Information Preferences of Reddit Communities Surrounding the Brock Turner Case

by Kathryne Brattland

I n the age of the internet, it is easier than ever for individuals to find like-minded groups and communities online for the purposes of discussing common interests, and sharing and receiving information. One of the most currently popular platforms for online communities is Reddit (www.reddit.com), which allows users to create and subscribe to communities, or subreddits, that cater to almost every interest imaginable. As a result, niche topics are certainly discussed at length by various subreddits, but more mainstream topics like current news events are still a main point of interest of many Reddit users. In 2016, one example of a news story that was heavily discussed on Reddit concerned the Brock Turner sexual assault case out of Stanford, which was highly controversial and heavily covered by the media. This study examines the information practices and preferences of three subreddits (r/News, r/Feminism, and r/MensRights) surrounding the Brock Turner case, in the context of theories of rape culture, information worlds, and communities of practice. After a review of these theories, it can be hypothesized that each subreddit's information practices and preferences will be influenced not only by each of their unique social norms, worldviews, and established rules of participation, but also by the larger culture in which they are all collectively situated.

Background: Case of People v. Turner

The media representation of the People v. Turner case and the resulting Reddit conversations surrounding it cannot be properly discussed without first briefly reviewing the details and timeline of the case. In January of 2015, Brock Turner (at the time, a member of the Stanford University swimming

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team) was arrested after two Swedish graduate students witnessed Turner assaulting an unconscious woman (identified only as "Emily Doe") beside a dumpster on the Stanford campus and intervened, detaining Turner until police arrived (Levin, 2016; Puckett, 2016). In June of 2016, Turner was found guilty of "assault with intent to rape and sexually penetrating an intoxicated and unconscious person" by a jury, which would normally carry a minimum two-year prison sentence in the state of California, and a maximum sentence of fourteen years (Levin, 2016, para. 7).

However, Judge Aaron Persky, who presided over the case (and was also a former Stanford athlete), determined that a much shorter sentence was appropriate for Turner (Mejia, 2016), since he was intoxicated when he committed the assault and therefore could not be held entirely responsible, and had already suffered as a result of the negative media attention he received during the trial (Levin, 2016). Judge Persky ultimately decided to hand down a six-month prison sentence to Turner, and in September of 2016, he was released for good behavior, after serving three months of his sentence (Levin, 2016; Mejia, 2016). Media representation of the case drew controversy due to many outlets consistently referring to Turner as a swimmer or ex-swimmer, instead of making his criminality the focus on their stories and headlines. The reason cited for this use of language is that under California law, Turner was not actually found guilty of rape, being convicted of the lesser charges of assault and penetration with an object (Gore, 2016). The widespread media coverage and subsequent controversy over this case made it an ideal focus for the study of information preferences and practices of three Reddit communities who were likely to be sharing and seeking information about Turner, his crime and his sentence.

Reddit

Reddit is a website that hosts a collection of smaller communities called subreddits, in which members post links and original content which are subsequently voted and commented upon by other members (Ovadia, 2015; Reddit, n.d.). Posts with higher votes are featured higher up on subreddit pages (and on Reddit's home page), thereby making the "most interesting, funniest, impactful, or simply amazing stories" the most visible content on the website (Reddit, n.d., "Vote"). Ovadia (2015) notes that "higher-quality content" typically rises to the top, but such quality judgments are entirely subjective. Users can become members of subreddits by registering on the website, and then using Reddit's search function to find subreddits pertinent to their interests (Ovadia, 2015). Ovadia (2015) remarks upon the ease and simplicity of the registration process, noting that the ability to quickly create disposable and anonymous accounts without an email address can lower the quality of discourse in some subreddits. There are two forms of post content on Reddit: links to other sites, or text, which can consist of original content like questions posed to members of the subreddit or statements related to the subreddit's main interest; posts may also contain a combination of links and text (Ovadia, 2015). Posts are discussed by

members of the subreddit, who may be answering questions posed in the original post or offering their own opinion on the matter at hand (Ovadia, 2015).

