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#NotOkay: Stories About Abuse on Instagram and Twitter

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Social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram have recently been used as venues for discussing abusive relationships and sexual violence. This study examines the ways in which social media users and how Twitter and Instagram users engaged with these posts by analyzing 500 Twitter and 500 Instagram posts focused on #NotOkay using a quantitative content analysis. There were marked differences between the posts on the two platforms as well as between engagement with these posts: Instagram overall elicited a higher median level of engagement than Twitter as well as more frequent expressions of social support; in addition, #NotOkay posts on Instagram were more likely to focus on specific acts of sexual assault. On Twitter, posts that included expressions of instrumental social support produced higher engagement. However, mentioning sexual assault produced higher engagement on both platforms. Providers and other interacting with sexual assault survivors should be aware of how these types of violence may be framed and expressed by different populations on different social media platforms.

KEYWORDS: sexual violence; social media; Twitter; Instagram

BACKGROUND

The Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network (RAINN, 2018) estimates that in the United States a person is sexually assaulted every 98 seconds. This adds up to 321,500 assaults each year among those ages 21 and older, and 60,000 assaults against children (Department of Justice [DOJ], 2015; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2013). However, data suggest that sexual assault is the most underreported crime in the country, with 63% of assaults going unreported (National Sexual Violence Resource Center [NSVRC], 2015). Still, best estimates suggest that one out of every five women in the United States will experience sexual assault in their lifetime (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2015). Even more upsetting is the reality that hardly any of the perpetrators of these sexual assaults are caught or reprimanded: currently, only six in every 1,000 perpetrators (DOJ, 2015).

To address this sexual violence crisis, the CDC and other government agencies urge taking a public health—not simply a criminal justice—approach to violence prevention (CDC, 2017b). Such an approach involves disrupting social norms that facilitate victim-blaming, problematic gender roles, and other risk factors for sexual violence (CDC, 2017a). Given the role of media in shaping social norms, there are increasing calls for understanding how media in general, and social media in particular, can be used to promote a public health understanding of violence (Carlyle, 2017). Increasing understanding of how individuals communicate, respond to, and interact with social media around sexual assault allows researchers, advocates, clinicians, and other support service providers to develop innovative ways of connecting to and supporting survivors, as well as informing the creation of social media-based prevention initiatives (Burton, McLemore, Perry, Carrick, & Shattell, 2016). As a step toward achieving these outcomes, we conducted a quantitative content analysis of #NotOkay, a sexual violence hashtag that went viral on Instagram and Twitter. The following sections briefly describe the importance of media portrayals of sexual violence, the unique features of social media conversations, and the relevance of #NotOkay in shaping public discourse about sexual violence.

MEDIA PORTRAYALS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Framing is one of the most common approaches to understanding media portrayals, with numerous studies demonstrating that the frame imposed on an issue or event can shape opinion on related policies (Druckman, 2001; Jacoby, 2000; Sniderman & Theriault, 2004), including support for public health approaches to violence prevention. Framing and frames “shape individual understanding and opinion concerning an issue by stressing specific elements or features of the broader controversy, reducing a usually complex issue down to one or two central aspects” (Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997, p. 568). Frames may highlight certain aspects of an event, policy, or an issue and through this guide the public to certain perceptions about that event, policy, or issue. Episodic framing presents an issue a specific example or story, while

thematic framing places issues in a general or societal context (Gross, 2008; Iyengar, 1990). While episodic frames can produce stronger emotional reactions than thematic frames, thematic frames tend to be more effective at increasing support for a given policy or proposal (Gross, 2008; Iyengar, 1990). Gross (2008) argues that this difference is largely attributable to the different functions of affective and cognitive processing, namely that emotions only partially mediate the relationships between media stories and policy decisions. In other words, the attributions made to individuals because of the individual-level focus of episodic framing overrides the influence of emotions in supporting individual-oriented responses.

A study of violence against women in traditional news media in Australia showed that more than 75% of the mentions of specific forms of violence were related to physical violence, while only 23% referred to sexual violence (Sutherland, Easteal, Holland, & Vaughan, 2019). This dominance of physical violence in media coverage is consistent with Carlyle, Slater, and Chakroff's (2008) findings. In addition, Carlyle et al.'s (2008) content analysis of newspaper coverage of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) demonstrated that articles are primarily episodic. Importantly, both traditional and social media portrayals of sexual violence and IPV may have implications for public policy responses as well as beliefs and perceptions regarding norms in this area (Carlyle et al., 2008).

Social Media

Social media platforms and mobile technologies are playing an increasingly important role in both increasing public awareness about sexual abuse and in giving a voice to abuse victims, particularly those who have not shared their stories previously. Recent studies on the portrayal of IPV on social media platforms appeared to show an encouraging trend: a study of 500 IPV-related Pinterest posts showed that 82% of pins were thematically framed, which may facilitate a more community-based approach to addressing sexual and domestic violence issues, and that sexual abuse was portrayed in 45% of pins, pointing to a more balanced portrayal of abuse instead of the largely physical abuse focused trend in earlier studies (Carlyle, Guidry, & Burton, 2018; Carlyle et al., 2008). Additionally, an analysis of IPV-related stories in a local Southeast U.S. county newspaper showed an increase in IPV-focused reporting over 5 years (Kelly & Payton, 2018).

