Grievance Articulation and Community Reactions in the Men's Rights Movement Online

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Abstract

The Men's Rights movements have grown extensively in the last four decades. Social media platforms, especially online communities, have been instrumental in the rise of the movement. Despite this, few studies have directly examined how the Men's Rights movement frames its grievance in online spaces or analyzed community reactions to user-contributed content. To fill these gaps, we analyze 70,580 posts contributed to /r/MensRights, a large community of Men's Rights activists on Reddit, using a combination of topic models and negative binomial regression. Our results indicate that users active on /r/MensRights have developed a core set of grievances. Due to the mechanics of Reddit, where users can upvote posts to increase their visibility, contributed content that is consistent with community norms is prominently featured. Online spaces such as /r/MensRights provide an optimal combination of self-reinforcing community norms and anonymity, providing social movements with powerful tools to expand their reach, recruit new members, and expand its political power. We argue that these dynamics apply more generally to social movement mobilization that occurs online.

Keywords

Men's Rights, online communities, Reddit, social movements

Introduction

Men's movements have grown extensively for the last four decades (Kimmel, 2013). One notable example was the Promise Keepers, an evangelical movement active in the 1990s that emphasized a return to male dominance in families (Bartkowski, 2000). At present, among the most active forms of men's mobilization is the Men's Rights movement, which argues that men's issues and interests have become neglected and subordinated, largely due to the political and cultural dominance of feminism (Fox, 2004; Jordan, 2016). Areas in which they see oppression of men include selective service registration, outcomes in the legal system concerning alimony and child support, the presumption of male guilt in cases of sexual assault, and domestic violence experienced by men (Fox, 2004). The movement has continued to grow and evolve since Richard Doyle founded the Men's Rights Association in 1973 (Messner, 1998).

Social media platforms have been instrumental in the rise of contemporary social movement mobilization (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Tufekci, 2017). The Men's Rights movement is no exception; scholars such as Ging (2017) and Hodapp (2017) have pointed to the reach and impact of the

manosphere, referring to the dense network of blogs, social media accounts, and online communities frequented by Men's Rights activists, pickup artists, and others. Campaigns like Gamergate, a coordinated harassment campaign targeting women in the video game industry, further underscores the impact of Internet-enabled tactics in men's mobilization (Chess & Shaw, 2015; Massanari, 2017). Despite this, research has largely focused how masculinity is constructed by Men's Rights activists or on prominent campaigns (Bonnett, 1996; Jordan, 2016; Magnuson, 2008). Given the central importance of social media platforms on the trajectory of Men's Rights mobilization, analysis of how participants in the movement articulate their grievances and respond to online content is needed.

This study directly addresses the limitations of the existing literature on the Men's Rights movement. We focus on

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two research questions: First, what are the large-scale patterns in how activists frame their grievances? Second, what do community reactions to posted content tell us about boundary maintenance by Men's Rights activists? To answer these questions, we analyze a unique database of 70,580 posts contributed to /r/MensRights, a large and active community of Men's Rights activists on Reddit, one of the world's most popular websites. We first use latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) to model the main themes in content contributed to /r/MensRights, consistent with our first research question. Next, we use negative binomial regression to assess how Men's Rights community members react to different types of content—specifically, patterns of upvoting and commentary—allowing us to empirically assess community boundary maintenance.

Our results indicate that there is an identifiable pattern to the grievances articulated on /r/MensRights. Community members frame their online discussions as points of contrast to the cultural and political domination of feminism. Some of the posts appeared to largely accept a postfeminist worldview emphasizing the redundancy of feminism in contemporary society (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2004). The bulk of the content, however, is better characterized as anti-feminist in its orientation, as feminism is treated as a hostile position with the central aim of subordinating men (Messner, 2016). Second, we argue that based on patterns of upvoting and commenting, the mechanics of Reddit produce a powerful online echo chamber. Users upvote and comment on posts that are consistent with community preferences, yielding latent boundary maintenance that ultimately privileges specific narratives about gender inequality. These findings advance our understanding of the Men's Rights movement and their use of Internet technologies. Such online spaces, we argue, provide an optimal combination of a self-reinforcing community norms and anonymity. Consequently, web communities like /r/MensRights are powerful, generalizable tools for social movements to expand their reach, recruit new members, and gain political power.

The Internet and the Men's Rights Movement

Internet technologies, and especially social media platforms, have profoundly influenced how social movements mobilize. Social movement organizations and actors can use the Internet to rapidly and widely spread their messages, recruit new members, organize protests, or stage a variety of actions completely online (Earl & Kimport, 2011; van de Donk, Loader, Nixon, & Rucht, 2004). Social media platforms, including websites such as Reddit, Twitter, or Facebook, allow users to share content and make accessible a wide variety of information while simultaneously encouraging other users to respond to posted material. For social movements, new media outlets can provide a direct pathway for recruitment and engage, unlike traditional media sources that often

distort or misrepresent a movement's message (Gitlin, 1980; Smith, McCarthy, McPhail, & Augustyn, 2001). Research has indicated that Internet technologies expand the possibilities for traditional tactics already in use by social movements such as petitions or boycotts (Earl, 2006; Strange, 2011), as well as provide entirely new forms of action that are completely online (Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010).