The platform of Reddit is democratic in that the website's users (or, more specifically, the moderators of various subreddits) are responsible for determining the presentation of the content and the order in which content is displayed (Ovadia, 2015). Subreddits vary by the quality of their content and the number of members or subscribers; a higher number of members may be indicative of greater quality and quantity of content, but this is not necessarily true for all subreddits (Ovadia, 2015). Since upvotes are based primarily on popularity, links containing objectively false information may rise to the top of subreddits, surpassing posts that are true but perhaps not as interesting to members (Ovadia, 2015). The members of subreddits form a sort of group identity, to the extent that they function as a unit in order to conform to the cultural norms that are developed over time (Ovadia, 2015). However, Reddit's mission statement claims that their site is intended to "help people discover places where they can be their true selves" (n.d., para. 1). Ovadia (2015) acknowledges the pervasiveness of racism and sexism on Reddit, adding that there are both positive and negative consequences of the ability of any user to create a subreddit on the topic of their choice.

Community Information Practices

Although information behaviors and practices are often studied on an individual basis, focusing on how people seek and evaluate information for their own use, there are also key theories dealing with the information practices of collective groups of people, particularly when the purpose of the information is to contribute to the shared learning interests of the community. Two of these theories, Jaeger and Burnett's *information worlds* and Wenger and Lave's *communities of practice*, demonstrate how groups form and then exchange information that is pertinent to their needs and interests.

The theory of information worlds (drawing on concepts from Elfreda Chatman's information theories with small, localized groups and Jurgen Habermas' with society as a whole) states that individuals' information behavior is influenced by people (such as friends, family, and coworkers) and other trusted sources in their immediate environment (or *small world*, a term borrowed from Chatman's research), as well as features of their larger social context (or Habermas' *lifeworld*), including public institutions, media, technology, and politics (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010). Small worlds consist of social groups with their own norms, social types, accepted information behaviors, and understandings of information value (or, in other words, their worldview) (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010). The value of information to any small world is determined by its content, user perceptions, the degree of control over the information, and its economic

(social or monetary) worth, and will differ from one small world to another (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010). Members of worlds negotiate norms surrounding how information is accessed, understood, and exchanged, both within the world and with outsiders (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010). People often belong to (and interact with) multiple small worlds, and will follow the norms of whichever world they are currently occupying (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010). There are boundaries between worlds, but these do not so much close small worlds off from each other as they allow for opportunities of exchange between mutual members (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010). These boundaries must be porous in order for individuals to access information from diverse sources, thus allowing democracy to flourish (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010).

When grouped together as a collective, the various small worlds comprise the larger lifeworld (a term first conceived by Habermas) of a society, which is influenced not only by its small worlds but also its media, economy and government. These latter three influences may promote or constrict the free movement of information between small worlds and dictate which information is socially acceptable (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010). The larger, more powerful media institutions can intentionally shape discourse and perceptions of events in small worlds and in the broader lifeworld, and Jaeger and Burnett (2010) argue that it is not possible for commercial media to be entirely objective because of the larger political and commercial influences on it. Jaeger and Burnett note that the internet can allow "individuals and small worlds to take an active role in the production and distribution of their own information sources" (2010, p. 88), but it can also be used by more powerful institutions to limit the flow of information between worlds. As previously stated, it is easier than ever for people to form into groups based on their needs and interests to share information, but the internet does not decrease the influence of the larger societal context on these information practices.

Another central theory surrounding social knowledge and information behaviors (similar to the theory of information worlds), Wenger and Lave's *communities of practice,* is defined as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, para. 5). Although this concept is typically applied to organizational and educational communities, other groups (including people who gather more informally) can also be considered communities of practice. It is worth noting that the actual act of learning in communities of practice may or may not be intentional; groups can form for a variety of purposes, with learning as an "incidental outcome" of participation in the group (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, para. 6). In order to truly be a community of practice, a group of people must possess the following three characteristics:

1. Joint enterprise: Identity defined by commitment and accountability to the shared interests and purpose of the group
2. Mutual engagement: Regular discussions, interactions, and sharing of information that contribute to the building of relationships

within the group
3. Shared repertoire: Knowledge, stories, language, resources, experiences, and tools with which the group negotiates meaning (Wenger, 1998; Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

The negotiation of meaning involves the interplay of two processes: participation (taking part in an activity with others) and reification (giving form to abstract concepts or experiences) (Wenger, 1998).