Importantly, the ascendance of social media allows individuals outside the broader media structure to participate in the processes of framing (Cissel, 2012; van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2013). Consider the example of #WhyILeft and #WhyIStayed: these hashtags arose specifically in response to victim-blaming framing of a domestic violence situation in traditional news media where reporters questioned why the victim stayed in the relationship if she was being abused. While the #WhyIleft/#WhyIStayed Twitter conversations that resulted from the Ray Rice abuse incident are a prominent example of the use of online activism to advocate for broad, societal-level changes related to violence against women (Weathers, Sanderson, Neal, &

Gramlich, 2016), not much is known about how sexual and domestic violence stories are shared on visual platforms such as Instagram, and how these conversations may differ as they unfold across different platforms like Twitter and Instagram. The current study addresses this gap by examining #NotOkay posts on Instagram and Twitter.

#NotOkay Conversations on Social Media

At the height of the 2016 United States presidential campaign, tens of thousands of women began sharing their experiences of sexual assault on Twitter and Instagram in response to an audio recording of then-presidential candidate Donald Trump boasting about groping women. In the recording, Trump is heard saying:

[...] I just start kissing them. It's like a magnet. Just kiss. I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. (Frans, Rimmö, Aberg, & Fredrikson, 2008) Grab 'em by the pussy. You can do anything. (Bullock, 2016)

Soon after the audio recording was released, Trump responded to public outrage by defending his remarks as “locker room banter” (CBS News, 2016). In response to the release of Trump’s remarks, author Kelly Oxford invited women to share stories of their first experiences with sexual assault:

Women: tweet me your first assaults. They aren't just stats. I'll go first: Old man on city bus grabs my “pussy” and smiles at me, I'm 12. (Domonoske, 2016)

Using the hashtag #NotOkay, the outpouring of personal stories brought attention to the pervasiveness of rape culture in America and its impact on women and girls nationwide (Domonoske, 2016). In the first 14 hours following Oxford’s post, more than 1 million women had responded; Oxford issued a follow-up tweet stating that she had been receiving a minimum of 50 replies per minute since her original post (Domonoske, 2016). By the following Monday morning, she had received more than 27 million tweets in response to her invitation (Gibbs, 2016). Women shared stories about assaults that were perpetrated in myriad spaces and stages of life, with some reporting being as young as 5 years old at the time of the assault (Gibbs, 2016). Numerous commenters remarked that they had experienced multiple assaults across their lifetime, which left some struggling to remember which assault was their first (Gibbs, 2016).

Understanding how social media contributes to or influences the framing—and reframing—of issues like sexual violence is critical to developing effective communications strategies for prevention (van der Meer & Verhoeven, 2013). While social media use among young adults has been associated with increased depression in young adults (Primack et al., 2017) and bullying (O’Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Xu, Jun, Zhu, & Bellmore, 2012), other studies demonstrate that social media use can be associated with increased social support, reduced stress, and greater well-being (Moorhead et al., 2013; Nabi, Prestin, & So, 2013). Given the large numbers of people of all ages participating on a variety of social media platforms, understanding how social support is communicated in conversations such as #NotOkay may help

to inform large scale interventions that utilize social media to create positive influences in the lives of vulnerable individuals. This, combined with the potential impact of sexual violence conversations on social media to shape public opinion in ways that are supportive of public health approaches to violence prevention overall, make this a compelling topic to study. As such, this study examined the viral hashtag #NotOkay, posing the following research questions:

RQ1: What do #NotOkay posts look like on Instagram and Twitter?

RQ2: What are the differences in engagement with these posts?

RQ3: How are sexual violence related messages framed on Instagram and Twitter?

RQ4: How is social support manifested in #NotOkay posts on Instagram and Twitter?

METHOD

This study presents a quantitative content analysis of a random sample of 500 Instagram posts and 500 Twitter posts (tweets) using the hashtag #NotOkay, collected in October 2016 using Netlytic.org. The analysis focused on the type of information and visuals included and the frequency of engagement with each post. Coding protocols for posts were developed, tested, and implemented for the coding process. Two coders were trained to establish intercoder reliability—each coder coded 10% ($n = 100$) of the sample, and the first coder coded the remainder of the sample. The individual coefficients were all considered to be reliable, with the lowest Scott's Pi (1955) coefficient at .84.

Content Analysis Categories

Instagram and Twitter posts were coded for variables related to sexual violence (victim blaming, consent, homicide, suicide, rape culture, "locker room talk," types of abuse, types of physical violence, types of psychological violence, and types of sexual violence), social support type (emotional, instrumental, and informational), perpetrator identity, frame (episodic or thematic), and visual characteristics (primarily image, primarily text, mix of image and text/meme, infographic, video, drawing, people present, and signs of physical abuse). In addition, poster identity and the frequency of engagement variables—likes and comments—were collected for each post.

