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Richard Edward Carter
University of Kentucky, reca238@uky.edu
Author ORCID Identifier:
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6305-4079
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Richard Edward Carter, Student

Dr. Kimberly A. Parker, Major Professor

Dr. Anthony M. Limperos, Director of Graduate Studies

"IT'S THE ONLY THING WE HAVE":
WHISPER NETWORKS AMONG WOMEN THEATRE ACTORS

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Communication and Information
at the University of Kentucky

By

Richard Edward Carter

Louisville, Kentucky

Co- Directors: Dr. Kimberly A. Parker, Associate Professor of Integrated Strategic Communication

and Dr. Chike Anyaegbunam, Professor of Integrated Strategic Communication

Lexington, Kentucky

2021

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https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6305-4079

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

"IT'S THE ONLY THING WE HAVE":
WHISPER NETWORKS AMONG WOMEN THEATRE ACTORS

Women who secretly warn one another via informal communications about men in their environment who may engage in some kind of misconduct are participating in a whisper network. This dissertation employs the narrative paradigm to understand how these networks function in the context of professional actors. Interviews conducted with actors who have worked in a variety of communities were analyzed in order to better understand how whisper networks function as warning systems that must be created because conventional means of protection may not exist or be trusted in their industry.

KEYWORDS: Whisper Networks, Communication Networks, Narrative Theory, Workplace Sexual Harassment, Theatre Industry, Women Actors.

Richard Edward Carter
(Name of Student)

04/06/2021
Date

“IT’S THE ONLY THING WE HAVE”:
WHISPER NETWORKS AMONG WOMEN THEATRE ACTORS

By
Richard Edward Carter

Dr. Kimberly A. Parker
Co-Director of Dissertation

Dr. Chike Anyaegbunam
Co-Director of Dissertation

Dr. Anthony M. Limperos
Director of Graduate Studies

04/06/2021
Date

DEDICATION

To my wife, Rachel. I never would have been able to start or complete this project without your support. Your help as an editor and sounding board has made this report a far more intelligent and more valuable work than it could have been otherwise.

To my daughter, Evangeline, who was born in the midst of this study. I hope that you will grow up into a world where you never feel the need to whisper about injustice.

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The following dissertation, while an individual work, benefited from the insights and direction of several people. First, my Dissertation Co-Chairs, Kimberly Parker and Chike Anyaegbunam, exemplify the high-quality scholarship to which I aspire. Next, I wish to thank the complete Dissertation Committee, and outside reader, respectively: Beth Barnes, Bobi Ivanov and Kevin McGowan. Rachel Shane served as outside examiner for my defense and also offered suggestions. Each individual provided insights that guided and challenged my thinking, substantially improving the finished product.

This study never would have been completed without the help of Stacey Cabaj, Sarah Provencal, McLean Fletcher, and Laura Matthews. They recruited participants, conducted masterful interviews, and provided invaluable editorial insights during the writing process. Finally, I wish to thank the participants of my study (who remain anonymous for confidentiality purposes). Their willingness to be interviewed exhibited bravery on their part, and their candor demonstrates a desire to care for and protect their fellow women actors.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Women in the Workplace

> Women will tell you they don't know precisely when, or how, they become aware that a man is a sexual predator. Someone — almost always another woman — usually tells us, in ways explicit and implicit, to be careful around a man. To not show up to a meeting alone. To invite someone else to come to lunch. To never stay late or go to drinks or email in a manner that could be taken the wrong way (Petersen, 2017).

Women in today's workplace may find themselves encountering challenges their male colleagues are far less likely to have to navigate (McDonald, 2012), such as sexual harassment and sexual assault in the workplace. Some organizations may institute policies and mechanisms to dissuade the prevalence of this behavior and facilitate reporting for victims of it (Vijayasiri, 2008). However, many industries with a decentralized labor market, such as music, hospitality, and agriculture may create environments where workers are less likely to know about policies their employers might have, or employers may not have such policies at all (Becker, 2020). Beyond structural challenges to reporting misconduct, there may be other reasons women choose not to report sexual harassment or sexual assault.

Other industries have a reputation for men in supervisory or powerful positions exploiting female workers. The restaurant industry and the modeling industry come quickly to my mind. Acting is a field that meets both of these conditions. Hence, if women actors are at risk for falling victim to acts of sexual harassment and sexual assault and are also less likely to report these actions, how can they be protected against these

kinds of workplace violence? Perhaps, they are working collectively to warn each other about the men in their circle who they may believe are threatening.

The present dissertation seeks to gain a better understanding of the informal communication networks used by women actors. These groups, recently named "whisper networks" in popular media, may serve as a means for women working in what may be a particularly vulnerable profession to protect each other from predatory behavior. In spite of their possible existence across many cultures and generations, little direct research has been applied to them. This study hopes to find answers to some basic questions about the messages they send, who receives them, and when are they believed. Because these are stories told between the participants, the narrative paradigm is a suitable lens through which to analyze how these warnings are understood. Although this study will strictly limit itself to the context of actors who are women, it may provide some elucidation for future researchers who seek to identify or understand whisper networks in other contexts or to study the phenomenon more broadly. The following section will detail sexual harassment as it exists broadly in the workplace.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Sexual harassment is a thoroughly studied phenomenon in academia and frequently finds its way into popular discourse by way of current events. Fitzgerald, Drasgow, and Magley (1997) defined it as "unwanted sex-related behavior at work that is appraised by the recipient as offensive, exceeding her resources, or threatening her well-being" (p.15). This definition would be inclusive of workplace rape and sexual assault, phenomena which have been studied to a lesser degree (Alexander, Franklin, & Wolf,

1994). However, many of the behaviors that constitute sexual harassment are less violent than rape and occur with far greater frequency (Giuffre & Williams, 1994). This is to say that it may be important for the reader to remember that mentions of sexual harassment may include behaviors of a broad range from unwanted leering to rape. Sexual harassment may go unreported because it is not recognized as such, or victims may be unwilling to report what they know to have been sexual harassment.

2.2 Failure to Recognize Sexual Harassment

In her literature review of thirty years of research on sexual harassment, McDonald (2012) found that studies conducted between 1980 and 2010 estimate 40-75% of women as having experienced workplace sexual harassment. It is worth noting that many of the subjects of these studies were likely asked if they experienced what they believed to be sexual harassment. By contrast, when Barak, Fisher, and Houston (1992) gave subjects a list of behaviors that constituted sexual harassment, 80-90% of women they surveyed reported being on the receiving end of these behaviors. In Cortina, Swan, Fitgerald, and Waldo's (1998) survey of undergraduate women, only 20% of the subjects named behaviors associated with sexual harassment as sexual harassment. Giuffre and Williams (1994) found that restaurant servers were unlikely to see sexual harassment behaviors as sexual harassment unless there was also violence threatened or the perpetrator was someone in power exploiting the victim for his own professional benefit. Texeira (2002) interviewed female police officers of color and found that younger officers were far more likely to report incidents of sexual harassment than older officers. The officers who joined their police force in the 1960s and 1970s often did not feel they had a vocabulary for the harassment they experienced and would have had no way to

know what they were reporting. Hlavka's (2014) female interview subjects often viewed harassing and coercing behaviors as normal when interacting with men and not necessarily falling into the category of sexual harassment. However, these respondents did not like these behaviors, they had become normalized in their minds, and the women did not see any means of recourse.

