

“WE FANGIRLS NEED OUR FANSERVICE”

A study on the topics of discussion in a
predominantly female online football community

Master's Thesis

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English
May 2013

JYVÄSKYLÄN YLIOPISTO

Tiedekunta – Faculty Humanistinen tiedekunta	Laitos – Department Kielten laitos
Tekijä – Author Anna Valkonen	
Työn nimi – Title “we fangirls need our fanservice” - A study on the topics of discussion in a predominantly female online football community	
Oppiaine – Subject Englannin kieli	Työn laji – Level Pro Gradu - tutkielma
Aika – Month and year Toukokuu 2013	Sivumäärä – Number of pages 100 sivua
<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Tämä tutkielma tarkastelee pääosin naisten muodostamaa <i>Livejournal</i>-yhteisöä, jonka kieli on englanti ja keskustelun aihe jalkapallo. Pyrin selvittämään, miten yhteisön jäsenet käsittelevät perinteisesti miehiseksi miellettyä diskurssia. Tämä selviää tutkimalla yhteisön puheenaiheiden eli topiikkien sisältöä vuonna 2010. Topiikkeja ja yhteisön käyttäjäprofiilia tutkimalla pyrin myös selvittämään, voiko yhteisön puheenaiheita tai itse yhteisöä kuvailla sukupuolittuneiksi. Urheilun on laajalti osoitettu olevan epätasa-arvoisia valtakonstruktioita ylläpitävä voima. Lisätutkimukselle on siis selkeää tarvetta. Omani kaltaisia tutkimuksia ei myöskään ole aikaisemmin tehty.</p> <p>Tämän poikkitieteellisen tutkielman teoriatausta ja viitekehys ammentaa eri toten sukupuolitutkimuksen ja verkkoviestinnän tutkimuksen kentiltä. Tutkimus toteutettiin kategorisoimalla ja analysoimalla 10% yhteisön topiikeista vuonna 2010. Kategorisointi toteutui Rowen urheilujournalismin analysointiin tarkoitetun typologian avulla. Vuosi 2010 oli merkittävä, sillä tuona kesänä pelattiin jalkapallon MM-kisat Etelä-Afrikassa. Yhteisössä tämä näkyi jäsenmäärän kasvuna ja viestiketjujen määrän räjähdysmäisenä nousuna.</p> <p>Tutkimus osoitti, että itse yhteisö oli jäsenistöltään enemmän sukupuolittunut kuin sen puheenaiheet. Puheenaiheet olivat monipuolisia koko vuoden, mutta etenkin kesäkuukausien aikana muutos oli huomattavinta aiheiden ja jäsenistön määrällisen kasvun myötä. Kesän myötä yhteisöstä kasvoi enemmän faniyhteisö kuin uutisiin keskittyvä yhteisö. Vuoden aikana puheenaiheet keskittyivät suurimmaksi osaksi ajankohtaisiin jalkapalloutisiin, vaikka myös viihteellisyys oli tärkeä osa yhteisöä.</p>	
Asiasanat – Keywords Computer-Mediated Communication, Sports Sociology, Gender Studies, Fan Culture, Womens' studies, Football	
Säilytyspaikka – Depository Kielten laitos	
Muita tietoja – Additional information	

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1. INTRODUCTION

The internet is a major means of mediation in many people's lives today. This is no wonder; the World Wide Web offers people fulfillment regarding many needs, such as knowledge, entertainment and a connection to other people and the rest of the world. According to Herring (1996c: 1) computer-mediated communication (CMC) can be defined as communication that takes place between human beings via the instrumentality of computers. To this date, Herring's definition of CMC remains simple and true. Moreover, according to Santoro (1995: 11), it can even be claimed that nearly all computer use, including different programmes and systems, fits within the concept of human communication. To put it simply, the entire internet is based on interactivity; someone producing a text on a website and another person, a consumer, reading or interpreting the product. The experience, albeit not always direct, is still communicative to both ends. According to Herring (1996c: 1) only some decades ago internet communication was merely known to few elite governments and US academic research institutions. Today it is taken advantage of by over 2,4 billion internet users worldwide (internetworldstats.com 2012). Smartphones and other portable devices included, the internet and its communicative aspects are literally everywhere.

Since direct communication over the internet has become increasingly important during the recent times, online social networks and social media websites are nowadays highly popular. Websites such as *MySpace*, *Facebook* and *Twitter* have acquired hundreds of millions of users from all over the world in order to have people more connected to one another. These websites have people often using their actual name and face as means of identification as opposed to disguising themselves behind a nickname or an obscure picture, an avatar, to represent themselves. However, as online discussion boards and communities, for example, provide people with the opportunity to form relationships and discuss different matters under the protection of a nickname or an alias, the chance of discussing matters that a person would not ordinarily discuss in their everyday life for any given reason becomes more accessible and alluring. Even the gender of a person can be easily obscured.

In the present study, the focus will be on a predominantly female online community that revolves around the topic of football. The community, *ONTD_football*, is a spin-off community of a larger entity called *Oh No They Didn't*, of which *ONTD* is an abbreviation. The original *ONTD* is one of the biggest entertainment gossip communities on the internet and on blog hosting service *Livejournal* (Livejournal.com 2013). This study examines how a topic that is traditionally seen male-dominated appears when discussed in a community formed mostly, if not solely, by females. This is done by analysing 10 percent of all of the topics of discussion in the community during the year 2010. The topics will be categorised and analysed in order to answer the question of what the topics of discussion in the community were like in 2010. In addition, the actual femininity of the community will be examined by considering the gender of the community moderators and by taking a look at how the community describes itself in the community information, which is open to public. It will be considered whether the topics allow *ONTD_football* to be described as a gendered place for females to talk about football or whether the community merely exhibits fandom-like features and is less concerned with the concept of gender itself. In 2010 the largest and most important football event in the world, the FIFA World Cup, was played in South Africa and during that time the number of members and topics rose considerably. I will also examine whether the time of the World Cup affected the nature of the topics, and if so, how.

My study will explore the troubled union of gender and sports. It wishes to provide information for the purposes of challenging prevailing stereotypes of sports as a male discourse. Female expertise and participation in sports both on- and offline should be encouraged more in the society. Moreover, females as fans should be more accepted to join male fan groups and communities if they are inclined to do so. I personally believe that sport is for everyone's enjoyment and thus everyone should be able to participate in it and discuss sports freely without unnecessary and/or poorly reasoned judgement. This also means that one should be able to express their gender in any given environment. The concept of football is especially interesting to study from the point of view of complex social constructions. The background of the sport as a game of many underprivileged people must be taken into account and to then examine it in the

light of the enormous business it is today. The status of women in football is just one piece of the complex puzzle.

In addition to having a basis in gender studies, this cross-disciplinary study also explores matters of sociolinguistics and computer-mediated communication. Regarding CMC the present study largely draws on the works of Herring, who has done extensive research on CMC and a variety of its aspects, including gender. The analysis of my study was largely done by utilizing themes from CMC in connection with scholar perspectives on gender and sports. My study will provide the field of CMC with a fresh perspective on the online communication and interests of female sports fans regarding their topics of discussion and exhibiting gender.

Although various studies exist on the topic of male football fans and football as a male sport (see: Brown 2007, Crawford 2009, Finn & Giulianotti 2000), the range of studies on female football fans and especially online discussion boards, communities and fandoms is scattered and in dire need of more critical research. Thus the study is able to contribute to the field with a fresh point of view, since to my knowledge no other studies on female online football forums have been made. The closest equivalent to the present study is a recent study conducted by Hynes (2012) in which female football fans' experiences of participating in male online forums were recounted and studied from the point of view of gender and sports, rather than online behaviour. The findings of Hynes' study offered my study the important mirror experience of female football fans in a male-dominated online environment, as the present study is about female football fans in a presumably predominant female online environment.

This study refutes the claims of feminist critics (see: Mednick 1989, Pollitt 1992, Steiner 1989) that gender differences should not be studied or pointed out in fear of validating socioculturally constructed, unequal gender stereotypes. I would argue that examining possible gender differences in computer-mediated communication, for example, is both justified and beneficial. For example in the case of football online forums and communities the contexts can be highly gendered and difficult to adapt to for other genders that are less dominant in the given environment, discourse or context. Studies such as the present one will help build a deeper understanding of the

communicative aspects of the modern society, especially from the point of view of gender and discussing sports online. Moreover, my study does not wish to completely dissolve the idea of differences between different genders. Although I personally encourage gender neutrality in many things, my study utilizes the terms ‘male’, ‘female’ and so forth in its descriptions of people while also acknowledging and encouraging the existence of a variety of other genders. My study examines the common features in the topics of one, predominantly female online community. Therefore the study does not aim to draw conclusions on the possible gender differences in handling the issue of football in an online community. However, my study will provide material for such purposes and is therefore able to contribute to the field. It is also groundbreaking in studying female online football communities.

In this study I will first introduce matters of gender within the discourse of sports. Especially the problematics of sports as a gendered and male-dominated domain and the stereotyping of gender-based interests will be examined, for example through exploring the importance of media and its influence. In chapter two I will move on into presenting the fields of online communication and communality. This will be done by first examining online communication, communities and especially fandoms from the sports-and-gender point of view. Then the online blog hosting service *Livejournal*, which is the central platform for the community studied here, will be presented followed by taking a brief look at the organization of online discussion especially regarding *Livejournal*. This will be done in connection with considering how the internet is utilized in a gendered manner, linking us back to chapter one. The outcome of all this, hopefully, is an intricate but cohesive look into the background of the themes the present study is concerned with: CMC and sports fandom in connection with the issue of gender. After that I will introduce the data of the study in more detail as well as the research questions and the methods of executing the study. I will then present the results and an analysis of the findings before concluding the study.

2. GENDER AND THE DISCOURSE OF SPORTS

In fields such as politics and sports the gap between the two sexes seems to remain unabridged from one decade to another. Discussing the issue of sports and gender does not come without a complete history of difficulties and biased opinions.

This chapter will start by defining the term *discourse* especially with regard to gender issues. By examining theories of scholars from the fields of discourse studies and gender studies the study will consider how and why gender-related demarcation exists in discourses, especially those of sport, through the notion of popular, gender-related stereotypes. The study will then move on to considering gender roles in the discourse of sports with a notion of the role of physical appearance in sports, especially from the viewpoint of media and its influence on the society. At this point it may also be useful to define what I mean when discussing *gender*. In general, whereas the term *sex* refers to the binary categories of ‘male’ and ‘female’, its counterpoint *gender* refers to the attributes, either ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ that are associated to either of the two main sexes (Archer & Lloyd 2002: 17). Therefore *gender* is a more culturally bound term than *sex* which merely refers to the biological attributes of a person.

2.1 Discourse and Gender Demarcation

The difficulty with defining discourse is that it can be explained from the viewpoint of many theories and disciplines, and thus different definitions can conflict and overlap (Fairclough 1992: 3). Moreover, Foucault, whose social theory of discourse is perhaps one of the most often referred to, also had a multi-discipline background and did not have a set system of ideas to build his work on (Mills 1997: 17). Moreover, according to Mills (1997: 17), as many theorists have based their definitions of discourse on the works of Foucault, they have faced the problem of not having a ready system to base their definition on, and thus the term has been modified over and over again.

Taking the discourses of gender into account, according to Mills (1997: 17-18), one definition of discourses is that they are systematic, structured sets of ideas that are formed within particular contexts. Therefore it can be assumed that

--- there is a set of discourses of femininity and masculinity, because women and men behave within a certain range of parameters when defining themselves as gendered subjects. These discursive frameworks demarcate the boundaries within which we can negotiate what it means to be gendered. (Mills 1997: 17-18)

These boundaries also apply to language use. Cameron (as cited in Mills 1995:32) has stated that women and men are positioned not unequally, but symmetrically, as outsiders to each other's verbal culture. Taking control of or adapting to a verbal culture other than one's own (according to gender) can pose a challenge, especially when the context is highly or even overtly masculine or feminine. Although it can be argued that demarcating genders and linguistic differences between genders is altogether futile (Fuss 1989: 28), it is clear that most people still differentiate texts and contexts according to gender, and therefore they themselves tend to fall under a certain, gendered category of language use. It can be argued that topics of discussion could be separated according to one's gendered verbal culture.

The situation of sports discourse, women's role in sports discourse and how females themselves handle the discussion of sports and sport-related issues is complicated. On one hand there is an opportunity for women to empower and emancipate themselves through finding different contexts – female, male or co-gendered – where to express their interest in sports. A freely chosen context might have gender-related judgement or not and the participants can themselves define how they handle the situation. Online communities and blogs are a great example of such a context. On the other hand, even if a female is able to freely select the context in which they express their interest in sports, the demarcation of genders and the marginalization of women still exist. Thus, females may often be constricted in one way or another when it comes to discussing sports.

Sports continue to affirm stereotypes of gender differences and in sports gender prejudice can even lead to abuse (Horne et al. 1999: 115). In order to avoid prejudice and ill treatment, women might sometimes feel the need to be cautious about where

and when to discuss sports or express being a fan. In this case, stereotypically masculine environments such as pubs and sports stadiums may be avoided (for more, see ch. 3.1.2). Moreover, when choosing a male-dominated online environment, a gender neutral approach may often be preferred to exposing one's feminine gender in fear of facing discrimination in conversation.

This was the case in Hynes' (2012) study, in which 16 female respondents recounted their experiences of belonging to one or more male-dominated online football forums. In their case, a gender-neutral approach was often preferred at least until the person had established themselves as knowledgeable "real football fans". It was felt that revealing one's feminine gender drew unwanted attention, sometimes being a distraction from the football conversation. The study also showed that it was common for the females to blend in by diminishing their feminine qualities and by even condoning chauvinistic behaviour in order to not be branded as the "uptight woman" at the forum (Hynes 2012: 198-201). Therefore adapting to the discourse of a heavily masculine online environment caused the female participants to perhaps hide some of their values and interests in order to fit in in this particular context. It is difficult to say how such a situation could be dismantled and changed since the culture of male sports discourse has a long and carefully cultivated history. The same situation could also apply to great number of other situations such as politics, economy and other historically or stereotypically male-dominated discourses. The situation faced by the women in Hynes' study must be at least somewhat arduous and repressing to those genders that do not naturally fall under the 'alpha male' category of language use.

In contrast, if a predominantly feminine context such as a female online community is the chosen outlet for those that employ a feminine verbal culture, it might bring with it a sense of emancipation through the relief of being free to express oneself. The harmony of the feminine conversational styles can also bring comfort (see ch. 3.4). However, it does not challenge the prevailing conditions either. In case a change is wanted, a female individual should probably adopt conversational qualities that are often considered to be of a male nature, such as asserting one's opinions as facts, using aggressive language and being more confrontative towards others (Holmes & Meyerhoff (2003:207) (for more, see ch.3.4).

2.2 Gender and Stereotyping

The aim of this study is to find out what a female discussion of a male entity entails, especially regarding the topics of discussion in an online community. It is important to continuously reconsider ideas of what different genders 'should be like' or 'should be interested' in – in general, to challenge prevailing stereotypes. Taking into account that gender is mostly a cultural construction in contrast to the biological categorisation of sex, age-old ideas of 'coding' genders and sexes with things such as colours, assumed interests and word- and name choices must be challenged in order to develop the society into a more mutually inclusive direction. I believe this is also one of the key elements in different genders having better access to verbal cultures outside of one's own. However, I do not aim to completely dissolve the idea of differences between different genders. Therefore the study does not require complete gender neutrality and it utilizes the terms 'male', 'female' and so forth in its descriptions of people.

Gender stereotypes can be explained as rationalizations of the general roles of men and women (Hoffman and Hurst 1990). Due to a physical attribute, such as a woman being able to breastfeed a baby, women are in general thought to be the more caring and nurturing gender even though men possess these attributes as well. Then again, as males tend to have a naturally more muscular body and an overall stronger physique, they are thought to be more apt for sports. Generalizations such as these justify existing social constructions (Archer & Lloyd 2002: 27). The mainstream media then often too willingly adopts these stereotypes and portrays them onwards to consumers who do not always read into things in a critical manner, although this idea has been challenged by Schneider (2004: 351), for example, who claims that concerning stereotypes, the effect media has on people is smaller than one would expect. The claim is curious. It seems that as media surrounds the society, giving out conscious and unconscious messages, it is hard to believe that any mind would not be affected by it. Also in the case of sports the effect of media is apparent in partly creating and then maintaining the idea of women being inferior to men.

According to Mills (2003:204), stereotypes regarding language use between different genders seem to lean towards two types: white, working class men who are direct,

assertive and impolite, and white, middle class women who are polite, deferent and “nice” to others. These notions can be directly compared to the findings of Herring (1993) (see ch. 3.4 for more). Mills, however, continues to argue that nowadays similar stereotypes cannot be assumed to be shared by everyone since women's participation in the public sphere has changed (2003:203). Taking into account that the internet as a whole is a public sphere and that my study is concerned with an online community perhaps populated by people from a large variety of ethnicities and backgrounds, it is difficult to say which, if any, stereotypes of female or male language use can be applied to theirs when considering their topics of discussion. However, it has been shown by Herring (1996a: 115) that in general online conversation styles do vary between different genders and therefore it can be assumed that these differences, or at least the qualities portrayed by females could be found from the topics of discussion of the online community the present study examines (see ch. 3.4 for more).

Keeping the distinction between two genders which Mills (2003: 204) mentioned in mind, it would be easy to think that the same applied to stereotypical interests of different genders. On the one hand, a man whose language use would be stereotypically direct and assertive, could also be considered to be interested in fast action and less emotional things – think of sport, cars, a heated debate with a friends over a beer for example. On the other hand, a woman whose language use would include qualities such as being nice and polite, could be considered to be interested in softer, lighter and neutral things – think of romance novels and talking about life and feelings with a friend over a cup of tea or coffee. However, in reality things are always more complex than a generalized idea would expect.

