Comparing American Soccer Dialogues: Social Media Commentary Surrounding the 2014 U.S. Men's and 2015 U.S. Women's World Cup Teams

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Abstract

Mega sporting events such as the World Cup have been found to stimulate categorization of in-groups and out-groups among fans. While self-categorization correlates with gender, the sport of soccer also facilitates nationalistic categorization. The World Cup features nation vs. nation competition while making gender a non-variable as the men and women compete in separate tournaments in separate years. This study examined 33,529 tweets illustrating social media match commentary involving U.S. teams and opponents on Twitter during the 2014 and 2015 World Cups. Results revealed U.S. teams were more likely to be described in regard to attributions of success and failure, while opposition teams were more likely to receive personal and physical attributions. Conversely, no differences were found between U.S. Men's and Women's teams in regard to characterizations of success and failure, but revealed the Women's team was more likely to receive personal and physical characterizations.

Keywords: *social media, self-categorization, gender, nationalism, soccer*

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Various media coverage has documented the United States' slow adoption of soccer as a mainstream sport (Brown 2007; Buffington 2011; Novak and Billings 2012). Widespread agreement exists regarding the gradual upward trend in American interest in the sport, while somewhat less agreement exists, concerning American competitiveness at all levels (Belson 2010). In 1994, the sport of soccer ranked 67th in popularity among surveyed adults, trailing events including tractor pulling (Wolff 1994), whereas it now is consistently in the top 10 (Harris Poll 2016; Sports Business Daily 2015), with men's soccer surpassing men's college basketball in popularity among U.S. fans in 2015 (Lintner 2015). According to the January 2016 Harris Poll, women's soccer was the highest-ranked women's sport in terms of popularity (Harris Poll 2016).

Concurrently, media interest and social discussions surrounding soccer increasingly percolate. In particular, the Men's and Women's FIFA World Cup events have been elevated to "megasport" status (see Eastman, Newton, and Pack 1994). The U.S.-Portugal group stage match in the 2014 FIFA World Cup was the highest-rated U.S. Men's national team broadcast in United States history with 24.7 million viewers combined on ESPN and Univision (Hibbard 2014), and that number was surpassed weeks later by the Germany-Argentina final with 26.5 million American viewers ("World Cup Final Sets TV Record" 2014). The 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup was also successful, attracting a record 25.4 million American viewers to the United States vs. Japan Final. In addition, both the Men's and Women's World Cup tournaments inspired massive social media discussion. The U.S. Men v. Belgium Round of 16 game drew 4.69 million tweets worldwide (Statista 2016), while the Women's Final secured 2.9 million tweets (Valinsky 2015).

Such appeal for soccer is rare in the United States, yet equally rare is the sports media event that garners similar levels of coverage and interest for men and women athletes. Cooky, Messner, and Musto (2015) found women athletes typically receive less than 2% of all coverage, a figure largely corroborated by Billings and Young (2015). Only the Olympic Games seem to attain any measure of gender equity in U.S. media coverage, but the World Cup appears to offer women's athletics a far more welcoming spotlight than all other non-Olympic offerings (MacArthur et al. 2016).

This study will examine the issues of gender and nationality using the joint cases of social media conversations arising from the 2014 Men's and 2015 Women's FIFA World Cups, while simultaneously providing an interesting juxtaposition within these larger issues: The U.S. Men's team achieving minimal success on the world stage, and the U.S. Women's team exemplifying the height of soccer achievement. Topics of gender and nationality are potentially embedded within online discussions, offering an opportunity to glimpse and examine the way fans perceive international sport media through these identity-oriented lenses.

Related Literature

Self-Categorization Theory

Self-categorization theory (Turner et al. 1987) is often described as "social identity of the group", establishing in-groups and out-groups that explain reactions to a variety of social communicative phenomena. From George Orwell's claim that sport represents "war minus the shooting" (Beck 2013) to more modern studies of inherent sport group classifications (e.g., Mehus and Holstad 2011), it is clear that sport exacerbates divisions between a presumed "us" and "them" with Billings, Burch, and

Zimmerman (2015) discovering this in World Cup-related social media specifically. The larger the athletic competition, the more rivals feel their divisions (Dimmock and Grove 2005).

However, self-categorization theory also explains how groups divide in less formal patterns, often based on demographics (e.g., race, gender) or social patterns (e.g., suburbians, folk music fans). Distinctions among out-groups are rarely pertinent. Rather, there are two ways to classify oneself: by who one *is*, and by who one *is not* (see Turner and Reynolds 2010). Studies have uncovered these patterns (e.g., Cialdini et al. 1976; Smith and Schwartz 2003) with findings mirroring the sentiments of Voci (2006), who claimed that "the more the self was perceived as different from the out-group and similar to other in-group members—the stronger were group phenomena" (86).

Such conceptions of self-categorization are crucial for understanding how dialogues unfold within the context of both the Men's and Women's World Cups—specifically pertaining to the U.S. Women's National Team, as it occupies an "in-group" by being American and yet constitutes a perceived out-group within a sports media landscape often dominated by men's sports. Thus, the current study can help to ascertain whether certain in-group affiliations can overcome—or at least blunt—other out-group distinctions.

