a method is necessary and thus, after inspecting discourse in Web 2.0 era Herring (2013: 6-7), concluded that in spite of all the changes, CMDA still seems a valid term for this kind of research as it clearly links to CMC and CMD and is based on established tradition. Consequently, CMDA is also the term and approach used in the current study. (For more detailed discussion on revisiting CMDA approach, see Herring 2013.)

Furthermore, Herring (2004: 343, 357) suggests that the basic methodological apparatus of CMDA is language-focused content analysis that can either be purely qualitative (observations of discourse phenomena can be made, illustrated and discussed) or quantitative (phenomena can be coded and counted, and summaries of their relative frequencies produced). These two can also be combined as for example, *Qualitative content analysis* (QCA) can provide suitable means for integrating qualitative methods into the coding of a certain phenomenon. Thus, the qualities of QCA will be examined more in detail in the next couple paragraphs to follow.

5.2 Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) and challenges of CMC study

As Schreier (2012: 1) suggests, in the heart of the QCA is one's own coding frame to which the parts of the material from the data will be assigned and categorised accordingly. These categories can be changed also during the analysis as there might be something that emerges from the data once the process of analysis has already begun (Schreier 2012: 4). Profoundly, the

systematic nature of QCA is its most distinctive feature (Schreier 2012: 5) and it is precisely this feature that is necessary for conducting this type of systematic research on the features of male and female language use online. Traditionally, content analysis has primary been used as a quantitative research method but currently, also qualitative content analysis has been applied as it addresses some of the weaknesses of quantitative approach (Zhang & Wildemuth 2009: 308). Moreover, as QCA goes beyond solely counting the words to study meanings, themes and patterns that might be visible or hidden in texts, it provides researchers an opportunity "to understand social reality in a subjective but yet, scientific manner" (ibid.), which yet again, is in the very core of the present study.

Consequently, a concept-driven, deductive strategy based on a theory, i.e. previous research, was used to build a coding frame for this particular study (for more detailed account on building a coding frame see e.g. Schreier 2012: 80-106). The comments collected for this study will be divided into four categories of *female style*, *male style*, *mixed style* (containing elements from both female and male style) and *neutral style*, a residual category for comments that cannot be forced to belong to any of the three first categories. Thus, one segment of data consists of one comment and these comments are assigned to a category based on the features that appear in each of the comments. Most typical features of female vs. male discursive styles, on the basis of which this categorisation is made, are hence presented in Table 3. It contains the most common features of these discursive styles based on previous research on the topic reported in the background chapter (especially in 2.2 and 2.1.2). This table provides the current study the guidelines for determining in which category these comments should be assigned to. Furthermore, two additional categories, i.e. mixed and neutral, were added to this coding frame, as it became clear in the very early part of this process that two binary categories (male vs. female style) would not be sufficient when examining language use on the internet. In addition, not all comments could be seen to contain enough evidence of such features, in which case a residual category is a necessary part of the coding frame.

Table 3: Collection of the most typical features of female vs. male discursive styles reported previously

Female style	Male style
Attenuated assertions	Strong assertions
Tendency to apologise	Tendency to self-promote
Explicit justifications	Presuppositions
Questions	Rhetorical questions
Express support	Challenge others
Post shorter messages	Post longer messages
Less involvement in public discourse	Control public discourse: start and end discussions in mixed-sex groups
Personal orientation: References to personal experience, own feelings, self-disclosure	Authoritative orientation: impose opinions strongly as facts or take an authoritative stance
Use polite language, express appreciation and empathy	Use crude language, profanities and flame
Hedge and express doubt, introduce ideas in the form of suggestions	More information-oriented, make controversial statements and use humour or sarcasm

To be able to assign these comments to corresponding categories, nevertheless, I chose firstly to investigate whether the commentators are men, women or identify themselves with some other term. Studying CMC data can also postulate many challenges, when it comes to relying on profile names and pictures. Androutsopoulos (2014: 82), for instance, explicates how CMC might complicate the process of social identity ascription for both researchers and participants. As noted afore, especially public digital communication is often carried out anonymously and among interlocutors who lack cues for shared social categorisation (Androutsopoulos 2014: 82), (see section 2.1.3 for further discussion). This creates difficulties for any sociolinguistic analysis that depends on clear-cut sociodemographic information, e.g. on gender (ibid.). Androutsopoulos (2014: 82) suggest that to address this issue, a researcher can, e.g. work with the social identity cues offered by users themselves. These include propositional information and indexical cues such as screen names and associated "virtual identity" signs such as avatars (ibid.). In the current study, I

draw conclusions based on interlocutors screen names and profile pictures, as I attempt to determine the sex of the interlocutors in question (before assigning the comments into different categories), but this, however, comes with uncertainty as screen names and profile pictures can be misleading. As Hine (2000: 119) puts it; the new technologies within CMC create fundamental problems of authenticity since visual anonymity allows for interlocutors to play with their identities deliberately and adopt different personae, and as a result, there is no guarantee that the identity performed in cyberspace will mirror that performed in offline settings. The present study, however, investigates gendered communication and despite these challenges, attempts to bring new insights to way women and men use language online nowadays.

6. ANALYSIS

The analysis of the present study will be organised so that firstly, comments collected from the Humans of New York Facebook page are assigned under four different categories, namely under *female style*, *male style*, *mixed*, containing features from both styles, or *neutral*, in which features of neither of the first two styles are apparent. (For more thorough account on the four different categories, see section 5.2.) The results of this division will then be analysed and overall conclusion concerning this part of the analysis are also drawn on the basis of the results presented. After this, with the help of key tools from computer-mediated discourse analysis, a more detailed analysis on some of the language features will be conducted to further investigate whether previously described differences in male vs. female style are replicated also on social media sites, or is a more current approach to looking at gendered discourse online, which e.g. challenges the stereotypically binary characterisation of gendered communication, closer to the truth nowadays. I will discuss my overall findings and larger implications further in this latter section and then draw broader conclusions in the discussion chapter.

The topics in the postings that were selected as data from the Humans of New York Facebook page ranged e.g. from discussing finding happiness and debating on young man's desire to do porn to more sensitive topics, such as discussing a suicide of a family member. There were altogether three postings, i.e. three pictures with captions that tell a story of a person featuring in the picture. In the first picture, one finds a full body shot of a regular-looking Caucasian young male with a caption *"I'm trying to find a way to be happy without being the best"* (Humans of New York Facebook page 2015b). The second picture is a close-up of an average-looking African-American young male with a caption *"I want to be a porn star but I think it would embarrass my mom too much"* (Humans of New York Facebook page 2015c). The third picture is another full body shot featuring a successful-looking Caucasian older male with a caption *"No matter how much we tried to help my brother, he wouldn't quit. We tried being*