2.3 Gender Roles in Sports and Media

Even though sports are often manifested as something that embodies egalitarian values, health and enjoyment, it is apparent that the concept of sports is also a stratified discourse that unequally divides dominance based upon, for example, gender and ethnicity (Horne et al. 1999: 117). Regarding gender, the place for women, especially fans of sports, is often in the margins. In order to reach equality society at large needs to go through a thorough change in values and views.

Media coverage of sports events has been extensively studied over the past decades, and it has been clearly shown that the media favours male sports while diminishing the role of female sports (Bruce et al. 2010: 11-12). Females sports are given a limited and partial view that is often based on gender-appropriateness and newsworthiness of a news piece (Hargreaves 1994: 193) According to Bruce et al. (2010: 9) and Horne et al. (1999: 171) when female sports receive coverage in the media, importance is mostly put on large scale events such as the Olympic Games, as well as choosing to highlight sports that are considered more feminine and gender appropriate, such as gymnastics and dancing.

The choice to give only partial coverage to female sports unfortunately affects the minds of the audiences. Since female sports are not given visibility, they are often thought to be non-existent or secondary to male sports (Bruce et al. 2010: 4). The same attitude seems to apply to how the union of women and sports is perceived in general. Sports are considered a masculine domain and a place for females to constantly prove themselves worthy of being mentioned. There seems to be an air of natural superiority about it; men being naturally more apt and gifted when it comes to both doing and viewing sports. Since the amount of media interest in women's sports is quite small, it might also imply to the larger audiences that women might not be interested in sports (Horne et al. 1999: 171) or that they have been won over after primarily having a negative attitude towards sports (Horne et al. 1999: 180). Thus whether it is a question of women playing sports or women following sports – the marginalization is frequent and shameless.

Hargreaves argues that sports actively exploit women and place women in a subordinate position in relation to men (1994: 33). This is due to a long tradition of thinking that sports are for men's enjoyment and that women are too frail to do sports. Moreover, men are seen superior to women also in the sense that in many sports men are able to go *citius, altius, fortius* – faster, higher and stronger. The best result is the most important result. Sports are also a place for constant stereotyping. Take almost any sport – ice hockey, running, basketball, boxing, gymnastics – and most people will

immediately have an idea of a person, a body type, a gender or an ethnicity that is most likely to achieve the best or most aesthetically pleasing results in any sport.

Of all cultural practices sport is amongst those that most prominently serve to demarcate the genders (Horne et al. 1999: 171, see also Hargreaves 1994). Horne and his peers explain that this is a world in which one is not a “real man” if they are not into sports and a world in which sports and femininity are conflicting terms (1999:171). In case a woman is into sports, constant reassurance is needed that they are indeed still feminine beings. In fact, it seems that due to the cultural connection that reinforces masculinity through sport, the same label of masculinity is applied then to female athletes – even to the point of both unjustly and irrelevantly evaluating their sexuality. As an example, female athletes can often be branded as “lesbians” and therefore not “real women” (Magee et al. 2007: 167). This was a claim familiarized by, for example, the masculine features of some sportswomen after undergoing hormonal manipulation in Europe during the Iron Curtain era. Another common extreme is that females are thought to be too frail or otherwise physically inadequate for sports – to maintain the ideal of women as maternal figures, any hard, physical tasks should be left to men. According to Hargreaves (1994: 44) this is an effect of Social Darwinism “survival of the fittest” kind of thinking that by biological measures women are incomparable to men and that their bodies are therefore unsuitable for sports.

Although all of the above might sound quite provocative and extreme, I would argue it is important to acknowledge the long history of demarcation behind these statements and this issue in order to begin dismantling them for the purposes of changing the present and the future of female sports discourse. Moreover, obviously not everything is said or written out as bluntly as the thought behind might suggest, for example concerning the claims about female athletes being lesbians. These generalized thoughts are often expressed in the form of a joke, an aside or as a careless afterthought. Or, in other words, *off-record*.

When female sports are portrayed in the media, emphasis is often put on sports that are considered soft and feminine although in fact little to no sports exist that women do not participate and compete in. This is one of the means by which media has control over

the view that the greater audiences have over female sports. Publicity helps to create support, interest and knowledge about any matter. If publicity is not given to any given matter, the matter will be known only to those in the know. Moreover, in the media the idea of male dominance is reproduced by continually associating women with appearance over performance (Horne et al. 1999: 172) and with a role that is more complementary rather than challenging (Thompson 1997 as cited by Horne et al. 1999: 116), further reinforcing the idea of female subordination due to a lengthy history of demarcation. The role of the media cannot be underestimated with regard to how the audience perceives the surrounding world – it shapes our attitudes, values and perceptions about the world and about our culture (Phillips 1997: 20).

Without underestimating the audiences, it would be difficult not to consider the effect that the media has on people. The invisibility of some female sports might be something many people do not even stop to consider since they have no knowledge on the fact that these sports exist. Therefore it is easy to adopt the attitudes and the silent messages portrayed by the media, which say that the union of sports and human beings are primarily that of sports and men.

2.4 Athletes as Pop Idols: The Role of Physical Appearance

As in the modern world athletes have for a long time been objects of idolization, even to the point of treating them as pop stars, it is not only their actions on the field that gain attention but their looks and private lives as well. I would argue that as the body is in the centre of sports and athleticism via physical qualities such as strength and endurance, it must have an equally important role within spectatorship of sport as well, regardless of gender. However, sometimes the line between whether an athlete is a star due to their attractive looks or rather because they are talented individuals becomes blurred. As a modern equivalent to a fan covering the walls of their rooms with posters of their idols, nowadays pictures are also looked at and shared online. Attraction to an athlete can also lead to becoming a fan of the sport as well.

The attraction and the general interest towards the life and actions of athletes is also a vital part of sports fandoms (see ch. 3.1.2.). Traditionally female athletes have been the

more sexualized of the two genders, but nowadays male athletes carry the pressure of being objectified as well. In a predominantly female online environment dedicated to following the world of football, such objectification is bound to emerge, although it cannot be estimated to which extent.

Miller (2001:11) claims that sports clearly continue “to be a space of heteronormative, masculinist, and white power” but that sports are “undergoing immense change, with sex at the center”. He adds that “objectification is a fact of sexual practice within capitalism” (see also Hargreaves 1994). While mostly agreeing with Miller, the issue of white power must be questioned due to its political, far right connotations – an issue which, however, has its place in the discourse of European football and is an altogether different discussion. Horne (1999: 173) claims the objectification of the female body is explained by the emergence of sports deemed suitable for women, such as aerobics and other fitness. Miller (2001: 9) also explains that as women’s bodies have long been the main target of this objectification with straight males as the implied consumer, nowadays it is also the male athlete body which is the object of desire for different genders. Crawford and Gosling (2004: 488 – 490) even argue that this might cause anxiety in male fans of sports. They might reject the idea of women as genuine sports fans in the fear of sex getting into sports, or for the fear of revealing themselves as admirers of the male body as well, also/even in a non-sexual fashion.

Crawford and Gosling (2004: 487) also argue that as the male, heterosexual gaze has dominated sports forever, a change has begun to be seen. One interesting point of view is that objectifying male athletes and applying a heavy, female gaze on them is a counterstrike to a history of male chauvinism, as suggested by football website *Kickette* (Kickette.com 2011). Nowadays also the male athletes can be the object of this female gaze, which is a heavy blow to centuries of patriarchy and which many men find unbearably unnerving. However, even in the light of all this information it can be argued that not all instances of objectifying athletes has, for example, a feminist or chauvinist agenda behind it. Many fans have a genuine appreciation for their idols and sexual manifestation is only one aspect of it, as is the wish to resemble one's idol in one way or another.

According to Miller (2001: 9) beauty is as much a part of male sports discourse today as toughness. Many athletes, including football players, are the faces of the advertisement campaigns of different companies, also those selling beauty products. Athletes are frequently spread on the pages of magazines in designer clothes, watches and scents. Many qualities attached to a certain athlete can then be transferred to the product, such as strength, reliability and invincibility (Gilchrist 2005: 127). It seems to go along with the profession nowadays to look after oneself and keep oneself presentable as a part of a brand – be the brand the athlete themselves, their team or a company in which advertisements they are in. For example, an athlete's freshly shaven chin can be dictated by having a razor company as a business partner. Both males and females are the intended consumers to be affected by these marketing tactics, since the pleasant associations connected with the sports star are then passed along to the product they endorse (Gilchrist 2005: 127).

Both Miller (2001: 8-9) and Gilchrist (2005: 127) use David Beckham as an example of a prominent male athlete who has broken away from the stereotypical image of a male footballer and who has become a star by combining elements of masculinity (being a professional football player) and femininity (putting importance on his looks, marrying a pop star, being provocative concerning the media). The fact that he has married a successful woman, Victoria Beckham, has even served to make him less masculine despite his very visible and leading role in many of the teams he has played for (Rowe 2010: 71-72). According to Rowe (2010: 71-72) the marriage of “Posh'n'Becks” has challenged, or in this case, equalized the traditional roles of a male breadwinner and a female homemaker. However, despite being at times emasculated by the media, the combination of good looks, leading an interesting life and being a visible media figure is what makes David Beckham an object of great interest for a large audience.

As Horne et al. put it; sport stars are often dubbed role models (1999: 174). However, since sport also offers the chance to objectify and sexualise the athletes, the statuses of a role model and a sex symbol can intertwine and vary. Another current example is football player Cristiano Ronaldo, who has been known for the past decade as both a very talented player and an athlete with looks that sell. In my opinion, this image has

had its pros and cons. As a businessman he is most probably well aware of both. On the one hand, taking care of his looks and image has brought him a lot of fans (and prospective buyers of the products he endorses). He has probably acquired fanbase from people who are otherwise not very familiar with football, as well. On the other hand, it seems that putting importance on his appearance also devalues him as an athlete in the minds of those who are firstly fans of the sport. Even though at the moment he is one of the best football players in the world, it seems that on the field he has to try twice as hard as many other players to prove that he has the skills to match his coiffed appearance, immense paycheck and confident behaviour. Again, I argue it is a case of fear of sex getting into sports, albeit in a disguised manner.

As the online community I examine in this study is a predominantly female one, it will be interesting to see whether the objectification of male athletes is a prominent theme in their topics of discussion and whether the community gives extra value to players that are considered attractive or interesting due to their off-field lifestyle choices. In the study conducted by Hynes on women who were part of a male online football forum, it was made clear that these women did not value discussions of footballers' "faces or cute hair" and branded that sort of conversation as "clueless" if there was no actual knowledge to support the conversation with (2012: 202). Moreover, the women in Hynes' study were ready to accept chauvinistic behaviour in order to blend in in the male online environment. This possibly included acceptance of biased and/or sexualized opinions of different genders. The women were also quite judgemental of the mix of being hyperfeminine and being a football fan (2012: 201-203). These opinions form an interesting juxtaposition with websites such as *Kickette*, which, in my opinion, is indeed a hyperfeminine entity but the creators of which are clearly knowledgeable about football.

It will be interesting to find out in my study if and how the community in focus relates to the information presented here and whether it focuses on football stars that are deemed physically attractive and/or otherwise interesting. Moreover, it remains to be seen whether the sexualisation of athletes is a prominent theme or whether hard issues are the main topic of discussion. It will also be fruitful to analyse whether the

community gives a gendered image of itself and whether it could also be described a counterstrike to chauvinism, as *Kickette* suggests of itself.

3. ONLINE COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNALITY

Varieties of online interpersonal communication are abundant and eagerly taken advantage of by a large number of people in all those parts of the world where internet connections are available. Online points of communication such as forums, discussion boards and chatrooms see people communicating in a variety of ways and with many different motifs. Undoubtedly the social aspect and the chance of forming relationships online is one of the key reasons why the internet is so popular and why many people are indeed addicted to its social media services such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Moreover, such services facilitate the kind of creative usage of the internet that is both attractive and even essential to many internet user today. Although it has been suggested that computer-mediated communication between human beings can mean virtually any use of the internet including programming and system usage (Santoro 1995:11), the present study follows the principle suggested by Thurlow et al. (2004: 16) who claim that CMC is often concerned more specifically with human interpersonal communication on the internet. My study is also mostly concerned with mediated human interaction, specifically in an online community context.

This chapter presents the idea of online communities, blogs and fandoms. Due to the positioning of this particular study, fandoms will be presented with a focus on sports fandoms and women's role in them. The organization of discussion and communication in online communities will also be presented in this chapter. Focus will be put on presenting blog hosting service *Livejournal*, which acts as the platform for the community examined in the present study. Finally, I will move on to examining gender roles in online environments, which links us back to what was learned in chapter 2 of this study.

3.1 Experiencing Communality Online

Regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, age or other attributes that divide people, the internet offers a place where anyone can have a voice without the face that might provoke prejudice (Thurlow et al. 2004: 99-100). Although the concept of online anonymity has been early challenged by Herring (1996a: 116), I would argue that it does exist to a certain point. In the internet, anonymity enables more provocative behavior and creates chances for debates and arguments from the safety of one's own home. However, it can also create a sense of intimacy regardless of distance and a chance for a self-disclosure even greater than in face-to-face interaction (Joinson & Paine 2007: 240). The internet offers anyone a chance to find people who share the same background, interests, opinions or other attributes that bring people together.

People are social beings who, in most cases, have an urge to gather and communicate with one another; in pairs and in groups of people who share the same experiences and interests (Forsyth 2006: 73). Other people help build a sense of self and a sense of acceptance (Fiske 2009 : 184). Nowadays even the most socially shy person is able to explore the internet for the purpose of seeking various opportunities for communicating with others and forming online relationships. The level of sociability of an individual does not matter; most people wish to find people to share at least something with. Whether it is about finding people who share the same life experiences and interests or being able to speak up on any given topic, in the internet one can choose to be social in a faceless manner and therefore even more free to speak their mind without considerable risk of being “found out” – as in someone recognizing the anonymous internet user by their name, appearance or address.

According to Wu Song (2009: 1), the appeal of getting together in the internet is that online one can experience communality without its usual burdens. This sounds truthful to a certain extent. In online relationships and online surroundings many people are able to remain emotionally detached despite the intimacy and intensity of the contacts. Moreover, even when emotionally detached, people feel more free regarding self-disclosure due to the safety of anonymity (Ben-Ze'ev 2004: 55). In the same vein, Wu Song (2009: 1) argues that in the internet a person can enjoy even the deepest aspects

of thought-sharing and communication without the attachment or the emotional bonds and obligations that come along real life friendships and family connections. Perhaps Wu Song's intent is to say that even though online relations can be intense, they still do not compare to ties formed by blood and/or sharing real life experiences. This claim can be countered, for example, by the idea of a person being able to choose their own family. Even though the legal or medical attributes of a so-called chosen family are different than those of the family a person was born in or adopted to, a group of friends, for example, can still represent an emotional family-type collective to an individual (see, for example Watters 2003).

Wu Song (2009: 1) goes on to argue that online people are free to reveal their inner selves without parochial judgement. I would argue otherwise, since in my opinion it seems clear that people are demarcated online based on any given attribute – gender being just one example. Given the ultimate freedom of speech offered by the internet, many people are also more willing to express negative thoughts and feelings over controversial issues or other people even to the extent of cyberbullying (see, for example Kowalski et al. 2012). It should not be overlooked that as the internet is a place that offers enormous chances for forming positive relationships, it is also a place for debate, discrimination and aggressive behaviour. People can be included or excluded – *cyberostracised* – based on a variety of features, gender, ethnicity, sexuality or language use are just few examples (Forsyth 2006: 71).

Some of the most prominent ways of online communication include chatrooms and discussion forums, which can be utilized by any number of people ranging from a few individuals to a mass of people. Nowadays there is also a range of social media websites such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Tumblr* that encourage people to communicate and share things. In the next part I will present the phenomenon of blogging. This will be done from the point of view of blog-hosting service *Livejournal* which is the central platform utilized by the community I examine in the present study.

3.2 Blogs: A Short Introduction

In my study I examine the online communal experience of a collaborative weblog – or, more commonly, a *blog*. Blogs can be defined as frequently modified web pages in which dated entries are listed in reverse chronological sequence (Herring et al. 2004b: 1). First weblogs emerged on the internet during the 1990's but blogging really began gaining rapid popularity only at the beginning of the 21st century via the release of internet platforms that made blogging more easy (Herring et al. 2004b: 1).

One reason for the massive success of the blogging industry can be found from the fact that as people have fast become more skilled with using computers and the internet, and as blogging platforms have become more and more simple and accessible, blogging is now both fashionable and possible for anyone with an internet connection. Easiness and contemporariness are key – via the emergence of microblog services such as *Twitter* and *Tumblr*, a blog post can be achieved by putting together a short string of words and/or a single picture. Moreover, the allure of blogging has many reasons, but one explanation is that for an individual, blogging offers a vehicle for self-expression and self-empowerment (Herring et al. 2004b: 1).

On the difference between blogs and discussion forums, an explanation can be given:

Author and reader roles in web pages are highly asymmetrical, in contrast with the fully symmetrical give and take of unmoderated discussion forums; blogs allow limited exchanges (in the form of comments), while according blog author and readers asymmetrical communication rights – the author retains ultimate control over the blog's content. (Herring et al. 2004b: 10)

Even though it must be noted that the excerpt is from 2004 and therefore quite dated in terms of the speed of evolving of the internet age, it does hold validity even now. The present study examines an entity that could be described as a community/collaborative blog. Although it is one blog, it has multiple authors – hundreds or even thousands throughout the years the blog has existed (no statistics available). Although the starting point of a blog entry can be described as asymmetrical in the sense that it has one author and other community members and other followers form the audience, the exchanges in the comments are seemingly limitless and symmetrical. However, in the

sense that the entries posted in the blog are of a public, topical and external value and that the website entails dated entries in reverse chronological order, the object community of this study does belong under the category of a weblog.