Statistical Analyses

Descriptive analyses were carried out for all variables. Differences between Twitter and Instagram posts were explored using logistic regression. Mann–Whitney U tests were used to check for differences in engagement between posts with versus without a range of dichotomous variables, and Kruskal–Wallis tests were used to check for differences in Pinterest engagement between posts with versus without a

range of nominal variables. For both tests, distributions of the engagement frequencies were evaluated and found similar based on visual inspection of a box plot for all variables involved. Whenever the Kruskal–Wallis tests found statistically significant differences, posthoc analyses via pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn’s (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons, with adjusted *p*-values presented.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

The first research question asked what #NotOkay posts look like on Instagram and Twitter. The majority of posts (79.6%, *n* = 398) on Instagram were published by individual accounts, of which 93.4% (*n* = 372) were posted by women, 4.8% (*n* = 24) by men, and .4% (*n* = 2) by nonbinary/genderqueer identifying persons. In addition, 9.4% (*n* = 47) were by nonprofits/community organizations, 4.4% (*n* = 22) by commercial entities, and 1.0% (*n* = 5) by news organizations. On Twitter, a smaller majority of posts or “tweets” (71.4%, *n* = 357) were published by individual accounts, of which 81.0% (*n* = 289) were posted by women and 19.0% (*n* = 68) by men. Moreover, 15.8% (*n* = 79) of tweets were published by nonprofit/community organizations, 2.6% (*n* = 13) by commercial entities, and 4.4% (*n* = 22) by news organizations. Of all the specific types of violence (physical violence, sexual violence, emotional aggression, economic control, stalking, and reproductive control), sexual violence was referred to most frequently (91.8% on Instagram and 76.6% on Twitter), while physical violence was mentioned in 12.8% of Instagram posts and 12.2% of tweets, and emotional aggression in 12.4% of Instagram posts and 8.0% of tweets (see Table 1 for complete results).

Logistic regression showed that most study variables were more frequently mentioned on Instagram. These were divided into general concepts related to sexual assault (assault as gendered violence, specific type types of sexual violence, repeated instances of sexual assault, and rape culture); two support behaviors (emotional support and education about sexual assault); and one specific responses to the origin of the #NotOkay hashtag (referring to Donald Trump as unfit for the presidency). Three of the variables—informational support related to sexual assault, report of a first-time sexual assault victim, and mention of a direct response to Trump’s reported actions—appeared more frequently on Twitter than on Instagram (see Table 2 for complete results).

TABLE 1. General Descriptives by Platform

Variable/Subvariable	Instagram	Twitter
Types of violence		
Physical violence	12.8% (<i>n</i> = 64)	12.2% (<i>n</i> = 61)
Scratching	3.1% (<i>n</i> = 2)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Hitting	9.4% (<i>n</i> = 6)	3.3% (<i>n</i> = 2)
Pushing/showing	10.9% (<i>n</i> = 7)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Throwing	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Grabbing	62.5% (<i>n</i> = 40)	27.9% (<i>n</i> = 17)
Biting	1.6% (<i>n</i> = 1)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Choking	4.7% (<i>n</i> = 3)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Shaking	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Hair-pulling	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Slapping	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	3.3% (<i>n</i> = 2)
Punching	1.6% (<i>n</i> = 1)	1.6% (<i>n</i> = 1)
Burning	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Use of weapon	1.6% (<i>n</i> = 1)	1.6% (<i>n</i> = 1)
Use of restraints	6.3% (<i>n</i> = 4)	1.6% (<i>n</i> = 1)
Sexual violence	91.8% (<i>n</i> = 459)	76.6% (<i>n</i> = 383)
Penetration	14.6% (<i>n</i> = 67)	17.0% (<i>n</i> = 65)
Penetration w/alcohol/ drugs	2.8% (<i>n</i> = 13)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Victim forced penetration	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Victim forced penetration w/ alcohol/drugs	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Verbal pressure/intimi- dation - sexual coercion	1.7% (<i>n</i> = 8)	2.9% (<i>n</i> = 11)
Groping	31.4% (<i>n</i> = 144)	35.8% (<i>n</i> = 137)
Noncontact unwanted sexual experience	12.0% (<i>n</i> = 55)	12.0% (<i>n</i> = 46)
Porn exposure	.4% (<i>n</i> = 2)	.3% (<i>n</i> = 1)
Sexual harassment	15.3% (<i>n</i> = 70)	27.9% (<i>n</i> = 107)
Sexual violence rumors/- sexual violence threat	.9% (<i>n</i> = 4)	1.8% (<i>n</i> = 7)
Unwanted filming/photos of sexual activity	.4% (<i>n</i> = 2)	.3% (<i>n</i> = 1)
Sex trafficking	.4% (<i>n</i> = 2)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Molestation by family	1.5% (<i>n</i> = 7)	2.3% (<i>n</i> = 9)
Emotional/Psychological aggression	12.4% (<i>n</i> = 62)	8.0% (<i>n</i> = 40)
Expressive aggression	11.3% (<i>n</i> = 7)	5.0% (<i>n</i> = 2)

(Continued)

TABLE 1. General Descriptives by Platform (Continued)