Some of the activities that may be undertaken by a community of practice include problem solving, requesting information and personal experience, repurposing resources and skills, coordinating toward a shared goal, gathering information to build arguments, gaining confidence through reinforcement of ideas, discussing events pertinent to the community, documenting failures and successes of the group, and visiting other communities to learn and fill knowledge gaps (Harlan, Bruce, & Lupton, 2014; Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). To this list, Harlan, Bruce, and Lupton (2014) would add the activity of initially learning the rules and norms, which must be achieved before successfully participating in any community of practice, along with acknowledging that many of the above practices and activities may build upon each other or occur simultaneously. Lev-On (2015) found that in an organizational context, members of a community of practice reported that their membership and participation in the community mainly served a cognitive purpose, by having access to the knowledge of their fellow community members through information sharing. Communities of practice can also serve the purposes of combating feelings of isolation, providing emotional support, and stimulating creativity (Lev-On, 2015).

A community of practice can be located in a physical, face-to-face setting or entirely online, be organized formally or informally, and can be comprised of any number of members (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Murillo (2008) conducted an extensive study which likewise concluded that social groups which exist solely online can be classified as communities of practice, provided they meet the requirements of Wenger's framework. Burnett, Besant, and Chatman (2001) conducted research on the application of Chatman's small world theory to virtual communities, and also found that the main concepts of this theory were relevant to online groups, rather than just physical small worlds. Virtually everyone is a member of some form of community of practice, whether in the realm of school, work or leisure, and may be a core or peripheral member of these groups (Wenger, 1998; Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Communities of practice are not self-contained, existing in a vacuum - they are situated within, and influenced by, broader historical, cultural, social, and institutional contexts (Wenger, 1998). Various communities of practice can also be part of the same "constellation", if they are observed by members or outsiders to share historical backgrounds, enterprises, conditions, members, artifacts, styles of discourse, and resources (Wenger, 1998, p. 127). By the above definitions and terms of communities of practice and information worlds,

a Reddit community (or subreddit) could certainly be defined as either of these theoretical groups, being influenced both by its members and the larger cultural context in which it is situated.

Information and News Bubbles

As useful as information worlds and communities of practice can be for sharing and exchanging information with like-minded individuals, there is also a risk that members may unknowingly receive biased information if they limit their information sources too narrowly. Savolainen (2007) found that when searching for orienting information on an issue, members of an informal community (in this case, environmental activists) relied on sources that were like-minded and "thematically focused", and those perceived to have a high degree of credibility and cognitive authority ("Discussion", n.p.). An audience is more likely to view information as credible if the message of it agrees with their existing beliefs (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Savolainen (2007) also found that his respondents trusted first-hand knowledge that agreed with their preconceived notions more than the second-hand knowledge of outsiders to their group. Overall, Savolainen (2011b) determined that contributors to online communities spend little time and energy seeking information that differs from their own personal knowledge.

There are many characteristics that factor in to the perceived credibility of information, including the source, the receiver (or audience), the medium, and the actual message or content of the information (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). When specifically assessing the credibility of a source, information seekers may focus on its aesthetics, professionalism, knowledge, expertise, and trustworthiness, which they may judge using stereotypes, assumptions or labels (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Savolainen (2011a) found that in online discussion forums, relevance of information to the users depends upon their perceptions of its quality and credibility. The quality of information is judged by a number of factors, including perceptions of its usefulness, correctness, and specificity, while credibility is assessed based on the reputation and expertise of the author of the information (Savolainen, 2011a). Another study by Savolainen (2011b) found that when providing information to others in an online forum, users depend on personal knowledge, networked sources, and experts or expert organizations as information sources.

When it comes to sharing information that one has found, perceived credibility and authority are not the only factors that group members consider. Personal interest and curiosity are important, but sharers also consider how the information can help them to connect and interact with other people and present a good image of themselves to their group (O'Brien, Freund, & Westman, 2014). People are also likely to strongly consider the social context of a group before deciding to share a particular piece of information with them, assessing whether the information will

have wide appeal (O'Brien et al., 2014). Mikal, Rice, Kent, and Uchino (2014) found evidence in online communities of content convergence or repetition, where members typically post content similar to what has been well-received in the past in order to gain the favor of their fellow community members, with little dissent in terms of content preference by community members (Mikal et al., 2014).