3.2.1 Blog-hosting Service Livejournal

The community that is the object of my study operates under the popular blog hosting service *Livejournal*. *Livejournal* is a communality-oriented blog hosting service that was begun in 1999 (Livejournal.com 2011). As of November 2012, there are 39,663,771 listed user accounts out of which around 1,790,795 user accounts are held active in some way (Livejournal.com 2012). In 2010, which is the year this study is concerned with, the ratio of males to females on *Livejournal* was 39,4% of males to a 60,6% of females (Livejournal.com 2011). It must be stated, however, that the number of accounts which have not specified gender information is rather large (4,338,013 as of November 8 2011), and therefore the margin of error can be notable. In November 2012, however, the gender balance had equalized with 45% of the account holders identifying themselves as male and 55% as female (Livejournal.com 2012). 20% of *Livejournal* account holders did not reveal their gender. The question of why such a large amount of people decide to not give their gender information is interesting and a case for a further study. Or perhaps they have given it but it has gone unrecognised: in *Livejournal* it is possible to choose between male, female and other/not specified – when choosing the latter, it will not appear on one's user profile.

Creating a basic account at *Livejournal* is free of cost and provides the account holder with a journal and a user profile. *Livejournal* users, account holders, can link their account to other accounts ("friending") or to join larger communities. At *Livejournal* the level of privacy is high and an account holder can choose whether they want to keep their personal journal public, private or somewhere in between. However, as noted, in addition to offering users the possibility of keeping a personal journal, *Livejournal* is also a vast social network which the users can freely take advantage of. Unlike personal journals where only the owner can post entries and control the possibility of commenting, community journals allow posting and commenting by

anyone who is a member of that community (Raynes-Goldie 2004). As in personal journals, also in communities single posts can be kept public or made private.

To conclude, the things that define *Livejournal* are, again, its sociability and perhaps also the easiness of operating it. Many users first come to *Livejournal* due to hearing about it from friends (Raynes-Goldie 2004), which further adds to the social side of *Livejournal*: having friends to share a personal journal with. It also adds to the easiness of *Livejournal* as the sociability of the platform means that new user will probably have someone to guide them in using the system and showing them how the service operates. Moreover, as each account comes with a user profile where one can list public information about them such as name, age, sex, location, interests and their listed *Livejournal* friends and communities, it is easy to find people with shared interests.

3.2.2 Organizing an Online Discussion: Basic Terminology

The organization of an internet discussion board is what keeps a board, a forum or a community coherent and consistent. Instead of having an unorganised mass of texts, things are labelled and organised so that different discussions are separated and that the replies appear as a logical continuation under the discussion they belong to. As Rutter and Smith (1999: 7) put it, perhaps the most basic feature of the interaction in newsgroups, or in this case, communities, is the use of “a descriptive subject or topic in the posting's header that gives some indication of what the post (and in turn, the thread) is about”. Simply put, the *topic line* is a short description of what the actual *post* or *topic* (also called an *entry* especially in the case of *Livejournal*) is about or in other words, what the topic of the discussion will be in one particular post.

The wording of the topic line is created by the person writing the post, and it is up to that person to decide what kind of information they want to give about the post. Then, to continue, when people begin writing replies and comments on a post, the post turns into a *thread*. The difference of a post and a thread can be defined by the amount of comments a post receives; at least two or more people and three or more replies are needed in order to turn a post from an *announcement* into an *exchange* (Rutter and

Smith 1999: 8), although it can be argued that also an unreplied post is an exchange within the whole community or forum. Thus, interactivity is key.

With regards to the importance of the topic line, something that makes *Livejournal* special is that readers do not only see the topic line when first viewing the web page. This is one thing that separates *Livejournal* communities from many other online discussion forums, underlining its blog-like quality instead. Under the topic line most posters write something that could be called a *teaser* that leads a reader to click a link that takes them into the full post (and the comment page). The teaser could include text, pictures, a video, a question or anything that tells more about the subject of the post. In case the topic line is not telling or interesting enough, the teaser will provide more information so that the reader can decide whether they want to view the full post and/or participate by commenting.

Using a teaser is not obligatory, however. In some cases the complete post can be visible on the front page. Most of the time using the teaser – or, as it is often called in *Livejournal*, a *LJ-cut* – is a matter of being thoughtful towards other *Livejournal* users who might not want to have their personal friends page clogged by a huge amount of lengthy posts and pictures that have not been placed under the LJ-cut. Clicking on the LJ-cut/teaser line takes the reader to read the full post if they are inclined to do so. In picture 1 the topic front page includes the time and date of the post, the topic line “MYSTERY POST!” and a short explanation saying that the entry is a surprise post which contains “Videos, Pictures, stories” and “something that tickles your fancy”. The LJ-cut is marked by the line “it's a seeeeeeeeeecret”. By clicking on the link the whole post, which in this case includes a random collection of videos, pictures and gossip, opens. By clicking on the two links below one can access the 24 comments already left in the post or to post one's own.

28 JANUARY 2010 @ 12:21 AM
 MYSTERY POST!

This is a surprise post! Videos, Pictures, stories.....come in and look. I promise there will be something that tickles your fancy

(it's a seeeeeeeeeeeecret)

tags: i can't think of a fucking tag, i climbed and conquered mount google, land-on-my-5head donovan, stu
 24 COMMENTS | LEAVE A COMMENT

Picture 1. <http://ontd-football.livejournal.com/1884540.html>

Something else that separates *Livejournal* from many other communities and forums is that since it is in the form of a weblog, in its layout the newest entry always appears on the top of the web page. In many other online communities, the entry with the latest comment moves on the top of the page regardless of whether there have been newer entries after it or not. It could be considered that in *Livejournal* this means that the reverse chronological hierarchy of the topics of discussion is preferred over the interest in certain posts as defined by the number and the timing of replies and comments to entries older than the most recent one. This also keeps the community fast-paced; the latest news are always on the front page, and that is also where the latest replies are centred. Moreover, it means that most posts do not have a long history – some threads might even have thousands of replies but are still forgotten along the way as new topics of discussion emerge to take over the front page.

3.3 Fandom Culture and the Marginalization of Female Sports Fans

Soap viewing had become the base on which witty, sociable women and men had built an interpersonal realm rich with strong traditions and a clear group identity (Baym 2000: 2).

The community blog the present study is concerned with is a formed by fans and therefore it can also be described a *fandom* community that operates under blog-hosting service *Livejournal*. The word itself derives from the words *fan* and the suffix *-dom*, and has been used since the beginning of the 20th century (Dictionary.com, 2013; Merriam-Webster.com 2013). Thus, compared to a fairly new term and phenomenon,

(we)blog, fandom is a word almost a hundred years older. The term 'fandom' is not easy to define, although historian Douglas Harper explains it as “the realm of avid enthusiasts” (Dictionary.com 2013). I would also argue that a fandom is a collective entity which employs a need and a feeling of belonging to an entity bigger than oneself. Therefore, in my opinion, a fandom is closely connected to the basic need for people to be affiliated with other people who share similar interests. Hognestad (2012: 27) offers a more philosophical insight arguing that fandom “can be seen as generative of knowledge on about something fundamentally human, the passionate adoption of identity”. In my opinion, Hognestad's definition explains best what separates a fandom from any collective based on a mutual interest. Passion is the key word when describing fanhood, especially fans of a lifestyle sport such as football.

The above quote from Baym is concerned with an online discussion forum dedicated to TV soap operas. Nevertheless it is a great example of what any online fandom community can be like when in continuous operation: a collection of fans of any certain matter coming together due to a shared passion and forming an alliance together stronger than its parts. In fact, one definition describes fandoms as being “more than the mere act of being a fan of something: (it was) a collective strategy, a communal effort to form interpretive communities that in their subcultural cohesion evaded the preferred and intended meaning of the “power block”” (Gray et al. 2007: 2). This follows an assumption that being a fan is for those that are less privileged in one way or another – regarding money, social status, gender, location or any other attribute that separate people from one another.

The community which my study examines deals with everyday happenings in the world of football. Football fandom, especially from the male point of view, both on- and offline has been studied widely compared to many other sports (for example, see: Brown 2007, Crawford 2009, Finn & Giulianotti 2000), which is not surprising taking into account the sport's intense reputation as a spectator and even a so-called lifestyle sport, meaning that football fans are often fans who dedicate much of their lives to following a certain club. The presumption in the present study is that the participants of the community are mostly female fans of the sport who have come together in the online world. The supposed femininity of the community makes it interesting, because

the role of women in sports, both as spectators/fans and active participants is often marginalized.

According to Crawford & Gosling (2004: 484-485) female fans are often seen as less committed, less “real” fans of any sport compared to male fans. This happens even if they exhibit the same amount of knowledge and commitment as men do, or even more. Crawford (2009) argues in his study that this might often be a question of gender performativity. Football matches, for example, are often seen by an audience at locations that are connected with performing the masculine gender such as public houses (pubs) and sport stadiums. At these locations masculinity is reinforced via the instrumentality of stereotypically male-gendered behaviour such as drinking beer and fist-fighting, even though these examples are quite extreme, somewhat localized behaviour, and I do not suggest that this is the case every time a male group sits down together to see a match. Although Crawford's argumentation lacks any actual problematisation or reasoning behind the difficult situation of female fans of sports, his point in mind it is now even easier to see why the online fandom environment would be an easier place for a female fan of sports to “fit in” at.

In order to fit in at real life places of sport spectatorship such as pubs or sport venues, women might need to adapt their behaviour into a more masculine direction, which in turn might lead to problems of judgement concerning gender-appropriate behaviour. I argue that this judgement happens when men feel some sort of fear over losing their masculine domain (also supported by Crawford and Gosling 2004: 490) and their “male space”, and perhaps also in the case of women who willingly adapt to and wish to reinforce a stereotype of gender-appropriate behaviour and interests, expecting it also from other women.

Fiske (1992: 30) claims that sport, as an example, is an exceptional form of fandom due to its basis being in the admiration of masculinity of the mass-appeal stars. Exemplars of masculinity no doubt attract all genders regardless of the driving force behind the appeal. However, female fandom does not escape the notion of admiring masculinity either. Crawford and Gosling's study (2004: 486) makes a claim that many male sports fans see especially young, female sports fans as people who are not very

knowledgeable or passionate about the sport itself. Rather, they are there for the sole purpose of seeking sexual relationships with the male players, even though their study proved that this was not the case with any of the fans they interviewed. As Crawford and Gosling conducted their study in the UK, I would imagine the local culture to at least somewhat affect the thinking of the male respondents. In the UK the wives and girlfriends, *WAGs*, are a source for constant media attention. As their often extravagant lifestyles are daily marvelled by a crowd of young girls, many of the girls aspire to become *WAGs* themselves (see, for example Barton 2012: 85-86, Mortimer 2012).

Crawford & Gosling's study (2004) also found that in many cases the female fans were willing to assert the fact that they were “real fans” by expressing deep knowledge of the sport and commitment to it (see also Hynes 2012). This includes the finding that many of the fans – both male and female – were keen on seeking a connection to the players by means of conversation and gaining their acquaintanceship. (Crawford and Gosling 2004: 489). In an online fandom the same personal engagement could be achieved by gathering information about the athletes in other ways – via interviews, social media and other fans, for example.

It has been claimed that most scholars have so far been mostly concerned with studying fans and fandoms as entities that do not challenge existing social hierarchies but keep them alive by conforming to them (see Gray et al. 2007). I would argue, however, that a fandom can also be a place for emancipation from alleged hierarchies and stereotypes. In case an interest of a person is considered atypical, it might bring with it a sense of loneliness in case the interest cannot be shared with anyone. However, bring in the internet with its endless varieties of socialization and one is bound to find people to share even the most uncommon interests with.

3.4 Gender Roles in Online Environments

As the present study is involved with discussing a predominantly gendered topic in a predominantly gendered online environment and as one of the challenges of the study is to provide information on challenging a prevailing stereotype of gendered interests and topics, I will now review what has been studied about gender differences in online

behaviour. The concept of gender especially related to the discourse of sports will be further considered in the forthcoming chapters on the discourses of sport and gender, but as gender is the theme that defines the whole of my study, it must already be introduced here at this point from the point of view of online communality and possible behavioural differences.

As I defined earlier in the study, whereas the term *sex* refers to the binary categories of 'male' and 'female', its counterpoint *gender* refers to the attributes, either 'masculine' or 'feminine' that are associated to either of the two main sexes (Archer & Lloyd 2002: 17). Therefore *gender* is a culturally bound term whereas *sex* only refers to the biological attributes of a person. Stereotyping, another central theme of the present study, also regards the notion of gender. Even though gender is a liquid term and nowadays a wide variety of genders publicly exist beside the categories of males and females, including transgender people, the stereotypical idea of men and women and the fundamental differences between them persist.

In 1993, Herring stated that despite a substantial body of research demonstrating sex differences in face-to-face communication, the question of sex differences in computer-mediated communication had only begun to be raised (Herring 1993). Herring's study shows that face-to-face strategies of conversation are adapted in online conversations, dividing different genders similarly both on- and offline. Herring noticed in her study that when sharing a conversational floor in an online community, discussions started by males get more attention and responses than those started by females. Thus, especially when discussing a gendered topic in a coed online environment, a female contributor could be overlooked or delegitimised by others (Herring 1993). When encountering such discouraging attitudes, female participation becomes less frequent and male domination persists.

One explanation for the abovementioned role division is that different genders seem to have different preferences over topics of discussion. Whereas males favour discussing issues and information, females tend to be drawn to personal topics and queries (Herring 1993). Another simple explanation is that females and males often have a different way of expressing themselves literally over the internet and occupy different strategies of communicating. As Holmes & Meyerhoff point out (2003:207), it has

been extensively shown that males are often more likely to post messages than females, to post longer messages than females, assert their opinions as facts, use more aggressive language and exhibit an adversarial orientation towards others (See, for example Herring 1993, 1996a, 1996b; Kramarae and Taylor 1993, Savicki et al. 1996; Sutton 1994). In contrast, females often post shorter messages, qualify and justify their assertions, are apologetic, supportive of others and exhibit an aligned orientation towards others (See, for example Hall 1996; Herring 1993, 1994, 1996a, 1996b; Holmes & Meyerhoff 2003; Savicki et al. 1996). However, it has also been noticed, that in a predominantly feminine online environment men tend to adapt some more feminine style of speech, whereas in a predominantly male online space women take on a more masculine way of communicating (Herring 1996b). Perhaps this could be viewed as an indicative of the possibility that a space could be shared if both sides adapt.

Two decades later, the results of Herring's 1993 study still seem valid. Some of the findings were even confirmed to still prevail in a more recent study (Herring 2010). Similar patterns occur in online communication of the present day – in online discussions, characters that exhibit 'male' behavioural attributes can easily gain control over the conversational floor or space. Moreover, it can be presumed to be a common pattern that when coed conversation occurs in an online environment dedicated to a gendered topic (male or female), these behavioural models could be fortified as one gender considers themselves to be more knowledgeable on the (gendered) issue than another. Therefore it could be proposed that in order to have a community that operates under harmonious conversation styles, a gendered community could be beneficial. However, if controversy and opinionated discussions are not wished to be avoided, then a co-gendered environment might be the most fruitful option.

Hynes' (2012: 200-201) study showed that in an online football forum the 16 female participants found that there were indeed differences between the conversational styles of different genders. The females recognized themselves as being calmer than their male counterparts. According to them the male forum members could often be described as competitive, overtly manly, aggressive and 'alpha male'. In contrast, the female members tried not to resort to swearing and “throwing tantrums”, were less aggressive and perhaps spend more time thinking about what they were about to write.

This study deals with the question of having a stereotypically gendered topic and having the conversation in an online environment presumed mostly female. In the community its members post daily news from the world of football. Each post is an individual topic on which members can comment and discuss different matters. Although the study does not include comparisons between the conversational spaces and topics of discussion of different genders, it can, however, lead to valid interpretation of why this particular community is as female-dominant as it presumably is. It will also provide material for possible future comparative researches.

As Herring (2004a:338) points out, much research on online behaviour is anecdotal and speculative rather than empirically grounded. I would argue that the present study is also speculative but that it is also empirically grounded and justified. Moreover, as a case study my study can finely succeed in pointing out what a female-dominant conversation of a gendered topic entails and therefore contribute new, relevant, knowledge to the field. Finally, it will also provide material for interpreting why it is attractive for a gender to have a conversational space of their own, especially when dealing with a gendered topic.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter presents the object and the data of the present study, the aims of the study and the methods that will be used to analyse the data. The procedure of the study will also be presented.

4.1 Data

The object of the present study is an online community, namely *ONTD_football*, which can be found under the blog hosting service *Livejournal*. The community, which has 7992 members as of February 2013 (Ontd-football.livejournal.com 2013), works as a collaborative blog, where community members post daily issues from the world of football, with some focus on prominent teams and players. Members also frequently comment on the entries as well as on the comments of one another, which makes the

community a place for constant discussion and interactivity. Comments are often posted in the form of moving .gif-images, *You Tube* –videos, macro pictures or other imagery, or written in a certain style that is characteristic to *Livejournal* fandoms, including a great amount of abbreviations, catchphrases, nicknames and references to past events and discussions. Thus, the comment section might be hard to understand for a person who is not familiar with the communicative means and the language use of fandoms. Moreover, it would probably be completely unintelligible for a person who does not know about football, the players and the teams discussed. In September 2011 the community had eleven moderators who observe that community guidelines are followed, especially during times when the posting rate is above average.

As stated before, *ONTD_football* is a spin-off community of a larger entity called *Oh No They Didn't*. The original *ONTD* is one of biggest entertainment gossip communities on the internet and on *Livejournal*. As of November 2010 *ONTD* has spawned 113 spin-off communities that focus on different aspects of culture, entertainment and the society (Livejournal 2010). *ONTD_football* is one of the most successful communities from the sports branch of the *ONTD* spin-off communities in terms of the number of members and of entries written. It is also the only one to have further subcommunities. According to Livejournal.com (2011), these seven subcommunities are mostly dedicated to different national teams, such as *ONTD_espana* for the Spanish football national team and *Loewsmiserables* for the German football national team, the name being a pun on the name of the German national football team's coach, Joachim Löw and the musical *Les Misérables*. *ONTD*'s relation with *ONTD_football*, as one of the moderators of the latter puts it, can be described as follows: “---and we are an *ONTD* community so gossip is always welcomed ;)” (Ontd-football.livejournal.com 2010). Other subcommunities are: *fuckyeahceleste* for Uruguay, *los_mexicanos* for Mexico, *omg_yanks* for USA, *ontd_france* for France and *ontd_italia* for Italian football.