Though sexual harassment may be commonly recognized as a crime, if the behaviors that constitute it are often not fully known or recognized as criminal when they occur, how can victims be expected to report it? How can they protect themselves from the behaviors that may decrease their level of satisfaction with coworkers, diminish their productivity, increase their risk of physical and mental illness, and lower their overall rate of life satisfaction (Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007). Fasting, Brackenridge, and Walseth, (2007) found that elite athletes who experience sexual harassment in their organizations are far more likely to respond internally by blaming themselves for the harassment than responding externally by reporting the incidents to their organization. Fasting, Brackenridge, and Walseth also found that these internal responses were associated with a decrease in athletic performance, a decreased interest in competition, and a decreased feeling of cohesion with their organization. Women may not always recognize certain behaviors as being sexual harassment, but there are likely other reasons they are not reporting the harassment against them.

2.3 Unwillingness to Report Sexual Harassment

Women in a wide variety of working places may feel there are structural impediments that make reporting undesirable. Knapp, Faley, Ekeberg, and Dubois (1997) found that many women who worked at small organizations tended not to report

perpetrators when it was an owner or supervisor because he often lacked any superior to hold him accountable. Temporary workers are less likely to report workplace sexual harassment at their temporary assignments because their agencies have an incentive to serve their clients, and it is easier to fire a temporary worker than look for a new customer (Rogers & Henson, 1997). Studies have found that workers in a variety of fields were often unaware of procedures or mechanisms for reporting sexual harassment in the workplace (Clancy, Nelson, Rutherford, & Hinde, 2014; Harned, Ormerod, Palmieri, Collinsworth, & Reed, 2002) Also, such mechanisms were less likely to appear in fields mostly populated by temporary or short-term workers, such as food service, temporary workers, and entertainment (Giuffre & Williams, 1994; Rogers & Henson, 1997; Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007).

Another common reason for not reporting incidents of sexual harassment involves the accuser fearing damage to her reputation. Pershing (2003) and Foster and Fullagar (2018) found that women were reluctant to report sexual harassment because they feared the damage it might do to their professional reputation to be labeled as a troublemaker or overly sensitive. These fears may be justified; Fitzgerald & Swan (1995) cited numerous courtroom examples where plaintiffs in sexual assault cases were strategically attacked for being less than credible. They noted that this behavior could dissuade future victims from litigating against those who perpetrate harassment against them.

Both Pershing (2003) and Foster and Fullagar (2018) also found that their participants were less likely to report sexual harassment because they had little faith the perpetrators would be punished. This same reasoning has been mentioned in numerous studies and the reasoning of the victims may be supported by numerous examples of men

who have been accused of their crimes and never held accountable (McDonald, 2012). Stone (2008) identified several instances when courts sided with defendants in sexual harassment cases because the plaintiff did not precisely follow organizational protocols for reporting sexual harassment. These failures to obtain justice may serve as warnings for women not to report those who have committed sexual harassment or other types of workplace misconduct.

2.4 Workplace Sexual Assault

Sexual harassment is not the only type of misconduct levied against women in the workplace. While seemingly less common than sexual harassment, sexual assault in the workplace does occur far more often than it should. Workplace sexual assault is studied less than sexual harassment, and its prevalence across fields is unknown, however, some studies have examined it in limited contexts. Harned, Ormerod, Palmieri, Collinsworth, and Reed (2002) found that 4.2% of the 22,000 women in the military they surveyed had been sexually assaulted on the job in the last twelve months. Clancy, Nelson, Rutherford, and Hinde (2014) surveyed 512 female academic field scientists and found that 25% had been sexually assaulted while working. Nearly all were assaulted while they were trainees and most were assaulted by a male superior. Schneider (1991) also found that bosses are responsible for over half of workplace sexual assaults. Sadly, this statistic is not tracked by any kind of regulatory organization, and data on workplace sexual assaults specifically appear to be limited to acute, often isolated attempts to gather it. Alexander, Franklin, and Wolf (1994) examined instances of workplace sexual assault in Washington state from 1980 – 1989 and found that women are more likely to be assaulted when they are isolated from others. Among their population, 85% were assaulted while they were at

work with no one other than their perpetrator, and half of the assaults occurred between 7pm and 6am. Seligman, Newman, Timbrook, and Halperin (1987) also found that sexual assaults among convenience store workers were more likely to occur at night. Isolation through time and proximity to groups of workers as risk factors for sexual assault are conditions into which actors may frequently find themselves.

2.5 Acting as a Labor Pool

While television, film, theatre[1], modeling, and web videos may be distinct in the content they produce, these industries frequently pull from the same labor pool. Through choice or necessity, many actors may bounce between jobs in different media (Cohen, 1998). In recent years, several states and municipalities have offered tax breaks and other incentives to lure film and television production from New York and Los Angeles (Film Production Capital, 2019). Actors in many locations who had previously been limited to acting in local theaters are now able to get small roles in movies and shows being shot in their region. The economic limitations that once relegated actors to a distinction, such as "television actor" or "community theater actor" or "Broadway actor" are changing rapidly. Actors are less defined by the venues in which they act than they used to be, but theaters still provide more acting opportunities in most North American communities than any other entertainment industry (see Appendix 7). Even in Los Angeles, the center of North America's film and television industries, there are about 200 small professional theaters (LA Tourism & Convention Board, 2019). Although this study may often refer to

[1] This dissertation will follow the convention of using the spelling "theatre" to describe the concept and industry of acting and performing. The spelling "theater" will be reserved for referring to the physical building where performances are held or an organization that produces plays.

acting within the theatre industry, it is worth mentioning that these same actors may often find themselves using their talents in related fields with increased regularity.

The nature of acting often directs workers into the vicinity of some of the vulnerable positions of isolation previously mentioned. Acting often requires working at night either for production shoots or rehearsals (Markus, 1979). Auditions with producers or directors are often conducted in environments where an actor is alone with a single individual (e.g., one who has the power to decide whether or not she gets a job) (O'Neil, 1993). Actors are also sometimes asked to rehearse alone with a director (Markus,1979).

Because plays, films, and television shows are produced by independent studios, theaters, and productions, some organizations may choose to institute policies regarding sexual harassment while others may not. Unions, such as Actors Equity Association and SAG-AFTRA, have reporting protocols, if a member wishes to take advantage of them, but many members find these policies onerous or have little faith in their effectiveness (Kaufman, 2018), and many working actors do not belong to these unions. The vast majority of actors are freelance workers who take jobs with a variety of theaters and organizations who may or may not have reporting structures (Appendix 7). Even if they have a protocol for reporting misconduct, there is no guarantee that an actor, new to the theater or company, would be aware of such mechanisms.

Switching between production companies and theaters may make the process of knowing which sexual harassment policies are in place challenging for actors. In addition, the "gig" nature of the theater labor market may also work to the benefit of sexual predators who are able to move between jobs before their misconduct is recognized. Lee Tull, a prominent actor and director in Dallas, was the director of new

plays at the Dallas Theater Center, but he also regularly worked at several theaters in the city and region and taught high school classes in the city (North, 2017). Inspired by the #MeToo movement, several women publicly alleged that Tull had used his power to sexually harass women in the Dallas theatre community (Lemieux, 2018). Tull was promptly fired and the community began a conversation about creating mechanisms to curtail future instances of sexual harassment (Richard, 2017). Several of the theaters in Dallas chose to adopt the Chicago Theatre Standards (CTS), a voluntary tool that allows theaters to self-regulate against sexual misconduct and exploitation. The CTS was created two years earlier after Darrell Cox, the artistic director of a theater in Chicago, was accused of sexually harassing members of the city's theatre community for two decades (Cox, 2017). Venice Theatre in Sarasota, Florida also adopted the CTS after famed actor, Ben Vereen, was accused of inappropriate behavior while directing the musical *Hair* (Handelman, 2018). But adopting these or any other regulations is voluntary for most small professional theaters that do not have standing agreements with Actor's Equity Association (Not in Our House, 2019). An actor who has been the victim of sexual harassment may or may not have clear understanding of the structural means of protection and justice that are available to her.