Social media technologies have altered the development, maintenance, and articulation of collective identity. Polletta and Jasper (2001) define collective identity as ". . . an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution" (p. 285). The Internet can provide a durable social space for activists to network, discuss, and reflect upon their role in a social movement. Research by Caren, Jowers, and Gaby (2012) on the White nationalist group Stormfront, for instance, demonstrated that its website served as an online hub of activity that enhanced movement identification and solidarity among its users. Social media can provide individuals such experiences at scale, in that movement sympathizers and participants can easily and anonymously engage in sustained discussions about a movement, its vision or goals and retain a sense of connectedness with ongoing activities (Bennett, 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

A significant portion of Men's Rights activism, such as the Gamergate campaign (Chess & Shaw, 2015; Massanari, 2017), takes place online. We argue that the heavy online presence of the movement has important consequences: first, the Men's Rights online community developed a strong set of norms governing the boundaries of acceptable grievance articulation, which were further reinforced by the anonymity or quasi-anonymity of Reddit. Second, the online community for Men's Rights activists on Reddit, in large part due to the dynamics of the website itself, encouraged the construction of an ideological echo chamber, further promoting widespread community support of a relatively narrow set of grievances.

The Dynamics of Online Communities

The Internet has created a virtual landscape with its own enclaves and gathering places for people to participate in the formation of online communities. From early scientific exchanges to digital gaming platforms to social media, participants in online communities develop norms of appropriate behavior and practices that fit with the online platform hosting the discussion, as well as the formal and informal norms of the community (Baym, 2007; Baym & boyd, 2012; Golding, 2000; Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Wenger, White, & Smith, 2009). Boundary maintenance is generally a core component of online communities, which are structured by users interacting within implicit or explicit hierarchies along with manifest and latent rules of conduct (Baym & boyd, 2012). The digital platforms of many online communities provide structure through permanent or semi-permanent user profiles, rating systems linked to individual user accounts,

and moderation tools to interject when user activity breaches online norms. Social hierarchies can involve formal positions such as moderators who can censor posts and ban users for offensive material or informal positions such as status as a long-standing community member that others defer to during disagreements. Boundary maintenance also occurs interactively through discussion and argument to rhetorically construct symbolic boundaries for the community (Potts, 2013; Potts & Harrison, 2013).

Anonymity and Online Identity. Online anonymity influences individual behavior and self-presentation, which can promote incivility in online discourse (Santana, 2014). This is linked to what Suler (2004) refers to as toxic disinhibition, which describes when individuals engage in anti-social behavior emboldened by the veil of anonymity and lack of offline consequences. Anonymity influences both the internal and external dynamics of web communities. Internally, anonymity may provide users a direct pathway to strategically manage their online identity (e.g., Leavitt, 2015; van der Nagel & Frith, 2015). This is particularly the case in online communities at the edge of institutionalized political discourse. For instance, after analyzing online neo-Nazi discussion forums, Wojcieszak (2009, 2010) finds that heavier participation in the community fosters ideological extremism. Another potential impact is the adoption of extremist views, which is more likely to occur when individuals believe that they are stigmatized offline for their views (Koster & Houtman, 2008).

Externally, anonymity or quasi-anonymous online identities may spill beyond a specific online community by way of trolling behavior or harassment. Trolling occurs when individuals or groups purposefully violate the bounds of appropriate behavior through their own disruptive behavior (Bergstrom, 2011; Ganzer, 2014; Herring, Job-Sluder, Scheckler, & Barab, 2002). Trolls may attempt to draw others into sometimes nonsensical arguments that detract from the routine activities of the community. By inserting themselves into ongoing conversations or initiating combative interactions with social media users they disagree with, trolls can subvert dialogue between contending groups and make online spaces more daunting for social groups and frequently attack women and minorities. Other tactics of trolls include creating accounts purporting to have links to groups like Black Lives Matter or feminist groups on platforms like Twitter, then proceeding to behave like an extreme caricature of members of these groups. Harassment, a separate tactic from trolling behavior, is more targeted and refers to sustained campaigns against generally a small number of targets. The offline identity of victims of harassment is sometimes posted publicly, and they generally receive hundreds or thousands of electronic threats of violence or sexual assault. As noted above, the Gamergate campaign is a representative example of particularly egregious online harassment (Chess & Shaw, 2015; Massanari, 2017).

