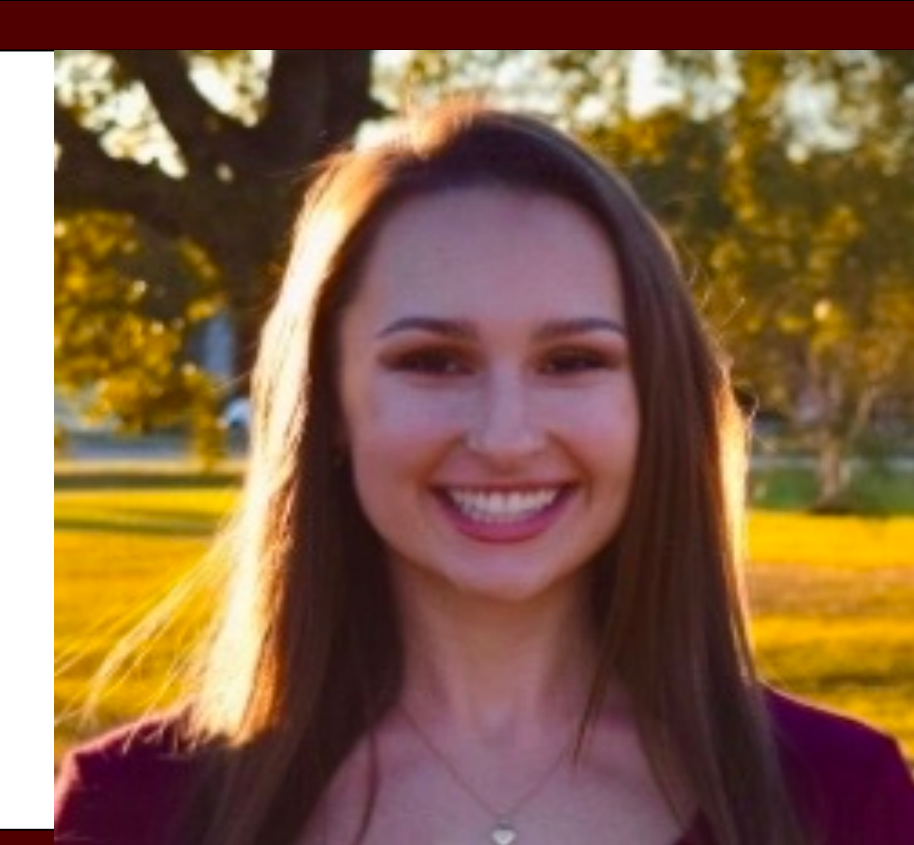




Whisper Networks and the Context in Which They Arise: A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

This study investigates whisper networks in the workplace. We aim to describe the context in which whisper networks arise as a means of communication to share specific information about sexual harassment (SH) and sex-based harassment within a professional environment. In doing so, we hope to be able to identify these specific contexts and thereby limit the occurrence of sexual harassment and sex-based harassment within the workplace.

Introduction

Terms to Know

- Whisper Networks- informal chains of communication often used by individuals to disclose information regarding sexual harassment.

Background

- The #MeToo Movement of 2017 empowered victims of sexual assault to share their harassment stories with the world through various social media platforms.
- Also in 2017, journalist Moira Donegan created a Google spreadsheet entitled, "Shitty Media Men", which allowed women to anonymously list the names of men in the magazine industry who allegedly committed sexual harassment.

Importance of This Study

- There is little research regarding whisper networks.
- To recognize where, when, and how whisper networks occur in workplace environments and take the necessary measures to provide support to those involved.

Research Question: In what context do people choose to share information about sexual harassment or sex-based harassment?

Method

Participants

- 88 total participants
- At least 18 years of age
- English-speaking
- Employed full-time (30+ hours)

- Employed at same job for 6 months
- Aware of sexual harassment situation in workplace

- Gender- Women (46.6%), Men (52.3%), Non-binary (1.1%)
- Race- White/Caucasian (70.5%), Black/African American (10.2%), Biracial/Multiracial (10.1%), Asian/Asian American (6.8%), Hispanic/Latino (2.3%)

Measures

- Open-ended survey made via Qualtrics

Participants Complete Survey

- Participants answered survey questions via Amazon Mechanical Turk

- Multiple coders perform conventional content analysis

Coding

Data Collection Continues

- Data collected until no new codes form among coders (saturation)

Results

Casual Conversation

- The information was shared through a normal and casual conversation.
- "...we were talking about the schedule and how we didn't want to have to work with this person".

At Work

- The information was shared while at work and during a work setting.
- "I just went to his office when he was available and asked him if I could disclose something to them".

Private

- The information was shared only in a private setting.
- "I shared it behind closed doors. I made it look like something else so that no one would think its suspicious".

Outside of Work

- The information was shared outside of a work setting.
- "I told them about it during our lunch breaks and after our shifts had ended in order to keep it quiet..."

Temporal Nature of SH Event

- The information was shared dependent on when the event occurred, such as before or after.
- "I shared this information immediately after witnessing it".

Technology

- The information was shared through technology such as social media or email.
- "An email chain was sent out to the ladies entitled Bake Sale. It's kind of our code subject line..."

Waited for the Right Moment

- The information was shared in desire of a private and comfortable moment.
- "I shared it during the weekly supervision. I felt it was the right moment before it escalated".

Discussion

- *Casual conversations* were reported to be the most common method of engaging in whisper networks, whereas the media focuses explicitly on digital reporting, or *Technology*.
- While some participants report the specific location in which whisper networks occur, others focus on privacy and timing as important features of a whisper network.
- Since whisper networks exist regardless of the location relative to one's workplace, future studies should consider the potential differences in content shared within differing contexts.