All of these factors for assessing credibility and relevance play into the selection of information to be shared with one's world or community, which may include news about current events. Jaeger (2005), as well as Jaeger and Burnett (2010), note that the internet enables the common issue of narrowly-focused information seeking, resulting in the phenomena of group polarization, which sees group members developing more isolated and extreme opinions. Koutra, Bennett, and Horvitz (2014) found that in the aftermath of a controversial or polarizing news event, people were more likely to access online information about the event that they predicted would be agreeable to their existing opinions on the matter. When someone is likely to be directly affected by an event, however, they will be more willing to seek out information outside of their "filter bubble", or the small realm of information sources they most frequently use (Koutra, Bennett, & Horvitz, 2014, "Conclusions"). The internet and its networking and communication capabilities can actually make it easier to critically analyze and compare information sources, which was reported as a crucial step in judging the credibility and authority of information from both insiders and outsiders to a community (Savolainen, 2007). Unfortunately, the majority of people seem to not take advantage of the available tools and resources to critically analyze the news they read, as the Media Insight Project (2014) found that only 4 in 10 Americans read beyond the headlines of news articles when learning about a particular subject or current event. In communities such as subreddits, where the headline or title is the most prominent part of a post, it is likely that headlines are a major deciding factor in users' decision to upvote or downvote.

Rape Culture

First coined in the 1970s, the term "rape culture" refers to a society in which the act of sexual assault is unfortunately a common occurrence, widely known to be illegal, and is overtly considered a heinous act, but at the same time hypocritically trivialized, normalized and accepted in a variety of ways (Harding, 2015; Marshall University, n.d.). Signs of a rape culture include acceptance of jokes about rape, lax sexual harassment laws, the widespread mentality that a woman's worth is based on her virginity while a man's is based on his virility, frequent disbelief and shaming of self-reported rape victims, and a legal system that tends not to harshly punish rapists out of fear of negatively impacting their lives, among other phenomena (Harding, 2015; Marshall University, n.d.). In a rape culture, the victims of sexual assault are scrutinized much more intensely for their actions and behavior than their accused assailants, placing the

responsibility for rape prevention on victims instead of those who actually commit these crimes (Harding, 2015; Marshall University, n.d.). Men and women alike are negatively affected by rape culture, as the misogynistic attitudes perpetuated by rape culture also place considerable pressure on men to conform to toxic standards of manhood, as well as perpetuating the myths that sexually aggressive men are strong and powerful, and that men who are raped are inherently weak (Marshall University, n.d.).

There is strong evidence that rape culture holds considerable influence over mass and social media. A study by Zaleski, Gundersen, Baes, Estupinian, and Vergara (2016) found prominent evidence of the influence of rape culture (specifically victim blaming) in online social media forums following the publication of news articles about rape and sexual assault. They argue that the pervasiveness of rape culture in social media and popular culture impedes one's ability to see sexual assault as an epidemic rather than an individual issue that can be blamed on the victim (Zaleski et al., 2016). They also found that in the aftermath of these news stories, survivors create "a collective call to action" by sharing personal stories and attempting to change the way that rape is discussed in society (Zaleski et al., 2016, p. 926). Franiuk, Seefelt, and Vandello (2008) found that men who were exposed to news headlines containing rape myths, like those perpetuated in a rape culture, reported "attitudes more supportive of sexual assault" (p. 797), while women did not report that reading rape myths increased their tendency to believe them. They posit that media outlets are one of the main ways in which rape myths are taught or reinforced in people's minds, since rape myths (as well as subtle language shifting blame towards victims) are found in many headlines for stories about sexual assault, and headlines are read more frequently than actual news stories (Franiuk et al., 2008), similar to the Media Insight Project's 2014 findings. They lament the fact that the inclusion of rape myths and victim-blaming language in headlines is likely not even a conscious or deliberate choice on behalf of journalists, but rather just a product of living under the influence of rape culture (Franiuk et al., 2008).

Methodology: Data Gathering

Data on the information practices of subreddits surrounding the Brock Turner case were gathered from three subreddits: r/News (https://www. reddit.com/r/news/), r/Feminism (https://www.reddit.com/r/Feminism/), and r/MensRights (https://www.reddit.com/r/MensRights/). After searching for "Brock Turner" in the search bar of each of these subreddits, results were filtered by the number of upvotes (see Fig. A below). Results can also be sorted by the number of comments on each item, or the chronology of the posting. However, for the purpose of determining which items were most popular among the community members of each subreddit, sorting by the number of votes granted by the community produced the most relevant data. No time limit was applied for the recentness of the posts, as the longest time frame allowed for filtering posts by date is one year. The

sexual assault committed by Turner occurred in January 2015, almost two years before the completion of this article, so it was necessary to include all available results.