There is evidence (Peterson, 2017) that actors working in Los Angeles may have adjusted to their lack of structural protections by creating their own informal networks of communication to protect one another from predators in their field. Without trusted, reliable, accessible means of reporting abuse, harassment, and exploitation, the women working in Southern California appear to have developed whisper networks within their

industry as a way to warn one another about men who had reputations for taking advantage of women.

Theatre also differs in nature from many other industries because of the requirements around touching that exist. Actors must frequently touch one another in performances and rehearsals when practicing scenes involving fighting, dancing, and physical intimacy. Several of the actors who served as participants in this study described how this environment where professional touching occurs often bleeds into touching that is not required for the performance. They detailed greeting with hugs, having a man casually put his hand around a woman's waist, and having men assist women in stretching and other warm-ups. Although some expressed discomfort with the way that men seemed to sometimes take liberties with their bodies, they seemed to accept it as the natural result of a vocation that requires touching for professional reasons. To them, the men seemed to feel that since touching was allowed in the context of rehearsals and performances, it should not be unduly restricted off-stage either.

This dominance of men is not limited to the physical interactions but exists in the realm of professional hierarchies, too. McGovern's (2020) review of League of Resident Theatre (LORT) companies over seven years found that men dominated the roles of director (64.8%) and artistic director (79.9%). These are the positions that have the largest say in who is cast in a show and who is not (Appendix 7). Only 75 theaters in the United States are LORT houses, and no reputable statistics exist that would provide similar data on the hundreds of small professional theaters, community theaters, and academic theaters that exist around the country. However, nothing in this study's data or my personal experience would lead me to believe those numbers would be meaningfully

different at other levels. Through the theatre industry, men make most of the decisions about who will get cast in the minority of roles for women (Appendix 7), and casting is a subjective process. A director or artistic director could choose never to cast an actor for any reason, and he would likely never be held accountable for those decisions. Thus, actors, especially women, may be fearful of offending a director who may be vindictive or even merely fickle. So, when one of these directors or artistic directors acts unprofessionally towards a woman actor, she likely has no means to hold him accountable and a strong disincentive to do so. Women actors have had to create their own means to protect one another from those men who would take advantage of an industry where misconduct is so difficult to punish.

2.6 Whisper Networks in Current Events

When substantial allegations of sexual assault, sexual harassment, and other improprieties reached a fever pitch in the American media during the second half of 2016, many outside the Hollywood community were shocked. Though Harvey Weinstein was not a household name to all Americans, many moviegoers and followers of celebrity magazines were familiar with him as one of the most notable executives in the film industry. When he was accused of vile wrongdoing by over 80 women (Williams, 2017), he earned a notoriety and a level of name recognition that may have exceeded what he had achieved by funding and producing movies. However, for many women in the film industry, rumors of his behavior were nothing new, and Britzky (2017) traced rumors of Weinstein's inappropriate behavior with starlets going back as far as 1998. However, he faced virtually no professional consequences for his actions, and no legal consequences – but for a few civil judgements paid for by his corporation (Farrow, 2017) – until a critical

mass of notable actresses publicly told their stories of frightening encounters with the executive. If these rumors were swirling for years, why did it take so long for Weinstein to meet the disgrace that he had avoided for decades? The existence of these rumors may have occasionally glistened into the light of public attention, but they were largely shared in private spaces.

The groundwork for Weinstein's expulsion from the company bearing his name (and the homes of actors he had made stars) was laid in early months by the #metoo movement. Guerra (2017) reported the movement as taking off after actress Alyssa Milano popularized the phrase on Twitter. Soon women across the globe were sharing their stories of sexual harassment, sexual assault, intimate partner abuse, and stalking through social media. While many men may have found the number of these confessions surprising, as Meza (2017) wrote, these stories were shared between women long before they appeared on Facebook and Twitter.

Petersen (2017) referred to the sharing of this information as occurring on "whisper networks." According to McDermott (2017), whisper networks occur out of necessity when an environment is too toxic for the structured means of lodging complaints either within an organization (e.g., to human resources departments, to managers) or traditional societal structures (e.g., police reports, direct address) are not seen as available. Peterson goes further to describe whisper networks as a means for providing safety and survival. She espouses that many women do not see these rumors as mere gossip, but as dire warnings about which men ought to be treated with caution or avoided altogether.

Whisper networks are not confined to the entertainment industry. Creswell and Hsu (2017) described a whisper network shared between women in New York City's financial industry who warn each other about aggressive men at a variety of companies. Chance and Koseff (2017) reported that female staffers in congress have long shared rumors and first-hand reports of senators, congressmen, and senior aides who treat women to a variety of kinds of sexual harassment. Haritos (2018) reported that anonymous online postings share whisper network accusations of over a dozen unreported cases of rape in the last year. Jackson (2018) wrote that female students at Yale make use of social media and anonymous Google documents to share the names of male classmates who are known to have sexually assaulted or harassed women. Though whisper networks may exist in many contexts, this study is chiefly concerned with ones that exist among female actors. Because female actors exist in an intersection of vulnerable working conditions and working in an industry notorious for exploiting women, they may provide one of the best populations to study whisper networks more broadly. Though there is no documentation regarding the prevalence of whisper networks in one field compared to another, female actors as a population work in an industry with several of the hallmarks Shaw, Hegewisch, and Hess (2018) associated with greater risk for experiencing sexual harassment: a) working in an isolated context (Markus, 1979; O'Neill, 1983), b) working in a male-dominated job (Gilman, 2019), and c) working in a setting with significant power differentials (Farrow, 2018). Thus, they may gain particular advantage from whisper networks and be more likely to utilize them. This makes the population valuable for looking at whisper networks within their context, but also a possible source for whisper network information more generally.

Peterson's (2017) article represents what is likely the first journalistic use of the term "whisper network" and it would be nearly a year before it would appear in any scholarly literature, but that does not mean they are a new phenomenon. However, being newly named and identified makes them a ripe source to be studied. How are these networks formed? Who is invited to join? What kind of messages do they send? Do they exist in other contexts? Why do women feel compelled to share this information secretly rather than reporting the men? This study cannot answer all of these questions, but hopes to elucidate some of how they function in the context of female actors who wish to warn one another about men who may present a threat of committing sexual harassment or sexual assault. As such, examining the extant scholarly literature on whisper networks is necessary to understand the current knowledge and understanding of whisper networks.

2.7 Whisper Networks in Academic Literature

This literature review casts a broad net to capture all scholarly mentions of the term, "whisper network." Because of its recent entrance into the lexicon, it is possible to take a comprehensive account of all apparent uses of the term in peer-reviewed sources. Although there is no way to be sure I have covered every academic source, I have exhausted Google Scholar and the academic journal databases available to me as I scour them for uses of the term. There are some terms that seem related or even similar, and this section of the dissertation will first explore these related types of communication. Next, it is worth examining the existing uses of the term whisper networks in hopes of deducing whether they point to a definition of the term and which examples of whisper networks may be cited in recent research. This review will then look at examples of whisper networks mentioned in academic literature and conclude with a review of the

narrative paradigm and an explanation of how it will be employed in this research project.