ONTD_football was created in 2008 and as of February 11 2013 has 13,111 entries created by members. For the purposes of this study the focus will be on the year 2010, when altogether 4490 entries were created. Due to the FIFA Football World Cup that took place in South Africa during June and July 2010, the year 2010 has been a time

when the community has undergone a major transition considering, for example, increase in the amount of members, doubling the amount of posts per day, increase of interest in the community from existing members and the variety of topics both expanding and then gradually decreasing. This selection also offers insight as to how the community has changed from the ending of one season of major league football and anticipating the World Cup to the aftermath of the World Cup and new major league football season beginning and continuing.

The data was selected by counting the amount of posts each month and then calculating 10 percent of that figure. This selection is fair, because the number of posts analysed each month is in proportion with the total number of posts published that month. It also puts emphasis on the time period of the World Cup, when the community was the busiest. I selected every tenth post of each month to get an even flow of posts throughout the year. When reaching the end of each month, I would have a number of posts equal to the 10 percent figure. However, due to a calculation error of mine I also picked the very last post of February 2010 and the very first of November 2010 into the data to get the exact 10 percent figure I was looking for.

Moreover, in my analysis I used the user profile of the *ONTD_football* community and the user profiles of the community's moderators in order to draw conclusions whether the community can be described as feminine and/or gendered. As mentioned in ch. 3.2.1. of my study, in *Livejournal* users can themselves decide whether they want to give gender information about themselves on their *Livejournal* user profile. The gender can also be hidden and/or different from one's biological sex.

Table 1: The monthly division of entries at *ONTD_football* during 2010

MONTH	TOTAL NUMBER OF ENTRIES	10% OF ENTRIES
January 2010	269	27
February 2010	217	22
March 2010	221	22
April 2010	292	29
May 2010	390	40
June 2010	604	60
July 2010	713	71
August 2010	432	43
September 2010	372	37
October 2010	412	41
November 2010	308	31
December 2010	260	26
YEAR 2010 TOTAL	IN TOTAL 4490 ENTRIES ALL YEAR	IN TOTAL 449 ENTRIES TO ANALYSE

Table 1 illustrates the division of posts made at *ONTD_football* during the year 2010. In total there were 4490 topics. As can be seen, the number of posts is approximately the same during the first four months of the year. The number of posts rises during the summer, reaching a peak in July with 713 posts. In July posting activity even triples compared to the number of posts in the early months of the year. Then, towards the end of the year the number of posts descends again, with the number of posts in December coming down to the same number of posts as in the early months of the year. The average amount of posts per month is 374,2.

In my analysis I will present all text excerpts as they have been originally written. This means that any typing mistakes, stylisations of texts et cetera will not be corrected or separately pointed out in the presentation of the results or in the discussion. Moreover,

I included all posts, also those that are “locked” from public and only seen to those people that have a *Livejournal* account and are a member of the group.

4.2 Research Questions

The aim of this study is to examine 449 entries created in the *ONTD_football* community during the year 2010 and to analyse the nature of the topics of discussion in the community. It will be taken into account that due to the 2010 FIFA Football World Cup the community acquired a large number of new members and, thus, a renewed variety of interests in the community as well. As sports and football are stereotypically seen as male-dominated fields of discourse, it will be interesting to study if the topics discussed in a community formed mostly, if not solely, by females reinforce this idea, or whether the topics can be described as gendered. The research questions are:

1. What kinds of topics were discussed in the community during the year 2010?
2. Did the World Cup affect the nature of the topics? If so, how?
3. Can the topics be described as gendered? If so, how?

4.3 Methods

In the case of the present study, the context is an online community that discusses football. Essentially, the study examines sports and football fandom in connection with the issue of gender. Therefore the study is based on an interconnected framework formed by the fields of computer-mediated communication (CMC), gender and sports studies. The study does not suggest that female football fans are a homogenous group with easily detectable, commonly shared interests within the field of sports. It tries to point out common features of one particular community and its topics of discussion.

Utilizing themes from the fields of gender studies, sports studies and computer-mediated communication studies, I will categorise and examine the topics of discussion in the community during the year 2010. First I will use Rowe's (1992, as cited by Crolley and Hand 2002: 14 and Boyle and Haynes 2000: 174) typology of

categorizing the topics of into *hard news*, *soft news*, *orthodox rhetoric* and *reflexive analysis*. Whereas *hard news* can be described as “ostensibly objective record of facts and events including match analyses”, *soft news* are instead made up of “gossip, scoops, exclusives, biography, hero worship and ‘infotainment’ largely contributing to the celebrity status of footballers”. *Orthodox rhetoric* presents an authoritative viewpoint where the writer subjectively articulates opinions based on their experience, fame or status. *Reflexive analysis* on the other hand “addresses the problematic of sport and by questioning the writer’s own involvement with and relationship to it” (Crolley and Hand 2002: 14).

While Rowe’s work is mostly concerned with newspaper sports journalism, the present study analyses a collaborative blog that is concerned with the latest news of the football world without being professionally journalistic. The four-point typology is fitting for the analysis, however, because the communal football conversation includes elements that are also found from sports journalism: discussing topical happenings – both *soft* and *hard* as well as opinionated and self-reflective pieces of writing.

To elaborate to Rowe’s typology, a number of categories have been added by me into the analysis. This was done in order to make the typology more fitting for the purposes of analysing an online community which has a predictable, categorisable line of discussion but which does not necessarily fit the limitations of the original four-point categorisation provided by Rowe. Already the initial analysis of the data showed that there was an abundance of posts that did not fit the four main categories, although there were also at least as many that showed that Rowe’s typology would be a functional basis for the categorisation. I will now present the four categories I added:

Picture post is a category for entries that include a large number of pictures as the main point of the entry. Picture posts can possibly be further categorised into soft news, hard news or other. However, this further categorisation proved to be difficult, since the picture posts included both entertaining commentary as well as information that could be categorised under hard news. Thus it was decided to keep them a category of their own. *Video post* is a similar category, in which a post mainly consists of one or more videos. *Community post* describes entries that are meant for

ONTD_football members as means of sharing community-related information, asking questions or providing a place for free discussion, such as *Friday Free For All* -entries, which occur every Friday. *Friday Free For All* -entries might have a topic or a query to provide a starter for discussion, but are generally a place for free discussion.

Moreover, if any other minor categories emerge, they will be pointed out separately and are labelled under the category *Other*. This includes, for example, entries that are concerned with the happenings of a league football season beginning or closing, such as players or coaches moving to another team. These will be secondarily marked as *season start* or *transfer speculation*. The *Other* category also includes posts that are “mixed” in the sense that they combine elements from more than one category and have thus been impossible to place under one category. It will also be noted if a report is from a newspaper or a website, for example, and has merely been forwarded to the community, as well as if an entry is clearly concerned with the World Cup. The appendices of this study include tables that show the whole data, including the topic line, categorisation and subcategorisation of each analysed topic.

The categorisation will help give structure to the more thorough textual analysis of what has been talked about in the community and what sort of message the topics convey. It will be considered if and how the topics affect whether the community can be described as gendered or not. The analysis will utilize principles learned from gender studies in connection with CMC and the discourse of sports. I will go through the data by giving detailed examples of topics belonging to certain categories. In analysing the user information of the community I will also take a look at the different word choices and expressions that can help determine whether the community can be described as predominantly female or, at least, imply to have the female gender as the presumed reader and/or participant. However, outside of these examples I will not employ any lists of words or expressions because I believe that the topics of discussion speak for themselves and a word-by-word analysis of language is unnecessary in the case of the present study.

5. RESULTS

This chapter will present the results of the study. This will be done by giving a short review of what the discussion topics at *ONTD_football* entailed each month of the year. The month-by-month reviews will offer a chronological understanding of the narrative of the year 2010 in the community. The reviews are accompanied by tables which illustrate how many different kinds of topics there were each month and how many topics there were of each category.

In order to make the results easier to comprehend, the year 2010 is divided into three distinctive time periods: from January to May, which was the time before the FIFA World Cup 2010 and during which the major league season ended and the build-up to the WC began; from June to August during which the WC was played and the aftermath of it was dealt with and from September to December during which the major league season began again and the year came to its end. In the next chapter I will present the analysis of the results seen here.

5.1 “GET YOUR FLOWERS & PERFUMES & CHOCOLATES” - *ONTD_football* from January to May 2010

Taking into account the background of *ONTD_football* as a subcommunity of an entertainment-based online community (*Oh No They Didn't*), the expectation for the present study was that the entries would have an emphasis on the category of soft news; entertainment, infotainment, idolisation and gossip. In addition, the initial expectation was that a number of football players and some of the more prominent football clubs would be strongly represented in the entries and the discussion in the community. This was mostly due to *ONTD_football* bearing resemblance to an online fandom – a collective of fans gathering together to talk, speculate and idolise their favourite characters, in this case athletes. Moreover, taking into consideration that the FIFA Football World Cup raised the profile of the community, it can be assumed that many new people came to the community for the purpose of getting information about a select few players and/or national teams, and perhaps also to find other people who are also interested in the same players and teams.

The reputation of the *ONTD* family of *Livejournal* communities being a place for entertainment and excitement also weighs on the matter of analysing the topics of discussion of the *ONTD_football* community. Since, according to its user information, *ONTD_football* is not the most serious place for conversation on football, it also takes pressure off some of the community members, especially new ones, since proving oneself seriously knowledgeable about football might not be the top priority in order to actively take part in the conversation.

JANUARY 2010	
Hard news	12
Soft news	9
Reflexive analysis	2
Picture post	1
Other	3

Already the entries of January proved the initial assumptions uncertain. In January the balance between hard (12) and soft news (9) was almost equal with a slight emphasis on hard news. Other categories were also represented by topics labelled under reflexive analysis (2) and one picture post. The topics of discussion during January ranged from evaluating football players' haircuts (*Real Madrid: The Hair Edition*, January 15 2010) to reports about league matches. 14 entries were reports forwarded to the community from a variety of outside sources such as newspaper websites deemed more or less trustworthy. The category of hard news was mostly represented by entries and reports that included match analyses. Some posts from the category of hard news also reminded people of important matches on each day, and were thus subcategorised under “match reminder” since they seldom included information other than a list of matches, their locations and playtimes in different timezones. Match reminder -posts were frequent throughout the year and were often used as topics in which members were able to follow and comment on matches together.

The category of soft news was more varied. Soft news entries included, for example, posts from a German player's wedding (*Philipp Lahm is getting married!*, January 20

2010), celebrating the birthday of a famous football coach (*A Special Day for The Special One*, January 26 2010) and forwarding pictures of naked football players (*Naked United Are Naked*, January 28 2010).

Throughout the year news reports were posted daily in the community. The reports came from a wide selection of sources, often resulting in entries based on scandalous or scoop reports. However, the community members and entry-makers also applied criticism of sources whenever needed. While reports acquired from *News of the World* or *The Daily Mail* were deemed most unreliable, reports from *The Guardian*, Goal.com or the BBC were met with more respect. Moreover, as one of the community moderators has stated, *ONTD_football* is a member of the *ONTD* branch, and therefore gossip is welcomed in the community.

FEBRUARY 2010	
Hard news	12
Soft news	6
Reflexive analysis	1
Picture post	2
Video post	1

The posts written in February continued in a similar manner as January. The amount of hard news stayed consistent (12) whereas the amount of soft news decreased (6). Again, there was one post that loosely fell under the category of reflexive analysis (*I am here to pimp the Football League :*), February 6 2010), one picture post (*Footie weekend in pics 20-21/02/10*, February 8 2010). February also included one borderline case that I categorised an informative picture post (*US Soccer Mega Post. Because it's been a while.*, February 26 2010). The post gave an introduction to the on-goings of US football with a heavy emphasis on pictures.

Another prominent theme that continually arose in the posts is social media and the members' interest in websites such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Especially the microblog website *Twitter* was celebrated as a window to the lives and thoughts of footballers and a cause for grief when a footballer decides to leave the service (*NOOOOOO*: February

12 2010) or for speculation when a piece of gossip leaks from a user of the service (*Tengo La Camisa Negra y El Capitan*: February 11 2010).

MARCH 2010	
Hard news	8
Soft news	6
Reflexive analysis	2
Picture post	2
Community post	2
Other	2

In March the categories begun slowly to stretch and vary more, with a number of entries including themes from two or more categories at once. The number of both hard (8) and soft news (6) entries dropped considerably taking into account that the total amount of posts was rising. However, those categories were still the most prominent ones. The hard news entries concentrated on reports of topical issues from the world of football whereas the soft news ranged from speculating the state of the marriage of a football player and a pop star (*GUESS WHAT CHERYL COLE (MIGHT BE) HERE TO STAY*, March 2 2010) to, once again, celebrating a players' birthday (*Feliz Cumpleaños Sergio*, March 30 2010).

The category of reflexive analysis was also present in March with two topics. There was also one entry (*USA POST*, March 18 2010), which included elements of reflexive analysis while being labelled under the category of hard news. March entries also included two community posts; one where the community members' opinion on a football related topic was sought after (*It's not like England was ever anything more than a long shot, really (weeps)*, March 14 2010) and one where community members were congratulated due to Women's Day (*GET YOUR FLOWERS & PERFUMES & CHOCOLATES*, March 8 2010). The latter entry was decorated with football related images and messages of empowerment.

APRIL 2010	
Hard news	12
Soft news	5
Orthodox rhetoric	1
Picture post	5
Video post	2
Other	4

At the end of March it seemed that the community was becoming more active due to the anticipation of league seasons ending and the World Cup approaching. Although the number of entries was almost the same as during the previous months (292, with three first months of the year having under 300 entries per month), the nature of topics was changing, which was also apparent in April.

The highest number of posts were labelled under the category of hard news (12), however five of the hard news entries were match reminders of important league games (see, for example: *Mexican Clasico*, April 4 2010, *r u ready*, April 6 2010 and *FA CUP SATURDAY*, April 10 2010). Other hard news reports concentrated on the ending league season and the upcoming FIFA World Cup, especially players who might miss important matches (see: *I hate everything*, April 19 2010 and *Ribery banned from Champions League final*, April 28 2010).

The rest of the entries in April were more entertainment-based. There were five cases of soft news, also a total of five picture posts and two video posts that included a YouTube -video without any other substantial text or commentary. The topics of the soft news ranged from a story of a fan meeting a footballer (*THE DAY I MET...John Carew :S*, April 24 2010) to a forwarded report of a girlfriend of a footballer packing two left foot shoes in his suitcase instead of a pair (*Leave her Crouchie. She's no good. But she's hot*, April 7 2010).

It was the five picture posts, however, that gained the most attention since their popularity was clearly increasing. Adding to the picture post entries, which go through a recent match and which include a large number of pictures with witty commentary, a

number of macro picture entries arose in April (see: *friday night german post!*, April 2 2010 and *I'm going to keep doing this until someone makes me stop*, April 18 2010). In macro pictures, a funny, picture-matching punchline or a clever exchange of words between players are inserted in the pictures and not written below them as usual. Texts on macro pictures are often pop culture references borrowed from the lyrics to a song or from a movie dialogue. Posts such as these add to the fun and entertaining nature of the community; the pictures are immensely funny but in a manner of inside jokes their meaning might only open up to those in the know about the happenings and the people of the football world. The category of picture posts was at times difficult to analyse, since some of the macro picture posts would have quite obviously belonged to the category of soft news, whereas those depicting a match in detail could have passed as hard news stories.

MAY 2010	
Hard news	5
Soft news	6
Reflexive analysis	2
Orthodox rhetoric	1
Picture post	11
Video post	9
Community post	2

The end of the major league football season and the upcoming World Cup were some of the most prominent themes handled in the entries of May. Many of the posts included information concerning the compositions of different national football teams playing in the World Cup (for example, see: *Spain Pre-List*, May 2010 and *The Unlucky Seven*, May 2010). Moreover, lengthy picture posts from the training sessions of different national teams were posted (for example, see: *German NT: Training Day 1*, May 2010 and *Spain NT Training 27.05.10*, May 2010).

Analysing May proved that the number of entertainment-based entries was growing, as was the anticipation of the upcoming World Cup. Previously popular hard news reports (5) without pictures gave room to humorous picture posts (11), video posts (9), soft news (6) and information and scoops about the upcoming World Cup. The amount of

hard news topics dropped considerably, especially when comparing to the early months of the year. Altogether, the entries of May were strongly branded with a sense of giddiness over the change from the end of the league football season to the time of the World Cup. Entertainment value and a visual approach to making entries were favoured over the previously popular manner of forwarding news reports without nearly any pictures attached.

5.2 “READY, CESC, GO” - *ONTD_football* from June to August 2010

Unsurprisingly, most of the entries written in June and onwards dealt with the FIFA Football World Cup. Out of the 60 analysed entries of June, a total of 47 were about the World Cup or touched upon the subject. Moreover, the amount of picture posts kept increasing (18). Most of the picture posts were of a humorous nature with added commentary on each picture, other were dramatic depictions of a match.

JUNE 2010	
Hard news	20
Soft news	5
Reflexive analysis	1
Picture post	18
Video post	4
Community post	2
Other	10

In June, hand in hand with the World Cup approaching and beginning, a new theme arose from the entries named *World Cup speculation*, which was categorised under other (10). Entries such as these were often news reports that could not be classified clearly as hard or soft news. In two cases these entries were concerned with the misfortune of the French national team in the World Cup and dealt with the possible reasons of the team's downfall (see, for example: *French NT news*, June 25 2010).

There were also a few mixed posts which often included commentary, news reports, speculation, pictures and videos in one lengthy post (see, for example *This has all been blown way out of proportion?*, June 20 2010 and *Fabio Capello crushes John*

Terry's England revolt!, June 21 2010). These types of hybrid posts were a new category and a good representative of the way the community had become more visual and versatile by summertime.