there for him. Then we tried to throw money at the problem. We tried to set him up with rehab, doctors, psychologists, even a job. Then eventually we just sort of threw up our hands and stopped associating with him, thinking that the alienation might shock him into changing. I hadn't spoken to him for two years when he killed himself" (Humans of New York Facebook page 2015d*).* The comments analysed in this section, thus, are collected in relation to these three postings and when examining these comments, one must bear in mind the context provided by the original posting. In order to provide further contextualisation for the readers, before starting the actual analysis of the features of language use, I have also chosen to present an example of the prevailing atmosphere present in the all three postings in this study in Figure 2, which also exemplifies the quite explicit rules of netiquette imposed by the commentators of the posts on this page.
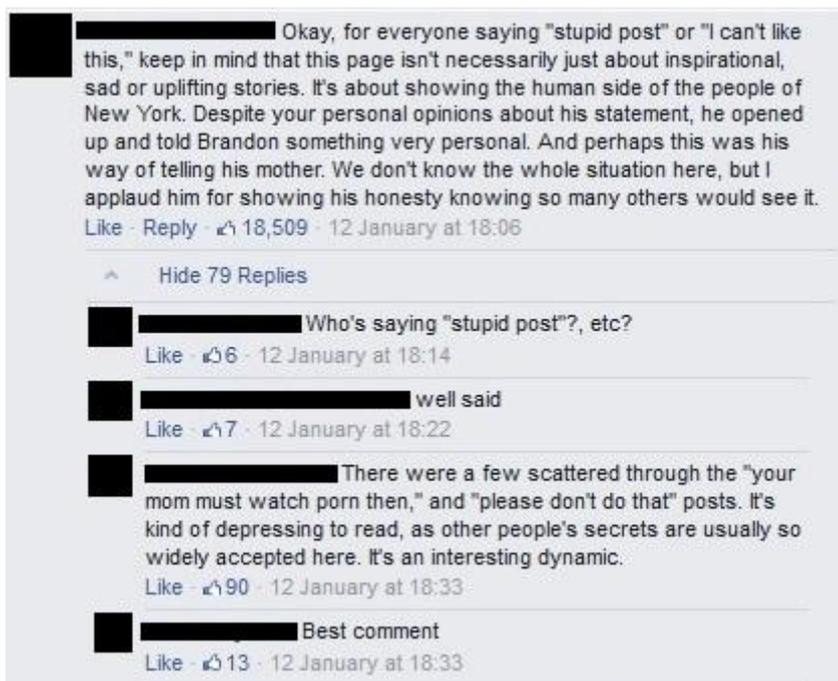
Figure 2: An illustration on a discussion taking place on the HONY Facebook page in January 2015 (Humans of New York Facebook page 2015c)

Figure 2, hence, presents a snapshot into the reality of communication on the Humans of New York Facebook page captured in January 2015 and also offers an example of quite explicit rules of netiquette imposed by the commentators of the page. In this illustration, hence, one can both see the overall appearance of

comment section on Facebook and an example of some of the positive comments that appeared this particular thread of discussion taking place on the HONY Facebook page. Context of the comments entails a picture of a man with a statement *"I want to be a porn star but I think it would embarrass my mom too much."*, as introduced previously. This particular thread of comments was selected to be part of the current study as it was seen to have commenced a fruitful conversation, in which both supporting and opposing comments toward the original caption of the post and also toward the (first) comment that initiated this thread. All comments in Figure 2 are written by women portraying the vast scale of language used by women in this study, i.e. forms ranging from authoritative orientation, in which no signs of attenuated language are present, all the way to the more typical type of female language, i.e. forms of appreciation (more detailed analysis on the features of the language use by women and men will follow later). What was rather prominent and quite surprising in the comments on this Facebook page were, nevertheless, the explicit rules of (yet rather implicit) netiquette. In her studies in the 1990's, Herring discovered that the netiquette of many of those discussion lists that she was studying was often compatible with male values and male adversarial style, which was consistent with the behaviour that was reported intimidating by many women (cf. Herring 1996a). In the present study, however, the netiquette is more in line with female style, but advocating this type of netiquette did not only seem to be a matter of women's determination (as could be expected based on some of the previous studies in the field, see e.g. Hall (1996)), since also some men reacted in favour of comments signalling appreciation as we can see from example 1:

(1) "Thank you! Finally someone who appreciates HONY posts for their raw insight into humanity, rather than to make judgements about people we know almost nothing about. The way I see it, HONY gives us an extremely unique perspective on humanity that we don't get anywhere else. HONY is a medium through which we should support, love, listen, and relate to other human's stories. It is not one through which we should judge or assume. We know next to nothing about these people. All we can do is listen, and try to relate. Judge less, care more."

Therefore, when analysing the comments collected from a page with these kinds of postings signalling a supportive atmosphere and with a tone of the discussion that cannot be perceived to be threatening to anyone, women in particular, who have been reported in many cases to have been intimidated by the overall tone of the discussions online as these often favour more masculine type of communication (Herring 2011), it can be concluded that based on these three postings the environment provided by this page seems to be far different from most of the "venues" in which this type of research has generally been conducted previously; the atmosphere on the HONY Facebook page is quite open-minded and supportive in nature, at least when examining closer the comments collected for this study. This also predicts somewhat dissimilar results for the current study when compared with the results of some of the previous research.

6.1 Number of comments and their distribution between genders

When performing the quantitative part of the analysis, i.e. calculating the individual comments of the data - the 170 comments collected from the comment section of the Humans of New York Facebook page - there were altogether 135 commentators, of which 61 percent (83) were women and 39 percent (52) were men. These commentators created in total 154 comments, of which women contributed 66 percent (101 comments) and men 34 percent (53 comments). 14 comments were discarded as they included either only a link to person's name or to a website, or only emoticons, which from the perspective of mostly text-only CMC analysis were not seen as relevant and hence, were left out of the analysis. In addition, two comments were considered ambiguous since gender (or more accurately sex) of the commentators was unidentifiable as the comments were deleted from the thread of discussion selected to be part of the analysis by the time gender was being investigated through screen names and profiles, and in addition, these profiles (or any other information matching the screen name used) could no longer be found through a general web search. The process of determining whether the commentators were in fact male,

female or identifying themselves with some another term, was mainly conducted through inspection of commentator's name and the profile picture in sight. In some cases, however, I was forced to visit the commentators (Facebook) profile for more information, for example, to see whether the persons in question have listed their gender on their profile info. It should also be noted that gender identity does not limit only to concepts of male and female but is rather a far more complex matter. Consequently, the very recent change to the gender selection on users' profiles on Facebook nowadays allows users to choose their gender more freely from a set of suggested terms or they are even allowed to type in their preferred description of their own gender (Machkovech 2015). All the informants in this study whose profile I investigated, nonetheless, listed their gender as male or female.

However, already the fact that from 154 comments in this study two-thirds (66%) were written by women demonstrates that, in the context of the present study, the public CMC on this particular page on Facebook does not seem to be as predominantly a male preserve as suggested previously in terms of public computer-mediated communication (see e.g. Coates 2004, Herring 2000) and that women's involvement on social network sites might have indeed increased during the past decade, as suggested previously by Herring (2011). However, the context plays a vital role in this matter as these results are only based on the reality on the Humans of New York Facebook page, which, based on the comments collected for this study, has proved to be a rather open-minded and supportive environment, and features with a variety of different people and stories. Therefore, it can be argued that a different website even on some other social network site might have produced different kinds of results. It must also be noted that Herring (2011) reported how women are often intimidated on the internet by the tone of the public discussions, except when it comes to communicating on social network sites as these sites often allow more control over the communication: unwelcoming comments can be deleted, there is a possibility to choose who can read and contribute, and harassers can be left out of the conversation (ibid.). According to Herring (2011), this explains why more

than half of users of social network sites are women and can also explain why two-thirds of the comments in the present study were generated by female users.

6.2 How do genders communicate online? Female vs. male style or something in between?

In order to be as precise and analytical as possible with the following part of the analysis, I have chosen to deploy Quantitative Content Analysis (QCA), as it offers the current study a systematic procedure for analysing this kind of CMC material by assigning segments of data into four different categories, i.e. *female style*, *male style*, *mixed* (containing elements from both female and male style) and *neutral* style, a residual category for comments that do not contain any particular features to enable such categorisation. These categories as well as the rationale behind the inclusion of these particular categories are presented in the section 5.2 together with Table 3, which contains the most typical features of female and male styles, and which also functions as guidelines in this study for determining in which category the comments are assigned to. For the purposes of clarification, I have chosen to add this table also to the present section of this study (see the following page).