Group Distinctions within Soccer

Many divisions are activated within a sports mega-event (see Roche 2000) such as the World Cup. Stott, Hutchison, and Drury (2001) found that World Cup fans frequently embraced nationalism as a core locus of their sports fandom, making in-group affiliations more relevant than other forms of self-classification. This is embodied in far more than

the team which one supports, explaining a core psychology in which, "due to shared group membership … fans of a team will be more likely to interpret the behaviors of that team favorably relative to fans of an opposing team" (Bruner, Dunlop, and Beauchamp 2014, 52). The common bond often referenced in regard to sports fandom becomes a mechanism for de-emphasizing other perceived self-selected in-groups (see Delia 2015). Such classifications become important in the context of gender in the World Cup, where soccer is considered a men's domain in the vast majority of the world, yet arguably is classified as a gender-neutral sport in the United States, likely due in part to the massive success of the Women's National Team compared to the Men's National Team.

National identity has been at the core of many previous mediated soccer studies. Billings and Tambosi (2004) analyzed 2002 World Cup television content surrounding the U.S. and eventual champion Brazil, arguing that due to the U.S. based-broadcast, the U.S. was positioned as the network's "home" team (even though the actual event was in held in Korea and Japan) and Brazil was framed as the "champion/superstar" team. "Home" became inherent to the positioning of the homeland of the network broadcasting the Cup. In the current study, the U.S. Men's National Team could be regarded as the "home" team, yet the U.S. Women's National Team could be regarded as *both* "home" and "champion/superstar." Christopherson, Janning, and McConnell (2002) analyzed media content relating to the 1999 Women's World Cup, finding language was used to diminish women's accomplishments, all while interspersed into an overarchingly positive portrayal, leading the scholars to classify the television coverage as "two kicks forward, one kick back" (170). Hence, national identity can play a relevant role in this struggle for equity. Angelini, MacArthur, Smith, and Billings (2017, in press) note that nationalism

can trump gender divisions to advance fandom of a given nation, again highlighting the theoretical question of whether one in-group (in this case, national affiliation) can alter a presumed out-group (in this case, women's sports in a mediated domain that consistently privileges men's sports).

World Cup and Social Media

Foer (2005) claimed that soccer is a mega-narrative for many explanations related to world values and policies. Even beyond the gatekeeper-oriented content from legacy media, mediated sport represents the rare opportunity for massive groups to have the same conversations about the same content simultaneously. Social media provides further avenues in the "world-wide living room" (Poniewozik 2010, para. 1). In addition, social media represents perhaps the largest disrupter/change agent of modern sport fandom (see Sanderson 2011). As Rowe (2014) explained:

> The experience of watching sport on television is changing with the proliferation of screens, the diversification of screen-based content, and the extension of interactive screen-facilitated communication. This 'live' performance of mediated sport spectatorship parallels in some respects 'live' mediated athletic performance, involving sharing the now and the making of digital memory." (752)

Fans utilize social media to discuss games, and as a surrogate for traditional forms of sports news. These conversations are both timely and overlapping, with massive high points at key moments. For example, the 2014 FIFA World Cup Final featured a peak of 618,725 tweets per minute (Carbery 2014). Twitter appears to be the nexus of many of these social media discussions because of its use of hashtags and searchable terms that

make real-time online discussions of sports media events easily attainable, with the 140-character limit more easily prone to short bursts of thought between key action points (Clavio and Walsh 2014). Thus, social media can become the embodiment of in-groups and out-groups, unfolding in real time (and methodologically superior to self-reported post-hoc recall) and rendered without cues as to which identity group one should feel most primarily a part of within the World Cup event.

Hypotheses/Research Questions

The current study collectively and simultaneously examines several key binaries, including notions of men vs. women and home nation vs. "other" nation. Hypotheses and research questions are offered in relation to each of these core binaries, as embodied in notions of self-categorization theory. Billings and Eastman (2003) created a descriptor taxonomy and employed it within sports media, providing a useful heuristic for examining social media commentary arising from each World Cup. The taxonomy features 16 classifications within three broader categories: (a) attributions of success (i.e., descriptions of superior athletic performances), (b) attributions of failure (i.e., descriptions of inferior athletic performances), and (c) depictions of an athlete's personality or physicality (i.e., descriptions of external variables not attributable to the athlete's performance, such as emotions or introvertedness).

Three hypotheses pertain to the combined Twitter database of games involving the U.S. Men and Women and their respective opponents in the 2014 and 2015 World Cups:

H₁: Americans will describe successes of the U.S. team in significantly different taxonomical terms than when describing successes of U.S. opponents.

H₂: Americans will describe failures of the U.S. team in significantly different taxonomical terms than when describing failures of U.S. opponents.

H₃: Americans will describe the physicality/personality of the U.S. team in significantly different taxonomical terms than when describing the physicality/personality of U.S. opponents.

Beyond these combined databases, gender differences are tested as well, offered in the following three research questions:

RQ₁: Will Americans describe successes of the U.S. Men's team in significantly different taxonomical terms than when describing successes of the U.S. Women's team?

RQ₂: Will Americans describe failures of the U.S. Men's team in significantly different taxonomical terms than when describing failures of the U.S. Women's team?