Since most of the entries were picture posts, match reminders (hard news, 20 posts) and speculative World Cup news reports, a couple of more entertaining entries emerged from the group. For example, in *Unite Against Baselayers!* (June 22 2010), a humorous stand was taken against the undershirts of football players in order to have them show more flesh.

JULY 2010	
Hard news	15
Soft news	12
Picture post	18
Video post	6
Community post	5
Other	15

In July, the World Cup came to its peak and its end. This was a matter that was apparent in the topics. Posts classified secondary as *fan posts* were quite visible with 19 such entries, since during the competition many players and national teams had gotten new, eager fans. Fan posts were most often portrayed as picture posts (18) (See, for example: *Stuart Holden is Better Looking Than Your Boyfriend, and Probably Funnier Too*, July 2 2010, *thank you. we love you.*, July 3 2010, *July 13th homage dutch soccer team oranje*, July 13 2010) or as other (15). As many players enjoyed their holidays after the World Cup, the number of gossip-related entries (often categorised as soft news, 12 posts) also increased as players were photographed around the world travelling and spending time with family and friends (See, for example: *He's in NEW YORK!!*, July 4 2010, *HE'S JUST BEING SERGIO TAG---*, July 18 2010).

Since the World Cup was ending, the number of WC-related posts dropped considerably from June (48 out of 60 posts in June dealt with the WC as opposed to 24 out of 71 posts in July). This could also be due to the number of the teams decreasing

during the World Cup progressing – as a community member's favourite national team was out of the competition, daily entries about the national team in question became obsolete. Moreover, after a note from a moderators, fans of certain teams gathered to discuss the matters of the team in one entry instead of beginning dozens of new ones about the same theme (See, for example: *FUCK YEAH SPAIN*, July 7 2010). It is also suspected that many fans moved their conversations on specific teams to other communities dedicated to these teams.

In July, a new subcategory of *Transfer speculation* (12) was added, since the player transfer market was open and daily news reports were speculating and contemplating on possible player transfers (See, for example: *Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho gives green light to sign Germany's Bastian Schweinsteiger – report*, July 8 2010, *welcome back fabio*, July 31 2010). Some of the entries were more reliable than others, and some even lead to news of transfers becoming true.

Altogether, July provided the analysis with entries that were far more difficult to categorise than those of the early months of the year. As the year progressed, entries became more diverse and almost always included a variety of elements – pictures and videos, commentary of various kinds, information from various sources, news reports et cetera. Thus categorisation became more intricate as well and even the division between different reported news pieces, *hard news* and *soft news*, became more difficult than previously.

AUGUST 2010	
Hard news	20
Soft news	13
Picture post	4
Video post	1
Other	5

In August, the number of entries dropped considerably from the amount of June and July; the World Cup months. Furthermore, out of 43 analysed entries only one was related to World Cup as the topic in question continued to deal with the problems of

the national team of England (*oh fabio*, August 9 2010). In contrast, the subcategory that arose in July, *Transfer speculation*, became even more prominent with 11 entries including a news report speculating a player's move from one team to another. Transfer speculation -news were often categorised under hard news (20) or other (5). The number of categories dropped from the previous months and the category of hard news was again the most prominent category.

The August entries were also often concerned with the beginning of league season (see entries subcategorised under *Season start*, 6 posts), with some introductory entries to teams or leagues (See, for example: *THIS IS A CHELSEA POST*, August 1 2010 and *C'mon The U!*, August 8 2010). Many of the introductory posts were labeled in the community as “101”s – meaning an overview or an introduction to a subject. Entries like these often include a variety of information and pictures about a team, a league or a player, designed to introduce the entity to a person who might not be very familiar with it before. As the community presumably acquired a large number of new members during the summer months, 101-entries were designed to help the new members choose teams to support and to give them further information about the world of football. In many cases these 101-entries were written by more knowledgeable members of the community in order to keep the new members interested in football – even after the memories of the World Cup began to fade away and as the new major league season was starting.

5.3 “Move along non-spain fangirls, nothing to see here” - *ONTD_football* form September to December 2010

SEPTEMBER 2010	
Hard news	8
Soft news	9
Orthodox rhetoric	1
Picture post	8
Video post	3
Community post	2
Other	6

In the autumn and winter entries the time of the World Cup seemed ages away as virtually no posts dealt with the World Cup or its aftermath anymore. In September, posts with a more serious nature and posts with a fun and entertaining nature (hard vs. soft) varied. Hard news (8) and soft news (9) were almost equal again. The selection did not bring any surprises, since similar variation had been a continuing theme throughout the year.

One of the biggest issues of the month was the financial troubles of Liverpool FC (See, for example: *blast from the past*, September 18 2010 and *From the Wall Street Journal (yeah, more LFC news)*, September 23 2010). Moreover, a lot of attention was put on matters outside the field, for example the lives of the wives of football players gained attention (See, for example *Queen Alex talks London Fashion Week, Lily Allen and Perez Hilton*, September 28 2010, *ZIS IS FASHION?*, August 13 2010).

OCTOBER 2010	
Hard news	10
Soft news	11
Reflexive analysis	1
Picture post	5
Video post	6
Community post	2
Other	6

October continued on the mixed path of having both serious, game-related hard news (10) in discussion as well as more entertainment-based entries (11 soft news topics). Altogether from Autumn onwards the community calmed down from the hyperactivity of the summer months. Posts were again easier to categorise between hard news and soft news, for example. Subcategories such as World Cup speculation and transfer speculation disappeared since the World Cup had ended already in July and the player transfers of the new season had already been executed. However, some fundamental changes had remained. Compared to some of the previous months, it was obvious that even the entries categorised as hard news had a lot of mixed elements in the posts – mostly humorous comments, pictures or other entertaining additions.

In October the category of soft news (11) was the one that really made an impact. Soft news entries ranged from dealing with the blogging of footballer Steven Gerrard's wife Alex Curran (see: *Queen Alex Discusses Her Birthday Week!*, October 5 2010 and *HATERS STAY PRESSED*, October 12 2010) to sharing videos of a day the life of footballer Cesc Fabregas (*What does the inside of Cesc's closet look like??*, October 22 2010) or David Beckham on hidden camera in an US TV show (*'Ricky' Beckham on Ellen show*, October 27 2010).

NOVEMBER 2010	
Hard news	8
Soft news	6
Community post	2
Video post	3
Picture post	4
Other	7

The year came to a predictable end with the entries of November and December also including a heavy mixture of both more serious and more gossip-related news. Interest shifted already from the previous World Cup to the next one(s), especially World Cup 2018 (See *BBC's guide to contenders*, November 30 2010 and *Oh My Lanta*, December 8 2010). This interest was mostly due to the future hosting countries being drawn at the time, but also because the excitement of the previous World Cup had many community members excited about participating in the next one.

DECEMBER 2010	
Hard news	7
Soft news	8
Reflexive analysis	1
Picture post	4
Video post	3
Community post	1
Other	2

Towards the end of the year the number of entries dropped considerably, especially under Christmas time. However, many important games were celebrated and especially the Spanish league game between Real Madrid and Barcelona, referred to as *El Clásico* due to their infamous and long rivalry, was keenly anticipated (see: *Lets get pumped*, November 28 2010 and *MOTHERFUCKING CLASICO*, November 29 2010). Otherwise the drop in the amount of entries and general interest was a bit surprising, and makes one wonder whether the community members that were acquired during the World Cup did not follow the community anymore or whether, as suspected before, the members had gone on to discuss the matter of their favourite club in a community dedicated to the club.

6. DISCUSSION

In this part of the study I will present an analysis of the results of the study. This will be done by first presenting what was found from the user information of the *ONTD_football* community with regards to performing gender, sexuality and the supposed predominant femininity of the community.

After this I will give a detailed analysis of the results of the study concerning the topics of discussion in the community during the year 2010. I will point out prominent themes in the topics of discussion and analyse examples of each. I will try to find answers for the research questions I have set.

6.1 Can *ONTD_football* be Proved Feminine?

The present study started out with the presumption that *ONTD_football* is a mostly female community. I will now explain how this was studied by looking at the *Livejournal* user profiles of the community members. In the user profiles *Livejournal* members can share details of themselves according to whatever they wish to share – name, age, location, birthdate and personal interests are amongst the commonly shared things. Also the gender of a person can be selected, published or left hidden. The *ONTD_football* community itself has a user profile, which was also examined for the purposes of the present study.

By exploring the user profiles of the eleven moderators (and the owner) of the community, I found that as of September 2011, four of the moderators identified themselves as females. I came to this conclusion according to the information the moderators have given of themselves in their *Livejournal* user profiles. Gender information about two moderators was available by looking at their *Livejournal*. Gender information of one moderator was available by looking at the links to the user's websites outside of *Livejournal*, such as *Facebook*, *Flickr* or *Last.fm*. Means of gender identification included, for example, using a female name, having a picture/ an avatar of a female person and/or referring to oneself using a feminine nominal group to describe oneself such as 'this girl'. As stated, many chose not to make any explicit references to their gender in their *Livejournal* user profile per se. This can be considered as a nod towards gender neutrality, but in some cases the information was readily available from other sources outside *Livejournal*. Thus seven out of the eleven moderators of *ONTD_football* identified themselves as female and none as male. It is also notable that many of the moderators chose not to expose their sex or gender in their user profiles.

The user profile of the community itself conveys a clear picture of the purposes of the community and the interests of it. The description of the community states that *ONTD_football* is an “*OhNoTheyDidn't* spinoff” in which “football, footballers and their thighs are appreciated”. This is continued by a table of welcome and information about the community, which includes an abundance of references to the physical attributes of football players and the general admiration of the players. It is also mentioned that the community is especially for those who “enjoy the finer things in life (that include but are not limited to) ie attractive men---” (*ONTD_football* 2011). Thus it can be further considered, at least, that the community represents a sexual interest in males, regardless of the sex or the gender of the community members.

In addition, the user info makes an abundance of gendered references such as the writer of the information wearing high heeled shoes, referring to non-humorous members by the name of “Sally Serious”, and to having *Livejournal* communities that can be described as “soul sisters”. Moreover, there are links to various feminine

football websites as well as a lengthy list of the community's interests that mostly, and notably, include sexual references to male footballers. Everything combined it is safe to assume that *ONTD_football*, as well as the places it links itself to, is a community that at least has a gendered spirit.

6.2 Analysis of the Topics of Discussion

In the next parts of the study I will present my analysis of the data in detail. This will be done by raising prominent themes from the community and discussing them in an organised manner, so that one theme will seamlessly follow another. The end result will be a complete analysis of the topics of the community in 2010. The answers to my research questions will be considered here and the results will be concluded in the final chapter of the study.

6.2.1 The Members Make the Community

The presumption for the present study was that the year 2010 at the *ONTD_football* community could be divided into three parts – before, during and after the FIFA Football World Cup in South Africa. This was true. The change in the nature of the topics during the year was obvious, although perhaps a bit smoother than I initially expected. Right in the beginning of the year it was clear that the community was mostly concerned with discussing forwarded news reports of topical issues. Lengthy picture posts, for example, were still missing for the most part. This 'seriousness', if it can be described so, was even surprisingly distinctive from the data sample taking into account *ONTD_football*'s notable background as a subcommunity of the famous gossip community *OhNoTheyDidn't*. Even though soft news pieces and a small number of picture and video posts did surface also in the earlier months of the year, it took time for the community to become as versatile in its topics and especially formatting (the use of pictures, moving images, videos, text formatting et cetera) as it was later in the year. Obviously the World Cup brought along new members and a great deal of variety and quantity in posts, but the change was bubbling under already in April and May with the anticipation of the WC and the ending of the league season approaching.

Since the number of entries was doubled during summer compared to the general amount of the entries of the previous months, it seemed obvious from the topics that there were new members in the community. Some of the posts made this clear via the author introducing themselves as a new member in the beginning or the ending of a post (see, for example: *I said maybeeeeeee you're gonna be the one that saves meeeee*, June 22 2010). This sort of posts almost always included a notion that as the member was new, they were unsure if they were posting correctly and sometimes also an apology over possible mistakes in posting. However, it seemed that not all new members were as apologetic and/or mindful of their newness to the community.

Regarding the topics, I would argue that the *ONTD_football* community cannot be described as an authoritative community. However, details such as the new members being careful not to make “mistakes” when beginning to post and the moderators making themselves known when new members emerge tell that there are some guidelines to be followed. It is obvious when looking at some of the entries and the discussions in the community, that in addition to having some knowledge about football, for example a certain level of knowledge on internet/fandom vocabulary is needed in order to read and comprehend the posts. The context of *ONTD_football* cannot be described as rigid, but as in most other online communities, it has a certain kind of level of humour and appropriateness that new members need to observe and adopt before being able to post and participate actively. It can be argued that in some cases it was also the lack of knowledge that led to new members making some errors in their participation, which influenced both the quantity and the quality of the topics especially during summer.

As mentioned, the increased amount of members and the content of the topics were also addressed by some of the moderators of the group during the summer and afterwards. One entry posted by a moderator gave information about the various sub-communities of *ONTD_football* and reminded community members of the rules of the community (see *I am also going to make an information kiosk post but this one is less funny or smart*, June 24 2010). Moreover, later in the year a moderator of the group used her voice to remind the community members of what is relevant and irrelevant

when posting to the community (see *read this*, November 1 2010). As the moderator in question wrote,

---sometimes simply posting a text entry and citing the source makes this place look like a cheap syndication site of football articles. i would love to see more personalization, opinions and commentary concerning some of the more "serious" topics. People come here for material that is different than what can be found on a regular news site. even if you don't think you have something to say i think there should be more evidence of research, and even the smallest effort of formatting makes a difference!

Perhaps posts like this were needed since the arrival of new members seemed to cause an overflow of entries that did not meet the standards of the community. For a variety of reasons such as success and visibility, a handful of national teams, league football teams and football players attracted more fans than others. Thus, numerous entries about said teams and players occurred daily, even to the extent of moderators having to step in on the issue. According to the moderators' posts, during the summer an unknown number of entries were even deleted due to unnecessary repetition in the topics of discussion. Hand in hand with having a high number of posts dedicated to a select few teams and players, the subcategory of fan post did become more apparent during and after the World Cup. This met the initial expectations for the outcome of the study, even though in the early months of the year the same expectations could be questioned due to the high number of hard news entries, which often consisted of a text piece only without further formatting.

6.2.2 The Thought Behind the Topic Line

During the summer months the topic lines of the posts became more elaborate and/or informal. This can be linked to the rise in the number of posts categorised and subcategorised under soft news, mixed posts, fan posts and other, in which the topic lines were often rather vague and/or not very descriptive of the content of the entry.

It was noted already in January and in the forthcoming months as well, that the topic lines were often more lucid and/or descriptive in case of hard news reports. Topic lines of soft news reports were instead often very casual or readable only to those in the know about the subjects that were being talked about. As an example, a topic line that

only says *A Special Day for The Special One* (January 26 2010) does not really reveal anything about the topic subject to a reader who is not familiar with the vast amount of nick-naming that goes on in the community, or in this case, a nickname that is known outside the community as well (famous Portuguese football coach José Mourinho is often referred to as *The Special One* and in this case, *A Special Day* is a reference to his birthday). In a similar vein, a topic line such as “*This a ~Special post*” (May 14 2010) gives similar information on who the post is about.

As an another example, February included an entry titled “*The real reason some girls want to be WAGs.....*” (February 16 2010), the title of which suggests that the entry might be a soft news piece due to the use of the term *WAG*, which refers to the wives and girlfriends of football players (see ch. 3.3) and who are also listed as an interest of the *ONTD_football* community in the user profile of the community. In this case, contrary to the expectations set by the topic line, the entry itself is a matter-of-fact report of the salaries of the highest earning players in the world without any further comment from the community member who has posted the entry. However, it can be argued that the topic line “*The real reason some girls want to be WAGs.....*” is more likely to draw in readers who are interested in gossip than those who are more interested in the sport and the 'hard news' alone. My personal belief is that all people are at least somewhat drawn to gossip, but here in this case the wording of the topic line seems gendered, if only for the insinuation that for “some girls” one important goal in life can be to become the spouse of a high earning (male) football player.

6.2.3 Sexual Devotion and the Importance of Images

The data of the study shows that at *ONTD_football* the wives and girlfriends of high profile football players are almost as worthy of attention and admiration as the players themselves are. However, the tone of the admiration is different from that shown towards the athletes and consists more of idolising the beauty, fashion and lifestyles of the football players' wives. The most popular of them are often glorified as being 'Queen WAGs' or goddesses; perfect people with perfect lives. It also seems that being a 'WAG' alone is enough of a 'claim to fame'. Even though many of the discussed people have careers on their own, the focus of the topics were their personal lives as a

wife or a girlfriend of a player, and as a mother of their children. The exception to this rule is Victoria Beckham, the wife of English football player David Beckham. She has made a significant career in the public eye both before her relationship with Beckham as well as during it. At *ONTD_football* she is perhaps most admired for her status in the world of fashion and for her omnipresence in the media since the late 1990's.

According to the results of my study, *ONTD_football* could be described as somewhat gendered according to stereotyping and general expectations of what heterosexual femininity entails and what female discussion of football could include. However, many of the qualities that felt gendered could actually be described as typicalities of any fandom. Throughout the year it was apparent that as the members were interested in what went on in the field, they were also very concerned with the player's personal lives, families and personalities, thus adding to the emotional connection to the players. If an interview of a player was posted, the bits about their personal lives or what they said about other famous players were highlighted instead of bits where the player talked about sport.