Ideological Echo Chambers. Several studies have found that the political views attached to online communities tend to become self-reinforcing (Gilbert, Bergstrom, & Karahalios, 2009; Jasny, Waggle, & Fisher, 2015; Morin & Flynn, 2014). Farrell (2015) argues that such dynamics create echo chambers, which are cyclical processes whereby specific political positions are repeated, and thus amplified, within a bounded online space. A central consequence of this process is that the political views held by members of an echo chamber tend to become self-reinforcing, and participants are generally insulated from dissenting views (Colleoni, Rozza, & Arvidsson, 2014; Jamieson & Cappella, 2008). The core views of an online community, then, ultimately become axiomatic. Such dynamics, especially when coupled with the anonymity of many social media platforms, serves to normalize the views of a community with little room for dissent.

The Men's Rights Movement Online

The joint consequences of anonymous or quasi-anonymous online identity expression in combination with the echo-chamber effect are crucial for understanding how communities are built and maintained in the Men's Rights movement's online spaces. The central grievances raised by Men's Rights activists emphasize reactions of anger and disgust about the perceived domination of feminism in political and social life (Kimmel, 2013). Men's rights groups often emphasize arguments using the language of there being a "backlash" against men (Kimmel, 2013). Backlash, in this context, generally refers to views that feminism has gone too far and that men are now experiencing reverse discrimination (Coston & Kimmel, 2012; Jordan, 2016).

Notably, this worldview conflicts sharply with earlier waves of men's mobilization that instead emphasized personal change and the nature of masculinity itself (Bonnett, 1996; Fox, 2004; Magnuson, 2007; Messner, 2016). Men's Rights activists have been more involved than other men's movements in their push against the perceived influence of feminism in the public sphere, especially in social media and other online forums. The position adopted by many activists takes aim at what critics see as a feminist ideology which they associate with negative traits such as militancy, hardline views, and more generalized discrimination directed at men (Yeung, Kay, & Peach, 2014). People and ideas which are labeled as feminist become associated with these negative traits and develop more resistance to their discussion and implementation. In online spaces, the most extreme version of the backlash involves targeting feminists with violent rhetoric, including threats of violence, death, and rape.

Perhaps the quintessential example of such conduct is the Gamergate campaign. Gamergate began when several female game developers and media critics such as Zoë Quinn, Brianna Wu, and Anita Sarkeesian were accused of creating unethical collusion between journalists and feminists to force progressive feminism onto the gaming industry (Chess &

Shaw, 2015). The women, whose personal and contact information was widely shared online, were then targeted with rape threats and death threats. Alongside the main Gamergate campaign, Men's Rights groups also targeted advertisers and sought to influence the 2015 Hugo awards for science fiction and fantasy writing due to perceived bias against men. Men's rights activists during these events showed hostilities toward any form of feminist ideology and a pronounced distrust in academic research on the topic.

Data and Methods

Our main source of data for this study is posts on /r/MensRights, a large, active Men's Rights community on Reddit, one of the most popular websites in the world.[1] Surveys have found that Reddit is used by more than 6% of all American Internet users, including 15% of men aged 18–29 years (Duggan & Smith, 2013). Reddit provides a platform for sharing, rating, and discussing news or other content in topic-specific forums known as subreddits like /r/MensRights. In these subreddits, a user may post topically appropriate original text or link to other online content such as images, videos, or news articles which can then be voted up or down by other users and commented upon (Singer, Flöck, Meinhart, Zeitfogel, & Strohmaier, 2014; Stoddard, 2015). The commenting system allows users to reply to posts and to other comments. Reddit uses a system of upvotes and downvotes for posts and for comments which influences the position of the posts on Reddit and hence the visibility of the content for users. Participants create profiles detailing their karma scores, which are based on upvotes for prior posting and commenting activity.

The volume of activity present on the Men's Rights subreddit is indicative that it serves as a central organizing hub for the movement, consistent with other research (Ging, 2017). At the beginning of our data collection, /r/MensRights had 87,140 subscribers, which grew by 72% to 150,141 subscribers by the end of May, 2017. Based on subscriber numbers, /r/MensRights ranked between the 500 and 600 most active Reddit communities over our study period.[2] Overall, this database provides valuable insight about the Men's Rights movement online due to the combination of /r/MensRights' popularity within Reddit and its high level of activity.

We collected 70,580 posts on /r/MensRights between 19 February 2014 and 31 May 2017, which represents an exhaustive enumeration of all contributed content during our analytic period. We collected data using a computer program we built to query Reddit's Application Programming Interface (API) and automate the extraction of up to 1,000 of the most recent posts per day, along with all comments, upvotes, downvotes, and other information for each post. The limitation of only the most recent 1,000 posts did not influence the comprehensiveness of our data. On an average day, about 57 posts were added to /r/MensRights, and no more than 129 were contributed in a single 24-hr period during data collection. We ran our computer program every 24-hr and databased all unique posts, comments, and metadata for analysis. Our analysis of posts concentrates on the text of each contribution. For comparability, we omitted any discussion captured in the self-post (if any) for each contribution and do not use any content from the comments (if any) reacting to the post.

