

Meet Kevin. He is 24 years old and working as a Product Designer in an early stage startup in SF, and has not had any formal university education. He is entirely self-taught in his trade and enjoys long walks alone.

Says:

- I know this may sound arrogant, but I don't mean it in that way. I just think that this is a serious problem we need to address.
- Reddit is like a cluster of circle jerks. Each subreddit is a circle jerk because posts in a subreddit usually support the group consensus or cater to the group culture anyway.
- I use Facebook but think carefully before unfollowing people if they have different opinions. I think people are quick to jump the gun and unfollow friends when it comes to polarizing issues if their friends disagree or speak out against their established worldview. I think that this can create an unhealthy environment because then you are artificially culling your newsfeed to only show you content that you agree with and find acceptable. I think there is a lot of value in hearing diverse opinions.
- I use Twitter but do the same thing (or at least I think I do – you never know with social media). Nowadays you can so easily pick and choose to surround yourself with whatever type of content. It's easy to hear only what you want to hear and see what you want to see, but that limits you.

Does:

- He was repeating his belief that it's important to surround yourself with a diversity of opinions.
- He got annoyed thinking about average Reddit users (maybe a hint of feelings of superiority because he avoids the site after being an avid user for a few years).
- He was differentiating between himself and the "crowd of people who aren't conscious of the fact that they are caught up in groupthink"
- He repeats the words "circle jerk," "groupthink," and "diverse".

Thinks:

- Diversity of opinions is important when it comes to crowds.
- He might think lowly of people who he sees as unable to recognize that they are living a lifestyle conducive to groupthink and are stuck in a vicious cycle.
- He is very introspective and spends a lot of time thinking.
- He is thinking of the future – how will social media shape this generation by influencing "crowds"?
- He needs to prove himself by being self-aware enough of destructive habits on social media.
- Individuality is most valuable.

Feels:

- He feels anxious at the thought of letting groupthink influence him.

- He's tired of people who (he deems) aren't open to considering the merit of different perspectives.
- He sees the importance of crowd power but is wary of its potential to be used in a negative way.

Insights:

- Conventional wisdom says that crowdsourcing is good, but really crowdsourcing is only good if there is diversity of opinions.
- The status quo assumption is that it's good for like-minded people to have a way to share information and collaborate with each other, but really it may have repercussions if there is little dissent and the information that is passed around is artificially culled to support the original group consensus.
- It would be game-changing to consider how ensuring a diversity of opinions when crowdsourcing can improve results.

Meet Steve. He is 28 years old and used to work as a researcher at Harvard.

Says:

- I worked at the Harvard Medical Research lab that used TopCoder to crowdsource for a solution to optimize edit distance calculations in DNA strings. I think we advertised \$6000 for the best solution.
- We received 100 or so submissions from people all over, and, if I remember correctly, 2/3rds of the solutions were functional and unique.
- Most solutions were, in fact, much better than the one we developed in house. The winning team smoked and embarrassed us – both in time and accuracy.
- It was honestly pretty insane. We just put an open-ended problem out there and had no way of knowing if this would work at all. We got so much more out of it than we ever expected.
- I think the reason it was so successful was because we made the problem as open-ended as we could. We spent a lot of time perfecting our posting to make sure that the challenge didn't impose any silly restrictions. We just wanted to see what people could come up with.
- I think we tried this sort of stuff in the past but failed. Maybe we imposed too many restrictions?
- *"TopCoder surpassed expectations: a two-week competition led to code that was just as good but almost three orders of magnitude faster for a few thousand dollars. Hard to imagine beating that." ~Ramy Arnaout, MD, DPhil, Associate Director Clinical Microbiology, Department of Pathology, BIDMC*

Does:

- He was repeating his belief that the success of the crowdsourcing project was due to the fact that they didn't try to shape or influence or "impose any silly restrictions" on the coders' ideas.
- He got visibly excited when I asked him for his opinion on why he thought the study was so successful.
- (I think) he left the interview feeling more positively than he did pre-interview.