RQ₃: Will Americans describe the personality/physicality of the U.S. Men's team in significantly different taxonomical terms than when describing the personality/physicality of the U.S. Women's team?

Method

The purpose of this study was to examine nationalistic sentiments within audience content on a social media platform in regard to telecasts of two mega-sporting events: the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup. In addition, this study

was designed to provide gendered comparisons of audience sentiments expressed toward the U.S. Men's and U.S. Women's teams. Therefore, this study mirrored the methodology outlined in the Billings et al. (2015) examination of nationalistic social media content, combining the data pertaining to the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup with the previously existing data from the 2014 Men's World Cup.

Content on Twitter pertaining to the U.S. Women's team was collected beginning two hours prior to, until two hours following, each of the seven matches the U.S. played during the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup. These matches included group-stage games against Australia, Sweden, and Nigeria, respectively. In the knockout stages, the U.S. played four matches against Colombia, China, Germany, and the Final against Japan. Data gathering was consistent with the procedure employed to collect Twitter content surrounding the U.S. Men's team and its 2014 World Cup matches against Ghana, Portugal, Germany, and Belgium. Aligning with the methodology outlined by Billings et al. (2015), game hashtags employed by the broadcast network airing the tournament (i.e., ESPN in 2014, FOX Sports in 2015) specific to each match were selected as the search term for dataset construction, and entered into the online software program Tweet Archivist to search and scrape tweet content. Upon activation, Tweet Archivist searched tweet content for the game-specific hashtag, creating a database of content specific to each match that was then downloaded into a Microsoft Excel file.

U.S.-specific game hashtags for the 2015 Women's World Cup were #USAvsAUS, #USAvsSWE, #USAvsNGA, #USAvsCOL, #USAvsCHN, #USAvsGER, and #USAvsJPN. Collection resulted in a total dataset of 26,031 tweets (N = 26,031). These tweets were combined with those analyzed during the 2014 Men's World Cup (N =

7,498), derived from game-specific hashtags #USAvsGHA, #USAvsPOR, #USAvsGER, and #USAvsBEL. This created a cumulative dataset of 33,529 (N = 33,529) tweets. Table 1 lists the game-specific hashtags as well as tweet frequency for each match played by the U.S. teams.

[Insert Table 1 About Here]

Tweets including game hashtags operated as the unit of analysis, and limited the dataset to dialogue specifically surrounding the U.S.-based telecasts of the 2014 and 2015 World Cups.

To facilitate comparisons between nationalistic, as well as gendered dialogue, the Billings et al. (2015) taxonomy was employed. This taxonomy was modified from the categories identified by Billings and Eastman (2003), with the three broad categories of attributions of success, failure, and personality retained. The 12 taxonomical categories consisted of: six categories designed to examine attributions of successes/failures (i.e., playing style, team poise, playing approach, experience, intelligence, fortune/consonance), and six examining personality/physicality (i.e., extroversion, introversion, emotion, appearance, size/parts of body, other). Tweets representative of each taxonomical category and frequencies are found in Table 2.

[Insert Table 2 About Here]

Data coding was conducted utilizing the program Leximancer, which has been employed to conduct analysis relating to large, text-based datasets (Bals, Campbell, Pitt 2012; Campbell et al. 2011). Leximancer is a textual analytics software that performs thematic analysis on content, identifying frequently occurring descriptors which can then be sorted and categorized into coding schemes. The software allows for development of a

user-generated thesaurus to analyze new datasets based upon previously-identified coding

schemes (Leximancer 2011). The 12 taxonomical categories utilized to code the 2014

FIFA World Cup data (Billings et al. 2015) were imported into Leximancer and

employed to analyze the game-specific Twitter content during the 2015 Women's World

Cup. The Twitter content from each match were imported into Leximancer; for the six

taxonomical categories identifying attributions of success/failure, the thesaurus was

updated to delineate the attribute according to utilization (e.g., playing style – success,

playing style – failure). In addition, category counts were ascribed to the U.S. or

opponents through cross-tabulation of country identifiers contained in each tweet. Each

thematically-coded tweet was mutually exclusive, and counts from each category were

exported from Leximancer to facilitate statistical analysis of the dataset. Frequencies for

each taxonomical category related to the U.S. or opponents were placed into tables, and

chi-square analysis was employed to determine significant differences between groups.

Results

Analysis of the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup data revealed 26,031 (N =

26,031) total descriptors, each mutually exclusive, in tweet content. Combined with the

7,498 (N = 7,498) tweets analyzed in the 2014 FIFA World Cup dataset (Billings et al.

2015), this yielded a cumulative total of 33,529 tweets and descriptors (N = 33,529). The

American teams received 16,795 of the descriptors (50.1%), while 16,734 (49.9%) of the

descriptors were directed toward U.S. opponents (i.e., Australia, Sweden, Nigeria,

Colombia, China, Germany, Japan (women), Ghana, Portugal, Germany, Belgium (men),

cumulatively). Results revealed 19,617 (62.0%) descriptors addressed attributions of

successes and failures, while 12,016 (38.0%) descriptors referenced personality and physicality.