Table 3: Collection of the most typical features of female vs. male discursive styles reported previously

Female style	Male style
Attenuated assertions	Strong assertions
Tendency to apologise	Tendency to self-promote
Explicit justifications	Presuppositions
Questions	Rhetorical questions
Express support	Challenge others
Post shorter messages	Post longer messages
Less involvement in public discourse	Control public discourse: start and end discussions in mixed-sex groups
Personal orientation: References to personal experience, own feelings, self-disclosure	Authoritative orientation: impose opinions strongly as facts or take an authoritative stance
Use polite language, express appreciation and empathy	Use crude language, profanities and flame
Hedge and express doubt, introduce ideas in the form of suggestions	More information-oriented, make controversial statements and use humour or sarcasm

It can be, nevertheless, noted that one of my research questions seeks to investigate whether there are any differences between genders in the first place. To be able to answer this, nonetheless, I shall first examine the (stereo)typical traits of communication based on these different features and after that, I will be equipped to form an analytically based opinion on whether these differences do exist.

In the following, results and discussion on the process of dividing the comments into four categories of female style, male style, mixed and neutral will be presented. First, comments generated by women are analysed and allocated into the categories based on the features that appear in the comments. After that, comments created by men are in focus and similarly to the women's comments, they are assigned to the categories accordingly. Following this, the case of the two ambiguous comments will be discussed and finally, a section summarising the results of the division of the comments will be presented, in

which the results of the current study will be more thoroughly and analytically compared with the findings of the previous studies in the field.

6.3.1 Comments written by women

Out of 101 comments created by *women*, 51 comments (50%) were assigned to the category of *female style*, 13 comments (13%) showed features of *male style*, 28 comments (28%) portrayed features of both styles, hence, belong to the category of *mixed* and 9 comments (9%) were considered *neutral*, i.e. there was nothing in particular that stood out in them, in which case forcing these comments into a specific category would have been rather pointless. Figures are also presented graphically in Chart 1 (below).

Chart 1. Comments posted by women.
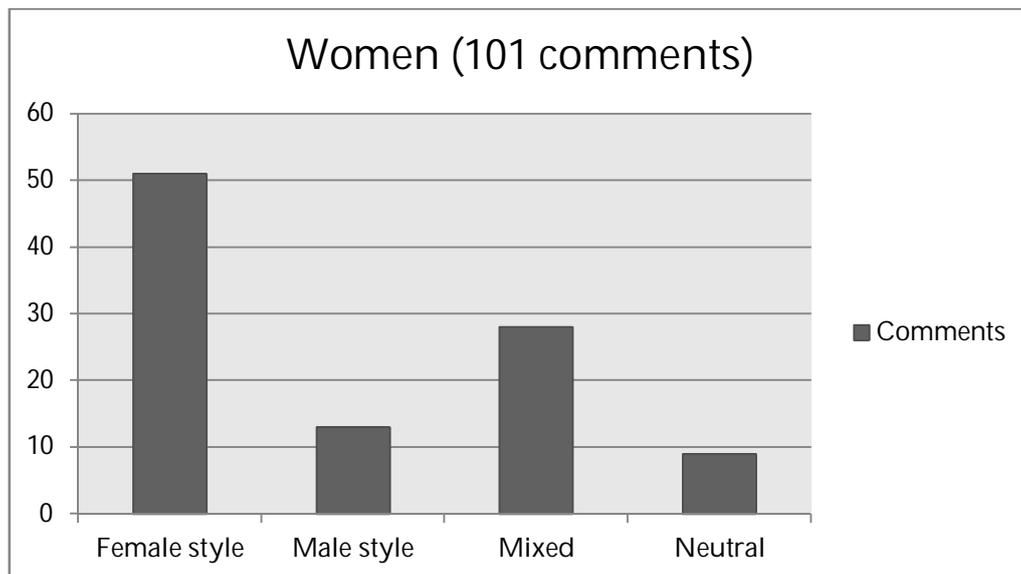
To give some concrete examples on the features that appeared in the comments posted by women, on the basis of which these comments were then divided into the categories, I have selected a few cases of points that illustrate the particular category in question. The first example to illustrate *female style,* in

which half of the women's comments were allocated, features with many typical characteristics of female style, which also made it easy to categorise:

> (2) "^^^Yes! I follow a couple other pages similar to this one for that very reason I've always loved thinking about being in other peoples' shoes and things like that, and these pages are so good at allowing us to do that for just a moment There are a lot of posts that 'break stereotypes' too which is great."

In example 2 one can find characteristics such as appreciation, in this case towards the HONY page in general. This comment also manifests a personal orientation as there are references to writer's own feelings, such as "*I've always loved thinking about being in other people's shoes*". The comment is also very supportive and uses polite language, all of which is consistent with the previously ascribed female style. Most of the comments allocated to this category demonstrated similar features, e.g. appreciation, polite forms and supportive language, which are in favour of confirming the results of some of the previous studies stating women tend to be more supportive and polite in their postings online (see e.g. Herring 1993, 1996a).

Not all postings in this category, nonetheless, manifested that clearly these typical features of female style. The second example, in which the aforementioned characteristics were less obvious, is more of a borderline case, which portrays also the challenges faced when categorising some of the comments:

> (3) "All I can say, it's a odd ambition .... I bet the money would be good though ..... Would I be impressed if one of my boys would choose this line of work? Or haven forbid, my daughter!? Probably not.... But then, I am a prude"

Example 3 e.g. lacks features of politeness or expressing appreciation and empathy but nonetheless, neither includes clear signs of male-linked discourse, such as authoritative stance or controversial statements. The comment, however, was assigned to female style based on the references to own feelings and self-disclosure that appear at the end of the comment, in which the writer

expresses how she would feel if her children (daughter in particular) chose to be porn actors. The writer concludes the comment by stating that she is a prude, which is an example of a self-disclosure. Comments similar to this one, nevertheless, were minority as most of the comments assigned to female style often featured with multiple female-linked traits of communication.

In the following, I will discuss comments posted by women that were assigned to *male style*, 13 of 101 comments altogether. The first example of this category illustrates clearly a style normally associated with men (example 4), but the latter example, on the contrary, portrays features that can be seen less obvious to male style (example 5).

> (4) "You want to applaud him for wanting to do porn? Yes HONY is about showing the human side but many times that human side is ugly and misguided. If he said, I want to try crack but I don't want to embarrass my mother, would you still applaud him for being "honest"?"

Example 4 differs significantly from the examples given in the previous paragraphs (i.e. examples 2 and 3). It is a challenging comment in which one can find strong assertions and even hostile attitude towards others, such as *"If he said, I want to try crack but I don't want to embarrass my mother, would you still applaud him for being "honest"?"*. Thus, all features in this comment suggest a style normally associated with men and in addition, the majority of the comments (written by women) that were assigned to this category of male style showed similar features, e.g. the tone in the comments was authoritative instead of being attenuated, a stylistic feature considered to be more typical for men's communication patterns online. However, only a small percentage of comments were similar to this one in terms of containing strong or aggressive language, but the fact that these kinds of features were found also in the comments posted by women, nonetheless, contradicts the notion of attenuated and supportive female style reported earlier e.g. by Herring (1993, 1996a).

Example 5, on the other hand, lacks some distinct features that clearly signal

masculinity, such as strong assertions and lengthy postings, and thus, was on the verge of various categorisations in the present study:

> (5) "This^ just because it's weird/unacceptable/ gross to you doesn't mean it's not important to someone else."

In example 5, the writer, nevertheless, imposes her opinion as a fact and does not include, for instance, any hedges to reduce the force of the utterance or refer to own experiences, on the basis of which it was concluded that this particular comment correlates with male style, and further supports the claims that nowadays women do not only post attenuated and supportive comments, but rather are using language in a more varied manner.