Data were gathered for the top ten upvoted posts about Brock Turner in each subreddit, including the title of each post, the title or headline of any external source linked in the post, the type of content in the post (link, plain text, or combination), the type of link (if applicable), and the source of the linked information (if applicable). In order for the sizes of the text corpuses for analysis to remain a relatively small size, and because studies have shown that the majority of people do not read past headlines when gathering news information (Franiuk et al., 2008; Media Insight Project, 2014), the actual text of the posts and linked articles or other information sources were not gathered for analysis.

reddit /r/news: search results - brock turner

Post all analysis/opinion/politics articles to /r/InTheNews

| /r/inthenews | /r/worldnews | /r/politics | new comments |

search

brock turner

☑ limit my search to r/news
advanced search: by author, subreddit...

posts   sorted by: top ▼   links from: all time ▼

Stanford Swimmer Who Raped Unconscious Woman Gets Short Sentence Because Jail Would Have a 'Severe Impact on Him'
⬆ 20,130 points • 3,826 comments submitted 1 year ago by StevenSanders90210 to r/news
∞ http://nymag.com/thecut/2016/06/stanford-swimmer-brock-allen-turner-sentenced.html

Fig. A. Screen shot of r/News search result page (including first search result) for "Brock Turner," sorted by top and filtered to include links from all time, captured 07/06/2017.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from each subreddit were analyzed with Voyant (https:// voyant-tools.org/), an online textual analysis and visualization tool. The titles of the top ten posts and the headlines of any linked articles or external web pages in the top ten posts were each entered as a corpus of text into Voyant, producing a list of the most frequently-used words in each corpus. In addition to Voyant's standard list of stopwords, the words "Brock", "Turner", and "case" were excluded from the corpus in order to produce a more meaningful analysis of the most frequently-used words. Only words that occurred more than once in the corpus were included in the lists; as a result, not all of the lists contain the same number of words, as some of the corpuses were longer and more diverse than others. Two lists of frequently-used words were developed for the r/Feminism and r/MensRights subreddits, and one frequently-used word list was produced

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for r/News, since r/News requires the titles of posts to exactly match the headlines of the articles linked in the posts. Also, the type of each post was qualitatively classified into one of three categories: text (containing no links to external sites); links (containing no editorializing text), which were further subcategorized into news, video and other; and combination, in which posts contained both text and external links. Lastly, the sources of any outside links were listed and qualitatively compared against each other to determine any similarities or differences of the most trusted or preferred information sources of each subreddit when it comes to information about the Brock Turner case.

Results

-r/News: The most frequently used words in post titles/headlines, along with the number of times they were used, are as follows: Stanford (7), assault (3), ex (3), judge (3), months (3), rape (3), sex (3), swimmer (3), swimming (3), USA (3), jail (2), and new (2). According to r/News subreddit rules, all posts must contain only news links and titles must match headlines exactly, so there is no available comparison to titles of posts. The news sources of this subreddit include *Fox Sports, NBC, The Independent, Yahoo, Palo Alto Online, People, ABC,* and the *Associated Press.* Both *NBC* and *The Independent* were linked twice in the top ten posts.

-r/Feminism: The most frequently used words in the titles of posts, along with the number of times they were used, are as follows: rape (5), judge (2), months (2), offender (2), and sex (2). The most frequently used words in headlines or external post titles, along with the number of times they were used, are as follows: Stanford (3), assault (2), crime (2), judge (2), months (2), rape (2), and rapist (2). The types of posts include four news articles with no accompanying text, two posts with combination of text and links (one with a linked news article, another with YouTube videos), two links to social media posts, one link to a petition, and one link to an art piece. The external news outlets and other websites linked from r/Feminism include *The Independent,* YouTube*, CNN, Mercury News*, Current Solutions, *Occupy Democrats*, Facebook, Twitter, change.org, and *The Influence*, with no site being linked to more than once.