The first hypothesis predicted Americans would describe successes of the U.S. team in significantly different terms than U.S. opponents in tournaments. Table 3 reports the number of tweets by U.S. teams vs. U.S. opposition related to attributions of success.

[insert Table 3 about here]

Due to the nearly equal split in overall comments directed toward U.S. teams (50.1%) when compared to U.S. opponents (49.9%), an expected frequency of .5 was utilized in chi-square analysis for Hypothesis 1. As Table 3 illustrates, U.S. teams received 7,117 (54.2%) descriptors of attributions of success, while U.S. opponents received 6,018 (45.8%) descriptors. This represented a statistically significant difference ($\chi2$= 194.59, df =5, p < .01), indicating that American athletes were more likely to receive success-based comments such as "happy with the victory of @ussoccer_wnt Australia did very well today, they have a pretty good team. #Women's World Cup2015 #USAvsAUS". Also, U.S. teams received a significantly greater number of attribution of success in regard to playing style ($\chi2$= 11.93, df =1, p < .05) (e.g., "Carli Lloyd is just passing to herself now. She's self-sustaining!!! #USAvsJPN"), experience ($\chi2$= 11.19, df =1, p < .05) (e.g., "Pass it around and tire them out! #ManDown #USAvsCOL #CoachMulligan"), and intelligence ($\chi2$= 3.91, df =1, p < .05) (e.g., "strong, fearless and smart: @alexmorgan13 #USAvsNGA"). However, the U.S. teams were statistically less likely to receive attributions of success in regard to poise ($\chi2$=48.06, df =1, p < .01) (e.g., "I'm unimpressed with that USA performance. Really no composure in the attacking half. The USA had plenty of chances to score. #USAvsSWE"), playing approach ($\chi2$= 56.38,

df =1, p < .01) (e.g., "Australia playing much better soccer here! #USAvsAUS") and fortune or consonance (i.e., good luck) ($\chi 2$= 63.11, df =1, p < .01) (e.g., "It went from skill to luck #USAvsAUS"). In light of these findings, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Hypothesis 2 predicted Americans would describe failures of the U.S. team in significantly different terms than U.S.-opposition teams. Table 4 reports the counts and percentages of attributions of failure.

[insert Table 4 about here]

U.S. teams received a higher percentage (56.3%) of attributions of failure than U.S. opponents (43.7%), constituting a significant difference ($\chi 2$= 68.96, df =5, p < .01) and was illustrated in such comments as "@MGGovia: USA- Horrible use of a corner. Cross it when your plan fails. #USWNT #USAvsSWE". Although U.S. teams were significantly less likely to be described as failing in regard to team poise ($\chi 2$= 10.49, df =1, p < .01) (e.g, "#USAvsCOL #TheTideTurns #Flopping #Fails #Colombia and they get their #JustRewards with a #RedCard") or fortune/consonance such as bad calls ($\chi 2$= 25.36, df =1, p < .01) (e.g., "Crap red card call on Columbia goalie, poetic justice on ok miss by USA. #USAvsCOL"), they were far more likely to be described with attributions of failure in regard to their playing approach ($\chi 2$=31.31, df =1, p < .01) (e.g., " Never felt like we had any momentum. Weird game. At least we didn't concede. Next game suddenly huge. @AOHartford #USAvsSWE"). These results collectively provided support for Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 stated Americans would describe the physicality and personality of the U.S. team in significantly different terms than U.S.-opposition teams. Table 5 illustrates differences along the six different taxonomical distinctions.

[insert Table 5 about here]

Overall, U.S. teams were statistically less likely to be described with attributes regarding their personality ($\chi2 = 179.35$, df $= 5$, p $< .01$), as highlighted in such tweets as, "Alexandra 'Muta Scale' Popp #USAvsGer". While American athletes were statistically more likely to be ascribed attributes defining them as extroverts, or having an outgoing personality ($\chi2 = 71.10$, df $= 1$, p $< .01$) (e.g., "colorful extroverts bent on revenge" http://t.co/dJQNANiVo3 @ussoccer_wnt kick some ass tonight #USAvsAUS"), they were less likely to receive comments perceiving them as introverts ($\chi2 = 44.19$, df $= 1$, p $< .01$). Additionally, American athletes were less likely to receive descriptors regarding displays of emotion ($\chi2 = 12.97$, df $= 1$, p $< .01$) (e.g., "Yellow cards even, the score is even—and players are attacking to keep possession of the ball. So many raw emotions. #USAvsGER"), less likely to receive comments on their physical appearance ($\chi2 = 7.40$, df $= 1$, p $< .01$) (e.g., "Columbia has great feet. So pretty. #USAvsCOL"), and less likely to receive comments not pertaining to the classification scheme ($\chi2 = 43.69$, df $= 1$, p $< .01$) (e.g., "Bring it on, Germany! #WomensWorldCup #usavschn #usa #shebelieves #ibelieve #winning"). Hypothesis 3 is supported.

Research Question 1 asked whether Americans would describe successes of the U.S. Men's team in significantly different terms than the U.S. Women's team. Analysis of frequencies revealed the U.S. Women's team received more overall descriptors - 11,193 (66.6%) - than the U.S. Men's team's 5,602 (33.4%). Due to the discrepancy (largely the result of an increased number of elimination games played by the U.S. Women), percentages of .666 and .334 of total frequencies for the U.S. Women and U.S Men, respectively, were employed as the expected values for the research questions.