Examples 6 and 7 provide us further insight on how we are dealing with a far more complex matter than just binary categorisation of male vs. female styles. From 101 comments posted by women almost one-third, i.e. 28 percent, were assigned to the category of *mixed* style, using components from both styles.

> (6) "[name omitted][4], I think "being yourself" is knowing when to let yourself be you and go ahead and procrastinate - and when to seriously discipline yourself against your tendency to procrastinate. It's ok to procrastinate on cleaning out the basement just because it needs it. It's not ok if a moving truck is coming for the stuff in the basement in a few days. (my rule is whether or not anyone else is depending on me, or waiting on me - then I cannot procrastinate. I've learned that I will be crabby, and not truly enjoy myself, until I know I've fulfilled any obligation I've made.)"

Example 6 features with many characteristics of male style, e.g. as its tone is authoritative, including sentences such as "*It's ok to procrastinate on cleaning out the basement just because it needs it. It's not ok if a moving truck is coming for the stuff in the basement in a few days*". In addition to being authoritative, the comment itself is rather long, both of which are normally seen to represent the more

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[4] As all clues that could lead to identification of the persons whose comments have been included into the analysis (such as profile names and pictures) are omitted in the present study, also the name of the person, to which this particular comment was a response, is left out of the example.

masculine way of communicating online. However, towards the end of the posting the tone shifts into a more personal one with references to personal experience and own feelings, e.g. *"I've learned that I will be crabby, and not truly enjoy myself, until I know I've fulfilled any obligation I've made."*, which is more consistent with the female style. This was quite frequent in the comments assigned to this particular category. Many women chose to apply, in fact, relatively authoritative tone in their writing but, for instance, forms of appreciation and signalling support featured also often in the comments posted by women. However, forms signalling e.g. insecurity, such as hedges and phrasing statements as questions, or apologetic language were not present in the comments written by women in this study, which indicates that women's language nowadays is not as insecure and attenuated either as suggested previously e.g. by Lakoff (1975) and Herring (1993, 1996a). Furthermore, this type of mixing male- and female-gendered features is also supported, for example, by the findings of Hall (1996).

Example 7 also confirms the tendency to combine gendered features in the postings but was rather atypical when comparing the other comments assigned to the mixed category:

> (7) "The quiet satisfaction with life that causes those fleeting moments of happiness is only found when you do real things to help real people."

In example 7 the writer's opinion is imposed as a fact but it lacks e.g. the authoritative stance (consistent with male style) as well as, for instance, references to own feelings or personal experience (consistent with female style). Nonetheless, even though this is a declarative statement, it is also a quite empathetic utterance, which is described to be more typical for women's way of writing. As a result, this comment was seen to portray features from both styles and was thus assigned to the mixed category.

Lastly, I will give some examples (numbered 8 and 9) of the comments that

were allocated to the category of *neutral.* Of 101 comments written by women 9 percent (9 comments) did not feature with any particular characteristics describing female or male style and hence, forcing these comments into a specific category would have been rather purposeless.

(8) "Who's saying "stupid post"?, etc?"

(9) "I agree 100%!"

Example 8 showcases a relatively simple question that could have been posted by any gender and does not include enough evidence of either female or male style. Similar comments with neutral features were assigned to this category. Example 9, on the other hand, could be assigned to female style on the basis of containing agreement, which could be seen to express support, which is more typical for women as men have been said to be more prone rather to challenge others. It was, nonetheless, concluded that this particular comment is not evident enough to be categorised as female style (as men could also write comments of agreement) and was hence assigned to the category of neutral.

6.3.2 Comments written by men

Now, I move on to analysing comments written by *men.* When examining the 53 comments posted by men, only 30 percent (16 comments) portrayed features of *male style* clearly enough to be assigned to this category. Conversely, 26 percent (14 comments) were considered to show traits of *female style*, 28 percent (15 comments) was seen to show characters of both styles, thus, assigned to the category of *mixed,* and 15 percent (8 comments) were considered *neutral* on the basis of not portraying any specific features to enable categorisation. Figures are also presented graphically in Chart 2 on the following page.

Chart 2. Comments posted by men
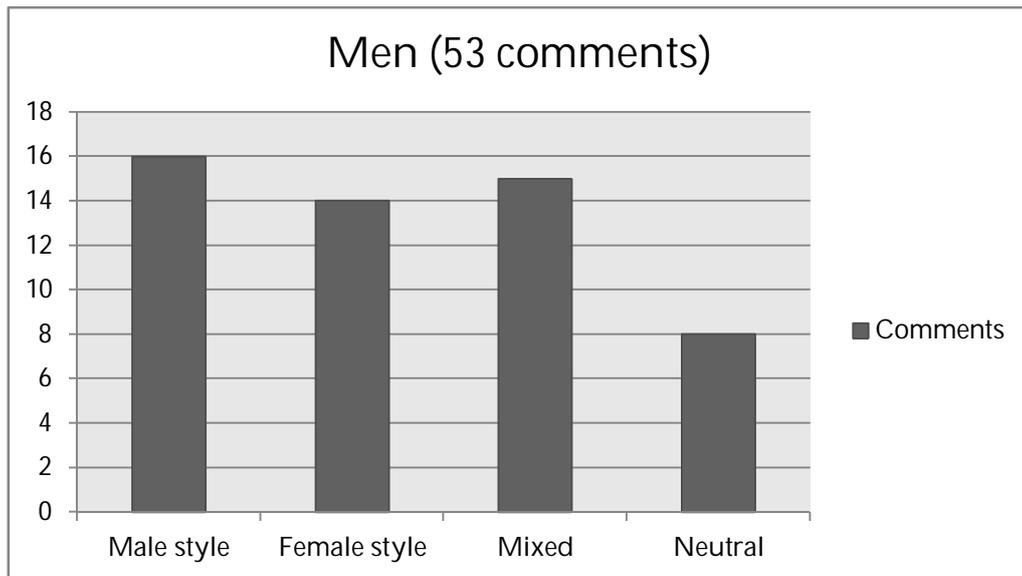
To illustrate some of the features that appeared in the comments written by men, I shall start by giving two examples of *male style,* to which 30 percent (16 out of 53 comments) were assigned. The first comment (example 10) is an illustration on the most typical types of comments that were assigned to this style, whereas the second example features with traits that were less common in the comments posted by men.

> (10) "The best way to discover your true self is to spend a great deal of time alone thinking and dealing with what really makes you tick. Your ideologies and morals will eventually show."

Example 10 demonstrates typical types of comments that appeared in this category. Its tone is rather authoritative than personal and the writer states his opinions as facts (rather than e.g. showing forms of personal orientation, such as references to own feelings), all of which is reported to be consistent with male style of communicating online (see e.g. Herring 1993, 1996a). Most of the comments in this category were similar to this one, although small minority of them also contained stronger or slightly more aggressive forms of language use, as example 11 demonstrates:

(11) "Patriarchal bs has spoken!"

Example 11 features with a swear word *bullshit* (analysed more in detail in the section 6.3.4) and is disparaging in nature. As men have been reported to use crude language and profanities more often than women (see e.g. Herring 2003), this particular comment was allocated to male style.

As most of the comments assigned to this category, however, generally featured with authoritative tone but lacked the adversarial side, it challenges the (stereo)typical view of adversarial male style, containing, e.g. strong assertions and profanities, as the majority of comments in this category were not perceived as adversarial or challenging as the previous studies in the field would have suggested (see e.g. Herring 1993, 1996a, 2003). This finding is also supported e.g. by Guiller & Durndell (2007) as they concluded that the male style that Herring described was substantially more extreme authoritative and adversarial than the male style that appeared in their study. A further discussion, however, on this subject will follow later as overall conclusions are drawn on the basis of what was seen typical or atypical in the comments when comparing previous research with the results of the current study.