Moreover, in the manner of fandoms, players' looks were of a high interest. The year saw a constant stream of entries dedicated to shirtless athletes and lengthy picture posts of attractive players. This could hardly be called a purely feminine quality, since both male and female fans apply their gaze to the object of their idolising. However, taking into account the predominant femininity of *ONTD_football*, this can be considered a sign of heterosexual devotion. Perhaps for a female community it is more socially acceptable to show this devotion openly, more so than for male communities. It must be noted, however, that also the wives and girlfriends of the players were often classified as "girlcrushes" and posts about them were often tagged as "I think I like girls now". Details such as these put the people who are being talked about in a quasi-homosexually charged position. Again, I argue that this is a case of gender and fandom appropriateness and that the same behaviour might not be similarly accepted and even encouraged at a male online environment. I could imagine that same shirtless pictures that are admired at *ONTD_football* could serve as 'fitness inspiration', for example, at a male community, but I suspect that people would easily find it as homosexual adoration. However, this is mere speculation and a case for further study.

It could be that the picture posts dedicated to matches, players, team outings et cetera gained rapid popularity and were valued highly because the community was becoming more fast-paced as the year progressed regarding posting rate. At the same time the attention span of the community members was seemingly growing shorter. The longer the text, the more likely it would be *tl;dr* (*too long; didn't read*, a common internet abbreviation and in itself a telling example of how online language of today needs to be more and more concise and quickly typeable) - for the community members. Pictures offer the same info in a more enticing package, including the possibility to see the players that are being spoken of. Throughout the year it was common that whenever a player was having a birthday, for example, the community would often celebrate by posting copious amounts of pictures of said player. Then again, a football match or a training session would be treated the same, especially just before, during and right after the World Cup.

Picture posts leave a question whether the category itself can be described as gendered or not. The category is split in the sense that some of the picture posts are like match reports, carefully executed and depicting a game in extensive detail. They relate to the *tl;dr* culture in the way that even though making the post must be a time-consuming piece of work for the author of the post, for the reader it offers the possibility to see and experience the match or any event in still pictures, often even without captions.

There was one picture post without any comments that offers a great example. This picture post depicted a World Cup football match in pictures only (*Spain 0 – 1 Switzerland pictures*, June 16 2010). The choice to dismiss any commentary was an interesting choice since the role of humorous commentary in picture posts had been prominent earlier. In this particular post the pictures, a total of 143 of them, tell the story of one World Cup match, particularly from the point of view of the Spanish national team. The pictures depict them at various points of the game; from the moment the team awaits to get on the pitch to the various states of attempts and disappointments until the end of the match where the other, less represented team celebrates its victory. Stylistic effort has been applied in putting together the post, for example in the form of posting some of the pictures more than once in order to put

emphasis on that particular moment or the emotion on a player's face. This single picture post excels in conveying the happenings of this particular game by relying only on a strong visual approach. The views of the maker of the post are visible in the sense that the game is strongly represented from the point of view of one team while the other is a mere guest in the story. Some players are also more represented in the pictures than others, such as Fernando Torres, David Villa, Gerard Piqué and Iker Casillas, leaving a feeling that these particular players were either the favourites of the maker of the post and/or key figures in the match. A post such as this one could be of interest to anyone regardless of gender or sex.

However, at least as many picture posts can be described as mere celebrations of a particular player's looks and bodies and a chance to admire the players together with other fans. A great number of picture posts try to capture amusing or endearing moments from a training session or a game. In fact, it seems that the quest of seeking the personality and the private life of the players is often apparent in picture posts. A sense of brotherhood and camaraderie between players is valued as a creator of emotional depth between the players as well as between the fans and the players. Especially pairings of players called 'bromances' (a portmanteau of the words brother and romance) are enjoyed immensely in the community, even naming these "player couples" with a combination of said players' names, for example: "Schweinski" for German footballers Bastian Schweinsteiger and Lukas Podolski; "Sernando" for Spaniards Sergio Ramos and Fernando Torres; "Criska" for Portuguese player Cristiano Ronaldo and Brazilian player Kaká. This is arguably a tradition transferred from the world of celebrity couples, with the likes of Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt being often named "Brangelina" in the entertainment media, for one example. It is similarly related to entertainment and gossip blog culture, perhaps inherited from *OhNoTheyDidn't*, that makes player gossip, soft news and the players' *Twitter* and *Facebook* accounts of great importance to the members of *ONTD_football*. Therefore, it could be suggested that those picture posts that are devoted to the adoration of a players' looks or relationships possess qualities traditionally thought as feminine, but not exclusively so. Those that concentrate on the game, are neutral and could be of interest to anyone interested in the game regardless of gender.

6.2.4 A Wish to Connect

The interest in the players' off-field lives and personalities was portrayed in various different ways throughout the year. In addition to showing interest in what the players have to say over different matters, humour was also an important part of the community. During the year a great number of often translated interviews of players and coaches were posted in the community. Another recurring theme was posting a question and answer (Q&A) section from a players' website whenever a new instalment emerged. Due to the humorous nature of the questions and the answers of the Russian player, Andrey Arshavin, these Q&A's were posted at the community throughout the year whenever a new version was published at his personal website. Some players such as Arshavin perhaps got more interest in the community than some other players, in this case due to his unorthodox antics on and outside the field. Not many community members seemed to physically admire the Russian player, but instead Arshavin was treated as a go-to-person for sympathetic laughs, funny moments and quotations that would often become repeatable inside jokes in the community.

Another similar player was Ryan Babel, a Dutch footballer who became notorious for his constant usage of the microblog website *Twitter*. Babel's style of expression and off-field antics made him a prominent character in the community, with his *Twitter* feed constantly re-posted at *ONTD_football* often under the headline *Ryan Babel Story Time* (see, for example *ITS BABEL TIMEE*, September 1 2010 and *Once upon a time...*, November 8 2010). This further suggests that the community members have a desire to engage in the private lives of the footballers they follow – a typical trait of a fan, and as a sought-after emotional connection perhaps more expected from females than males. The acts that the players perform on the field, no matter how skilful a player is, are often not enough to completely engage someone to become a fan. In order to build a picture of the person that the player is, any drop of personal information is celebrated in the community. The information is especially valued when coming from the player personally, or from someone close to them such as a family member or a friend.

6.2.5 Exploring the Lost Categories

Throughout the year it seemed that the community lacks entries that would be considered as belonging to the category of orthodox rhetoric. The community members do express being fans of the sport and the players, but do not portray any “higher knowledge” of either issue. Reported topics often came with a comment from the original poster, but those comments were often kept short and to-the-point. Moreover, reassurance was often needed from other community members in the form of asking questions at the end of a post – a guaranteed way to create comments and discussion. It is one idea that the notion of displaying orthodox rhetoric does not sit well with what has been studied about female online communication. In contrast, queries and support-seeking does. However, portraying these typically feminine conversational attributes does not necessarily mean that the community members are happy playing nice – in the comments members often display negative opinions and sometimes display aggressive behaviour that could be described as atypical for female conversational styles. In the topics themselves it is perhaps preferred to remain neutral and not position oneself below or above the others.

The category of reflexive analysis was also somewhat under-represented for the whole year. I would argue that this is mostly due to many topics being firstly hard or soft news, reports or other. These topics were then categorised as such. However, if there was any commentary added by the author of the post, that would be the place where reflexive analysis would take place. The most interesting data sample including both reflexive analysis as well as orthodox rhetoric was a post about David Beckham (*But then his heel, his heel, his heel...*, March 16 2010) that was initially categorised as reflexive analysis because the entry began with a self-reflective and analytical piece about him written by a female fan of Beckham. However, the entry also included a rare occasion of orthodox rhetoric because it continued with a long quotation from a blog entry written by a journalist on a BBC website. Here I present an excerpt of the reflexive analysis part of the entry. The excerpt came with an explanation written by the original poster that it was written about David Beckham by a fan of Manchester United:

As much as I hate to admit it, I was glad to see him return to Old Trafford. He's like that ex-boyfriend you loved a lot when you were seeing him, so you accepted all his off-field drama but then he goes and finds a hotter girlfriend (*cough*Madrid*cough*) So, in anger, you "accidentally" throw/kick a boot at his gorgeous face and he runs away hurt (and comes back in stitches). That signals the end of your relationship, and you tell him to fuck off to Madrid (while you scream "Why have you forsaken me?!" to his picture). You move on, get a new boyfriend who also plays on the RW. he scores 40+ goals one season, and wins the Ballon d'Or eventually (top-notch boyfriend if a tad too greasy). But greasebag also falls for that dreaded hoebag, Madrid. (She keeps ruining all your relationships! wtf?!) Your next boyfriend is much less attractive than the previous two, and does not play on the RW (right-wingers are bad luck, you think) but at least he can still score...and pretty well, I might add. The original love of your life has gone through at least two more girlfriends after Madrid. Then, one day, as fate would have it, you are forced to reconnect with your ex-Becksfriend. He looks good, but older, and with less scoring potential (in other words, he's not as hot as when he left). You feel good seeing him (muahahahaha!), and your now-bf shows your ex up by scoring a brace (Yay less-attractive-but-killer-scorer-bf!). Yet you can't help but think back to all the awesome memories you shared with Becks-- 1999 was definitely the best year you spent together and when you hear that he's gotten in an accident, you can't help but feel bad for your ex even if he did leave you for that filthy-rich infectious hoebag called Madrid in 2003. (*But then his heel, his heel, his heel..., ONTD_football, March 16 2010*)

The above excerpt is interesting due to the style of writing and the high amount of references made in the text. While primarily being a text about how it feels like for a fan when a star player leaves their team, a fan often (but not always) being primarily a fan of the team and secondarily of the player, the text also makes references to a number of football players, teams, player positions on the field and in general portrays knowledge of the sport. What makes it stand out in this particular context is the personifications made about the football clubs. Real Madrid and other teams are referred to as the new "girlfriends" of the writer's favourite player (Beckham) and Real Madrid is as well referred to as "She" and "hoebag". Football players are referred to as the writer's "boyfriends" and "ex-boyfriends". The story is told from the perspective of a relationship breaking up due to the infidelity of the boyfriend, with both participants getting into new relationships in between before meeting again after several years, reminiscing on the relationship they once shared, both participants having moved on and gone through different things. In this light, looks are also highlighted as a parameter in determining the worth of different players, or in this case, boyfriends. One is called "gorgeous", one "greasy" and one "less attractive than the previous two" as well as "less-attractive-but-killer-scorer-bf". Even though pieces of reflexive analysis such as this entry seemed to occur rarely on *ONTD_football* in 2010, I would argue that this entry depicts the nature of the community as a fandom particularly well.

It combines knowledge and devotion to the sport with personal feelings and a fan-like approach, with the femininely heterosexual approach of considering the male players as boyfriends, all in all written with a tongue-in-cheek attitude.

6.2.6 Considering the Question of Gender

Even though the *ONTD_football* community was and is an attractive place for fans of certain teams and players, for an abundance of information, pictures and gossip, it is also a place where people who know the field of football discuss the happenings of the field, on a larger scale. Even though a small number of teams and players gained a lot of attention in the community, a number of entries were also dedicated to teams and players of more obscure leagues and countries than those represented in the World Cup or in the Champions League, for example. Even though the present study does not include any proven information or data on the locations and ethnic backgrounds of the community members, it is very possible that as an online community, dedicated to a worldwide matter, *ONTD_football* has members from many, if not all parts of the world. In *ONTD_football* it is possible to post entries and inform other members of any league, team, competition or a player according to a community member's own interest. In case the assumption that the community members come from all around the globe is true, this can also mean that a global selection of leagues, teams, competitions and players are represented in the community, of course to very different extents. Moreover, the data of this study supports this idea with many examples throughout the year.

But the question remains, to which extent is *ONTD_football* gendered? The results show that the majority of the moderators of the community have chosen to represent a female gender. As the same can be expected from a majority of the community members – at least from those that are active in their participation – the community surely exhibits stereotypically feminine interests in their topics of discussion while the main topic itself, football, is a stereotypically male domain. My argument is that even though the community is gendered concerning the actual performed gender of the majority of the members, otherwise the community is more a typical fandom than a place where gender matters. Moreover, the fandom-like features became more

prominent only through the course of the year. It is notable that none of the topics of the data include any discussion on being a female fan of a male-dominated sport. The community does not discuss the hardships of being a female football fan or the merits of it. All in all, gender does not seem to be an issue in this particular community.

As the community has thousands of members, it is also bound to have so called lurkers (the author of the present study included) who follow the community either actively or occasionally, and might not contribute to the community at all regarding posting entries or commenting on entries. Even if the community can be described as somewhat gendered, definitive knowledge about the members is vague guessing at most, even if the gender of the moderators could be defined as mostly female and even if it can be said that females are the implied readers of the community. It can be suspected that not everyone would feel comfortable or interested participating in the daily activity of the community. The community is quite heterosexually and furthermore femininely charged, and it would be somewhat curious if a heterosexual male would find the environment appealing for daily, active participation. However, concerning stretching genders and sexual identities, *ONTD_football* does not need to be exclusively feminine; perhaps just open to a wider array of topics to discuss.

In one topic titled *World Cup Dreamy Team* (June 26 2010) an entry from a male football fan's website was reported in *ONTD_football*. The entry depicted the most sexually attractive players of the World Cup, with commentary from the community member who reposted the entry in the community. In this post, it was underlined that the original poster was male, making it a special feature and further adding to the idea that *ONTD_football* is predominantly female. Emphasizing the fact that it was a male who was evaluating the players' looks was also one of the most obvious occurrences of gender boundaries being displayed in the community. In my opinion, on the basis of the data, even though I believe the community to be predominantly female, I would not describe it as a girls' club.

As mentioned, during the year 2010 gender played very little role in the topics discussed. Some of the only cases when this happened was during Women's Day, and from July onward, when an interest in deeper issues was raised. For example, a number

of entries was dedicated to homophobia in football (see, for example: *yoann gourcuff victim of homophobia?*, July 10 2010, *Topfan survey!!*, July 13 2010). Moreover, footballers' mental issues, domestic violence and hooliganism were acknowledged (see *Football related seriousness*, July 7 2010). Entries were also dedicated to the humanitarian work of teams and players (see: *More about Team Uruguay's Fundación Celeste – Plan Ceibal*, July 23 2010).

Out of the issues dealt within the community, homophobia was probably one that gained the most attention, even to the extent that some of the community members began a campaign called *Red Card Homophobia*, which was dedicated to increasing awareness of homophobia and to promote equality (in sports) regardless of sexual orientation. Within the limitations of my study it is impossible to evaluate whether raising issues such as this can be considered a gendered action especially since the action's aim is to promote equality – hopefully between genders in football as well. Obviously one would hope that similar activity would be important to any gender, but unfortunately the masculine tradition in sports sometimes oppresses expressing such opinions.

Finally, something that cannot be dismissed in the analysis, is the notable absence of female football at *ONTD_football*. Out of the data for the study, women's football occurred as a topic only on three occasions. *All Hail* (January 7 2010) celebrated the fact that Brazilian footballer Marta got her own shoe made by Puma. *It's Women's Footie Time* (April 11 2010) was a post about US women's football. *Women's Football 101* (June 26 2010) was a thorough introduction into women's football especially from the US point of view, but also presenting the global competitions and the best leagues and players in the world. However, these posts were lone attempts at raising awareness in a sea of thousands of posts about men's football. Arguably more should not be expected from a community that describes itself as “appreciating the sport and the fine men who play it” and which is as heterosexually charged as it is.

Still, it seems surprising that a predominantly female community that deals with a traditionally male entity would not raise the question of equality in sports more. As mentioned, the question of homophobia has also been a topic in the community. So,

why not this? This combined with the lack of posts about gender and football and/or gender and being a football fan makes one wonder whether the community is missing any feminist ideology in its members. This is also surprising taking into account the emancipatory prospects of belonging to a community that unabashedly objectifies and both adores and ridicules male athletes.

Moreover, the members of the community are shown to have full control of discussing the topical happenings in the world of football as specialists of the subject. Therefore it is puzzling why the topic of gender is not talked about – as I suggested before it seems as it does not matter in the community. One idea is that in Europe the demarcation of women in football is quite a bit more of an issue than in the United States. In my experience many of the community members are from North America, so perhaps being a female football fan is not as big of an issue there as it is in other parts of the world. However, this is mere speculation and thus I cannot offer any definitive answer.

7. CONCLUSION

The study was successful in answering the questions it posed. The topics discussed at *ONTD_football* during 2010 were versatile and ranged from serious hard news to entertainment-based and idol worshiping pieces of soft news. Other categories such as picture and video posts emerged, but the community relied on the steady flow of actual news pieces to keep the interest and the participation going. However, it is not easy to say whether it was the hard news or the soft news that were more prominent in the community. It seemed that even though hard news was the larger category, in the end it was the soft news and the gossip that give the community its “edge” over similar websites, newsgroups and, perhaps, predominantly male online football communities. Moreover, many of the picture posts and video posts half-belonged to the category of soft news for their fandom-like nature of handling any topic in pictures alone.

The World Cup clearly affected the nature of the topics. Firstly, because the WC in itself is a rare and prestigious occasion which attracts people that do not normally follow league football. During the WC months almost all of the posts in the community were about the tournament, which differed greatly from the topics

discussed in the earlier and the later months of the year. Secondly, there were a lot of new, excited members coming into the community during the tournament. The excitement about the game and about the community meant that entries become more and more versatile in their topics and in formatting. It was also obvious that some players and teams were gathering more new fans during the tournament, which even lead to the moderators of the community stepping in on the issue and reminding community members that there need not be dozens of posts per day about the same teams and players. Thirdly, the WC brought about a handful of subcategories that came and went as soon as the summer was over, such as World Cup speculation and Transfer speculation. Therefore it could be argued that during and after the WC the community was at its peak both in the number of posts as well as in the nature of topics discussed.

The most difficult question to answer is whether the topics of the community are gendered or not. I would argue that the community is gendered in the sense that based on the user information the community identifies mostly as female and that it exhibits a clear sexual devotion towards the male football players. However, the topics of discussion, which my study was most concerned with, are a completely different matter. As mentioned, a large portion of the topics fall under the category of hard news. Discussing hard news cannot be described as a gendered action. In my opinion, the same goes for the category of soft news, because to a certain extent, discussing gossip is not a gendered quality either. I believe it is the blatant showcasing of sexuality and sexual desire that is the most gendered quality about the community, and even that stretches between different sexes and genders. Moreover, many posts mention in the topic line or within the entry that the assumed readers are 'girls', which of course demarcates the readers according to their performed gender. However, only the topics considered, in my opinion they are not gendered for the most part even if the community itself is.