Analysis in regard to the attributions of success received by the U.S. Women's and U.S. Men's teams are displayed in Table 6.

[insert Table 6 about here]

Overall, no statistically significant differences regarding attributions of success were found between the U.S. Women and U.S. Men. Within individual attributions of success, however, differences were discovered. Members of the U.S. Women's team were more likely to be described in regard to their poise ($\chi2 = 453.94$, df = 1, p < .01) (e.g., "Glad to see press could shake the nerves a little and get that nice calm finish #USAvsAUS #WorldClass"), playing approach ($\chi2 = 233.71$, df = 1, p < .01) (e.g., "What a great offense the #USA is playing tonight!!! #USAvsGER"), or as the recipients of good fortune or luck ($\chi2 = 222.31$, df = 1, p < .01) (e.g., "U.S. is lucky. This could easily be 3-1 #USAvsAUS #WomensWorldCup"). The U.S. Men were more likely to receive attributes pertaining to a creative playing style ($\chi2 = 151.76$, df = 1, p < .01) (e.g., "#USMNT brilliant set-piece routine yesterday—free-kick creativity").

Conversely, RQ2 asked whether Americans would describe failures of the U.S. Men's team in significantly different taxonomical terms than the U.S. Women's team. Statistical analysis of descriptors related to failures by the U.S. women's and U.S. men's teams are illustrated in Table7.

[insert Table 7 about here]

As with attributions of success, no significant difference overall was found between the U.S. Women and U.S. Men in regard to attributions of failure. With respect to individual attributions of failure, significant differences were found. The U.S. Women were more likely to be described as failing due to a lack of poise ($\chi2=239.12$, df =1, p < .01) (e.g.,

"USWNT needs to calm down. You're better than that ladies #USAvsAUS"),

questionable strategy ($\chi2 = 97.21$, df = 1, p < .01) (e.g., "Weird to say, but the US women

could take tactical lessons from the men. #USAvsNGA"), or bad fortune or luck ($\chi2 = $

124.70, df = 1, p < .01) (e.g, "That game should not have been a draw we should have

had at least 2 PKs but the refs were horrible and not calling anything #USA

#USAvsSWE"). Audience members on Twitter were more likely to attribute the failures

of the U.S. Men to their lack of creative ability ($\chi2 = 68.97$, df = 1, p < .01) (e.g., "That's

fine. RT @bsmolka As exciting as #USAvsPOR game was, #USAvsGER might be just

as boring. Two teams highly motivated to play a 0-0 draw"). Neither team received

significantly more failure comments in regard to experience or intelligence.

Lastly, RQ3 asked whether social media participants would describe the

personality/physicality of the U.S. Men's team in significantly different taxonomical

terms than the U.S. Women's team. Table 8 outlines the frequencies related to personality

and physicality received by the U.S. Women's and U.S. Men's teams.

[insert Table 8 about here]

The U.S. Women received more descriptors regarding their personality and physicality

than the U.S. Men ($\chi2 = 98.29$, df = 5, p < .01), as indicated in tweets such as, "RT

@EEElverhoy: Nasty head-head hit. While the girls tough it out the men would be

making funeral arrangements though let's be honest. #USA…". The U.S. Women were

more likely to be described as outgoing or extroverts, ($\chi2 = 115.44$ df = 1, p < .01) (e.g.,

"Can't hear the TV, hope they're talking about how baller Julie Johnston is.

#USAvsSWE"), as well as more reserved or introverted ($\chi2 = 276.11$, df = 1, p < .01)

(e.g., "Carli Lloyd is #WorldClass and an academic all-conference player at

@RUAthletics."). The U.S. Women received more descriptors regarding emotional displays ($\chi2 = 112.64$, df = 1, $p < .01$) (e.g., "@_juliejohnston_ is my spirit animal. Pure heart and fearless. #FIFAWomen's World Cup2015 #USAvsSWE"). The U.S. Men received more descriptors falling outside the coding taxonomy ($\chi2 = 75.23$, df = 1, $p < .01$) (e.g., "I can't wait for the 26th!!!!!!! @FIFAWorldCup #USAvsGER").

Discussion

Analysis of U.S. national team-related discussion on microblogging site Twitter pertaining to the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2015 FIFA Women's World Cup yielded insight into many aspects of U.S. soccer fandom. Results supporting the first hypothesis indicate that the "us vs. them" attitudes inherent in fandom (Billings et al. 2015; Billings, Angelini, and Wu 2011) and self-categorization (Turner et al. 1987) can lead to individuals ascribing certain levels of success to the groups they support, and may manifest in displays of superior knowledge regarding the fans' favorite team compared to the opponent. Put into terms of self-categorization, people are more likely to understand their in-group, and lack the same level of knowledge regarding the out-group.

