

Symptoms or community support? Distinction between language use of posters and commenters on PTSD and CPTSD online communities

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ONLINE SUPPORT COMMUNITIES

Reddit, a popular social networking site (SNS), has provided researchers with rich data on mental health discourse.

CURRENT PRACTICES

While some researchers do distinguish submissions and comments as self-disclosure and social support (Choudhury & De, 2014), a number of studies examined them either together or interchangeably (Park et al. 2018; Zomick et al. 2019; Sekulic et al. 2018; Chen et al. 2014)

RESEARCH QUESTION:

Are there linguistic differences between the original posters (OP) and commenters?

METHODS

- $N = 361,908$ online conversations
- 54,724 unique users
- Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) (Pennebaker et al. 2011)

	Established	# Users
r/ptsd	2008	54,855
r/cptsd	2012	99,486

Results show a clear distinction between original poster and commenter across several linguistic markers.

Table 1. Welch's T-test PTSD posts vs comments

	Mean		t	df	η^2
	Submission $N = 9,898$	Comment $N = 18,443$			
Pronoun					
I	9.39	7.48	35.18***	22,336	.425
we	0.32	0.30	1.59*	20,673	.019
you	0.79	4.15	-84.15***	25,045	.829
she/he	1.28	0.78	19.54***	17,816	.255
they	0.52	0.57	-3.86***	24,290	.045
ipron	6.13	7.16	-23.94***	26,824	.267
Emotion					
posemo	2.41	5.92	-59.05***	24,407	.578
negemo	4.43	3.52	20.74***	25,023	.239

Table 2. Welch's T-test C-PTSD posts vs comments

	Mean		t	df	η^2
	Submission $N = 7,928$	Comment $N = 18,465$			
Pronoun					
I	9.58	7.99	8.76***	18,478	.346
we	0.32	0.36	-3.93***	18,813	.048
you	1.01	3.65	-67.01***	25,882	.687
she/he	1.08	0.67	18.90***	13,394	.269
they	0.63	0.62	-0.43*	18,004	.005
ipron	6.56	7.47	-18.81***	21,124	.222
Emotion					
posemo	2.97	6.40	-51.89***	25,703	.524
negemo	4.39	3.39	22.59***	17,717	.285

Note: * $p < .1$ *** $p < .001$

DISCUSSION

Individual symptoms & support-seeking

- **First-person pronouns** and **negative emotion words**: OP's traumatic experience and symptomatology

Community support & advice-giving

- **Second-person pronouns** and **positive emotion words**: advice-giving, positive, supportive conversations with OP
- **Impersonal pronouns**: higher degree of psychological distance from events

CONCLUSION

Findings suggest that submissions and comments need to be examined separately - submissions reflect individual symptoms and comments may be more indicative of community characteristics

FUTURE DIRECTION

- Replicate in other mental health communities (r /anxiety) or online support groups (r /relationships)
- Explore communities without a clear support-seeking/giving roles, e.g. various political or debate communities with back-and-forth discussions

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