Variables

We use two dependent variables in our analysis: one of which reflects fully anonymous participation in /r/MensRights and the second capturing quasi-anonymous participation. The first is a count of the number of upvotes received by each post.[3] We use this variable to capture how /r/MensRights community members both built and enforced its social norms. Patterns of upvoting are a rough measure of community reception, with three caveats. First, /r/MensRights allows any Reddit account to upvote posts. As a result, posts that are highly upvoted reflect the preferences of the accounts voting on that specific topic. Some of these members may be active participants in /r/MensRights, while others may engage with the subreddit completely anonymously. Second, an important limitation to this variable is that Reddit adds "fuzzing" to vote counts to deter bots that programmatically vote on content. As a result, there is some level of measurement error on this variable. This is unavoidable given the limitations of the Reddit API. Despite this substantial limitation, several prior studies have analyzed upvotes (e.g., Liang, 2017; Weninger, 2014; Weninger, Johnston, & Glenski, 2015), and it is important to emphasize that the specific amount of vote fuzzing is relatively small and is applied to all Reddit posts.[4] Even though upvotes are not a fully objective measure, posts with a high number of upvotes do suggest broader support by accounts participating in /r/MensRights. The third limitation is that on 6 December 2016, Reddit altered how upvotes were displayed to both users and developers both historically and continuing forward. As a result, the more recent posts in our sample may have higher upvote counts stemming from the changes to the vote tabulation system. We use an indicator variable to control for this shift in our statistical analysis, described further in the following.[5]

Our second dependent variable is the number of comments received by each post. Since each comment is linked to a specific user account, making them quasi-anonymous forms of participation, we expect that the factors predicting variation in commentary will differ from upvotes. Overall, analyzing the number of comments provides a complementary way to measure community norms, as it provides insight about the type of posts that elicit higher levels of direct engagement by other participants in the /r/MensRights community.

Our independent variables are organized in four substantive groups. First, we build a polytomous variable of the *major topic* of each post using LDA. LDA allows researchers to automatically code the content of textual documents into a

specified number of latent topics (Blei, Ng, Jordan, & Lafferty, 2003). Within an LDA model, each document contains a mixture of themes or topics reflected by the relationship between words used in and among the documents which illustrate the authors' intended meaning (DiMaggio, Nag, & Blei, 2013). We selected a specification with seven topics based on a comparison of the substantive results for models containing between 2 and 20 topics in combination with quantitative summaries of model fit, following the steps in Nikita (2016).[6] The seven topics, discussed in more detail in the following, focus on issues of feminism, rape and sexual assault, gender inequality, domestic violence, family issues, information sharing, and romantic relationships.

The second group uses four variables to account for the *community dynamics* of /r/MensRights. The first two measures emphasize the patterns of prior attention and community reception to the main topic of each post. We calculated the prior number of other posts with the same topic, based on our LDA, for a 7-day period. We used a similar technique to sum the total number of upvotes on the post's topic for the prior 7 days. The third and fourth variables focus directly on how each post's author engaged with /r/MensRights and how the community reacts to their contributions. Here, we summed the total number of upvotes (if any) for the post creator and also summed the total number of posts contributed by each user for the prior 7 days. We compared the results using several different lag periods, and the statistical estimates were substantively equivalent to the tables discussed in the following.

Third, we used two variables to control for *emotional expression*. Themes of anger and disgust are core frames used by the contemporary Men's Rights movement (Kimmel, 2013). We built a variable for expressions of both emotions in using the words in each post we analyze. To operationalize these emotions, we draw on the NRC Word-Emotion Association Lexicon (Mohammad & Turney, 2013)—a cross-validated list of words associated with specific emotions—to cross-reference each word in a post title with the NRC items for anger and disgust. Specifically, if a post contains the set of words T and a second set of words captures expressions of anger, A, then the size of $T \cap A$ points to an angrier tone. We calculated the intersection of the words in each post and the sets of words for anger, ultimately returning a score for the extent to which each post contained tokens for anger. Values of 0 denote an absence of words tagged in the NRC as angry, with the score growing as the overlap between the words of each post and the set of angry keywords increases. A similar process was repeated for words tagged as expressions of outrage in the NRC.

Last, we use a single-control variable to capture changes to the calculation of upvotes. As noted above, on 6 December 2016, changes to Reddit increased upvote counts. To account for this, we use an indicator measuring whether ($=1$) or not ($=0$) the post was contributed after the changes to the upvote calculator was rolled out.