Variable/Subvariable	Instagram	Twitter
Excessive jealousy	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Coercive control	8.1% (<i>n</i> = 5)	7.5% (<i>n</i> = 3)
Threat of physical/sexual violence	8.1% (<i>n</i> = 5)	40.0% (<i>n</i> = 16)
Exploitation of vulnerability	69.4% (<i>n</i> = 43)	60.0% (<i>n</i> = 24)
Gaslighting	17.7% (<i>n</i> = 11)	2.5% (<i>n</i> = 1)
Economic control	1.4% (<i>n</i> = 7)	.4% (<i>n</i> = 2)
Limit access to finances	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Limit access to work opportunities	71.4% (<i>n</i> = 5)	100.0% (<i>n</i> = 2)
Stalking	2.6% (<i>n</i> = 13)	.4% (<i>n</i> = 2)
Leaving flowers, cards, etc.	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Watching/following from distance	23.1% (<i>n</i> = 3)	50.0% (<i>n</i> = 1)
Showing up in places where victim is	7.7% (<i>n</i> = 1)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Cyber-stalking	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Reproductive coercion	.2% (<i>n</i> = 1)	.2% (<i>n</i> = 1)
Hide/throw away birth control	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	100.0% (<i>n</i> = 1)
Lie about wearing condom/damage condom	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Refuse to wear condom	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Try to get pregnant against partner's will	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Pressure/Force abortion	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Pressure/Force continuation of pregnancy	100.0% (<i>n</i> = 1)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Attempt to induce miscarriage	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)	0% (<i>n</i> = 0)
Social support		
Emotional social support	28.0% (<i>n</i> = 140)	13.6% (<i>n</i> = 68)
Informational social support	5.0% (<i>n</i> = 25)	8.0% (<i>n</i> = 40)
Instrumental social support	4.8% (<i>n</i> = 24)	4.2% (<i>n</i> = 21)
Other variables		
Acts of violence too many to remember	4.5% (<i>n</i> = 10)	4.0% (<i>n</i> = 11)
Allies in ending sexual assault	31.6% (<i>n</i> = 158)	19.2% (<i>n</i> = 96)
Assault as gendered violence	57.8% (<i>n</i> = 289)	43.8% (<i>n</i> = 219)

(Continued)

TABLE 1. General Descriptives by Platform (Continued)

Variable/Subvariable	Instagram	Twitter
Bystander intervention	2.8% (<i>n</i> = 14)	1.6% (<i>n</i> = 8)
Consent	10.8% (<i>n</i> = 54)	11.4% (<i>n</i> = 57)
Education about sexual assault	38.6% (<i>n</i> = 193)	23.0% (<i>n</i> = 115)
First time victim	25.5% (<i>n</i> = 56)	15.5% (<i>n</i> = 43)
Not locker room talk	15.6% (<i>n</i> = 78)	13.8% (<i>n</i> = 69)
Normalization of sexual assault	11.2% (<i>n</i> = 56)	12.8% (<i>n</i> = 64)
Rape culture	17.8% (<i>n</i> = 89)	7.4% (<i>n</i> = 37)
Repeated victim of sexual violence	35.5% (<i>n</i> = 78)	16.5% (<i>n</i> = 46)
Resources for survivors	4.4% (<i>n</i> = 22)	2.6% (<i>n</i> = 13)
Response to Donald Trump	57.2% (<i>n</i> = 286)	44.8% (<i>n</i> = 224)
Trump unfit	45.6% (<i>n</i> = 228)	18.0% (<i>n</i> = 90)
Victim blaming	13.2% (<i>n</i> = 66)	7.6% (<i>n</i> = 38)
Visual present	100.0% (<i>n</i> = 500)	48.4% (<i>n</i> = 242)
Person present	53.8% (<i>n</i> = 269)	69.8% (<i>n</i> = 169)
White	80.3% (<i>n</i> = 216)	82.8% (<i>n</i> = 140)
African American	6.3% (<i>n</i> = 17)	17.2% (<i>n</i> = 29)
Hispanic/Latinx	4.5% (<i>n</i> = 12)	14.8% (<i>n</i> = 25)
Asian	3.3% (<i>n</i> = 9)	15.4% (<i>n</i> = 26)

Research Question 2

Research question two asked what the differences in engagement were between these posts. On Twitter, the median retweet frequency was 3.00, the median reply frequency was .00, and the median like frequency was 4.00. On Instagram, the median like frequency was 63.00 and the median comment frequency was 6.00. On Instagram, Mann–Whitney U tests showed that the mention of physical violence, the threat of physical violence, and rape culture elicited lower engagement than if these variables were not mentioned. In addition, showing an African American person in an Instagram visual also produced lower engagement. Higher median engagement frequencies were associated with grabbing, reports of completed/attempted forced penetration, groping, emotional aggression, exploitation of vulnerability, victim blaming, sexual assault education, assault as gendered violence, emotional support, posts as a response to Trump and posts mentioning Trump as being unfit for office, report of a first-time victim, repeated victim of sexual violence, consent, and displaying a White person in an Instagram visual (see Table 3 for all significant results).