2.8 Related Types of Communication

While the term "whisper network" appears to be more common to media commentators than scholars, there is relevant research on culture-specific gossip and grapevine communication. In some cases, individuals may casually use some of these terms interchangeably, but they are distinct from one another, and these distinctions are valuable to understand before delving into the subject of whisper networks. By understanding these terms more clearly, it can provide some insight into related forms of communication that may appear to function like whisper networks, but actually serve different purposes.

2.8.1 Gossip

Whisper networks function as a channel for the dissemination of gossip. Gossip can be defined as two parties sharing information about a third party who is not present (Foster, 2004). Dunbar (2004) argued that gossip is a fundamental aspect of human communication and relationship building and has its roots in the grooming habits of our primate ancestors. The relationship between gossip and women has been described by Jones (1980). She described it as the result of the shared experience of womanhood, and suggested that the way young girls develop their speaking abilities earlier and with more sophistication than young boys may lead to women's gossip being conducted with greater acumen than gossip shared with or among men. Gluckman (1963) found that gossiping about scandals in particular had cohesive results within small groups and served as beneficial to society in a broader sense.

Bosson, Johnson, Niederhoffer, and Swan (2006) found that sharing negative information about other people helped to create affinity between the parties. They theorized that the shared negative information created in-group/out-group boundaries where certain characteristics or behaviors were seen as belonging to others while giving the information sharers a greater sense of commonality. Many of the articles about whisper networks in mainstream journalism attribute the spread of rumors about men to be motivated by a woman's concern for the safety of another, but it may be motivated by its ability to form closeness, too. Colson (1953) also noticed the appeal of sharing gossip within an American Indian tribe as promoting a sense of togetherness within the tribe by establishing otherness when gossiping about those outside the tribe.

The source of the gossip can relate to its impact. Koidl and Mattews (2017) discovered that rumors spread over social media can have very differing effects, but the credibility of the rumor's author played a vital role. Even if the rumor did not result in serious consequences, the credibility of the author was carried over into the credibility of the message.

In some cases, gossip can be weaponized, such as the findings of Şantaş, Uğurluoğu, Őzer, and Demir (2018) who found that gossip was used to facilitate 31.1 percent of the workplace revenge observed between employees in healthcare environments. Sotirin and Gottfried (1999) found that female executive assistants shared gossip about other members of their organization in order to create grounds to shun, alienate, or punish them through the limited means at the disposal of these workers sitting on a very low rung of the corporate ladder. Much of the literature on gossip tends to use targets who are on the lower end of the power spectrum in the context of the shared

gossip. Because secretaries in a company (Sotirin & Gottfried), women in a business (Jones, 1980), or American Indians (Colson, 1953) being studied by missionaries do not generally have the same opportunities to advocate for themselves in the face of perceived injustices, they must seek other tools, and gossip appears to sometimes lead to retribution while also strengthening peer relationships.

2.8.2 Grapevine Communication

Much of the research surrounding gossip is done in the context of the workplace and is often referred to as grapevine communication. Grapevine communication or informal communication networks consist of messages shared between workplace colleagues outside of the formal communication structures of an organization (Hellweg, 1987). Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, and Labianca (2010) found that spreading gossip or engaging in more grapevine communication in the workplace increased the perceived informal influence an employee has over his colleagues within the organization. However, employers who perceived employees as spreading a greater amount of gossip, whether positive or negative, than other employees tended to look unfavorably upon those employees and see them as underperformers with the organization. Clegg and van Iterson (2009) described gossip in the workplace as kind of surveillance that allows those who share the gossip to have power over those about whom the gossip is shared.

The intent of gossip, whether to build closeness, titillate, or exact revenge, is distinct from a whisper network message's intent to warn. It is easy to imagine that some communications may be motivated by multiple intents and categorizing it as gossip or a whisper network message may not be a straightforward process. That being said, existing literature on gossip and grapevine communication does not deal with whisper networks in

a focused manner and research on these topics should not be viewed as equivalent to research on whisper networks. As the reader shall see, this distinction reveals an opportunity for researchers interested in the topic.

2.9 Scholarly References to Whisper Networks

Direct research on the phenomenon of whisper networks appears to be absent in academic literature. There are some passing mentions of whisper networks in scholarly literature, but there is no apparent consensus on a definition of the term, a taxonomy of the components of a whisper network, or any compilation of the contexts in which they may exist. The most commonly cited source of information on the topic of whisper networks in academic articles seems to be an article from *Newsweek* by Summer Meza (2017) aptly titled, "What is a whisper network?" Although writing for academic journals, Ackerly and True (2018), Germain, Robertson, and Minnis (2019), and Phipps (2019) all used Meza's article to either define or explain whisper networks. None of these articles focus on whisper networks and only mention them tangentially; however, they chose to use this article from popular journalism, rather than an academic source.

It may be worth noting that the term is used in some information technology literature as the term "whisper communication" and refers to a computer protocol used in some peer-to-peer networks (Abdulaziz, Çulha, & Yazici, 2018; Municio, Marquez-Barja, Latré, & Vissicchio, 2018). These networks are sometimes called "whisper networks", but they bear no relationship to the whisper networks on which this research will focus. Nonetheless, the recent adoption of this term in the information technology field may be evidence that the broader concept of a whisper network has begun to enter the larger cultural zeitgeist.

The remaining literature review attempts to catalog the relevant uses of the term in hopes of creating a useful definition of a whisper network that can be used in the present and future research. This will be done be comparing and critiquing extant definitions of the term and claims of specific instances of whisper networks that appear in peer reviewed literature.

2.10 Definitions of a Whisper Network

The most overt attempt at defining a whisper network comes from Hurren (2018), who created a glossary to provide language and awareness around issues related to sexual harassment among university faculty. Hurren defines a whisper network as:

> A form of social support that operates under the radar with the goal of thwarting further experiences of sexual harassment. It is a network of faculty who share information about colleagues and/or those with power-over who are known for sexual harassment in the workplace. (p. 634)

Hurren's (2018) definition is restrictive, while also being vague, but it does speak to the main points of a whisper network. Given the context of Hurren's glossary, it is fitting that she confined a whisper network to existing among faculty and dealing with matters of sexual harassment. However, whisper networks most certainly can exist outside of a university and the messages spread by them may describe behaviors that are both more and less aggressive than sexual harassment. A man may make women uncomfortable by his nature or behavior in a way that does not rise to the level of sexual harassment. On the other hand, whisper networks may pass along messages of a man who has committed an offense more heinous than harassment, such as rape. The severity of the behavior is not relevant to the network's goal of curtailing it in the future.

In addition to considering the content of messages in a whisper network, this definition also considers the nature of these communications. Hurren's (2018) use of the idiom "under the radar" is less than specific in describing the clandestine nature of a whisper network. She does not specify under whose radar they operate. Do they wish to exclude only the perpetrator and his allies? Do they wish to keep information away from civic or organizational structures of power, such as police or human resources departments? Does their level of secrecy sometimes exclude parties who could be vulnerable to the offending behavior? This colloquial description leaves the definition open to a great deal of speculation.