Analytic Strategy

We use a two-pronged approach in our analysis. First, as noted above, we use LDA to measure the major topics or grievances raised in /r/MensRights. This allows us to inductively analyze how the rank-and-file of the Men's Rights community frames issues. Second, we use negative binomial regression analysis to assess community reactions to /r/MensRights posts, based on the number of upvotes and the number of comments in response to a post. Both variables are highly overdispersed, meaning their conditional variance is significantly larger than their conditional mean, making negative binomial regression an appropriate analytic choice over other types of count models (Hilbe, 2011).

Results

Table 1 summarizes our LDA analysis, proving the names, interpretation, representative keywords, and relative frequency of each topic. We present results for a seven-topic model specification based on a comparison of its substantive fit as well as its empirical support using model fit statistics. The keywords were selected from the lists of the words most predictive of specific topics.

The first topic emphasizes rape and sexual assault, which was the major grievance in over 21% of posts on /r/MensRights. Posts coded with this topic often emphasize a perceived one-sidedness in public and societal discourse about rape, which was generally viewed as sharply discriminating against men. Second, 17.46% of posts were designed to share information within the Men's Rights community. Here, participants in /r/MensRights would link to information often written by other Men's Rights organizations and activists. Some of these posts also linked to examples in the popular press which were used to provide evidence of discrimination against men. Our third topic, gender inequality, was a relatively broad category of posts where participants on /r/MensRights provided anecdotal descriptions of discrimination, often as a result of their participation in the Men's Rights movement. It was also routine for these posts to argue that women were social privilege, while men were not. Feminism is the fourth topic, which captured posts where some element of feminism was the central focus; often users emphasized the role of the feminist movement to create social inequality at the expense of men. Importantly, though the feminism topic was the focal claim in 15.73% of posts, it permeated much of the discussion online.[7] The fifth and sixth topics are based on issues of domestic violence and family issues, respectively, appearing in 11.08% and 10.18% of posts. The major point of contention across these two topics was similar, as it focused on legal discrimination, even though they targeted different social institutions. Specifically, these posts raised examples of domestic violence directed at men, while the family court system discriminated against men during divorce and child custody cases. In both cases,

Table 1. Topics of Conversation in /r/MensRights Posts, 19 February 2014 to 30 June 2017.

Topic name	Interpretation	Representative keywords	Sample (%)
Rape and sexual assault	Perceived discrimination against men for cases of rape and sexual assault, particularly on college campuses	Rape, woman, sexual, sex, man, accused, false, student	21.35
Information sharing	Links to resources having to do with the Men's Rights movement or cases of perceived discrimination against men or boys	Feminist, men, video, article, news, media, watch, show, YouTube, news	17.46
Gender inequality	Men as the victims of systematic discrimination by feminists, disputing the wage gap or that men have social privilege	Men, women, equality, society, White, gap, privilege, power, less, different	15.8
Feminism	The dominance of feminism in popular culture, feminist attacks on equality, feminist backlash against the Men's Rights movement	People, feminist, right, movement, feminism, issue, discuss, think, justice	15.73
Domestic violence	Men as survivors of domestic violence, a failure of equal protection for men and boys from abuse under the law	Violence, men, victim, domestic, boy, law, abuse, discrimination, suicide, protect	11.08
Family issues	Perceived discrimination in family law against men in cases of child or spousal support or visitation	Child, support, father, work, pay, mother, court, kid, time, help	10.18
Relationships	Negotiating romantic relationships, tactics and strategies for "picking up" women	Get, like, know, guy, say, want, girl, call, friend, tell, feel	8.39

Note. Keywords were unstemmed for clarity. Total sample size is 70,580.

many users emphasized the lack of legal recourse available to men. Finally, the seventh topic focused on relationships, representing 8.39% of posts. While some of these cases emphasized strategies to avoid false accusations of sexual assault, another common theme was discussions of how to engage with women romantically. This is likely in part due to the overlap between some Men's Rights activists and the pickup artist community (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016).

A more synthetic analysis of the topics points to two general themes about how issues were framed on /r/MensRights. First, a central theme cutting across nearly all of the subreddit discourse is that feminism and feminist policies permeate and dominate social institutions, consistent with an anti-feminist perspective. Second, while participants sometimes pointed to more latent forms of discrimination, the bulk of attention focused on what was described as active discrimination designed to disempower, oppress, and marginalize not only Men's Rights activists, but men more broadly. Taken together, we suggest that these themes comprise the core axioms adopted by /r/MensRights users.

