



# An Exploration of the Information Shared Through Whisper Networks: A Qualitative Analysis of Informal Communication Regarding Sexual Harassment

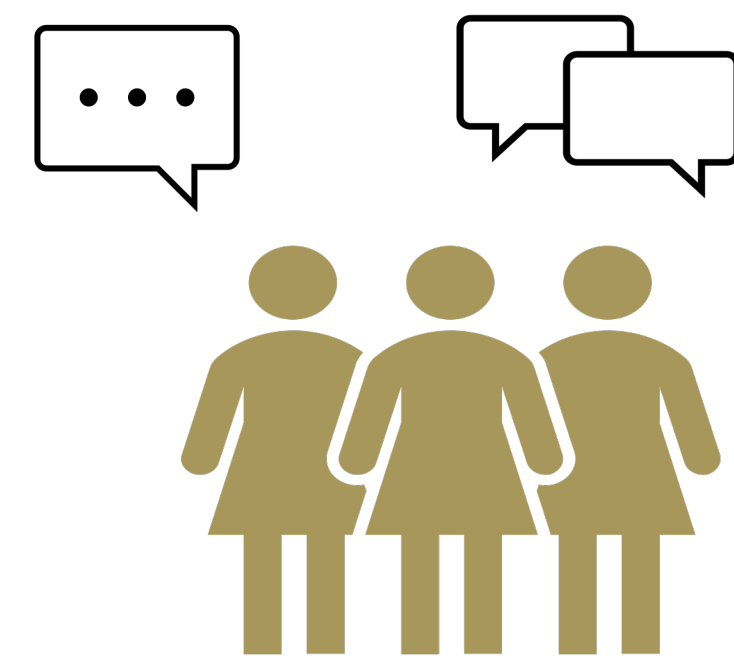
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## Abstract

The Whisper Networks study aimed to identify and describe the content that is shared within whisper networks. Through a survey we collected responses from participants who have been involved in whisper networks and coded the data to further understand the content communicated and shared within whisper networks.

## Introduction



### What are Whisper Networks?

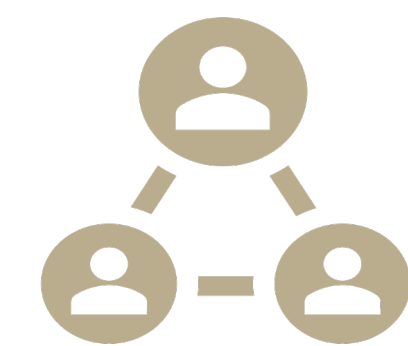
Whisper Networks are private and informal forms of communication used "to warn each other about abuse and harassment," specifically in workplace environments. (Peters, 2020)

Whisper networks are conversations typically among women that share information, accounts, allegations, and stories of sexual assault, harassment, and abuse. (Meza, 2017)

- The origins of Whisper Networks are ambiguous but rose to social consciousness around 2017 when the #MeToo movement grew in popularity.
- The importance of this study is that our study is a first step at defining and describing whisper network participation in the workplace.

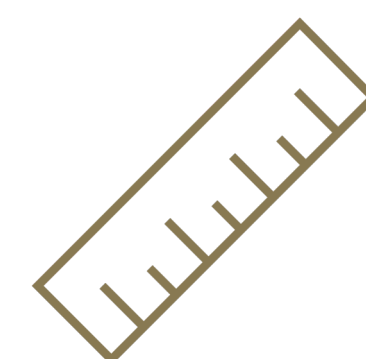
Research Question: What is the content shared within whisper networks and how can we better understand whisper networks through the content being exchanged?

## Method



### Participants

- 88 participants filled out a survey through Amazon's Mechanical Turk.
- Requirements
  - 18 years of age or over
  - English-speaking
  - Employed in the United States
  - Work at least 30 hours per week at the same job for 6 months or more
- Able to be involved in or witness a form of a whisper network



### Measures

- Questions asked regarding content
- What information did you share/not share?
- Demographics
  - Age
    - Mean = 36.58
    - SD = 9.51
  - Gender
    - Woman = 46.6%
    - Man = 52.3%
    - Non-binary/Third-gender = 1.1%

## Results

"I shared the fact that one of the managers had a problem with being a little too grabby or handsy with his female co-workers and subordinates."

"I warned the new girl who was hired recently that a manager in another department, but adjacent to ours, is a bit too "touchy" and talk too familiar with female employees."

Content

**Harassment**  
Includes actions or words directed at a person that results in discomfort, often sexual in nature.

**People Involved**  
The information shared involved specific people.

**Inappropriate Actions by Management**  
Unprofessional actions (physical or verbal) performed by those in charge.

**Office Romance**  
Individuals in the workplace partook in a romantic relationship.

**Invitation**  
An individual was asked by an employee to meet outside of work hours for reasons unrelated to work.

**Formal Repercussions for Behavior**  
Consequences set forth by upper-management as a result of the unwanted behavior.

**Racism**  
Discrimination against an individual on the basis of race or ethnicity.

Unspecified Harassment  
Unwanted Verbal Harassment  
Unwanted Physical Actions  
Unwanted Sexual Attention  
Sexism  
Quid Pro Quo

Management  
New Employees

"I told my female coworkers about one of our supervisors who is known to make inappropriate comments and unwanted advances towards them...He's been reported a few times, but the higher-ups like covering for him."

Responses were grouped into 3 main categories:

- Participants who warned others
- Participants who were warned
- Participants who did not warn

## Discussion

Participants in all 3 categories reported harassment as the top code for content. Within the code of **Harassment**, the content most discussed included the people involved, unwanted verbal harassment and unwanted physical actions. A Qualitative analysis of our codes shows that unwanted actions, whether verbal, physical, flirting, attention, or harassment were all the main content of information shared within Whisper Networks.