r/MensRights: The most frequently used words in the titles of posts, along with the number of times they were used, are as follows: rape (4), prison (3), false (2), people (2), and they're (2). The most frequently used words in external article headlines or other external post titles, along with the number of times they were used, are as follows: rape (3), sexual (3), Stanford (3), assault (2), prison (2), and sentence (2). The types of posts include seven links to news articles with no accompanying text (with two different users posting the exact same link under the same title), two posts with just user-created text, and one embedded Youtube video accompanied by a YouTube link. The external news outlets and other websites linked from r/MensRights include *The Los Angeles Times, Mercury News*, YouTube, *Attn.com, Reason.com, The New York Daily News*, and the *Australian*

Broadcasting Corporation. Only *Reason.com* was linked to twice, in the previously mentioned instance of two users posting essentially the exact same post. Also, two posts in r/MensRights posted links to an archived version of a news story from www.archive.org instead of linking directly to the original website.

Discussion

A comparison of each subreddit's data revealed enlightening (and sometimes alarming) trends in the conversations each community conducted about the Brock Turner case, in the context of their own small worlds or communities of practice as well as the larger context in which they all coexist. Overall, the most frequently used words in the titles of all thirty of the analyzed posts, along with the number of times they were used, included rape (12), Stanford (7), judge (5), sex (5), and months (5), indicating a focus on the crime itself, the location, the trial, and the sentence, which was not particularly surprising. It was also not surprising that r/Feminism and r/MensRights used the word "rape" more than r/News did, since the post titles of r/News are restricted by the language that is used in the actual headlines. r/Feminism and r/News were more similar to each other in terms of most frequently used words in post titles than either of them were to r/MensRights, which may indicate that as information worlds or communities of practice, they could share a similar set of norms, or share mutual users or subscribers (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010; Wenger, 1998). However, r/News and r/Feminism still displayed a considerable degree of difference in their norms, since r/News was the only subreddit that mentioned "swimming" or "swimmer" in the titles of posts, and r/Feminism was the only subreddit to call Turner an "offender." r/News seemed to be more highly influenced by the context of rape culture than r/Feminism, focusing on Turner's future instead of his crime. Only r/MensRights brought up the word "false" anywhere in the titles of their posts, more specifically in the context of discussing the issue of false rape accusations. This was a main focus of this subreddit, even though the subject of false rape allegations is objectively not related to the Brock Turner case, showing that r/MensRights allows for and even encourages the reframing of information to make it more relevant to their interests and beliefs. The most frequently used words in the post titles in r/MensRights also curiously included the words "they're" and "people", which indicates that they referred to outsiders to the community frequently in their discussions, and were aware that their opinions on the Brock Turner case were quite different from those of most other communities.

The overall most frequently used words in all linked headlines or titles of external links across the three subreddits proved to be very similar to the most frequently used words in the titles of posts, but the differences between post titles and external link titles in r/Feminism and r/MensRights revealed interesting insights into their information practices and norms. r/Feminism was the only subreddit to post an external link mentioning the words "crime" and "rapist" in any of their external links, showing that they were willing to take a much stronger stance against Turner than either of

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the other two subreddits. r/News did not feature any discrepancies between titles of posts and titles of external sources, as this is not allowed according to their subreddit rules, but 30% of links in r/Feminism were reworded, and 62.5% in r/MensRights. This shows that r/MensRights is much more likely to reframe external information sources to fit their worldview than r/Feminism, although this community still practices this to a lesser degree. In this case, these communities do not necessarily need to find information that corresponds to their beliefs or worldview if they have the option of reframing it to serve this purpose (O'Brien et al., 2014).

An analysis of the types of most upvoted posts on the three subreddits indicated that twenty-six of the thirty analyzed posts were just links to external information sources with no accompanying text, which may mean that Reddit communities in general prefer this type of post over posts that include editorializing on the part of users. The only subreddit that did seem to upvote posts with pure text and no external information sources was r/MensRights, suggesting that this community values information based on the personal knowledge of its members (Savolainen, 2011b). This finding, in conjunction with the fact that r/MensRights heavily reframes information sources, also falls in line with the information worlds theory, which states that some small worlds may show a preference for "local or internal information", believing that information originating from outside the community has less value than that originating from within (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010, p. 96). The external information sources linked in the three subreddits came from a total of twenty-two unique websites, with only three shared information sources between subreddits. *The Independent* was linked to in both r/News and r/Feminism, and *Mercury News* and YouTube were linked to in r/Feminism and r/MensRights. There was interestingly no overlap between r/MensRights and r/News in terms of information sources, which speaks to the information valued by each community and the credibility they assign to different information sources (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010; Savolainen, 2007). Both r/Feminism and r/MensRights included some links from overtly progressive or conservative websites (respectively), which also indicated that they preferred information from sources that agreed with their beliefs to a certain extent (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010).