We now turn to our analysis of the factors influencing community reactions to specific posts. We begin by examining baseline differences in upvotes and comments across our seven topics. Figure 1 summarizes the mean and 95% confidence interval (CI) for each of the topics in our LDA for both the number of upvotes and the number of comments. Posts on /r/MensRights had an average of 83.44 upvotes and 20.13 comments. These results point to a contrast between the topics that /r/MensRights users upvote and discuss. Posts discussing rape and sexual assault, for instance, have an average of 110 upvotes (95% CI=[102.84, 117.06]), making it the most upvoted topic, yet rank fifth when it comes to the number of comments

($M=19.66$; 95% CI=[8.84, 20.48]). Posts discussing relationships are in the middle of the distribution for upvotes with a mean of 81.18 (95% CI=[70.94, 91.41]). However, these posts tend to receive the highest level of discussion and commentary on /r/MensRights ($M=27.52$; 95% CI=[25.99, 29.05]). Similar comments apply to discussions of gender inequality, which have lower levels of upvotes with more extensive discussion among the /r/MensRights users.

More broadly, Figure 1 indicates that the participants in /r/MensRights are selective in how they engage with the content on the subreddit, in that the issues that are heavily upvoted differ from the comments that users actually discuss. We suggest that this occurs because upvotes are used as a form of anonymous boundary maintenance while commentary is quasi-anonymous, which may filter out more visitors to /r/MensRights since comments are linked to specific user accounts. As well, research on Reddit more generally has indicated that many users upvote or downvote posts without reading them (Glenski, Pennycuff, & Weninger, 2017), suggesting that the patterns described above are at least in part immediate reactions by /r/MensRights community members.

We now turn to our regression analysis to examine patterns of upvotes and commenting. Table 2 provides the coefficients and standard errors of the negative binomial regression model for each of our dependent variables. The first set of estimates, which capture the major topic of each post, points to different patterns of engagement for upvotes and commenting. Holding other variables constant, posts emphasizing issues of feminism and family issues are statistically equivalent to the reference category, posts about relationships, when it comes to upvotes ($p>.05$ for both variables). Posts about rape and sexual assault receive more upvotes relative to posts about
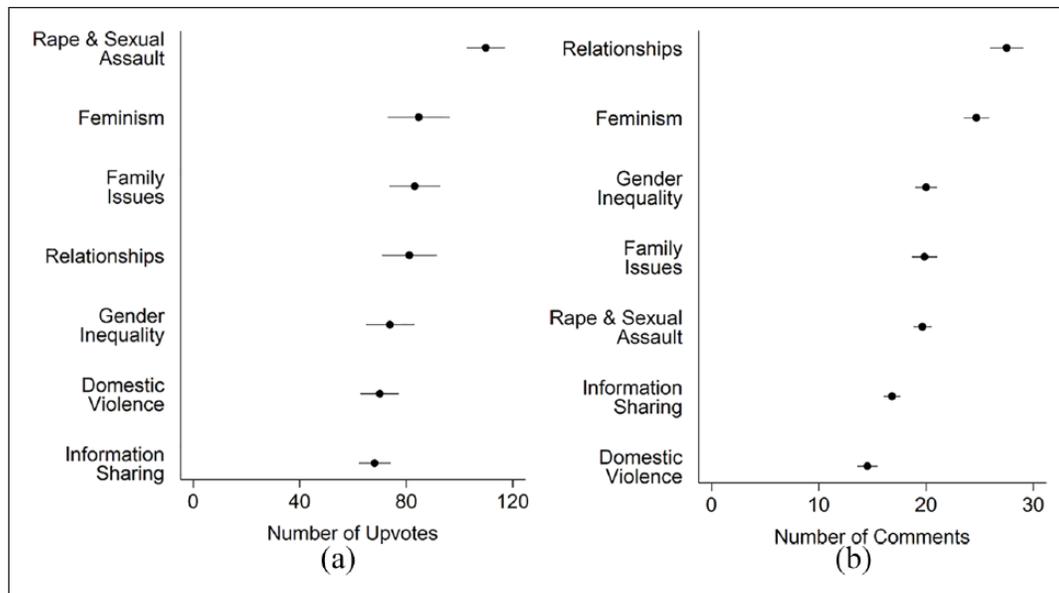
Figure 1. Means and 95% confidence intervals for dependent variables by topic (*n* = 70,580).
Note. Mean differences are statistically significant for upvotes and posts (*p* < .001).

relationships (*p* < .001). Finally, posts about gender inequality, domestic violence, and information sharing each receive fewer upvotes (*p* < .05), again relative to the reference category. Turning to our model predicting comments, we see a stark difference in the pattern of regression coefficients. As before, we use posts about relationships as our reference category, and here, our model indicates that participants on /r/MensRights discuss relationships more than any other topic (*p* < .001 for all comparisons). Though the magnitude of the differences varies, the sign of each coefficient is consistent.