In addition, the next two examples also continue to challenge the adversarial male style as they are illustrations of *female style,* to which 26 percent (14 out of 53 comments) written by men were allocated based on the features that appeared in these comments. Example 12 features with clear female-linked patters, while example 13 was only assigned to this category after a long consideration.

> (12) "[name omitted], you are awesome, and your comment made me so happy! Please keep being awesome. Everyone else: Please be as awesome as [the same name omitted as in the first sentence]."

Example 12 contains forms of appreciation such as "*you are awesome*" and

manifests a personal orientation with references to own feelings, e.g. *"your comment made me so happy!"*, all of which is perceived to be typical for female style of communicating online. Majority of the comments written by men that fell under this category displayed similar features, such as appreciation towards others, which further indicates that nowadays men do not use as assertive and adversarial forms of language as suggested previously (see e.g. Herring 1993, 1996a, 2003). This is further supported by example 13, which also lacks the (stereo)typical features used to describe male style and, in fact, is quite attenuated:

(13) "thank god someone knows... i certainly don't know much"

The comment in example 13, written in response to a pondering on finding happiness, was different from most of the comments assigned to this category. It is seemingly neutral combination of two declarative clauses in terms of not featuring with obvious gendered patterns. However, in the latter sentence *"i certainly don't know much"* the writer can be seen to degrade oneself and on the basis of this attenuation, this particular comment was allocated to female style. These two examples also tells us more about the actuality of language use online amongst men and how this actuality seems to differ a great deal from those past studies, in which men's language use is portrayed as more aggressive.

However, it is also noteworthy to keep in mind the context of these discussions, from which the data of the current study derives from. Based on the three postings selected for this study, the general atmosphere and hence, the netiquette on the Humans of New York Facebook page has proved to be rather open-minded and supportive, which most likely also affects the way men are communicating in this environment. A different type of website might have resulted into fairly different findings in terms of actuality of language use online but as this study focuses on this particular aspect on this particular site, the findings of the present study are also valid.

In the following, I will move onto examining some of the more sensitive data (see section 4.3 for ethical considerations). The next two examples belonging to the category *mixed* further showcases how binary categorisation of male vs. female style might not be enough nowadays to describe discourse taking place in online environments. A parallel number of comments of male and female style, namely 28 percent (15 out of 53 comments) posted by men were assigned to this category.

> (14) "I disagree. If you're not there for your family or loved ones, then who would be? No one. God forbit i ever got addicted to anything and none of my friends or family wasn't there for me, i would be extremely offended and feel really bad. There is help out there so kicking a loved one out of your house or ignoring them doesnt do anything. Clearly thats the moral of this guys story. Stay strong everyone and yeah its hard but they can change and they DO need your help. No excuses."

Example 14, thus, can be seen to contain features from both male and female styles. For instance, it starts with a quite authoritative and even a somewhat challenging tone (considered to be more masculine way of communicating) but soon shifts into a more personal tone with references to own emotions, such as *"i would be extremely offended and feel really bad"*. Furthermore, at the end of the comment also forms signalling empathy and expressing support appear, such as *"Stay strong everyone and yeah its hard"*, which all are perceived to be more typical for women's language use. Nonetheless, the overall tone of the posting remains authoritative as the commentator is maintaining his point of view throughout the comment and also expresses it very clearly, e.g. by stating *"but they can change and they DO need your help. No excuses."*. These types of features were seen to be very typical in the comments that were assigned to this particular category. For instance, comments with authoritative or information-oriented tones, nonetheless, also fairly often contained forms of appreciation or support and even personal orientation. This is also a strong indication that that the current discourse online might, in fact, favour mixing of male- and female-gendered features, as suggested e.g. by Hall (1996).

Furthermore, example 15, which also supports the claims of mixing these features, is a demonstration of a type of comment that was not initially assigned to this category:

(15) "not poking holes just engaging in dialogue . "

On the surface this comment seems to lack any of the features of female or male style as it is a regular declarative sentence, but since its purpose is to reduce the force of the writer's previous utterance, it can be perceived as containing language use that has been reported to be more typical for women's communication. However, the sentence also features with authoritative tone and thus, this comment was best seen to represent the mixed category and further challenge the previously prevailed binary categorisation.

Lastly, to give and illustration on the comments that fell under the category of *neutral*, 8 out of 53 comments (15 percent), in which neither of the gendered styles was particularly apparent, I shall present two examples (numbered 16 and 17) which also highlights the necessity of this type of residual category.

(16) "Also he might be joking"

(17) "Amen"

This type of comment presented in example 16, in which speculations of whether the person in the picture was only kidding about his aspiration to be a porn star were expressed, featured, in fact, in fairly large number of comments by both genders. If the comments were simple statements of an opinion and did not manifest any clear signs of masculine or feminine discursive patterns, such as in this case, I chose to allocate them to this category. As for example 17, the comment does not contain enough evidence to enable reasonable analysis and was hence allocated to this residual category.

6.3.3 Deleted comments - the case of ambiguity

As explained at the beginning of this chapter, two comments in the data collected were considered ambiguous since the gender of the commentators was unidentifiable, as the comments were deleted from the thread of discussion selected to be part of the analysis by the time the gender was being investigated through screen names and profiles, and in addition, these profiles (or any other information matching the screen name used) could no longer be found through a general web search. It is unknown by whom the two comments in question were deleted, but as the thread had already been recorded for the purposes of the current study, the later-deleted comments are present in the data of this study, and hence are also analysed, although separately from the other 154 comments, as the gender of the writers who created these 154 comments could be identified with a relative certainty. The two ambiguous comments are presented below in example 18, which appeared in relation to young's man desire to be a porn actor, and in example 19, which appeared in the discussion on a suicide of a troubled family member:

(18) "Yep, why don't we see some pedophiles' thoughts on here too?? That's really authentic too! We just want to see real people"

(19) "I disagree. I think this is worded to separate people and make some feel left out of the conversation. You don't know what people do or don't understand, and it's foolish to assume you do know."

Both examples 18 and 19 demonstrate a style that is normally associated with men, as for instance, both challenge the ideas presented by others, are authoritative in tone and feature with strong assertions such as *it's foolish to assume you do know.* In example 18 even relatively controversial ideas are presented as the writer contradicts the rather open-minded atmosphere of the discussion and demands that if the same principles are held, it would, for instance, justify the opinions of pedophiles to be accepted publicly. It might be precisely this controversial, sarcastic and assertive tone of the comment that led to its removal, as it clearly deviates from the general atmosphere and perceived netiquette of the discussion on the Humans of New York Facebook page. On

the basis of the features in these two comments it could, thus, be argued that the commentators are male, but concluding so could also be a sophistry since in some cases, also females conduct assertive behaviour online with controversial statements (see e.g. example 4 in the present study). Consequently, the matter of whether these ambiguous comments were posted by men, women, or a man and a woman, will be determined inconclusive in the present study. What makes them interesting, however, is the fact that they were removed from the thread of discussions fairly quickly, as it is possible also for general public nowadays to some extent control discussions taking place in social network sites, which also facilitates the user-friendliness of these sites and might, for example, lead to higher participation among female users (cf. Herring 2011 on the topic).

6.3.4 Actuality of language use online - summary on the gender-linked features

Now, as I have categorised and presented the rationale behind this division of the 154 comments in question into the four categories of female style, male style, mixed style and neutral style, I shall further evaluate and discuss my findings in a more coherent summary. Out of these 154 comments analysed in this study 66 percent (101 comments) were created by women and 34 percent (53 comments) were written by men. Tests that focus on obtaining statistically significant results have not been included in this study, but instead the percentages attained by the categorisation have been compared and based on these percentages conclusions on prevailing differences have been made. In other words, by examining the number of comments assigned to each of the categories and the grounds for this division, some valid conclusions on gendered communication styles online, or absence of certain gender-linked features, can be made. Moreover, in this section I will present some noteworthy instances of language use by both women and men that seem somewhat striking in the data or deserve to be highlighted, and analyse them to

investigate further what these instances reveal from the stylistic differences (or similarities) between genders in an online setting in the 2010's.