Kruskal–Wallis tests were used to determine if there were differences in like frequencies between groups of Instagram posts that diverged by author identity. Median like frequencies were statistically significantly different between the different types of author identity, $\chi^2(6) = 36.811$, $p < .001$. Posts by news organizations, commercial entities, and female individuals all produced higher median like frequencies than posts where the identity of the author could not be ascertained; and posts by news

TABLE 2. Logistic Regression

Variable	<i>B</i>	SE	Wald χ^2	<i>p</i>	OR	95% CI
Physical violence	-.270	.252	1.148	.284	.764	.466,1.251
Sexual violence	-1.368	.222	37.983	<.001*	.255	.165,.393
Emotional aggression	-.331	.258	1.648	.199	.718	.433,1.191
Victim blaming	-.134	.270	.245	.620	.875	.515,1.485
Consent	.540	.276	3.829	.050	1.716	.999,2.946
Emotional support	-.855	.211	16.500	<.001*	.425	.281,.642
Informational support	1.118	.314	12.651	<.001*	3.058	1.652,5.662
Education re. sexual assault	-.635	.175	13.186	<.001*	.530	.376,.747
Allies in ending sexual assault	-.053	.194	.076	.783	.948	.648,1.386
Normalization of sexual assault	.443	.270	2.687	.101	1.557	.917,2.645
Response to Trump	.562	.214	6.876	.009*	1.753	1.152,2.668
Trump unfit for office	-1.759	.231	57.828	<.001*	.172	.109,.271
First time victim	.429	.210	4.175	.041*	1.536	1.018,2.318
Repeated sexual assault	-.997	.223	20.086	<.001*	.369	.238,.570
Assault as gendered violence	-.424	.170	6.196	.013*	.654	.469,.914
Assault not locker room talk	.293	.254	1.330	.249	1.341	.814,2.207
Rape culture	-.985	.243	16.426	<.001*	.374	.232,.601

*Significant at $p < .05$

organizations also produced a higher median like frequency than posts by male individuals. Instagram median comment frequencies were also significantly different between the different types of visual types, $\chi^2(6) = 44.289, p < .001$. Posts by female individuals were associated with higher median comment frequencies than posts by nonprofits and posts where the identity of the poster could not be ascertained (see Table 4 for all significant results).

On Twitter, Mann–Whitney U tests showed that higher median engagement—likes, replies, and retweets—was associated with the presence of the following variables: physical violence, groping, noncontact unwanted sexual experiences, sexual harassment, sexual assault education, consent, allies in ending sexual assault, normalization of sexual assault, assault as gendered violence, “locker room talk,” and direct responses to Donald Trump. Lower median engagement was associated with the presence of the following variables: grabbing and the story of a first-time victim (see Table 5 for all significant results).

TABLE 3. Dichotomous Independent Variables and Median Engagement on Instagram

Engagement Variable	Variable	Median Present	Median Absent	U	p-Value
<i>Increase engagement</i>					
Likes	Grabbing	67.00	32.00	670.000	.022
Likes	Forced penetration	70.00	57.00	16,743.000	.035
Comments	Forced penetration	20.00	5.00	19,536.500	<.001
Comments	Groping	10.00	5.00	29,668.000	.003
Likes	Emotional aggression	632.00	58.00	18,033.500	<.001
Comments	Emotional aggression	25.50	5.00	20,374.500	<.001
Likes	Exploitation of vulnerability	1093.00	67.00	14,416.500	.001
Comments	Exploitation of vulnerability	97.00	14.00	16,273.500	<.001
Comments	Victim blaming	19.00	5.00	18,320.500	<.001
Comments	Consent	10.00	6.00	14,188.000	.032
Likes	Emotional support	70.00	53.50	28,711.500	.015
Comments	Emotional support	13.00	5.00	30,097.000	.001
Likes	Sexual assault education	70.00	49.00	33,884.500	.007
Comments	Sexual assault education	10.00	5.00	34,363.000	.003
Likes	Response to Donald Trump	64.00	50.50	26,691.500	.007

(Continued)

TABLE 3. Dichotomous Independent Variables and Median Engagement on Instagram (Continued)

Engagement Variable	Variable	Median Present	Median Absent	U	p-Value
Likes	Trump unfit	65.50	53.50	34,865.000	.017
Comments	Trump unfit	7.00	5.00	9,738.500	.041
Likes	Assault as gendered violence	67.00	47.00	34,274.500	.018
Comments	Assault as gendered violence	8.00	5.00	34,261.500	.017
Likes	First time victim	202.00	63.00	6,141.500	<.001
Comments	First time victim	25.50	7.00	6,780.500	<.001
Likes	Repeat victim of sexual violence	136.00	62.00	6,436.500	.047
Comments	Repeat victim of sexual violence	22.00	7.00	7,185.500	<.001
Comments	Person: White	8.00	4.00	3,580.000	.003
<i>Decrease engagement</i>					
Likes	Physical violence	43.00	98.00	11,779.500	.030
Likes	Rape culture	47.00	64.00	15,388.000	.019
Likes	Threat of physical/sexual violence	24.00	632.00	55.500	.021
Likes	Person: African American	28.00	65.00	1,133.500	.005
Comments	Person: African American	3.00	7.00	1,350.500	.041