The present study would benefit from a variety of counterstudies of the topics of different online football forums – international or local, formed mostly by males, females or mixed gender. Such a study would enable making comparisons on the similarities and differences in the topics of discussion on the same subject by different

genders. It would also make it possible to find topics that are considered interesting by all genders. This would help football fans regardless of sex or gender to find common ground as fans of the sport. To me it seems that at *ONTD_football* equality and tolerance are at a high level and virtually no topic of discussion seems to be ignored or regarded as unworthy (the topic of gender itself excluded, perhaps because it has not really been raised).

As a frequent lurker of the *ONTD_football* community, for me the most problematic thing about the study was to confine myself to the data – the 449 entries I gathered to analyse. At times, especially during the first stages of the analysing, it felt that the data was not sufficient and did not meet my expectations for the outcome of the study. I was constantly tempted to expand it by picking and choosing topics outside the data that fit some point of view I was trying to make. However, as I went on with the study I realized that even though the 10 per cent might not tell the whole truth, it would give a sufficient idea of it. I was also forced to see that my own hypotheses had been prejudiced and partly wrong. This was a happy revelation to me, since the diversity of the topics was much greater than I initially expected.

It was also difficult to ignore the comment sections where the actual conversation and opinions was. It is clear, however, that even though I stuck to the 449 entries, the knowledge I have of the community outside the data somewhat affected my analysis. I do not consider it to be a shortcoming, however. I would argue that my knowledge of the context was a key element in analysing the topics and understanding the bigger picture.

Another problem I encountered was the fact that finishing this study took a much longer time than I initially expected. This means that many of the numbers in the study such as the member count of *ONTD_football* has already changed by thousands from the time of beginning this study in September 2010 to the time of writing this conclusion in February 2013. Major championship tournaments such as the UEFA European Football Championships have already been played in 2012, and the qualifying games for the next World Cup are going on at the moment. Looking at the number of posts it seems that even the community itself has become more inactive

during the last two years, which is discouraging to say the least. It does not mean that the fans have quit, however, but rather suggests that the members have perhaps gone on to discuss the sport in the subcommunities dedicated to certain teams instead.

Moreover, the fast pace of internet trends have already gone on with services such as *Instagram* becoming a great influence on fans being able to follow their idols online. However, even if time has gone on, the present study is not any less important by any means. It contributes new information to the sparse field of studies on female football fans and on female online sports communities. It also successfully answered the questions it set out to answer. Also, the study can even be soon compared again in 2014 when the next FIFA World Cup is played in Brazil.

To conclude, I argue that regardless of the abovementioned problems, my study has successfully shown that the members of the *ONTD_football* community have been able to establish a place where discussion about football is free, vivid and knowledgeable. Like *Kickette*, the community does seem like a counterstrike to chauvinism – even if questions of gender are not very foregrounded in the community aside from the issue of homosexuality in football.

The community genuinely seems to be a place where all aspects of football – the actual and the superficial – can freely be discussed, celebrated and contemplated without visible discrimination or demarcation. I have no reason or grounds to make any claims that a more masculine place of discussion of football would be any more condemning or rigid than *ONTD_football*. However, from the things I gathered from reading Hynes' (2012) study, from a female perspective male football forums seem to be hypermale places where femininity is best kept as neutral and as low-key as possible. Therefore I argue that the members of *ONTD_football* would bring a challenge to anyone underestimating their knowledge or passion on the subject of football due to their gender, age or other interests within or outside the sport. Both the free kicks and the thighs can surely be appreciated without being condemned as clueless by anyone, man or woman.

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APPENDICES

Table 1. *ONTD_football*: Monthly division of entries started in the year 2010 (A total of 4490 entries) + 10% of each month's entries. Average of entries per month: 374,2.

MONTH	NUMBER OF ENTRIES	10% OF ENTRIES
January	269	27
February	217	22
March	221	22
April	292	29
May	390	40
June	604	60
July	713	71
August	432	43
September	372	37
October	412	41
November	308	31
December	260	26
YEAR 2010 TOTAL	4490 ENTRIES	449 ENTRIES TO ANALYSE

Tables 2-13: Topic headers of analysed entries, primary categorisation and either subcategorisation and/or further comments that are relevant for the analysis. Sum of posts categorised under each category.

Table 2; January 2010

TOPIC LINE	PRIMARY CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY , COMMENTS
POINTLESS POST IS POINTLESS SORRY	Soft news	
New Year Gift for Kaka Fans: MAESTRO Magazine	Other	Advert
if you didn't know already....	Hard news	Report
(no subject)	Reflexive analysis	
Brazil's Marie Claire magazine chose the sexiest footballers	Soft news	Report

All hail	Hard news	Element of hero worship, report
Flash report!	Hard news	Report
why hasn't this been posted?	Hard news	Report
Everybody hates Robinho?	Soft news	Photos
HUH WHAT?	Reflexive analysis	
Jozy Altidore on Hati	Hard news	
Real Madrid: The Hair Edition	Soft news	
new nike advert	Other	Report about an advert
La Liga matches	Hard news	
Portsmouth fail to get winding-up order struck off as judge backs taxman	Hard news	Report
Rafa laughs off Stevie rumours	Hard news	Report
Philipp Lahm is getting married!	Soft news	Report, photos
How to kick a club when they're down...	Hard news	Report + comment
FA Cup Round Four: Chelsea vs. Preston	Picture post	
As some of the games are early...to remind people...	Hard news	
BREAKING NEWS: Salvador Cabañas get shot in the head.	Hard news	Report
A Special Day for The Special One	Soft news	
what happened to "i have four great strikers i don't need anyone else"?	Hard news	Report
Naked United Are Naked	Soft news	Photos
stolen from ontd_political, since LJ won't let me link to it without my whole entry disappearing.	Soft news	Report + comment
i wonder who'll give him a lift to training?	Other	Soft or hard news depending on the angle. Report + comment
Ahoy matey	Soft news	

CATEGORIES FOR JANUARY	TOTAL NUMBER OF POSTS
Hard news	12
Soft news	9
Reflexive analysis	2
Picture post	1
Other	3

Table 3; February 2010

TOPIC LINE	PRIMARY CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY , COMMENTS
Papers blame Dinho's bad derby performance on 3 night party	Soft news	Report
I don't want no stinkin magic this time around	Hard news	Match reminder
(no subject)	Hard news	Match reminder, Picture post, Commentary
I am here to pimp the Football League :) you will never get a penalty, peter crouch	Reflexive analysis	Community post
This sounds pretty fuckin cool	Hard news	
I quite like him...	Hard news	Report
Mr. Tengo La Camisa Negra y El Capitan	Soft news	
NOOOOOO	Soft news	Report
La Liga	Hard news	Match reminder
Nakata Thinks Ronaldo is Doing it Wrong	Soft news	
The real reason some girls want to be Wags.....	Hard news	Report
Coach News!	Hard news	
Viera accepts violent conduct charge	Hard news	Report
I never do this:	Hard news	Match reminder
Footie weekend in pics 20-21/02/10	Picture post	
OH MY GOD	Soft news	Report
Wayne Bridge quits England over John Terry affair.	Hard news	Report
US Soccer Mega Post. Because it's been a while.	Picture post	Information

La Liga	Hard news	Match results
Footballers' facebook lives...	Soft news	Humour
xabi alonso making of catálogo chocrón joyeros 2010	Video post	Soft news

CATEGORIES FOR FEBRUARY	TOTAL NUMBER OF POSTS
Hard news	12
Soft news	6
Reflexive analysis	1
Picture post	2
Video post	1

Table 4; March 2010

TOPIC LINE	PRIMARY CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY , COMMENTS
Oh Pompey.....	Hard news	Report
GUESS WHAT CHERYL COLE (MIGHT BE) HERE TO STAY.	Soft news	Report
I watched 10 times and counting.....	Soft news	Picture(video) post, Fan story
Mexico 2-0 New Zealand	Picture post	
oooooo new signing.	Hard news	Report
GET YOUR FLOWERS & PERFUMES & CHOCOLATES	Community post	
Cristiano, the Hollywood superstar~	Soft news	Report
Gerard Pique interview 12/03/2010, translation and pictures	Other	Interview
It's not like England was ever anything more than a long shot, really (weeps)	Community post	
Happy Birthday Theo! (even though its tomorrow)	Soft news	Report
But then his heel, his heel, his heel...	Reflexive analysis	Orthodox rhetoric report from BBC
Albert Riera Burns Some Bridges	Hard news	Report bordering on gossip, Comment

USA POST	Hard news	Report, Reflexive analysis
(no subject)	Other	Interview
WE DID IT!!!!!!	Picture post	
The Return of Robin	Hard news	Report
first phil brown now tony mowbray who else will go before the end of the season??	Hard news	Report
Ramos and Kun will put their differences aside to sing for Haiti	Soft news	Report
Cesc Fabregas Story: In Preparation for Arsenal vs Barcelona:	Reflexive analysis	Report
Feliz Cumpleaños Sergio	Soft news	Picture post
Rooney out for two or four weeks with sprained ankle.	Hard news	Report
Benfica news?	Hard news	Report, video

CATEGORIES FOR MARCH	TOTAL NUMBER OF POSTS
Hard news	8
Soft news	6
Reflexive analysis	2
Picture post	2
Community post	2
Other	2

Table 5; April 2010

TOPIC LINE	PRIMARY CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY , COMMENTS
friday night german post!	Picture post	Macros
Mexican Clasico	Hard news	Match reminder
r u ready	Hard news	Match reminder
Leave her Crouchie. She's no good. But she's hot.	Soft news	Report
OMGG! THE FIRST MEXICAN IN MANCHESTER!	Hard news	Report
oh happy day!	Hard news	Report + comment

FA CUP SATURDAY	Hard news	Match reminder
It's Women's Footie Time	Hard news	Information, Picture post
Televisa Deportes Spots	Video post	
no wonder I keep having to change my glasses.	Soft news	Community post, Picture post
it almost feels like the weekend	Hard news	Match reminder
How to use a mosquito net featuring Alex Song, Emmanuel Eboué and Johan Djourou	Soft news	Video
Goal.com special: 10 worst Premier League transfers of 2009-10.	Orthodox rhetoric	Report
so, uh? this happened	Picture post	
I'm going to keep doing this until someone makes me stop	Picture post	Macros
I hate everything	Hard news	Report
twitter post	Soft news	Entertainment
(no subject)	Hard news	Elements of orthodox rhetoric, Report
Videos del día!	Video post	
100 Players to look out for this summer pt2/10	Other	Information, WC
THE DAY I MET..John Carew :S	Soft news	Fan story
It's Man United post, yes please	Picture post	
100 Players to look out for this summer 5/10	Other	Information, WC
Manchester City make emergency goalkeeper request	Hard news	Comment
North American Summer Tours....	Hard news	Match reminder
Ribery banned from Champions League final	Hard news	Report
I HAVE TO STUDY FOR MY FINALS a.k.a. BARCA/INTER SPAM	Picture post	Community post
100 Players to look out for this summer 9/10	Other	Information, WC
100 Players to look out for this summer 10/10	Other	Information, WC

CATEGORIES FOR APRIL	TOTAL NUMBER OF POSTS
Hard news	12
Soft news	5
Orthodox rhetoric	1
Picture post	5
Video post	2
Other	4

Table 6; May 2010

TOPIC LINE	PRIMARY CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY, COMMENTS
best goal celebration ever	Video post	
it's so easy, it's so easy, it's so easy at the lane	Picture post	
Dharma United	Other	Fan post
Have some giggles amidst this week's gigantic stress vomts.	Picture post	Humour
GROUP D intro	Video post	WC information
what is this i don't even	Picture post	Random, Fan post
because you know you want too.	Community post	
not forgotten	Reflexive analysis	History
some journalists getting bored	Hard news	Report, Commentary
Haterzzz to the left; the Prince is coming through	Soft news	WC information, Commentary
OH HAI, WE ARE CHAMPIONS TOO!	Video post	Hard news
Spain Pre-List	Hard news	WC information
Don't know if this got posted or not...	Video post	Random
Something that's personal to me.	Reflexive analysis	Neutral, Commentary
Hi Slovakia	Fan post	WC information, Video post, Commentary
German NT: Training Day 1	Picture post	WC
(no subject)	Community post	Fan post

This a ~Special post	Soft news	Gossip, Comment
O god. Not this story again.	Soft news	Gossip
Leicester suspend player over BNP vote!	Soft news	Report, Commentary
:	Hard news	Report
The New 3 Lions	Video post	WC, Soft news
THIS IS A SRS CRACK POST	Picture post	Humour
There is a reason behind this. Promise.	Video post	Interview, Fan post
Terry & Co not arrived yet but party's already begun.	Picture post	WC
Maradona runs over journalist and then calls him and asshole	Soft news	Report, Commentary
Turn aroundddd	Video post	
Championship play-off preview!!!!	Other	Information, Report
Campioni d'Europa	Picture post	Non-humour
A post in which Jens Lehmann is being awesome	Other	Fan post
omg picspam	Picture post	WC, Fan post
Yoo, Platini, why won't you let me be great? -England	Hard news	Report
prima 'dona	Soft news	Gossip, WC, Commentary
Sexiest team in the 2010WC?	Picture post	WC
Spain NT Training 27.05.10	Picture post	WC
more waka waka dancing	Video post	WC
The Unlucky Seven.	Orthodox rhetoric	WC
Sunday's Friendlies.	Hard news	Match reminder
Moar Crisrina Piczz	Picture post	Soft news report, Gossip
this is just weird	Video post	WC, random

CATEGORIES FOR MAY	TOTAL NUMBER OF POSTS
Hard news	5
Soft news	6
Reflexive analysis	2
Orthodox rhetoric	1
Picture post	11
Video post	9
Community post	2

Table 7; June 2010

TOPIC LINE	PRIMARY CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY , COMMENTS
32 Countries, 31 Bloggers, One Trophy	Other	WC, Competition for bloggers
This is a...	Picture post	WC
I'm sick of playing by the rules of someone else's game.	Hard news	Report, WC
It's official	Hard news	Report
Rio ruled out of WC	Hard news	Report, WC
Rio Ferdinand misses World Cup	Hard news	Report, WC
I have a strong suspicion Argentina really want to win the World Cup.	Soft news	WC
TIME Magazine's 11 World Cup Players to Watch	Hard news	WC
The boys arrive in Frankfurt	Picture post	WC
Mannschaft Picspam	Picture post	WC
Because we need a México post	Video post	WC
Another one bites the dust: Nani out of the WC	Hard news	Report + Commentary, WC
England NT training pics.	Picture post	WC
World Cup 2010 Predictions: Five Things Spain Need To Do To Get Out Of Group H	Other	WC speculation
Mexico's Angel of Independence arrives in SA	Soft news	Report, WC
The Germans train again.	Picture post	WC
Because everyone needs a little Harry,	Other	WC

Timmy and Lucas in their diet...		
New post to avoid overload, server crashes, oil spills, etc	Hard news	Match reminder, WC
Anyone using Chrome?	Other	WC
Match day 3 – for the love of god, no more draws!!!!!!	Hard news	Match reminder, WC
In case you missed it: BIGGEST 'WIN' in US Soccer History!! WUT WUT!	Reflexive analysis	Fan post, WC
The Pele jinx	Other	Report, WC speculation
New images of Cristiano Ronaldo for Emporio Armani Underwear	Soft news	Pictures
World cup day 5 – 'group of death'	Hard news	Match reminder, WC
AWING REAL HARD	Soft news	WC, Fan post, Pictures
READY, CESC, GO	Picture post	Soft news
Spain 0 – 1 Switzerland pictures	Picture post	WC
Non-WC post	Hard news	Match reminder
FOOTBALL, FOOTBALL, FOOTBALL!!!	Community post	
An Argie Celebration	Picture post	WC
World Cup Day 8 Continued	Hard news	Match reminder, WC
Because we all need a “Schweinski” to cheer us up ^_^	Picture post	Fan post, WC
Reds confirm warm-up games	Hard news	Match reminder
Yellow Yellow Yellow	Hard news	Report, WC
This has all been blown way out of proportion?	Other	Mixed post: WC, Report, Elaborate commentary, Video
Fabio Capello crushes John Terry's England revolt!	Hard news	Report, Orthodox rhetoric commentary, WC speculation
WC DAY 11, PART 2.	Hard news	Match reminder, WC
Unite Against Baselayers!	Picture post	Humour
Warren Buffett Would Have Lost \$30	Hard news	Report, WC

MILLION If France		
I said maybeeeeee you're gonna be the one that saves meeeee	Soft news	Scoop report
DAVID VILLA ESCAPES FIFA ACTION (YAY!)	Hard news	Report
Daylife is obsessed with Djibril's body	Picture post	WC
I am also going to make an information kiosk post but this one is less funny or smart	Community post	Information for new members
Colbert Report and The Daily Show: Algeria-USA	Video post	WC
Let's Celebrate!	Picture post	WC
BORING GAME WAS BORING	Picture post	WC
French NT news	Other	WC Speculation, news report
World Cup Dreamy Team	Picture post	WC, Commentary
MOAR FRENCH PROBLEMOS	Other	WC Speculation, Orthodox rhetoric news report, Commentary
ENGLAND WE STILL LOVE YOU	Picture post	WC
South African talking about the World Cup	Video post	WC
50 bucks says Michael Bradley does it with his cleats on	Other	Mixed: Fan post, Orthodox rhetoric, Picture post, Video, WC
World Cup 2010 Day 18, continued	Hard news	Match reminder, WC
THIS IS A MASSIVE SAMURAI BLUE PICSPAM POST	Picture post	WC
Another Dave Henson :)	Video post	WC
Messi is not "unprotected"	Other	WC speculation, Interview, News report
Roy Hodgson 'Confirmed As New Liverpool Boss'.	Hard news	Report
Nigerian Team Suspended for Poor Play	Hard news	Report, WC
I bring you some Oranje	Picture post	WC
World Cup Doppelgänger	Picture post	Report, Soft news