Overall, these estimates point toward specificity in boundary maintenance practices on /r/MensRights. The estimates for the topics of posts in Table 2 indicate that users react differently to content when upvoting or engaging in conversations, even after controlling for other variables. Posts about relationships tend to elicit more discussion, while patterns of upvoting are more variable. We suggest that the differences observed reflect the different type of boundary maintenance that occurs on /r/MensRights. Since upvoting is anonymous on Reddit, participants in the community may be willing to signal agreement with more controversial topics such as rape and sexual assault. In contrast, commenting is quasi-anonymous, and as a result, participants in /r/MensRights may be more selective in the discussions that they engage in. Finally, upvoting requires little effort on Reddit, which may itself explain part of the different patterns in community responses. Here, users may rapidly upvote posts that are attention grabbing while scrolling through other content without other engagement.

The variables measuring community dynamics suggest important differences about how prior content on /r/MensRights influences community reactions to posts. There are clear cycles of attention to specific topics on Reddit, as shown by the positive coefficients for the prior upvotes on topics in the models for both upvotes and commentary (*p* < .05 for both models). This is offset by the coefficients for prior posts on topics, which decreased upvotes by a logged count of .044 (*p* < .001) and decreased comments by a logged count of .01 (*p* < .05). Our results indicate that user accounts that are active in /r/MensRights are more heavily upvoted, though this is tempered by the negative coefficient for the number of posts linked to a specific account, which results in significantly less upvotes and comments.

This pattern of results suggests that the more active users on /r/MensRights receive the most attention, especially when they post on a topic that is inside a cycle of community attention. Although there are clear penalties for flooding the subreddit with content, which may be a community reaction to penalize derivative posts, prominent users of /r/MensRights may play a disproportionate role in shaping the larger patterns of discourse on the subreddit. Such users are also likely to contribute content already consistent with the core community beliefs on /r/MensRights, which highlights the importance of the echo-chamber effect in shaping the tone and topical content of contributions to the subreddit.

The third group of variables measures how anger and disgust in the text of a post influence community reactions. Angrier posts are more heavily upvoted but receive fewer comments (*p* < .001 for both coefficients), while posts with more words articulating disgust received more upvotes and comments (*p* < .001 for both models). The point estimates for the coefficients for disgust are also larger compared to the estimates for anger. These results indicate that on /r/MensRights, community members react in a way that increases the visibility of anger and disgust, consistent with

Table 2. Negative Binomial Regression of the Factors Influencing the Number of Upvotes and Comments on /r/MensRights, 19 February 2014 to 30 June 2017.

	Number of upvotes	Number of comments
Topic of post		
Feminism	−0.037	−0.093***
	(0.026)	(0.024)
Rape and sexual assault	0.229***	−0.329***
	(0.028)	(0.025)
Gender inequality	−0.111***	−0.280***
	(0.026)	(0.024)
Domestic violence	−0.169***	−0.605***
	(0.028)	(0.025)
Family issues	−0.043	−0.319***
	(0.028)	(0.026)
Information sharing	−0.162***	−0.433***
	(0.027)	(0.024)
Community dynamics		
Prior upvotes on topic	0.044***	0.010*
	(0.006)	(0.005)
Number of prior posts on topic	−0.013***	−0.004**
	(0.002)	(0.001)
Prior upvotes for creator	0.025***	−0.004
	(0.003)	(0.003)
Number of prior posts for creator	−0.020***	−0.024***
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Emotional expressions		
Anger	0.051***	−0.033***
	(0.010)	(0.009)
Disgust	0.154***	0.168***
	(0.013)	(0.012)
Timing of post		
After upvote calculation change	0.792***	0.193***
	(0.017)	(0.016)
Intercept	4.040***	3.267***
	(0.034)	(0.031)
Dispersion parameter	0.397***	0.483***

Note. $n = 70{,}580$. Reference category for topic variables is posts about relationships.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$ (two-tailed tests).

Kimmel's (2013) description of the contemporary Men's Rights movement. Our data do not provide any specific information about why there are contrasting patterns of commenting across our measures of anger and upvoting. One possible explanation is that users may react more quickly to posts that are angrier, even without reading the underlying content. This is consistent with other research on how users engage with the Reddit platform (Glenski et al., 2017).

Finally, our control variable capturing changes to the upvote system on Reddit is positive, as excepted ($p < .001$). Posts contributed after 6 December 2016 also receive more comments. It is difficult to determine why this is the case directly, as the count of upvotes did not change. One possible reason for this finding is that changes to the upvoting system may have pushed more content from /r/MensRights to a

more prominent position in /r/all, a subreddit capturing all highly upvoted content across Reddit. If true, the more extensive discussion could arise from more Reddit users viewing the content.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined /r/MensRights, a large community of Men's Rights activists on Reddit. The manosphere is a central area of organization, community-making, and mobilization for the contemporary men's movement (Hodapp, 2017), yet few studies have examine grievance articulation in online spaces, nor how activists engage in boundary maintenance in online communities based on their reaction to such content. Drawing on literature examining online social movement

communities (Baym & boyd, 2012; Caren et al., 2012; Koster & Houtman, 2008), we argued that the Men's Rights community on Reddit provides an ideal digital space to examine the movement. The mechanics of Reddit provide an objective snapshot not only of what Men's Rights community members post about on the platform, but also important information about both anonymous and quasi-anonymous reactions by others involved in the subreddit. These reactions, we suggest, provide empirical evidence of how community norms are created and sustained on Reddit. Using the concept of online echo chambers, we argued that a core set of grievances exist on /r/MensRights, which are taken as axiomatic by community members.