Thinks:

- Independence of opinions is important when it comes to crowds.
- He thinks it's good to - at least initially - shield group members' opinions from those of the collective group so that they won't unnecessarily doubt their initial impressions or insights or fear ridicule after hearing other group member's opinions.

Feels:

- Crowdsourcing opinions, submissions, etc., might work better if we try to maintain independence of opinions for participants. This way, each individual can give at least one input which is mostly generated from their own unique world view/persona. It's not inconceivable that someone might

change their opinion or not speak up after hearing others' opinions, especially if those other opinions differ radically from their own, out of fear of being alienated and being seen as stupid or radical.

Insights:

- Conventional wisdom says that crowdsourcing is a way for people to collaborate, but really crowdsourcing may more effectively be used as a tool that aggregates individual submissions while preserving independence of opinion amongst participants.
- The status quo assumption is that people work better when they collaborate, but really it is not inconceivable that some groups may "artificially cull" what would have otherwise been perfectly reasonable, albeit "odd" solutions when they impose restrictions they feel are "reasonable" (but may not be fair or founded restrictions after more thought) from the very beginning.
- It would be game-changing to consider how ensuring that people are not swayed by their peers when tackling problems and proposing solutions to those problems, at least initially, could lead to better results.
- An interesting possible case study: could, say, preventing someone from reading other Quora answers before they give their own answer from their own unique skills and experiences (or otherwise somehow prevent them from tainting their worldview with others' opinions right off the bat) result in a better range of answers? We could potentially measure this by considering the satisfaction of the original question asker and perhaps the average number of upvotes on answers since people may feel more engaged?

Katelyn living on University Avenue; Yelp Reviewer

1. **What are the steps you take when trying to decide where to eat for a meal? (Please list out steps with regards to Yelp and otherwise)**
 - see what restaurants are nearby
 - see how many stars the restaurant has
 - see how many ratings that restaurant has
2. **Why did you decide to use this process?**

I've had good experiences at restaurants with higher ratings!
3. **How often do you use Yelp?**

Quite often, whenever I go out! So usually 1-2 a week!
4. **Do you find the results satisfactory?**

I do!
5. **What are the most important/best features of Yelp?**

The reviews are very helpful and the hours of the restaurant!
6. **Do you use Yelp reviews or friends' recommendations more?**

Both pretty equally!
7. **How do you feel about Yelp? How do you feel about people's reviews?**

I do like Yelp and think it's really helpful!
8. **How important are the reviews of others? How much do you take into account others' reviews?**

Reviews depend on who is reviewing to be honest! I usually try to take into account reviews from pretty established reviews
9. **Why do you write reviews for Yelp?**

I want to contribute to the community
10. **How does writing reviews make you feel?**

It makes me feel like I'm helping others by giving them tips for restaurants
11. **Can you tell me of an instance where Yelp really helped?**

When I want to see if a restaurant is open late at night or at a certain hour
12. **Has Yelp/food advice from people made your life more or less convenient?**

More convenient!

13. Can you please give an example?

When I go to a restaurant, I will usually order an item that has good reviews on it. That way I know that it's more or less pretty yummy and at least I won't be disappointed! (Although sometimes I have been...)

Say

- Really like Yelp
- Use it quite often (1-2 a week)

Do

- Use Yelp to look for restaurants in the area
- Use it to pick out good dishes
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Think

- Convenient way to check which restaurants are good and open
- Established reviewers are more trustworthy-> almost like friends
- Restaurants with higher reviews are better

Feel

- Feel like helping out others by writing reviews

Yolanda from Cubberley Café

Lived in U.S. for 23 years, From Panama

Worked in Cubberley Café for 15 years

Loves trying ethnic foods as well

Say

- Really like seeing people happy
- Really gets to know students coming in and out

Do

- Sells things seasonally
- sells things manager says to sell
- Sells profitable things
- Sells made to order sandwiches

Think

- Wants to make students happy with good food
- She is satisfying students' needs

Feel

- Feel like contributing to the community of students