TABLE 4. Poster Identity and Median Engagement on Instagram and Twitter

Platform	Engagement Variable	Median High	Median Low	p-Value
Instagram	Likes	Commercial: 105.50	Cannot tell: 36.50	.010
	Likes	Female: 67.00	Cannot tell: 36.50	.038
	Likes	News: 191.00	Cannot tell: 36.50	.018
	Likes	News: 191.00	Male: 21.00	.034
	Comments	Female: 8.00	Nonprofit: 2.00	<.001
	Comments	Female: 8.00	Cannot tell: 2.50	.002s
Twitter	Likes	Nonprofit: 82.00	Male: 2.50	<.001
	Likes	Nonprofit: 82.00	Female: 2.00	<.001
	Likes	Nonprofit: 82.00	Cannot tell: .00	<.001
	Likes	News: 82.00	Cannot tell: .00	<.001
	Likes	News: 82.00	Female: 2.00	.021
	Likes	Female: 2.00	Cannot tell: .00	.045
	Likes	Male: 2.50	Cannot tell: .00	.027
	Replies	Nonprofit: 2.00	Female: .00	<.001
	Replies	Nonprofit: 2.00	Cannot tell: .00	<.001
	Replies	Nonprofit: 2.00	Commercial: .00	.013
	Replies	News: 5.50	Female: .00	.023
	Replies	News: 5.50	Commercial: .00	.020
	Replies	News: 5.50	Cannot tell: .00	<.001
	Retweets	Nonprofit: 65.00	Cannot tell: .00	<.001
	Retweets	Nonprofit: 65.00	Female: 1.00	<.001
	Retweets	News: 74.00	Cannot tell: .00	.001
Retweets	News: 74.00	Female: 1.00	.004	

TABLE 5. Dichotomous Independent Variables and Median Engagement on Twitter

Engagement Variable	Variable	Median Present	Median Absent	U	p-Value
	<i>Increase engagement</i>				
Likes	Physical violence	160.00	3.00	19,261.500	<.001
Retweets	Physical violence	193.00	2.00	19,678.500	<.001
Replies	Physical violence	11.00	.00	19,042.000	<.001
Replies	Unwanted sexual contact: groping	1.00	.00	28,862.500	.018

(Continued)

TABLE 5. Dichotomous Independent Variables and Median Engagement on Twitter (Continued)

Engagement Variable	Variable	Median Present	Median Absent	U	p-Value
Likes	Noncontact unwanted sexual experiences	583.00	3.00	16,322.500	<.001
Replies	Noncontact unwanted sexual experiences	71.00	.00	17,150.000	<.001
Retweets	Noncontact unwanted sexual experiences	671.00	2.00	17,401.500	<.001
Likes	Sexual harassment	96.00	2.00	19,259.500	<.001
Replies	Sexual harassment	9.00	.00	19,617.000	<.001
Retweets	Sexual harassment	53.00	1.50	19,884.000	<.001
Retweets	Informational support	53.00	1.00	235.000	.021
Likes	Consent	287.00	2.00	19,328.500	<.001
Replies	Consent	29.00	.00	18,851.500	<.001
Retweets	Consent	223.00	2.00	20,201.500	<.001
Likes	Sexual assault education	77.00	2.00	29,598.500	<.001
Replies	Sexual assault education	4.00	.00	28,706.000	<.001
Retweets	Sexual assault education	54.00	2.00	30,131.500	<.001
Likes	Allies in ending sexual assault	31.50	2.00	25,161.000	<.001
Replies	Allies in ending sexual assault	1.00	.00	21,897.000	.032
Retweets	Allies in ending sexual assault	20.50	2.00	24,339.000	<.001
Likes	Sexual assault normalization	192.00	3.00	20,246.500	<.001
Replies	Sexual assault normalization	11.00	.00	19,974.500	<.001
Retweets	Sexual assault normalization	202.00	2.00	21,010.500	<.001
Likes	Response to Donald Trump	23.00	2.00	35,977.500	.001
Replies	Response to Donald Trump	1.00	.00	36,874.000	<.001
Retweets	Response to Donald Trump	17.50	1.00	37,736.500	<.001
Likes	Assault as gendered violence	17.00	2.00	36,949.500	<.001

(Continued)

TABLE 5. Dichotomous Independent Variables and Median Engagement on Twitter (Continued)

Engagement Variable	Variable	Median Present	Median Absent	U	p-Value
Replies	Assault as gendered violence	1.00	.00	35,788.000	.001
Retweets	Assault as gendered violence	11.00	1.00	37,834.500	<.001
Likes	Not locker room banter	287.00	2.00	22,095.500	<.001
Replies	Not locker room banter	12.00	.00	21,558.500	<.001
Retweets	Not locker room banter	202.00	2.00	22,692.000	<.001
	<i>Decrease engagement</i>				
Likes	Grabbing	2.00	638.00	136.500	<.001
Retweets	Grabbing	.00	655.00	118.500	<.001
Replies	Grabbing	.00	49.50	137.000	<.001
Likes	First time victim	2.00	5.00	3,995.500	.028
Retweets	First time victim	.00	4.00	3,917.500	.016

A Kruskal–Wallis test was carried out to determine if there were differences in like frequencies between groups of tweets that diverged by author identity. Median like frequencies were statistically significantly different between the different types of author identity, $\chi^2(6) = 63.575$, $p < .001$. Post hoc analyses revealed that posts by nonprofits and news organizations elicited higher median like frequencies than posts by female individuals and posts where the identity of the poster could not be ascertained. Median reply frequencies were also significantly different between the different types of author identities, $\chi^2(6) = 42.672$, $p < .001$. Again, posts by nonprofits and news organizations elicited higher median reply frequencies than posts by female individuals and commercial entities, or those posts where the identity of the poster could not be ascertained. Finally, median retweet frequencies were significantly different between the various types of poster identities, $\chi^2(6) = 76.454$, $p < .001$. Once more, posts by nonprofits and news organizations elicited higher median retweet frequencies than posts by female individuals and posts where the identity of the poster could not be ascertained (see Table 4 for all significant results).