The nature of social media fandom is further exemplified in the support of the second hypothesis. A stronger connection with one's team can lead not only to disparagement of the opponent, but also expressions of frustration when their team is not performing as capably as supporters would like. Unsurprisingly, fan commentary expressed that other teams were wary of the U.S. Women, or employing unsavory tactics (e.g., "flopping") against the U.S. Men, indicating a more emotional fandom. However, these tweets also included discussions of strategy for both U.S. teams. Thus, engaged fans displayed interest not only in the results of the matches, but in how those results are

attained. Support for Hypothesis 3 might indicate support for fandom-related tweets, but while terms used to describe the U.S. teams and their opponents differed, these mostly did not include negative comments regarding the opponents' physical appearance.

The first research question asked about differences in descriptors of success pertaining to the U.S. Men and the U.S. Women. The finding that neither the U.S. Women's or Men's teams received more success-related commentary is noteworthy considering the fact the women's team won the FIFA Women's World Cup in 1991 and 1999, and has never finished lower than third in seven FIFA Women's World Cups. This could have been a result of the U.S. Men's team reaching the knockout stages in the 2010 and 2014 tournaments despite their underdog status, thus impressing the audience by exceeding expectations. Discussion of the women's success to the men's comparative lack of significant advancement occurred in coverage regarding the discrepancy in the monetary prize the women received from FIFA for winning their tournament ($2 million for the team) compared to the $9 million received by the U.S. Men for reaching the knockout stages (Isidore 2015).

Regarding the second research question, although no difference in attributions of failure were found between the U.S. teams, the differences between the commentaries for the U.S. teams in regard to skill are pertinent to the conversation on performance. The men did not participate in the World Cup for four decades and have only made the quarterfinals once despite qualifying for every tournament since 1990, while the women have never finished worse than third since their tournament's 1991 debut. Based on this history, the women's team's performance itself—not merely the results—is expected to be dominant, while the men's team is often described by media coverage as achieving

success (and overcoming any skill deficiencies) due to superior fitness (Davis 2014). Successful moments for each team are perceived based on different expectations due to their respective histories and perception within the international soccer world. Also noteworthy is the notion that the women's tournament does not feature the same high level of competition (McIlvaine 2016), a view attributed to attitudes pertaining to the longer history of the men's game, as well as possible gender biases of the individual who is commenting (Mertens 2015).

The U.S. Women received more personality and physicality descriptors, answering research question three. Comments pertaining to the personalities or toughness of the U.S. Women match the perceptions of the U.S. Women as featuring more outgoing spokespeople such as Megan Rapinoe (McIlvaine 2016). Coverage of the U.S. Women often discusses individual personalities (e.g., Rapinoe, Abby Wambach, Hope Solo), while U.S. Men's coverage prior to their World Cup focuses on the U.S.' expected struggles against stronger teams which come from more of a soccer-playing culture (Buffington 2011). Further, the fact the 2014 roster did not include U.S. all-time leading scorer Landon Donovan meant the men's team did not have a well-known, dominant on-field personality for fans to discuss (McLaughlin 2015). While the FIFA Women's World Cup will likely catch the eye of stateside viewers due to expected high performance by the U.S. team, the Men's tournament might need extra hype for casual fans due to the U.S.' expected struggles.

In regard to the two teams' relative attention levels among sports fans on Twitter, the dataset for the FIFA Women's World Cup more than doubled the number of tweets for U.S. games a year prior. Despite Twitter itself experiencing slower than expected user

growth during that time period (Frier 2015), this can be partially accounted for with the three extra games in which the U.S. Women participated as the team advanced to the final match of the tournament. While the Women's games received a higher number of average Tweets per game, three individual U.S. Women's games – the Round of 16 (Colombia), semifinal (Germany), and final (Japan) – matched or exceeded the highest total for the U.S. Men's games, which was 3,856 for the opener against Ghana. This again exemplifies the popularity of the U.S. Women's team during the World Cup compared to the Men's team, which often competes with more traditional soccer nations for support among stateside fans (Brown 2007).

The differences in individual attributions found between the U.S. Men's and Women's teams present noteworthy findings in regard to the in-group vs. out-group classifications within self-categorization theory, as well as within the sport of soccer. Stott, Hutchison, and Drury (2001) documented that World Cup fans utilized nationalism as an in-group classification The finding that the U.S. teams were described in different ways than U.S. opponents supports the nationalistic in-group classification. Similar to how attention on certain sports is highest under the Olympic spotlight (Abrahamson 2016; Deford 2012), the U.S. Women would be seen as an in-group among American fans, and receive more mainstream and social media coverage during the tournament, which is held in non-Olympic years and during the summer months—a somewhat less congested timeframe in the U.S. sports media landscape.

It has also been noted, however, that self-categorization can be defined simply by who one *is* and who one *is not (*see Turner and Reynolds 2010), and as such, gender can be used for in-group vs. out-group categorizations. Due to their gender and overall

position in a U.S. sports media landscape dominated by men's sports (Wallace 2016), the U.S. Women could simultaneously be classified as an out-group. Potentially, the historical context of the women's game as well as the level of success the U.S. Women have achieved, which in turn results in higher expectations and different attributions between the two national teams, facilitates an out-group classification based on gender that could outweigh the in-group classification of nationalism. Thus, the in-group classification due to nationalism is present during the Women's World Cup, but could be diminished by gender-related out-group classifications when compared to men's sports in the U.S. and the Men's World Cup.