Firstly, in the light of some of the results of the current study, revisiting stereotypical binary division of male vs. female style is a necessity. It is true that the half of the comments in this study posted by women (51 out of 101) fell under the category of female style showing features typical for women's discursive style, such as forms of appreciation, support, politeness and personal orientation. Nonetheless, the other half of women's comments manifested also quite different features or contained none of the traits said to be characteristics to the women's language. For instance, comments that contained more masculine features (e.g. all the 13 percent categorised into male style and 28 percent categorised into mixed style, hence, 41 percent in total) displayed features such as authoritative orientation and assertive language, instead of attenuated style, and in some cases, these comments were also rather lengthy, which is also perceived more typical for men's style in online settings. This is precisely the most striking feature in the current study concerning the comments posted by women as example 20 also clearly exemplifies:

> (20) "[name omitted]- Spend time alone. Do things you enjoy, and have new experiences to learn more about yourself. Meet new people. Question everything. Put yourself outside of your comfort zone and be open to new happenings and interactions, and learn how you react and why. Then understand how that effects other people and their interactions with you. Know that you control nothing in life but yourself. Self-reflection isn't hard, but it does take time and patience and an open mind, and not a whole lot of people are willing to give those things."

Comments with these kinds of features presented in example 20, such as authoritative tone and assertive orientation, suggest a fairly different actuality compared to the stereotypical image of women communication online, whose language is often said to be attenuated, overly supportive and mainly containing only traditional female language features, as suggested previously e.g. by Herring (1993, 1996a) and Guiller & Durndell (2007). Consequently, forms signalling insecurity, i.e. attenuated or apologetic language, hedging or

introducing ideas in the forms of suggestions, were extremely rare in the comments analysed in this study, which to me indicates that 'women's language' in online setting is not as powerless as suggested earlier (see e.g. Lakoff 1975), or attenuated (see e.g. Herring 1993, 1996a), and hence, showcases that the way women use language online has at least somewhat shifted from those first studies of 'CMC and language'. It also seems that, in the context of social media and the Humans of New York Facebook page in particular, women are very active in the public discourse, as two-thirds of the comments (that were somewhat randomly chosen for data) were written by women, even though all the persons featuring in the original postings by HONY were, in fact, male. This excludes the option of women commenting only postings of other women, and in addition to signalling a very different reality online in the 2010's, compared to those studies that emerged in the 1990's or in and around millennium, in which the internet was seen rather as a male preserve, further seems to prove Herring's (2011) view that social network sites are easier environments for women in terms of participation, due to the ability provided by these sites to have control over the public discussion, as for instance the unwelcoming comments can be deleted, which could also be observed in the present study (see 6.3.3 for further discussion).

In the analysis of the comments written by men (34 percent of all comments, i.e. 53 out of 154), similarly the binary categorisation and the typicality of the male style was seen to be challenged. Purely a glimpse at the figures of the categorisation of the comments created by men suggests something else than an existence of a clear male style, as only 30% (16 out of 53 comments) were seen to belong to the category of male style and parallel number of comments, i.e. 26% (14 comments) and 28% (15 comments), were assigned to the female style and to the category of mixed. These categories, thus, add up the totality of comments containing forms of feminine language use all the way to 29 comments, which comprises 55% of all comments posted by men in this study. Similarly to the comments assigned to the category of female style that were posted by women, also the majority of these 29 comments featured with forms of appreciation and

supportive language, and not with forms of attenuated language. Thus, the way men were perceived to communicate in the present study was not as adversarial and authoritative as suggested earlier by Herring (1993, 1996a, 2003), which is also parallel with the results of Guiller & Durndell (2007). These kinds of results, hence, suggest that the conventional male style no longer accurately depicts the way men communicate online in the present-day setting and that the strict polarisation between genders is not the most reasonable approach when researching gendered communication nowadays. Rather, as Coates (2004: 4) conveys, gender should be viewed as plural, with a range of femininities and masculinities available to speakers at any time, and from which persons can then construct a range of gendered personae depending on the situation. However, as mentioned above, in the context of the present study, in which the data was gathered from a website that proved to have a relatively open-minded and supportive atmosphere, and consequently also netiquette, the Humans of New York Facebook page has, without any doubt, affected the nature of the comments posted by men and women in the present study.

Nevertheless, what was rather striking in the comments posted by men and greatly different from the comments posted by women were the isolated instances of flaming and swearing. Example 21, "*i read your typical comment aloud in a snotty white girl voice*", demonstrates a clear instance of flaming. However, flaming appeared only in one comment out of 53 comments posted by men and thus, cannot be extrapolated to apply to male style in general, but nonetheless, is a noticeable instance which the comments posted by women lacked. In Figure 3 an illustration on this flame and a response to it are presented to provide readers, in addition to a further contextualisation, also a glimpse on this matter in its authentic context on Facebook.
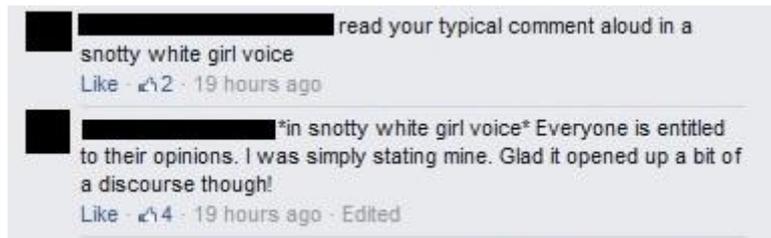
Figure 3: An illustration on flaming and a response to it on the HONY Facebook page in January 2015

As defined previously in the section 2.1.3, flaming refers to derogative, obscene or inappropriate language to express strong or negative opinion or to offend someone on the internet, and it is normally associated with men's language use online (Herring 1996a: 149). In example 21 the comment is quite distinctly meant to be offensive and features with word choices that can be considered inappropriate, such as *snotty white girl voice*. Furthermore, it does not take a stand on the discussion itself but is rather directed personally to the commentator in question, i.e. a woman, which in this case, undoubtedly affected writer's choice of words. Her response to this flame, conversely, is quite assertive but not offensive and does not contain any language that could be considered inappropriate. At the end of the comment, she even expresses her gladness (even though slightly sarcastically) on the matter that the comment created such a response (thus, on the basis of the large variety of the features in the comment, this particular comment was assigned to the category of mixed).

In addition to flaming, the only instance of swearing that appeared in the 154 comments was found in the comment posted by men. In example 11 (which was initially presented in the section 6.3.2) *"Patriarchal bs has spoken!"*, the abbreviation *bs* refers to a swear world *bullshit*. None of the comments written by women contained swearing which can be seen to be somewhat similar with Thelwall's (2008) findings in which he reported that in the US, male MySpaces[5] contained considerably more 'strong swearing' than those of female MySpaces. However, in the present study, this is only an isolated instance and in order to

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[5] In this context MySpaces (in plural) refer to profiles on this particular social network site, which, similarly to Facebook, can be created by users themselves.

reach more comprehensive conclusions on the matter of gender differences in swearing on Facebook, a larger sample will be required.