To empirically examine grievance articulation and boundary maintenance on /r/MensRights, we built a unique database of 70,580 threads posted over several years, representing an exhaustive depiction of activity on the subreddit. Using a combination of LDA analysis and negative binomial regression, we demonstrate the discussions on Men's Rights focus on phenomena rooted in a combination of postfeminism and anti-feminism, though particularly the latter, that emphasize discrimination against men, particularly stemming from rape and sexual assault, domestic violence, family court, and other major social institutions. Community members regularly emphasize the role of feminism in creating and maintaining these inequalities, a widely held belief expressed repeatedly on /r/MensRights.

The regression analysis indicates that the anonymous upvote system used across Reddit resulted in strong contrasts to how participants in /r/MensRights engaged with posted content, relative to the quasi-anonymous commenting system. As well, posts that were angrier or displayed high levels of disgust were upvoted more heavily, consistent with the work by Kimmel's (2013) research. Some of the community responses of posts appears to be reactive, such as upvoting only specific types of content, while patterns of commenting appear to be more strongly shaped by the substantive content of the post. For example, discussions of relationships received the most comments, which may be in part due to the overlap between Men's Rights activists and the pickup artist community (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016).

Overall, our results indicate that there is an identifiable set of community norms on /r/MensRights. Users who contribute content that are consistent with these norms receive a warmer community reception, whether that is more upvotes or more sustained discussion. This ultimately creates an echo-chamber effect on the subreddit, which may be further enhanced by the increases in upvotes the most active users in the community receive.

Our regression analysis examined two forms of boundary maintenance: anonymous upvotes and quasi-anonymous commentary. The pattern of results differs across the regression models for each variable, which is linked to how users publicize their digital identities. Certain topics received more upvotes, but less discussion, indicating that many participants in /r/MensRights are reacting to the topic and valence of the post, which further

confirms research indicating that many Reddit users vote on posts that they have not read (Glenski et al., 2017). Importantly, the emphasis on emotions like anger and disgust may require new community members to rapidly absorb the main grievances of the movement uncritically. This finding has significant implications for research on effects of online communities more generally. Research indicates that online communities can promote the adoption of extremist views (Wojcieszak, 2009, 2010). While the tone and tenor of content posted on /r/MensRights was relatively consistent over time, and we emphasize that we saw little evidence of such radicalization on the subreddit, this may not be the case for other social movements on both the political left and right that have embraced online technologies as tools to attract new supporters. Future research, therefore, would do well to trace the development of grievances in online spaces to better understand such processes.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Notes

1. According to web analytics firm Alexa, Reddit is the eighth most popular website in the world and the fourth most popular in the United States. See: https://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/reddit.com (Accessed 8/23/2017).
2. The ranking estimates are based on daily data on the subreddit's popularity available at: http://redditmetrics.com/r/MensRights (Accessed 8/23/2017).
3. Since we collected posts every 24-hr period, there was some degree of variability in the upvotes. To standardize all content, we analyze values based on when the post was archived by Reddit, which locks the post to further upvoting, downvoting, and commentary. We used a similar approach to analyze the number of comments.
4. See the discussion by a Reddit engineer at: https://www.reddit.com/r/announcements/comments/5gvd6b/scores_on_posts_are_about_to_start_going_up/davcgta/ (accessed 9/2/2018).
5. To further investigate the potential impact of measurement error on upvote counts, we used two additional approaches. First, we used quantile regression to examine patterns at the 5th, 25th, 50th, 75th, and 95th quantiles of our variable measuring upvotes, which emphasizes the relative rank of each post rather than its precise number of upvotes. Second, we compared the estimates in Table 2 to a separate negative binomial regression model that omitted all posts with more than 2,000 upvotes. In both cases, the results were comparable to the model estimates provided in Table 2.
6. Specifically, we used the quantitative summaries described by Nikita (2016) to identify the top five model specifications

based on statistical fit. From there, we manually reviewed each to the models in detail to assess the substantive coherence of the topics produced by each. The seven-topic specification we use in our analysis was the result of this process.

7. The string "feminis*," for example, appeared in more than 48% of posts when the post text and comments were considered.

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