During both tournaments, in-game hashtags provided an opportunity for researchers to gather and categorize tweets. In addition, Twitter itself featured the use of hashflags (Wagner 2014), small flags representative of participating nations when users hashtagged a three-letter abbreviation. For the Men's tournament, U.S. Soccer did not create and promote a specific hashtag. In 2015, U.S. Soccer created and promoted the #SheBelieves hashtag which was utilized by fans on social media during the tournament, and provided the namesake for the 2016 #SheBelieves Cup, an invitational tournament which included the U.S., Germany, France, and England. The hashtag's message was similar to FIFA's campaign promoting the Women's World Cup as inspiration for young people, with marketing including the slogan "Live Your Goals", which was also featured in a patch on each uniform.

Regarding limitations and future study, the primary hindrance in the current design lies in the fact that data gathering for this study was limited only to in-game hashtags depicting U.S. matchups. This was done in order to minimize the chances the

dataset would include tweets that did not pertain to the World Cup. Individual tweets categorized through the use of individual team hashtags, or player names, would provide a much more massive dataset and potentially richer data, but would likely include a number of tweets that have little to do with the games. Moreover, for potential future research, a focus not only on U.S. games, but on Twitter conversation for games involving other teams—perhaps all knockout stage matches—would provide further insight into how soccer fandom manifests on social media worldwide, and into the level of "us vs. them" in such discourse. In addition, an application of this methodology to other major soccer tournaments would also prove interesting in regard to notions of fandom and self-categorization. Also, this methodology can also be applied not only to professional and international soccer, but also for in-game hashtags from fan groups around other sports, as the game-specific hashtags are usually displayed on screen by the broadcasting network. Finally, a study comparing the broadcast commentary to the fan commentary on social media may yield further insight.

Conclusion

This study provides a useful comparison between discussions surrounding the U.S. Men's and Women's World Cup teams. Given the number of significant differences found individually between descriptions of Americans and non-Americans as well as men and women, it is clear that each group is being discussed in vastly different manners. However, the sheer magnitude of the number of comments about both the U.S. Women and foreign teams underscores how soccer, specifically the World Cup, appears to be broadening the U.S. sports fan base by facilitating conversations beyond national borders and beyond men's sports exclusively.

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Table 1

In-game hashtags and tweet frequency

U.S. Women		U.S. Men	
#USAvsAUS	3,452	#USAvsGHA	3,856
#USAvsSWE	3,852	#USAvsPOR	1,795
#USAvsNGA	890	#USAvsGER	3,677
#USAvsCOL	4,426	#USAvsBEL	1,950
#USAvsCHN	1,141		
#USAvsGER	5,608		
#USAvsJPN	6,662		
Total for each team	26,031		11,278
Overall total	37,309		

Table 2

Taxonomical Categories and Examples

Category	Frequency	Percent	Example
Playing Approach	6041	18.02%	Tied up now. #USWNT need to figure out their ball control. #AUS will keep attacking and take advantage of those counter attacks. #USAvsAUS
Emotional Team Displays	4,982	14.86%	THERE'S NO CRYING IN SOCCER. or was that baseball? #USAvsGER #TomHanks
Fortune/consonance	4,501	13.42%	Bad call ref, keeper got touch on the ball. Yellow at very best #WomansWorldCup #USAvsCOL
Team Poise	4,001	11.93%	Glad to see press could shake the nerves a little and get that nice calm finish #USAvsAUS #WorldClass
Experience	3,041	9.07%	USA is known for offense and I think they experimented too much in the first half with inexperienced fwds. #USWNT #USAvsSWE
Introversion	2,203	6.57%	Nice @CarliLloyd!! #USAvsCHN
Extroversion	2,130	6.35%	Rapinoe is salty. #Women's World Cup2015 #USAvsGER
Intelligence	1,997	5.96%	halftime, usa definitely has possession. LEGGO LADIES!! #USAvsGE
Playing Style	1,208	4.64%	Such a good match up, defense is strong on both halves. #USA needs the same magic they've been missing all tournament. #USAvsGER
Other	1,357	4.05%	Yay USA wins!! USA USA USA
Appearance	1,064	3.17%	Poor girls hair is getting all messed up #USAvsGER http://t.co/gFdijkwSRe
Size/parts of body	1,004	2.99%	RT @sluggahjells: Blood just gushing all over the face of Alexandra Popp #USAvsGER http://t.co/Czr7XJ85z6
Total	33,529		

Table 3

Attributions of success for U.S. and U.S.-Opposition Teams

	US	Percent	US Opposition	Percent	Total
Playing Style	451[a]	57.9%	328[a]	42.1%	779
Team Poise	1,206[b]	45.1%	1,470[b]	54.9%	2,676
Playing Approach	2,315[c]	57.7%	1,699[c]	42.3%	4,015
Experience	1,100[d]	55.5%	882[d]	44.5%	1,982
Intelligence	715[e]	54.5%	598[e]	45.5%	1,313
Fortune	1,329[f]	44.5%	1,658[f]	55.5%	2,987
Total	7,117[g]	54.2%	6,018[g]	45.8%	13,135