CATEGORIES FOR JUNE	TOTAL NUMBER OF POSTS
Hard news	20
Soft news	5
Reflexive analysis	1
Picture post	18
Video post	4
Community post	2
Other	10

Table 8; July 2010

TOPIC LINE	PRIMARY CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY , COMMENTS
5head and Bob Bradley at the NYSE	Soft news	Picture post
PAUL'S FRIENDS GO AGAINST HIM.	Soft news	Report, WC
GOD IT IS KINDA RANK IN HERE!!!	Other	Fan post, WC
Toy story / World Cup mashup	Other	Picture post, humour, WC
Stuart Holden is Better Looking Than Your Boyfriend, and Probably Funnier Too	Picture post	Fan post, Videos
thank you. we love you.	Picture post	Fan post, WC
YOANN GOURCUFF SHOULD NOT BE A PROFESSIONAL VUVUZELA PLAYER.	Video post	Fan post, WC
IT'S TIME FOR ANOTHER EPISODE OF LES MEAN GIRLS/BLEUS	Other	WC speculation, News report
Gerrard to FIFA: "Why aren't the players ever asked?"	Hard news	Report, Commentary, WC
Coz we need moar Asian players in here	Picture post	Fan post
He's in NEW YORK!!	Soft news	Gossip
QFs: picspam and thoughts	Picture post	Fan post, WC
Capello's kicking players out of the NT.	Hard news	Report, WC
The Awesomeness of Maradona and Diego Forlan	Soft news	Report, WC
Walk, Walk Fashion Baby	Picture posts	Soft news
World Cup 2010 Day 22	Hard news	Match reminder, WC

Bayern wants Fábio Coentrão...	Soft news	Transfer speculation
Mr. Amazeballs himself, Fernando Hierro.....	Other	WC Speculation, News report, Commentary
Germany's time has come, says Ballack	Other	WC Speculation, News report
Football related seriousness	Soft news	Report, Commentary
FUCK YEAH SPAIN!	Picture post	Fan post, WC
To Those With Nothing, Soccer Is Everything	Other	Editorial piece, Reflexive analysis, WC
Real Madrid coach Jose Mourinho gives green light to sign Germany's Bastian Schweinsteiger - report	Soft news	Transfer speculation
SINCE EVERYONE KINDA FORGOT ABOUT HIM:	Picture post	Fan post
Nando speaks to Pesi bitchface free	Video post	Fan post
NEVERMIND MANCS, CHELSKI IS GOING TO WIN THIS.	Soft news	Transfer speculation
flamengo goalkeeper accused of mistress' murder	Other	Scoop, News report
yoann gourcuff victim of homophobia?	Other	Scoop, Homophobia, Issues
Müllsteiger	Picture post	Fan post, WC
ONTD AWARDS CEREMONY	Community post	WC
Müller rocks	Soft news	WC
From FIFA Itself: Ramos crowned as La Roja conquer	Hard news	Report, WC
5 Head at Dodger Stadium	Picture post	Soft news
oic	Hard news	Transfer speculation
mod post	Community post	
Topfan survey!	Community post	Information, Homophobia
July 13 th homage dutch soccer team oranje	Other	Fan post, WC
GUESS WHO IS RETIRING FROM HIS NT?	Hard news	

Charity	Picture post	Humanitarian work
Guti & Queresma	Picture post	Videos, Transfer
The Puerto Rico Islanders beat the LA Galaxy	Hard news	Match result
No me gustan las putas! / Match spam / Just spam	Hard news	Match reminder, Match post
Some Unseen Footage on the airplane carrying the Spanish Team	Video post	Soft news, WC
ONTD_football's favourite stalker is back! REAL MADRID TRAINING PHOTOS 29/7/2010	Picture post	Fan post
Bordeaux training photos	Picture post	
welcome back fabio	Hard news	Transfer speculation

CATEGORIES FOR JULY	TOTAL NUMBER OF POSTS
Hard news	15
Soft news	12
Picture post	18
Video post	6
Community post	5
Other	15

Table 9; August 2010

TOPIC LINE	PRIMARY CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY , COMMENTS
THIS IS A CHELSEA POST	Other	Introduction to a club, Picture post
who exactly are these guys in suits?	Soft news	Report, scoop
OMGOMGOMGOMG!!!! YES!!!!	Other	Amateur tournament information
Branching out	Soft news	Picture post
Dolphins. Messi. Vacation. A closer look at his WAG.	Soft news	Picture post
EPL goalkeeper kits 2010/11	Soft news	Pictures

If you are bored with Real Madrid UCLA posts, DON'T CLICK HERE! (pic&vid heavy)	Picture post	Fan post
The real deal: Europa League, 3 rd round qualifying	Hard news	Match reminder
TODAY IS THE DAY – Colón finally signed	Hard news	Season start, Transfer speculation
Silva in the City. Day 2.	Picture post	
WHOOZ WATCHING – Real Madrid VS LAGalaxy	Hard news	Match reminder, Match post
C'mon The U	Other	Introduction post, Picture post
oh fabio	Soft news	WC-related speculation
Bro Menezes' squad	Picture post	Hard news, Commentary
Ricardo Carvalho to sign for Real Madrid.	Hard news	Transfer speculation
because this needs a post on its own	Hard news	Match reminder, Match post
Capello-oh no!	Soft news	Report, Speculation
Liverpool News Roundup	Hard news	Reports, Speculation
Kaka update: Doctor exaggerated his injury	Soft news	Report
Neymar Close to Chelsea Deal	Other	Transfer speculation
WALK ON... This is a LIVERPOOL POST	Soft news	Season start
...because Turkish Super League has started...	Other	Mixed post: Information, Season start, Picture post, Hard news, Video
BOJAN KRKIC VS. SERGIO CANALES	Picture post	Fan post
Almunia waiting for keeper news	Hard news	Transfer speculation
football matches, yo	Hard news	Match reminder, Match post
Soldier Field to host USA vs Poland Oct. 9	Hard news	News reports
TEARS FALLING AS I FALL DOWN IN	Hard news	Transfer

A SLOW CIRCLE AND DIE		speculation
chop chop chop	Hard news	Transfer speculation
The list of Argies who will face Spain on Sept. 7th	Hard news	Match information
hehehehe	Soft news	News report, Match speculation
Prankster targets Chelsea pants	Soft news	
WOW JUST WOW	Hard news	Transfer speculation
CL MATCHES AND LEAGUE CUP AND W/E ELSE	Hard news	Match reminder
lol this mess	Hard news	Transfer speculation
Lahm wants new Bayern deal	Hard news	Transfer speculation
Champions League 2010/11	Hard news	Season start information
Raul Meireles to Anfield	Hard news	Season start, Transfer speculation
Finally Football all day	Hard news	Match reminder, Match post
Good Riddance	Hard news	Season start, Transfer speculation, Twitter
soooooooooooooo what has wilshere been up to	Soft news	
loltastic	Soft news	Fan post, player trivia
Van der Sar still happy to play on..	Soft news	Player interview (Edwin Van der Sar)
I see Milwaukee I see France I see Neymar's underpants	Video post	Humour

CATEGORIES FOR AUGUST	TOTAL NUMBER OF POSTS
Hard news	20
Soft news	13
Picture post	4
Video post	1
Other	5

Table 10; September 2010

TOPIC LINE	PRIMARY CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY , COMMENTS
Summer Transfer Market: THE END	Hard news	Transfer speculation, Statistics
UEFA finally accomplish something useful....	Soft news	WC-related
move along non-spain fangirls, nothing to see here	Community post	Twitter, Fan post
Steven Gerrard praises Carra, remains adorable while doing so	Other	Interview with a player, Soft news report
Sexy Ruud is BACK! :D	Other	Interview with a player, Soft news report
bastian schweinsteiger appreciation post	Picture post	Fan post, videos
THIS IS A BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA NT INTRODUCTION POST	Other	Introduction to a team
Gigg's Blasts 'Overpaid' Youngsters	Soft news	Report, Interview with a player (Ryan Giggs)
“Supporter” fail	Soft news	Racism issue
Mexico en la piel.	Picture post	Hard news, Match reminder
Guardiola “making of” a new commercial.	Video post	Soft news
Cristiano Ronaldo Commercial – Timeforce Watches	Picture post	Soft news
Lolita tried on his new shirt (EMD understood the necessity to document every	Picture post	Fan post

single second of it)		
this IS actually the dumbest goal in the history of football	Video post	
Most fans in Europe?	Soft news	Statistics
blah blah blah	Hard news	Match reminder, Match post
ZIS IS FASHION?	Soft news	Picture post
PIMPAMPIMPAM	Soft news	Picture post
UEFA's Michel Platini Warns Referees of 'Near-Zero Tolerance' of Mistakes	Hard news	Report
México is celebrating 200 years of Independence..	Picture post	
Arsenal wants some Germans	Orthodox rhetoric	Transfer speculation, commentary
everyone wants a piece of this man....	Soft news	Report, scoop
“a softer world” remixes, part 2!	Picture post	Fan post
blast from the past	Hard news	Report
This really takes the ball	Hard news	Report
Messi's Injury Update	Other	Mixed post: Soft news, Picture post, Video, Twitter
Match pictures and interview with Berba and Forlan.	Picture post	Match post, Interviews with players
Carling Cup hehehehe	Picture post	Hard news reports
Short but funny vid of Real Madrid getting their official photos done	Video post	Fan post
From the Wall Street Journal (yeah, more LFC news)	Hard news	Scoop
SAF: Berba deserved headlines, not me...	Soft news	Reports
Everyone's Favorite Argie is back training :)	Hard news	Video
It's the question no one likes to answer...	Community post	Query
(no subject)	Other	Interview with a coach
Queen Alex talks London Fashion Week, Lily Allen and Perez Hilton	Soft news	Reposted blog entry
Champions League Wednesday	Hard news	Match reminder, Match post

Messiah gets his Golden Boot	Other	Mixed post: Video, Twitter, Picture post
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CATEGORIES FOR SEPTEMBER	TOTAL NUMBER OF POSTS
Hard news	8
Soft news	9
Orthodox rhetoric	1
Picture post	8
Video post	3
Community post	2
Other	6

Table 11; October 2010

TOPIC LINE	PRIMARY CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY , COMMENTS
When an Argentine man says, “Pasame la sal..”	Picture post	Fan post
ERIC NORTHMAN/BRAD COLBERT/ALEXANDER SKARSGARD BEING LOUD AND SEXY	Video post	Fan post
Bono is Sergio Ramos...	Soft news	Video, Twitter
Capello names England squad to face Montenegro.	Hard news	Orthodox rhetoric commentary
WE HATE THE WAY YOU LIE	Video post	
Queen Alex Discusses Her Birthday Week!	Soft news	Reposted blog entry
Just lol and enjoy....	Video post	Fan post
New Zealand vs Honduras Oct9: Preview	Other	Mixed post: Pictures, Videos, Interviews
Jose has been kept busy I see.....	Other	Fan post
08/10/10 (I'm running out of titles, damn it.)	Community post	“Friday football free for all”
TIME 10 Questions for Thierry Henry	Video post	Interview with a player

GQ GOODNESS	Picture post	Fan post
Breaking News: Euro 2012 Qualifier – Darren Bent out of Montenegro clash	Hard news	Report, Comment
6-3 a Tennis Score? Nah, Football!!!	Hard news	Match post, Video
HATERS STAY PRESSED	Soft news	Reposted blog entry
The first rescuer: former baller Manuel González	Soft news	Report
Red Card Homophobia round-up	Community post	Issues
Portugal NT celebration post	Other	Mixed post: Match post, Reflexive analysis, Picture post
IN LIGHTER NEWS	Soft news	Video post
I don't care about them other girls, just be good to me	Hard news	Match reminder, Match post
GUESS WHO SCORED A HAT-TRICK TODAY!!!!!!111!!!1!!!1!!!!	Picture post	Fan post
Union vs Red Bulls Pictures	Picture post	Match post
MOOR PRINCE MEGA POST (+FAPPING PARTY)	Soft news	Report
Inter Milan boss Rafael Benitez blames Christian Purslow for Liverpool FC demise	Other	Report, Interview with a coach
fanboyyyyys	Soft news	Report
maybe nobody cares...	Soft news	Report
Liverpool fans attacked in Naples	Hard news	Report
What does the inside of Cesc's closet look like??	Video post	Fan post
Barcelona players got their new audis!	Picture post	Soft news
elitist match spam is better than you	Hard news	Match reminder, Match post
FMF/Brasileiro/Argentina/Paraguay/Uruguay/Portugal/Eredivisie/MLS/Others thread	Hard news	Match reminder
will this ever stop?	Soft news	Report, Hooliganism
Funny how the light can change your view	Soft news	Statistics, report
World Cup 2018 race hottin up	Hard news	Report
The world mourns Paul the octopus, Maradona doesn't	Soft news	Report

'Ricky' Beckham on Ellen show	Video post	Soft news
matchspam post of awesome	Hard news	Match reminder
De La Red	Reflexive analysis	
No new Liverpool posts in over 23 hours? What is this madness?!	Other	Mixed post: Interview, videos, information
Women's Football Set For Professional Change	Hard news	Report, information
It's a Royston Drenthe interview!	Other	Interview with a player

CATEGORIES FOR OCTOBER	TOTAL NUMBER OF POSTS
Hard news	10
Soft news	11
Reflexive analysis	1
Picture post	5
Video post	6
Community post	2
Other	6

Table 12; November 2010

TOPIC LINE	PRIMARY CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY, COMMENTS
Five Ambitious Signings to Replace Juan Pablo Angel	Hard news	Transfer speculation, News report
read this	Community post	Community rules
Valencia Players play tour guides	Video post	Soft news
Queen Alex discusses Dubai and Whipping Hair	Soft news	Reposted blog entry
TWITTER ALERT	Soft news	Twitter
Spurs want to be like another north London club	Hard news	Transfer speculation, Orthodox rhetoric commentary
FIGHT NIGHT IN MILAN	Soft news	Report, Scoop,

		Video
Mexican Futbol/Brasileiro/MLS/Others thread	Hard news	Match reminder
it's been awhile....	Other	Mixed post: Match report (hard news), Interview with a coach, Statistics, Pictures
Maccabi Haifa 0 – 2 Hapoel Tel Aviv	Other	Mixed post: Match report (hard news), Pictures, Transfer speculation
You cry when you see players wearing pink? It's not the worst what can happen...	Picture post	Soft news
A year after	Soft news	Mental issues in football
A bit early, but.	Other	Information, Copa America draw
Howard Webb WC Finals Memorabilia at stake	Other	Information, Competition, WC
Attention ladeez: Someone's a free man again.	Soft news	Gossip
“Your nose is soo not Zlatan's!”	Hard news	Match reminder, Match post
Huddlestone ruled out for three months	Hard news	
What the..	Video post	
International Friendlies + Euro 2012 Qualifiers	Hard news	Match reminder, Match post
It has been ages since I made a serious post here	Hard news	
USA's “C” team performs like a “B+” team; gets a W. and other USA stuff	Picture post	Match report
“Xavi would be like Scousey”	Hard news	Match reminder, Match post
zlatan's ego is too powerful for his arm	Picture post	Videos, Injury
te odio maravillosamente messi	Video post	Humour
Kaka get's down Karzy	Soft news	Gossip
Jose Mourinho talks about coaching, Real & BARCA PLAYERS	Other	Interview with a coach
George Best	Other	Memorial post

frfrfrfriday free for all, y'all	Community post	Friday free for all
Lets get pumped	Picture post	Match reminder
MOTHERFUCKING CLASICO	Hard news	Match reminder, Match post
BBC's guide to contenders	Other	WC 2018, report

CATEGORIES FOR NOVEMBER	TOTAL NUMBER OF POSTS
Hard news	8
Soft news	6
Community post	2
Video post	3
Picture post	4
Other	7

Table 13; December 2010

TOPIC LINE	PRIMARY CATEGORY	SUBCATEGORY , COMMENTS
What the fuck?	Video post	
Maravilloso	Picture post	Soft news (player birthday)
Saturday matchpost for EPL/Bundesliga/Eredivisie/Ligue1/La Liga/Serie A	Hard news	Match reminder, Match post
More on FIFA being corrupt and incompetent/The English reaction to the 2018 decision	Hard news	
TORRES' WIFE GOES INTO LABOR, TORRES TO MISS MATCH	Soft news	
Liverpool 3 – 0 Aston Villa	Hard news	Match report, Pictures
Bros b4 hos	Picture post	Soft news
Oh My Lanta	Soft news	Player comment, WC 2018
Whatta Man	Soft news	Player comment
Evra: Arsenal are a club in 'crisis'	Soft news	Player commentary
Queen WAG Sylvie van der Vaart on her	Soft news	Commentary

cancer fight		
Yes this needs its own post	Video post	
Nasri is French Footballer of the Year	Hard news	
Football managing!!!!	Community post	Query
Belated Birthdays Boulevard	Picture post	Fan post, Player birthday
“Pep is a liar”	Hard news	Match reminder, Match post
Liverpool FC Christmas Party	Picture post	Soft news
Feliz Navidad from Villarreal!	Video post	
Landon Donovan won't return to Everton on loan	Hard news	Transfer speculation
Ehehehe lololol hahahaha	Soft news	
BENVENUTO LEONARDO!	Other	Information, Club news
OH HAPPY DAAAAAAAAAAAY	Soft news	Twitter
Arsenal breaks Chelsea hoodoo	Other	Mixed post: Match report, Statistics, Interview with a coach, Pictures, Video
Avi Cohen has died	Hard news	Picture post, Memorial
Meet the new ASEAN CHAMPION!	Reflexive analysis	Fan post, Pictures
professional irl trolls trolling in the new year	Soft news	Report

CATEGORIES FOR DECEMBER	TOTAL NUMBER OF POSTS
Hard news	7
Soft news	8
Reflexive analysis	1
Picture post	4
Video post	3
Community post	1
Other	2