Losh (2018) did address the matter of exclusion. She noted that while whisper networks may be effective warning systems, they do not necessarily protect everyone. Anson (2019) also referred to the power of whisper networks but describes that power as occurring when members of the group break their silence and make the messages public. Although both of these writers make glancing mentions of whisper networks as being efficacious, they provide little evidence for their claims, and neither provides any definition of what they are.

One of the most succinct and useful definitions in academic literature may appear in Liu's (2018) quotation not of another academic source but of Tolentino's (2017) New Yorker piece that defines a whisper network as "the unofficial information channel that women use to warn each other about men whose sexual behavior falls on the spectrum from creepy to criminal" (p. 940). This definition, too, does not create a clear picture of the nature of the discretion employed by the networks. In fact, it does not even posit that the networks or their messages are withheld from anyone. Using this definition, open

communication through social media or other visible channels that exposes both men and accusers to the public might be considered a whisper network. In fact, whether public accusations of impropriety, such as the #metoo movement, #LoSHA, and the Shitty Men in Media list constitute their own whisper networks or whether they are public manifestations of whisper networks has been an issue on which writers express differing opinions (Donegan, 2018; Gajjala, 2018; Guerra, 2017; Roiphe, 2018). Sadly, these opinions have not led to any public debates that might result in a clearer consensus of the definition of a whisper network.

Furthermore, Rentschler (2018) referred to whisper networks as functioning "as informal feminist justice networks" (p. 505). This and the above definitions suggest whisper networks exist in the context of communication among women. There is every reason to believe that whisper networks may exist among any community which feels it cannot avail itself of formal systems of justice. However, like the aforementioned works, this research project will focus on whisper networks comprised of women actors that warn each other about men they may encounter in the workplace.

In order to evaluate whether these definitions of whisper networks are accurate, it is helpful to know the specifics of what is communicated in the messages. While some whisper network messages may detail sexual harassment or assault, some messages may be about events or behaviors that, while bothersome to the message-sender, do not rise to the level of sexual harassment. Other messages may be about subjects in an entirely different realm. Knowing exactly what is said in a whisper network message is critical to being able to accurately categorize these networks within the field of communication. Thus, the following research question is posed:

RQ1: What specific kinds of content are communicated in whisper network messages?

The answer to this question may help elucidate the intentions behind whisper networks to create a more research-based definition of the term. However, proceeding with research requires having an operating definition of some kind in order to proceed with this research. At a later time, the definition may be revised based on the outcomes of this study and the answers to the aforementioned question.

CHAPTER 3. CREATING A DEFINITION FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

Because the existing academic articles have not shown consensus around a definition of whisper networks that can be applied across contexts, it is useful at this point to develop one for the purposes of the present study. Although whisper network messages may be delivered along with grapevine communication and gossip, defining it as its own phenomenon is a vital step in being able to study it.

Based on the extant literature on whisper networks – academic and not – and results of this study's data, a general definition of a whisper network is of multiple messages exchanged covertly among some vulnerable group in order to warn one another about the conduct of those outside the group who might threaten their wellbeing in some form. Future studies may choose to limit this definition based on the scope of their research. The vulnerable groups may be limited based on a demographic quality such as race or gender or occupation or a more specific quality. The content of the messages and the nature of the threats may be specified further. The identities of the threatening parties may also be narrowed. This dissertation will use an operational definition of a whisper network as (a) multiple (b) messages (c) exchanged (d) covertly among a group of (e)

women in order to (f) warn one another about the (g) conduct of certain (h) men. Each of these eight objects that constitute the conception of a whisper network will be explored in greater detail below. Each of these facets is defined by my attempt to be consistent with definitions and examples from previously mentioned literature. Any literature that is not consistent with the object is mentioned.

3.1 (a) Multiple Messages

The number of messages delivered among members of the group is important for defining the phenomenon as a network rather than a conversation. When an individual sender's message to an individual recipient is not passed along to another person or has no possibility of doing so, the group is merely a dyad. While the kind of conversations where one woman will tell another about a man she knows who has done something he ought not have done doubtlessly take place and may serve important functions, they do not constitute a network of communication. A whisper network must include at least one message passed from a sender to multiple people or passed from a sender to a receiver who then sends it to a third party. A network must include more than two people, but it does not have to include a message of differing content. A woman who tells another woman a story she was told about a man is expanding the network even if she is trying to the best of her ability to maintain the fidelity of the original story.

Not all women in the network need to know one another or share messages with all members. Messages can be sent anonymously. A woman who receives a message unintentionally becomes a member of the network. Although she may be an end point on that network, she is still a node in that matrix. The sender does not need to receive any feedback from the receiver. A member of the network may act as a sender, a receiver, or

both at different times. Participants in a whisper network may share other information, but the whisper network refers only to the group in moments of sharing and acting upon whisper network messages.

3.2 (b) The Nature of Messages

A whisper network is based on the sharing of *whisper network messages*. For this definition of whisper networks, the message must be one of negative valence. A woman telling another that she went on a date with a coworker and had a positive experience and no workplace rules were violated does not constitute a message in a whisper network. There would be no reason to – metaphorically – whisper about this. These messages must describe unfavorable conduct of men as will be defined more thoroughly later. These messages could be a simple warning or an elaborate story. It could be a picture or text message evidencing abuse or hearsay from a party unknown to the receiver. The message may be incomplete, and it does not have to be factual.

The example of whisper networks mentioned by Harol and Zackodnik (2019) do not necessarily spread messages that are negative in valence. The graduate students who spread rumors about faculty prone to engage in consensual relationships do not necessarily view this behavior negatively.

3.3 (c) Channels of Communication

Whisper network messages can be sent through a variety of channels. Messages can be passed along verbally, through written channels, or through computer mediated channels. A network can consist of a variety of channels, and a single message can be relayed through multiple channels. A whisper network may also exist along a single

channel. Though no research has been conducted on the history of whisper networks, it is likely they have existed for generations if not centuries and existed in cultures with low literacy. In such cases, whisper networks would have existed solely along verbal channels, perhaps living up to their name.

3.4 (d) The Level of Secrecy

The covert nature of whisper networks is essential because the women believe it is inadvisable to share these messages openly. They may accept that the message becomes public, but the sender must remain anonymous. The reasons the sender and others in the network have for maintaining secrecy is irrelevant to being classified as a whisper network. Some women may fear retribution for spreading a whisper network message (Cortina & Magley, 2003). Others may predict not being believed. They may also not wish for the men to be subjected to social, reputational, professional, or legal consequences that may arise if the message becomes public (Engel, 2017). The actual need for secrecy could vary widely between senders and networks. It does not matter if someone spreading a message might or might not be subjected to retaliation if exposed; that the woman perceives there is risk is the salient issue. It is also immaterial how severe the consequences might be; that the woman perceives there could be any consequences is the relevant matter. Women in a whisper network may go to varying lengths to protect the covert nature of the network, but they may also simply have a tacit understanding that these kinds of messages are not to be shared freely or the original sender's identity should not be divulged.

Several writers have written about the phenomenon of whisper networks that have gone public (Gibson et al., 2019; Sarmah, 2019; Gajjala, 2018; Perez & Saldago, 2019;

Vemuri, 2018). In this case, the clear implication is that the whisper networks were at some point private, assuming private to be mutually exclusive from public. None of these authors suggest that these public online accounts of misconduct should continue to be classified as whisper networks.