[a]$\chi2= 11.93$, df =1, $p < .05$;
[b]$\chi2=48.06$, df =1, $p < .01$;
[c]$\chi2= 56.38$, df =1, $p < .01$;
[d]$\chi2= 11.19$, df =1, $p < .05$;
[e]$\chi2= 3.91$, df =1, $p < .05$;
[f]$\chi2= 63.11$, df =1, $p < .01$;
[g]$\chi2= 194.59$, df =5, $p < .01$;

Table 4

Attributions of Failure for U.S. and U.S.-Opposition Teams

	US	Percent	US Opposition	Percent	Total
Playing Style	228	53.0%	202	47.0%	429
Team Poise	628[a]	47.4%	698[a]	52.6%	1,325
Playing Approach	1,176[b]	58.0%	851[b]	42.0%	2,026
Experience	564	53.2%	496	46.8%	1,059
Intelligence	366	53.4%	319	46.6%	685
Fortune	687[c]	45.3%	828[c]	54.7%	1,514
Total	3,647[d]	56.3%	2,835[d]	43.7%	6,482

[a]$\chi2= 10.49$, df =1, p < .01;
[b]$\chi2=31.31$, df =1, p < .01;
[c]$\chi2= 25.36$, df =1, p < .01;
[d]$\chi2= 68.96$, df =5, p < .01.

Table 5
Descriptions of personality/physicality for U.S. and U.S.-Opposition teams

	U.S.	Percent	U.S. Opposition	Percent	Total
Extroversion	1,202[a]	56.5%	927[a]	43.5%	2,130
Introversion	887[b]	40.3%	1,316[b]	59.7%	2,203
Emotion	2,485[c]	49.9%	2,497[c]	50.1%	4,982
Appearance	459[d]	43.2%	605[d]	56.8%	1,064
Size/parts of body	476	47.4%	528	52.6%	1,004
Other	521[e]	38.4%	836[e]	61.6%	1,357
Total	6,031[f]	50.2%	5,985[f]	49.8%	12,016

[a]$\chi2= 71.10$, df =1, $p < .01$;
[b]$\chi2=44.19$, df =1, $p < .01$;
[c]$\chi2= 12.97$, df =1, $p < .01$;
[d]$\chi2= 7.40$, df =1, $p < .01$;
[e]$\chi2= 43.69$, df =1, $p < .01$;
[f]$\chi2= 179.35$, df =5, $p < .01$;

Table 6

Attributions of success for U.S. Women and U.S. Men Teams

	U.S. Women	Percent	U.S. Men	Percent	Total
Playing Style	179[a]	39.7%	272 [a]	60.3%	451
Team Poise	1,156 [b]	95.9%	50 [b]	4.1%	1,206
Playing Approach	1,205 [c]	52.1%	1,110 [c]	47.9%	2,315
Experience	747	67.9%	353	32.1%	1,100
Intelligence	463	64.8%	252	35.2%	715
Fortune/consonance	1,146 [d]	86.3%	182 [d]	13.7%	1,328
Total	4,897	68.8%	2,220	31.2%	7,117

[a]$\chi2= 151.76$, df =1, $p < .01$;

[b]$\chi2=453.94$, df =1, $p < .01$;

[c]$\chi2= 233.71$, df =1, $p < .01$;

[d]$\chi2= 222.31$, df =1, $p < .01$;

Table 7

Attributions of failure for U.S. Women and U.S. Men Teams

	U.S. Women	Percent	U.S. Men	Percent	Total
Playing Style	94[a]	41.1%	134 [a]	58.9%	228
Team Poise	603 [b]	96.0%	25 [b]	4.0%	628
Playing Approach	629 [c]	53.5%	547 [c]	46.5%	1,176
Experience	390	69.1%	174	30.9%	564
Intelligence	242	66.1%	124	33.9%	366
Fortune	598 [d]	87.0%	89 [d]	13.0%	687
Total	2,554	70.0%	1,093	30.0%	3,647

[a]$\chi2= 68.97$, df =1, p < .01;

[b]$\chi2=239.12$, df =1, p < .01;

[c]$\chi2= 97.21$, df =1, p < .01;

[d]$\chi2= 124.70$, df =1, p < .01;

Table 8

Descriptions of personality/physicality for U.S. Women and U.S. Men Teams

	U.S. Women	Percent	U.S. Men	Percent	Total
Extrovert	630[a]	52.4%	572 [a]	47.6%	1,202
Introvert	827 [b]	93.2%	60 [b]	6.8%	887
Emotion	1,416 [c]	57.0%	1,069 [c]	43.0%	2,485
Appearance	278	60.6%	181	39.4%	459
Size/parts of body	295	62.0%	181	38.0%	476
Other	256 [d]	56.6%	265 [d]	43.4%	521
Total	3,742 [e]	62.0%	2,289 [e]	38.0%	6,031

[a] $\chi^2 = 115.44$, df $=1$, $p < .01$;

[b] $\chi^2 = 276.11$, df $=1$, $p < .01$;

[c] $\chi^2 = 112.64$, df $=1$, $p < .01$;

[d] $\chi^2 = 75.23$, df $=1$, $p < .01$;

[e] $\chi^2 = 98.29$, df $=5$, $p < .01$;