Herring (1996b: 120) has also suggested that the two (stereo)typical styles (men tending to be more adversarial and women supportive/attenuated) are in fact gendered on the basis of that the extremes of each are manifested almost exclusively by one gender and not the other. The results in this study suggest only somewhat similar reality in Facebook environment as, on the one hand, the isolated instances of flaming and swearing appeared only in the comments written by men (of the total 53 comments), and such instances of this type of strong language use where not found in any of the 101 comments written by women. On the other hand, in the light of the results in the current study, the suggested extremes of female style (characterised by attenuation and supportiveness) was not that clearly seen to be manifested by women only, as also in the comments written by men, for instance, supportiveness and appreciation was equally present. Herring (1996b: 120) also stated that regardless of this strong tendency of the extremes of each style to be manifested almost exclusively by one gender and not the other, it may also often be the case that men and women are not separate species online as many of the posts fall into a middle category, i.e. mixing male- and female-gendered features or the absence of either. This particular notion is strongly supported by the results of the present study as the features on the basis of which the categorisation of the comments was made, suggest a tendency towards mixing gender-linked features online as, for example, the percentage of comments which contained language use normally associated with the opposite gender was as high as 45% in this study; 70 comments out of 154 (41 comments by women and 29 comments by men). In addition, if the comments assigned to neutral style, 11% of all comments, (17 in total; 9 by women and 8 by men) are added to the number of comments mixing the two styles, the overall percentage that either demonstrate mixing male- and female-gendered features or the absence of either, increases all the way to 56% (87 comments out of 154 in total), which comprises over half of the comments analysed in the present study. On the

basis of these percentages, hence, it can be concluded that in the present study, mixing features of the two styles has proved to be the most typical way of communicating online, i.e. in this particular case, on the Humans of New York Facebook page. These results are also supported by the findings of Eisenchlas (2012) and Brown (1998), as for example Eisenchlas' results pointed towards a more complex picture than the stereotypic binary characterization of gender and language use. Brown (1998), on the other hand, suggested that gendered communication styles might actually be more of an expectation of someone's gender than actual gender difference, which is in line with Butler's (1990: 25) view that gender is always a doing, constituting the identity it is purported to be and consequently, there is no actual gender identity behind the expression of gender as the identity is performatively established by the precise "expressions" said to be its results.

Furthermore, in the context of some of the previous studies on gendered differences on Facebook, the present study highlighting discursive differences and similarities thus only partially relates e.g. to Wang, Burke and Kraut's (2013) study in which they concluded that women tend to share more personal topics on Facebook, such as family matters, whereas men discuss more public topics, e.g. politics and sports. Even though the data in the present study consists of comments, which are quite different from prototypical sharing (such as status updates), the results are somewhat comparable, as in the current study the topics that were chosen for data received comments from both genders and in addition, also the comments posted by men featured with personal topics, such as family-related matters. Thus, the results of the present study also further question the stereotypical view of gender-linked behaviour on Facebook.

Accordingly, in addition to the studies of Eisenchlas (2012) and Brown (1998), the present study provides evidence that revisiting stereotypical binary division of male vs. female style could bring us closer to the current actuality of

computer-mediated communication in the Web 2.0 era and also verifies the more current theorising in the field of language and gender, in which gender is rather seen as something that we 'do', instead of perceived as a given construction, and also that gender is plural (instead of a mere binary categorisation) with a range of femininities and masculinities that are available to speakers at any time and at any place (Coates 2004: vi, 4). Furthermore, as the internet is simultaneously a performative space and a performed space (Hine 2000), these different femininities and masculinities are performed also in the online setting, which can also be observed in the results of the current study, as both women and men can be seen to have performed a gender identity of their choosing and consequently, resulting into a variety of ways of communicating online.

7. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The present study aims to investigate the current reality of gendered communication in online setting, in the context of the most popular social network site of our time, i.e. Facebook. The research aim has been from the beginning to examine whether the communication online nowadays is similar to the findings of previous research in the field of computer-mediated communication and gender, as well as of language and gender on a more general level. Are there differences in ways which women and men communicate on Facebook? Are these differences as rigid as stated previously or has something changed during the past decades or years? Gender has been studied in the field of computer-mediated communication since the 1980's, when the global network internet was launched, and it goes without saying that the internet and consequently, interactions taking place online have changed greatly during the course of the recent developments. Especially the past decade and the emergence of the participatory Web (also referred to as Web 2.0), which, for example, entails the vast explosion of the popularity of social network sites such as Facebook, have transformed what the internet is perceived to be nowadays. As a result, an update also in and around of the subject of gendered communication online is necessary.

The focus in the present study landed mainly on text-based CMC, although in a very multimodal context, namely on Facebook and on the Humans of New York Facebook page in particular. The data for the present study was collected in January 2015 from the comment section of the Humans of New York Facebook page in relation to three different postings created by the page (HONY) itself. Hence, the comments posted by the followers of the page is what the data of the present study consists of and the original postings by HONY merely provide the topic and surroundings for the discussion. 170 comments were selected from three separate threads of discussions (from three consecutive days) and out of those 170 comments 154 were selected to be part of the analysis. These 154 comments were then assigned with the help of

Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) into four categories of female style, male style, mixed style (containing elements from both female and male style) and neutral style, a residual category for comments that did not fit to any of the first three categories. The comments were assigned to these categories based on the (gendered) features that appeared in each comment to examine the current reality of gendered communication online. Later, also with the help of insights from Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) gender-linked patterns of communication were in further focus in order to gain more thorough understanding of the communicational differences (or similarities) between genders.

The categorisation of comments in this study produced intriguing results. First of all, out of 154 comments in total 66% (101 comments) were created by women and 34% (53 comments) by men. This result is fairly outstanding in regards of the participation on the internet as the internet has often been perceived as a male preserve (see e.g. Coates 2004, Herring 2000) and it has been stated that men often control public discourse, i.e. start and end discussions in mixed-sex groups (Herring 2003). Nonetheless, as suggested by Herring (2011), women's involvement precisely in the context of social network sites has increased during the past decade, as these kinds of social network sites often allow more control over the communication and, for example, unwelcoming comments can be deleted and harassers can be left outside of the conversation. This might dissipate some of the fears relating to public communication as it has been reported that women are often intimidated by the tone of these public discussions online (Herring 2011). In the light of the results of the present study, in which two-thirds of the comments collected were created by women, this view of increased participation by women on the social network sites seems to match the current trend on Facebook. These results, however, only depict the reality on the Humans of New York Facebook page and thus, in order to be able to reach broader conclusions and more generalizable results, a more extensive study on female participation online, in which various sites are included, should be conducted.

Secondly, most of the previous research on the subject of gendered communication online has created very strict binary categorisations, in which typical characteristics of female attenuated/supportive style and male adversarial style are recorded and proved to exist in many different online settings (see e.g. Herring 1993, 1996a, 2003; Guiller & Durndell 2007; Amakye 2010). The results of the present study, however, seem to contradict the previously determined categorisation of gendered communication, as for instance, in this study men did not manifest as adversarial and authoritative behaviour online as suggested earlier, which is also parallel with the findings of Guiller & Durndell (2007). Out of 53 comments created by men in this study, only 30% (16 comments) were seen to belong to the category of male style, and in fact, a quite large number of comments, namely 55% (29 comments; 14 assigned to the female style and 15 to the category of mixed) contained also female-linked features, such as appreciation towards others and references to personal experience, which suggest something else than an existence of a clear male style and showcases how the language used by men is, in fact, fairly versatile as it combines elements from both styles.