3.5 (e) Women as Participants

For the purposes of the present study, women serve as the senders and receivers within a whisper network. This molecular fact, as Wittgenstein (1922) would describe it, may change in future research that studies networks that are similar in all other terms and purposes but exist among ethnically, racially, religiously, economically, ideologically, or otherwise bound groups who feel their lack of power prevents open discussion of abuse. Evolving perspectives on gender identity may also redefine this component of the definition. Some previously mentioned studies do mention whisper networks that may not be exclusive to women (Bardi, 2018; Harol & Zackodnik, 2019), but the term will be used in the context of groups exclusive to women in this study.

These networks among women exist because they tend to traffic messages about conduct towards women. If a boss is abusive to men and women in equal measure, stories of his behavior are likely to spread among both genders. Whisper networks are concerned with the conduct to which women, due to their comparative lack of power in many circumstances, are most vulnerable.

3.6 (f) Warning as Purpose

The whisper network messages must be sent with the primary intent to warn other women. It does not need to recommend a course of action, such as avoidance or caution.

However, it cannot be with the primary intent to gain closeness or create social alienation of other women in the way gossip sometimes operates (Sotirin & Gottfried,1999). It must not be shared chiefly to entertain or titillate. Those may all be results of the message being received, but it must act first and foremost as a warning to the receiver about the conduct of a man.

Once again, Harol and Zackodnik (2019) describe a whisper network whose purpose may or may not be to warn. Hurren (2018) describes the messages as being used to thwart future instances of sexual harassment. This may be by spreading warnings, but she does not specify the means.

3.7 (g) The Broadness of Conduct

Although Hurren (2018) explicitly mentions sexual harassment as the subject of whisper networks, this may be because the context of her definition is in a glossary of terms related to sexual harassment. Herbenick et al. (2019), Schlesselman-Tarango (2019), de Blasio & Malalis (2018), and Bardi (2018) also write about whisper networks that address sexual harassment. However, the whisper networks described by Miller (2018) and Malone Gonzalez (2019) also spread messages focused on sexual assault. Airey (2018) does not specify the kind of behavior whisper networks warn about except to say which men should be avoided. The broadness of this statement may be instructive. Just because a man does not have a history of engaging in sexual assault or sexual harassment does not mean that women in whisper network might not find something about him concerning. By suggesting avoidance of the man, it might be a way to imply, “I don’t know of anything wrong that he’s done in the past, but something about him makes me think he could sexually harass or sexually assault someone.” Thus, the study

chooses to use a broad term of conduct and defines using Tolentino's (2017) words: "sexual behavior [that] falls on the spectrum from creepy to criminal" (p. 940).

3.8 (h) Men as Subjects

Men are the subjects of whisper network messages because of the power differential with women in work, education, and many facets of society. Though women are certainly capable of sexually harassing other women, it is noteworthy that not a single example in academic literature or journalism refers to a whisper network that shares information about women. Communication of warnings about such events would be worthy of study but fall outside the definition created here.

Given that this study has defined whisper networks for the time being, specific examples of these networks can be explored. By considering these instances of whisper networks, it may be possible to examine not only the content of the messages but other components, too. In particular, this study is interested in who sends the messages and who receives them.

3.9 Examples of Whisper Networks

Several academic pieces describe the existence of whisper networks. However, this description is typically fleeting and leaves much to the imagination. Perhaps the participants in these groups wish to honor their clandestine nature by making only oblique references to their existence. To someone researching whisper networks, these mentions are both exciting in their validation that they do exist and frustrating in the lack of details usually provided.

One compelling occurrence in documenting the existence of specific networks is when writers mention their personal participation in one. In discussing sexual harassment among academics, Airey (2018) wrote, “like most women, I have been a part of the whisper network at conferences that circulate stories of men to avoid” (p. 8). No data or evidence was provided to support her assertion that “most women” have engaged with whisper networks at conferences, but her claim to have been involved in whisper networks at more than one conference also implied that they are not an unusual phenomenon. In a guest editorial, Herbenick et al. (2019) claimed that all six of the authors have at times participated in whisper networks to warn others about men who had a history of sexually harassing women.

Other academic works refer in passing to whisper networks occurring in several contexts and among several populations. Whisper networks are mentioned as occurring in communities where women may warn each other about police who abuse their positions of authority. Miller (2018) wrote about women in New York city warning one another about police who abuse stop and frisk policies and touch women in ways or places beyond what is necessary. Also related to police misconduct, Malone Gonzalez (2019) described whisper networks among young black women in the working-class and working-poor communities of a city in the southern region of the United States who may warn each other about police officers who may engage in sexual violence against women in the communities they patrol.

Other workplaces are noted as places where whisper networks are employed as a protection against misconduct. The NY Commission on Human Rights published a study that noted that short-term and temporary workers may use whisper networks as a means

of warning each other about sexual harassment because they do not trust or feel empowered to use the reporting mechanisms at the organizations at which they work (de Blasio & Malalis, 2018). Schlesselman-Tarango (2019) described whisper networks as being common and robust among librarians as a means of sharing information about male workers around whom women should be careful. She also expressed a belief that similar networks likely present in other professions dominated by women.

Beyond homogenous communities of women, some other groups are mentioned as having their own whisper networks. In Bardi's (2018) interview with Sincere Kirabo, he mentioned whisper networks being utilized by LGBTQ humanists who wish to warn each other about other members of the secular community who may engage in sexual misconduct. Harol and Zackodnik (2019) mentioned whisper networks existing among the graduate students they surveyed used to tell one another which faculty members like to engage in consensual sexual relationships with students. The authors of this study are unclear as to whether graduate students are warning one another about faculty who may wish to date students or spreading rumors for the sake of entertainment.

In these examples, the message content focuses on the misconduct of men. However, it is not always clear who was sharing these messages. Though the receiver is sometimes known, the sender is never identified, and the reason the receiver was selected as the recipient of the message is unclear. The receiver may fairly wonder why she was warned. She may wonder how many others were warned or whether others were chosen not to be warned about the misconduct. Thus, the following research question is proposed:

RQ2: What are the criteria for inclusion in or exclusion from a whisper network?

In all of these cases of whisper networks, the existence of the networks is presented as a fact, but no attention is given to the factual evaluations made by the members of the network. In the cases of the community-based or workplace-based networks, messages are presumably shared between people who know each other. However, the messages they share may be stories that are being spread from a different origin, someone the receiver may not know and whose credibility the receiver may be unable to access. In the case of whisper networks gone public, the receiver may have no direct contact with the sender, let alone the originator of the warning, and no ability to judge that person's credibility. The narrative paradigm provides a framework for examining these matters of story, credibility, and judgement.

CHAPTER 4. EVALUATING WHISPER NETWORKS THROUGH THE NARRATIVE PARADIGM

In evaluating and understanding whisper networks, it may be valuable to attempt to view them through a paradigm which might elucidate additional information or make some concepts easier to grasp. The narrative paradigm described by Fisher (1984) viewed humans as storytelling creatures. As such, decisions are reached by finding *good reasons* for doing something. These good reasons may be based on stories of history or biography or culture. When these stories resemble the lived experience of a person, he or she is more likely to accept those stories as providing good reasons for their decisions. Fisher believed that humanity is full of stories and individuals must choose which they accept and which they reject.

4.1 Elements of the Narrative Paradigm

The narrative paradigm contains several parts described by Fisher (1984) and some that have been added by other scholars which may be relevant to the present research.