Research Question 3

Research question three asked how sexual violence related messages are framed on Instagram and Twitter. On Twitter, 34.8 ($n = 174$) tweets used episodic framing, and 38.8% used thematic framing. On Instagram, 36.0% ($n = 180$) of the posts used episodic framing, and 45.0% ($n = 225$) used thematic framing. Mann–Whitney U tests

showed that on Instagram episodically framed posts produced both higher likes and higher comments than thematically framed posts.

Research Question 4

The final research question focused on the portrayal of social support related to sexual violence on Instagram and Twitter. Informational and instrumental social support were both approximately equally present. However, emotional social support was significantly more frequently present in Instagram posts. On Instagram, posts that express emotional social support were more likely to elicit than posts that did not. The presence of emotional social support did not make a difference in engagement with tweets in this sample.

DISCUSSION

Popular press coverage of #NotOkay highlights many of the same themes evident in our results. Gibbs (2016) described how many posts discussed the internal struggles that come with sexual assault, such as one post that read “I remember every assault like it happened yesterday. It lives in my body. It takes up space. I remember, Do they? #NotOkay.” Some added to their posts that they had never told anybody about their assault(s), and others talked about the shame they carried with them as a result of the violence (Domonoske, 2016). A number of those sharing were uncomfortable with being publicly attached to their stories and created anonymous social media presences just to participate in the conversation (Domonoske, 2016). Instead of sharing stories, some posts simply offered words of support for those who were sharing. Some people sent out messages of support for specific groups, such as male and LGBTQ+ victims, while others, including Kelly Oxford, simply shared that they were proud of those who were sharing, the shame was not the victims’ to bear, and that they were a community (Wang, 2016). The use of the #NotOkay hashtag brought into the public gaze the experiences of individuals affected by sexual assault. Since many victims never disclose such experiences, or even identify things that have happened to them as being sexual assault (Sabina & Ho, 2014), this was an important moment in our national conversation on sexual assault. With the exception of public figures facing accusations, sexual assault is largely kept out of social discourses because of the guilt and shame that comes from a culture of victim-blaming (Weiss, 2010). Even then, most media and public attention focuses on the specific case rather than on the broader issue of sexual assault as a public health issue. The engagement of social media users with #NotOkay thus offered a unique opportunity to examine how a wide array of individuals perceived and described experiences of sexual assault. Further, because #NotOkay specifically originated within social media, this was also an opportunity to explore how users create communities and social support networks within that context.

The results of this study have interesting and important implications for the use of social media to generate and influence conversations about broad societal concerns,

as well as to raise awareness of issues such as sexual assault and abuse in the population at large. In particular, the apparent differences between Twitter and Instagram postings indicate what spaces these platforms operate within among users. For example, a majority of Instagram posts and tweets were published by individuals. Since this was a movement of individuals sharing their stories, this is not particularly surprising, however, Instagram demonstrated a significantly higher presence of most specific sexual assault related variables than did Twitter. This difference is critical to advocates and care providers who seek to use social media to generate awareness of the impact of sexual assault on individuals. Whereas Twitter posts may have reflected a variety of understandings of what the #NotOkay hashtag implied, Instagram posts appear to focus more directly on specific acts of sexual assault. This suggests that Instagram may be more conducive to focused advocacy efforts, and that it is more likely to distill a conversation from the general to the specific. Such observations can directly inform the design and delivery of interventions or awareness-raising campaigns focused on sexual assault and other types of intimate violence.

Similarly, there is a notable difference in the demographics of post authors between Twitter and Instagram: on Twitter, 15.8% of posts were published by nonprofit entities while only 9.4% of posts on Instagram were. This suggests that nonprofits tended to be more active on Twitter than on Instagram, which means that those nonprofits are likely to mainly reach individuals who are more “typical” of Twitter users. Specifically, according to the Pew Research Center on Internet and Technology, more adults report using Instagram than Twitter, but Instagram users tend to be younger overall than Twitter users (Smith, 2018). For interventions or campaigns that target younger, potentially more tech-native demographics, Instagram may thus be a more useful tool than nonprofit presences in this analysis would suggest.

Interestingly, tweets that mentioned sexual assault specifics elicited significantly higher engagement than those that did not, and Instagram posts that mentioned certain sexual assault specifics elicited significantly higher engagement than posts that did not; however, the dynamic was less pronounced than on Twitter. On Instagram, posts that mentioned physical violence elicited less engagement. This may be indicative of the ways in which users considered what defined or indicated either sexual assault or other intimate violence. This suggests some problematic understanding among users in terms of how the different types of intimate violence interact or overlap. Since posts identifying specific acts of sexual assault were more engaging than those identifying physically violent acts, it may be that users view these as separate issues. This can confound the efforts of care providers and advocates to promote health and safety among vulnerable individuals, and potentially reduce the effect of screening and intervention efforts (Burton & Carlyle, 2015).