Viewed together, the entire body of data suggests some overarching themes about the information practices and preferences of each subreddit. r/News seems to be heavily influenced by rape culture, favoring several articles with headlines portraying Brock Turner as a victim whose life has been ruined, instead of considering the fact that he is a criminal who has ruined the life of another person. To some extent, it stands to reason that a large and relatively mainstream subreddit like r/News would be steeped in rape culture, as some members of the community may be unaware of the existence and insidiousness of rape culture, having not had to confront this reality in the course of their lives. r/MensRights touts several rape myths as facts, especially overplaying the frequency of false rape allegations, but this is hardly surprising in the context of this specific community who

actively rails against the idea that rape culture is real. r/Feminism was the only subreddit that worked to actively overthrow rape culture, including links not just to news stories but also to activist efforts like petitions, art projects and widely-shared social media posts.

Conclusion

This study found that subreddits on Reddit, although all part of the same online platform, are unique communities with their own sets of information practices and social norms but are still heavily influenced by the larger contextual factors of culture and media. However, the extent to which these communities either embrace or reject the norms of their larger culture vary depending on the mandates and interests of each subreddit. Some communities may simply report what they see on the surface level of their society as represented in the media, while others may take on an activist role in order to disrupt what they see as a harmful status quo. The Brock Turner case was a controversial and polarizing news event, drawing strong reactions from those who either hated or unabashedly supported Turner throughout the timeline of the case. One of the major limitations or challenges of researching a topic as controversial as the Brock Turner case is that it is nearly impossible to analyze the data objectively and without bias, not to mention the difficulty of even wanting to view an individual like Turner in a neutral and objective way.

Another limitation of this study is that the data set, comprised of only thirty posts (ten from each subreddit), is a very small sample, and data gathering and analysis was limited to one specific topic. Therefore, the findings of this study may not be indicative of the information behavior practices of these communities when it comes to other subject matter. In the future, it would be beneficial to explore the information behavior of online communities (including, but not limited to, Reddit) concerning broader topics, and with larger sample sizes, using a similar methodology.

Lastly, one of the most important implications of this study (and one of the most pressing areas of future research) is that rape culture clearly has an influence over our society's news media, which cannot be addressed until consumers of news are at least made aware of the existence of rape culture. This influence could be especially dangerous for those who consistently receive their information from biased and narrowly-focused information sources, as under-informed or misinformed people, acting collectively, can potentially do a great deal of damage to a democratic society, not to mention to their fellow citizens. It is the role of some public institutions, like schools and libraries, to ensure that members of small worlds are able to access a wide variety of perspectives through the free flow of information (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010). Through education and awareness initiatives, better information practices can be encouraged in individuals and groups to ensure that information from all types of sources flows freely through society.

Addendum:

In the year since ths article was completed, there seems to have been a sea change in the amount and nature of online and media discourse surrounding sexual assault cases. Between the #MeToo campaign's sovering and inspiring shows of survivor solidarity and the downfall of powerful and privileged abusers like Harvey Weinstein, Lous CK and Kevin Spacey, it has been heartening to witness what may very well be an important step towards dismantling rape culture. However, it has recently been reported that Brock Turner is appealing his sexual assault conviction, since he and his legal team believe that he was not given a fair trial, and that Turner did not actually commit any crimes in January of 2015. The fact that Turner refuses to accept the consequences of his actions, as minimal as they already were (serving half of a six-minth sentence and being required to register as a sex offenter), it is disappointing to say the least. It remains to be seen what will come of this appeal (if anything), but if the recent online conversation and news cycle around sexual assault has demonstrated anything, it is this: Rape culture will not go away quietly, but neither will those dedicated to eradicating it.

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