4.1.1 Narrative rationality

Fisher (1984) distinguished narrative rationality from Aristotelian rationality. Narrative rationality finds reasons for making decisions based on stories as metaphor and analogy rather than taking a deductive view of the elements of a problem and weighing them against one another. It is also a means by which humans evaluate the stories they hear and decide which ones they believe are relevant to their experience and which are most likely to influence their future behavior. Fisher saw the two main contributors to this evaluation to be *coherence* and *fidelity*.

4.1.1.1 Narrative coherence.

When the events of a story flow together logically, it can be said to be narratively coherent (Fisher, 1984). Certain behaviors or events in a story may not appear logically consistent how behaviors or events take place in the real world, but when hearing stories, people are concerned with whether they are internally cohesive within the universe in which the story takes place. A story may take place in a universe with a logic that is different from the one we experience in our daily life, but it can still be coherent if the story abides by the rules it sets out for itself.

4.1.1.2 Narrative fidelity.

A story's resemblance to a person's experience with the world and view of reality is its narrative fidelity. A story should ring true with the stories from a person's past experience and the other stories he or she has accepted and used as part of shaping perspectives and values. Fisher (1984) believed that fidelity was evaluated on five criteria: 1) What are the values contained in the story? 2) How effectively does the story connect to those values? 3) What could happen to the people who espouse those values?

4) How aligned are the values of the story with the value of the person observing the story? 5) Are those values representative of the noblest values in human experience? Fisher believed that stories with high levels of coherence and fidelity were more likely to have greater influence over the individual.

4.1.1.3 Narrative emotion.

Deslandes (2005) added narrative emotion to Fisher's (1984) work by delineating the logical ways in which observers assess stories from the emotional responses they may feel when they observe them. The emotional reactions that result from the story are, Deslandes believed, fundamental to whether people accept that story and use it to conceptualize their emotional response to other parts of the world they may encounter in the future. Deslandes writing is theoretical and not based on research conducted by her or others. I have been unable to find examples of narrative emotion used in research and will not be applying it to the current research. However, I do wish to mention narrative emotion in the interest of providing a full picture of narrative theory.

4.1.1.4 Focalization.

The concept of focalization was added to the narrative paradigm by Holley and Colyar (2009). It refers to the perspective through which the story is told. This might be the actual writer or storyteller. A storyteller could also relay a narrative told through the eyes of another character. When the observer feels a part of herself reflected in the character whose story it is, the story has a high degree of focalization.

4.2 Uses of the Narrative Paradigm in Research

Several studies provide examples of how the narrative paradigm can be used to guide a research project such as this. Stutts and Barker (1999) used coherence and fidelity

to evaluate how brands will be received by consumers. Sloan (2015) analyzed the stories of entrepreneurship among acupuncturists and evaluated how those stories could use narrative rationality to inspire new acupuncturists to have greater confidence in their decisions to be small business owners. Lee and Leets (2002) found that online hate groups were more effective at crafting recruiting messages with strong narratives even if the messages of hate were more implicit than messages with explicit hate messages and weak narratives. McNamara (2014) created a strategy for using the narrative paradigm in military storytelling to enhance perceptions of the military. Glasser (2006) used the narrative paradigm to explain why some journalistic exposés were especially successful at drawing attention to wrongly accused prisoners. The journalists' ability to tell stories of guilt and innocence that created a strong sense of narrative coherence and fidelity were more likely to be compelled by the piece. Chen, Bell, and Taylor (2016) found that subjects were motivated by stories promoting healthy behaviors when the focalization was high.

All of these studies involve analysis of public stories. Fisher (1984) was chiefly concerned with public rhetoric. However, the stories told in whisper networks are private in nature. To be clear, neither Fisher nor any other scholar mentioned has argued that the narrative paradigm may only be used in evaluating public storytelling, but all of their work has existed in this realm. Of particular relevance to the present study, Sharf (2009) argued that the narrative paradigm can be used analyzing dyadic discourse. She examined interviews between medical providers and patients and looked for storytelling elements that emerged during these confidential conversations. Although the present study will not look for stories jointly created through discourse as Sharf has done, I am buoyed to know

that a previous scholar has employed the narrative paradigm to examine private interactions.

4.3 Using the Narrative Paradigm to Examine Stories Shared by Whisper Networks

A narrative paradigm is an appropriate lens with which to view the messages of a whisper network because they are almost certainly stories. A whisper network message, in order to be successful, should contain information of the male offender (character), the offending conduct (action), and the effect (reaction) on the victim (second character). Many whisper network messages are likely to include more complex elements of story, such as those described by Aristotle (1961): protagonist, antagonist, setting, crisis, and climax. These elements form not only a story but a plot, and a plot carries tension and drama that are compelling to an audience. Though whisper networks exist to spread warnings, the notion that these warnings could be carried within the structure of a story rife with tension and drama makes the messages all the more likely to spread. A mere warning to stay away from a man without details is unlikely to travel as far as a message that also piques the interest of the receiver. Adding a story to a warning is like the wings of Box Elder seed that allow it to catch the wind and travel farther faster than the acorn that simply falls to the ground.

4.3.1 Coherence

The present study seeks to examine how a receiver of a whisper network message assesses the coherence of the story told to her. The internal logic of a story is likely to play an important role in the credibility of the whisper network message to a receiver. A story that appears to contain internal inaccuracies or holes in the narrative structure may

not be deemed as truthful. Thus, the stories with less coherence may not be spread as thoroughly amongst a whisper network as those that maintain their coherence.

A challenge does occur with a larger network. As a message moves from one receiver to the next, it is likely to fall victim to the foibles of listening and human memory. Over time any story may change or lose details as it spreads from receiver to receiver. The loss or alteration of details may detract from the story's original coherence. The coherence of a message is not static but dynamic and constantly being scrutinized with each transmission.

4.3.2 Fidelity

The degree of fidelity a person finds in a whisper network message is likely to hold great sway over whether the receiver of the story chooses to spread the message herself or abide by its warning. The case of Bill Cosby (Giles & Jones, 2015) exhibits two ways in which the fidelity of a message can be questioned by a receiver.

First, the details of an act may seem too foreign to the lived experience of a receiver to be believed. That Cosby was luring women to apartments and hotel rooms, drugging them, and raping them is a monstrous reality. Before his behavior was public knowledge, it is easy to imagine a woman hearing a story about such an incident and finding it too far from her experience of reality to believe something that seemed like a horrific scene in a movie could have actually happened to a person she may know. If she had heard that it had happened several times to multiple women, it might make the story even less credible. Her perspective on reality may tell her that serial rapists are caught and go to jail, especially a public figure.

Second, the perceived character of the offending male could also conflict with the whisper network message. Cosby had a public persona as a man who cared deeply about African American youth and community. In his popular television show, he portrayed one of the most beloved fathers and husbands in American culture (Levin, 2018). To those who had never met the man, his outward character might appear to be unimpeachable. Women who were friends of Cosby's victims and were among the first to hear of his misdeeds were surely shocked by the accusations. How could one of the most important African American entertainers in history have behaved in such a dastardly way? Overcoming this cognitive dissonance was not easy for individuals just as it was not easy for the American public as a whole. To accept Cosby's guilt, our culture has had to cast a pall over everything from his stand-up comedy, his movies and television shows, his pudding commercials, and even his philanthropy. We now view those as the works of a bad man.

4.3.3 Focalization

When a woman hears a whisper network message, how does she relate to the teller or the victim of the story? It may be that the age, race, class, sexual orientation, profession, background, or other detail create a feeling of connection between the message receiver and the main character in the story. The present study seeks to understand whether a high degree of focalization makes a receiver more likely to believe the story and heed the warnings therein.