Nonetheless, also the female style, often characterised, for instance, by attenuation (which includes e.g. hedging and expressing doubt, asking questions, apologising and introducing ideas in the form of suggestions), supportiveness (characterised by expressions of appreciation, thanking and activities that make other participants feel accepted and welcome (Herring 1996a: 147)); and by empathic utterances and references to personal experience, was not seen as definite as some of the previous studies have suggested (see e.g. Herring 1993, 1996a, 2003; Guiller & Durndell 2007). Half of the comments written by women (51 out of 101) were categorised under female style since they mainly manifested features associated with women, such as forms of appreciation, support, politeness and personal orientation, but strikingly, the other half of the comments (50 out of 101) demonstrated also quite different features or contained none of the traits said to be characteristics of the female

style. Hardly any of the comments written by women included attenuated forms and in addition, 41% of the comments featured with characteristics associated with men, such as authoritative orientation and assertive language, on the basis of which these comments were then categorised to male style (13 comments in total) and mixed style (28 comments in total). This dispersion of the features in the comments created by women can be interpreted to signal more variety also in the way women communicate in the present-day setting, not only online but also in the offline environments. Thus, based on the results of the present study, the female style and everything it entails should no longer be perceived as tentative or attenuated, but should rather be seen as more varied with different communicational features ranging from supportiveness and appreciation to assertiveness and authoritativeness.

The process of categorisation and allocating comments to male style, female style, mixed style and neutral, however, was not always a clear-cut and easy procedure as the comments contained various features that could enable more than one categorisation. Nonetheless, after a long consideration on problematic comments, matching categories were found on the basis of analysing what was most apparent in the comments. In the very early stage, it also became evident that two categories (male vs. female style) are not going to be sufficient for this type of research and with the help of the mixed and neutral categories, a more reasonable approach was implemented. Especially the mixed category proved to be extremely helpful as a fairly large number of comments portrayed sings of both styles and thus, an attempt to decide whether a comment should be assigned merely either to male style or female style would have been illogical.

Based on these results of the present study, therefore, combining gender-linked features has proved to be the most typical way of communicating online currently in the context of social network sites, especially in the one provided by the Humans of New York Facebook page. This result confirms Herring's (1996b: 120) view that regardless of the strong tendency of the extremes of the

each style (i.e. male and female style) are manifested almost exclusively by one gender and not the other, it may often also be the case that men and women are not that different online as many of the posts fall into a middle category, namely mixing male- and female-gendered features or the absence of either. In the present study, the results indicate that the number of comments which contained language use normally associated with opposite gender was as high as 45 percent (70 comments altogether; 41 by women and 29 by men) and if to this is also added the comments that showed no specific gender-linked features (comments assigned to neutral style; 9 by women and 8 by men), the overall percentage of comments that either demonstrate mixing male- and female-gendered features or prove the absence of either, increases all the way to 56 percent (87 comments out of 154), which comprises over half of the comments analysed in the present study. These results are also supported e.g. by the findings of Eisenchlas (2012) and Brown (1998), as for instance, Eisenchlas' results pointed towards a more complex picture than the stereotypic binary characterisation of gender and language use, and according to Brown's (1998: 4) view, gendered communication seems rather to be a matter of perception, in other words seeing a difference instead of seeing a similarity, and that communication styles between genders are indeed fluid and flexible, rather allowing diversity instead of rigid communication standards and differences. Furthermore, the results of the current study also confirm the present theorising in the field of language and gender, which also challenges the binary thinking and offers a view on gender as plural, with a range of femininities and masculinities that are available to speakers at any time, and which in addition, regards the concept of gender identity as a social construct rather than as a 'given' social category (Coates 2004: 4, 6-7). As a result, gender is something that is accomplished in talk every time we communicate (ibid.), which is also reflected in the results of the present study, as for example, numerous comments included language features normally associated with the opposite gender. Thus, one of the key conclusions in the present study is that gender is not something rigid or defined in advance, but is rather formulated in the communicational situations, in which persons select from those available sets of

femininities and masculinities and perform a gender identity of their choosing, consequently, resulting into a variety of ways of communicating online.

However, for the present study and its findings the context provided by Humans of New York is exceedingly important as it with most certainty has impacted the public communication on this site. The number of supportive comments and comments expressing appreciation was high in postings by both genders and thus, affected the percentages generated by the categorisation performed in the analysis chapter of this study. When analysing data, not only was it discovered that the HONY Facebook page is quite open-minded and supportive, but also the netiquette imposed by the users of the page themselves entailed instant feedback on the judgemental or strongly negative comments towards the persons or statements in the pictures shared by HONY and/or towards the commentators or their opinions in the comment section. The atmosphere, as well as the context from which the data for the present study was collected, therefore, proved to be supportive and non-judgemental, which undoubtedly affected the overall results of this study. A different website would most likely have produced different results and this is to be noted when comparing the results of the present study with past or future studies. Furthermore, a study with a larger sample of data from various websites within social network sites or other social media formats could also produce more generalizable results, as in the present study only 170 comments from one specific website were collected.

The current study, nonetheless, has succeeded in contributing to the research on gendered differences in communication as it, for example, suggests that communication online nowadays is far more varied and is not based on solid differences between genders. The research questions of this study, nonetheless, often concerned differences as, for instance, the main question speculated whether there are differences in how males and females communicate on this particular site on Facebook? Based on the results of the present study, it can be

concluded that there are some differences but not as many as could have been expected on the basis of some previous studies in the field of CMC and gender. One can also question the necessity of this kind of research approach as, for instance, the current theorising in the field of language and gender seeks to divert attention away from this kind of binary thinking and rather suggests that gender is plural. In order to reach as comprehensive understanding of this matter as possible in the present study, it was, however, necessary to start investigating this from the perspective of differences and through this inspection then reach to a conclusion that, at least to some extent, rather points to the similarities, in other words to the tendency to combine masculine and feminine discursive features. Nonetheless, as the isolated instances of flaming and swearing only occurred in the comments written by men, one can thus ask whether CMC guarantees a gender-free environment. These isolated instances of derogative language use by men, such as flaming and swearing, showcase how discussions online can feel intimidating to some (as suggested previously e.g. by Herring 1996b, 2011) and shift power dynamics online in favour of the gender using stronger utterances. However, not necessarily all women feel intimidated by this type of stronger language use and also women can use derogative forms in their writing, be it online or elsewhere. Hence, CMC does not guarantee gender-free environment (as also suggested previously e.g. by Guiller & Durndell 2007 and Yates 1997), but the violations of reasonable communication ethics are hopefully nowadays decreasing at least in the context of social network sites where the communication can be moderated by the users themselves. Nevertheless, hate speech, aggressive and racist comments, alongside with xenophobia still seem to be current and burning issues in the online environments (see e.g. Banks 2010). From the optimistic point of view, nonetheless, the way social media sites often operate also make it easier for the users of these sites to report these instances, and as a consequence, the public discussion on the internet could be more carefully monitored and made more secure.

Accordingly, the findings of this study will not only contribute to the field of

CMC and gender, and gender and language by building a bridge between the previous studies conducted before the vast expansion of several social media sites and the actuality in 2015, but they also offer new insights on the current, every-day language use online, which is also affected by and affects the reality of the offline world. Thus, in the light of the findings of the present study it seems that social network sites have, at least to some extent, levelled gender differences in an online setting, which then as a result, provides us with a wider understanding of gendered language use in both online and offline settings as both of these comprise the world we currently live in. Not only are the present communication styles fluid and flexible, but there also seems to be a great deal of variety in the way women and men communicate. There are differences but the rigid communication standards might no longer be the most suitable way for depicting the overall reality. However, it is to be noted that this conclusion is reached on the basis of the data gathered from three different threads of discussion, on three consecutive days, on the Humans of New York Facebook page, which proved to be a rather open-minded in nature, and as a consequence, only provide us a relatively small snapshot of the present-day reality online. Hence, a far more comprehensive study, in which multiple sites and preferably also different social media formats are included, should be conducted to reach more extensive conclusions on gendered communication online and the differences and similarities between genders in the current and constantly evolving world.

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