Framing considerations may offer further insight into these perspectives, since episodic framing relies more on a single defining instance of something, whereas thematic framing of an issue generates a broader and more generalized awareness. With the advent of the #NotOkay hashtag, many postings reflected responses addressing the Trump recording from which the notorious “grab ‘em by the pussy” phrase originated. This suggests a very specific, episodic type of frame for understanding the

issue at hand, specifically sexual assault. In our analysis, Instagram used thematic framing more frequently than episodic framing, while Twitter used the two framing techniques about evenly. Further, on Instagram episodic framing (specific stories) elicited more engagement; specific sexual assault accounts were also found significantly more frequently on Instagram than on Twitter. For Instagram users, then, #NotOkay appeared to attach more specifically to sexual assault and to particular *acts* defined as sexual assault. This is concerning in terms of how an individual may subsequently view their own experiences: if what happened to them does not fall into the episodic framing with which they are familiar, they may feel that their experience is either invalid or does not constitute an assault. In a 2012 literature review, Grubb and Turner found that what they term “rape myth acceptance”—cultural or social perceptions and related expectations of how and why rape occurs—influences how victims of sexual assault perceive themselves, are perceived by law enforcement and the judicial system, and are targets of blame by all of the preceding as well as other social entities. The influence of social media framing of sexual assault can thus have a powerful effect on how users conceptualize sexual assault and may have negative impacts on those uncertain about their own experiences and victimization. In our study, Instagram #NotOkay posts elicited much higher median engagement frequencies than did those on Twitter, *and* evinced more expressions of social support, which in combination with our other findings suggests that Instagram users had more stringent definitions of what kinds of victimization were validated in #NotOkay posts.

On a more hopeful note, however, we found that Tweets by nonprofits and by news organizations elicited higher engagement than tweets by other types of publishers—suggesting that for Twitter users, authoritative advocacy and other information on the subjects encompassed by #NotOkay was regarded more favorably than was that by other entities. This suggests that Twitter users were actively engaged in a more thematic type of framing, in which more types of experiences and contextual details were validated. Posts on Twitter that focused on instrumental types of social support also produced higher engagement than other types, further reflecting a potentially broader and more encompassing framing of intimate violence issues on Twitter.

Lastly, showing an African American person in an Instagram visual produced lower engagement, in spite of 43% of African American Internet users being active on Instagram (Pew Research Center, 2018), and African American women in several studies reporting a higher prevalence of sexual violence (Smith et al., 2017; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). This is reminiscent of Gross (2008) who experimentally examined public support for mandatory minimum sentences using vignettes of an abused woman who helped her boyfriend (the abuser) sell drugs. Gross manipulated framing type (episodic versus thematic) and race (White versus Black) and found that a White defendant produced significant opinion change across frame type, while a Black defendant was not significantly different from the control. These results, taken in the context of the social-political environment of the United States, suggest that public perceptions of Black female victimhood are problematic (Kane, 2018) and

underscores that attending to the intersection of race and gender in prevention efforts is crucial.

Implications

Overall, the #NotOkay conversation called attention to how commonplace sexual assault is and the prevalence of rape culture in the United States (Wang, 2016). This use of the #NotOkay hashtag to create a collective conversation is referred to as “hashtag activism” or “hashtag feminism” because of its specific focus on issues related to female equality (Khoja-Moolji, 2015; Yang, 2016). Researchers and activists note that many marginalized groups, including women, have taken to social media as an act of resistance against oppressive systems within society (Duffy, 2015; Kreiß, Meadows, & Remensperger, 2015; Odine, 2013; Stache, 2015). This underscores the need for researchers and practitioners aiming to prevent violence against women to be actively engaged in conversation on social media.

Social media platforms have increasingly become a place where sexual assault survivors share their stories. However, different types of platforms are used differently, and public health and health communication professionals need to both familiarize themselves with these social platforms and effectively use them in engaging sexual assault survivors. While the majority of nonprofits and government entities in this sample appeared to post on Twitter, Instagram actually looked to be a promising outlet for advocacy efforts and should be considered by public health and nonprofit advocacy organizations. Practitioners must strive to keep pace with the ever-changing social media landscape to effectively reach their target audiences. In addition, providers and others interacting with these vulnerable individuals should be aware of how sexual assault and other types of intimate violence may be framed and internalized by different populations, depending on their social media consumption. This may provide practitioners with new strategies for interacting with sexual assault victims and their allies and for educating the public about these issues. Moreover, short-term social media activities provide a less time- and resource-intensive way of advocacy for victims, making this a promising medium for often-understaffed nonprofit organizations to effectively reach large numbers of survivors (Murray, King, Crowe, & Flasch, 2015). In sum, this study’s findings have the potential to inform both the design and delivery of sexual violence intervention and awareness campaigns, providing insight into how sexual violence survivors perceive themselves and the trauma they have experienced.

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