These components of narrative theory contribute to the observer's sense that a story is compelling. According to Fisher (1984), when an observer finds a story

compelling, he or she is likely to incorporate the values or lessons of the story into his or her future decision-making process. This poses two research questions:

RQ3: Which elements of whisper network messages contribute to the message receiver's senses of coherence, fidelity, and focalization?

RQ4: How do elements of narrative theory (i.e., coherence, fidelity, focalization) impact a whisper network message receiver's decision to heed the message's warning?

CHAPTER 5. METHODS

The following sections will detail how the author gathered and analyzed data. An overview of the design will be presented followed by further details on the population sample, measurements, and the process for analyzing the data.

5.1 Overview of Design

5.1.1 Interviews

A series of interviews were conducted using a snowball method of sampling. Interviews were conducted by a group of four women who have either worked as actors themselves or are particularly familiar with the profession. These interviewers are women with graduate degrees in theatre and experience working in academic theatre. Academics were targeted to work on this study in hopes they would have an understanding of the scholarly rigor required of interviewers in such a project. I also speculated that academics – especially professors yet to receive tenure – would feel incentivized to participate in such work. I have offered to collaborate with them on any future publications that may arise from this study.

A sample of between 20-30 women was initially targeted, but interviewers proved even more ambitious in their recruitment. Although participants were not paid for their

time, interviewers were reimbursed on a per interview basis. Several interviewers found that many women were enthusiastic to participate in these interviews upon learning the topic. I had a modest personal budget that allowed me to offer $40 per interview while still allowing room for the purchase of audio recorders to be sent to interviewers and the latest version of NVIVO to be purchased. I trained all interviewers in interview technique. These trainings were conducted via video conferencing platforms or telephone to accommodate for the distance between us and public health recommendations regarding social distancing. This was also helpful in recreating the circumstances that they encountered, as all but two interviews were conducted remotely (two interviews were conducted in person at an outdoor location). While learning interview techniques was important, it was equally crucial that all interviewers have a chance to practice with and become confident in their ability to use the technology that was used to gather data in this study.

All identifying information about the interview subjects was withheld from me. Participants were furnished with a list of legal and mental health resources should anything have arisen during the interview that may have compelled a participant to seek follow up assistance (Appendix 5). Audio recordings of the interviews were made and submitted digitally to me with no identifying information.

In the event that subjects mentioned or gave identifying information about any individuals, that information was removed from the audio file by the interviewer. This only occurred once. The interviewer noted that a name was used and cut the name from the digital file before sending it to me. Some of the subjects of these interviews have worked in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Dallas and

mentioned the names of men who have been publicly accused of sexual harassment or sexual assault. With one exception, I have chosen not to include any of those names in this dissertation. Frankly, those quotations were not relevant to this study.

A few participants do mention Harvey Weinstein, and I have included those quotes in this dissertation. His misconduct has been thoroughly documented in the media, and his deeds have been adjudicated in court. As of this writing, he is incarcerated (Mohr, 2020) and awaits further criminal (Levin, 2020) and civil (Chan, 2020) trials. His infamy has made him the prime example of a sexual harasser and abuser of power in the entertainment industry among the interview participants. Due to his notoriety, any attempts to obscure his identity from interview quotations by using a pseudonym would be thwarted by the context of the quotations and appear, I believe, silly.

5.1.2 Coding

Audio transcript files were coded directly and selectively transcribed as needed. When Wainwright and Russell (2010) conducted interviews with chronic constipation patients, they believed that the sensitivity of the subject matter made outsourcing transcription to a third party inappropriate. They also felt the nature of the data they gathered did not lend itself to be transcribed by members of the research team. Instead, they chose to code audio files directly using the qualitative analysis software NVIVO8 which has features designed to do exactly that. However, Zamawe (2015) noted that Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) products do not perform qualitative analysis, rather they assist in managing the data for the researcher during analysis. He found that when using the software (NVIVO9) to assist in re-analyzing audio data previously coded on transcripts, he was able to be more efficient

and query data with greater accuracy. Rosensteel (2016) noted that learning to use her CAQDAS – NVIVO10 in her case – added some additional challenge, but she asserted that the efficiency and accuracy it added to her analysis of the interviews she conducted far outweighed this hurdle. In my case, I had already used NVIVO12 in a pilot study I conducted for this dissertation and availed myself of several online learning modules to ensure my proficiency and confidence in employing the program towards my analysis.

NVIVO12 allows for sections of an audio file to be highlighted. These sections can then be added to certain nodes. A node may be labeled in any way and may be a theme or a part of a theme or not related to themes at all. The program keeps a count of audio selections assigned to each node. Selections can then have additional information pinned to them, such as notes or transcriptions. Once I added all audio selections to the nodes, I reevaluated the nodes. Some were omitted. Others were consolidated and others were split into small categories. The organizational capability of a CAQDAS was helpful as I began a thematic analysis.

5.1.3 Thematic analysis

For this project, I made use of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step process for thematic analyses which includes: 1) familiarizing yourself with the data, 2) generating initial codes, 3) searching for themes, 4) reviewing themes, 5) defining and naming themes, and 6) producing the report. This is a deductive theoretical thematic analysis and patterns were sought related to the research questions posed above. In particular, themes involving content (RQ1), inclusion & exclusion (RQ2), narrative elements (RQ3), and narrative rationality (RQ4) were identified. In essence, I was chiefly interested in how the interview subjects describe what is in the messages shared in whisper networks, with

whom it shared, and how do the elements of the stories told in these messages influence how they think about the messages.

5.2 Participant Sample

This research project focused specifically on the population of women working as professional and community actors in the United States – although some acted abroad in addition to their work in the United States – and their experiences with whisper networks. Interviewers were selected based on their close association with the population. In some cases, they have worked alongside actors on theatrical productions. In other cases, they are or were actors, themselves. Interviewers recruited participants using a snowball sampling method. They were encouraged to first reach out to individuals they know and to ask those participants to recommend potential interviewees.

All interviewers currently live in different regions of the country and were encouraged to find participants of varying levels of experience and histories working in various locations within the United States in order to gain a requisite variety of samples. The life of a professional actor involves working in intense rehearsal and production schedules and often forging fast personal bonds. Many actors frequently travel to work in other areas when opportunities present themselves. Just as different communities across the country have different cultural traits, acting communities within those cultures may be similarly diverse in behaviors and values. Casting a wide net among this group helped to identify commonalities across cultures.

5.2.1 Psychological safety

Although participants were not sought out on the basis of whether they have themselves been the victim of sexual harassment or workplace sexual assault, it was

possible that such events may come up during the course of rehearsals. Even if they are not related to the context of the individual's work in the theatre, discussing these subjects may have triggered memories of her exposure to sexual trauma at other points in her life. I had no intention of re-traumatizing anyone in the course of conducting this research, and this project employed several steps to help provide psychological safety for all research subjects. This process included: 1) informing subjects about the nature of the interviews when they are approached, 2) a thorough pre-briefing prior to the interview, 3) observing best practices related to consent throughout the interview process, and 4) providing resources to participants at the conclusion of the interview.

5.2.1.1 Informed approach.

When approached by the interviewers for participation in this study, all potential subjects were furnished with a brief description of the study's goals and some detailed information about the subject matter of the interviews (Appendix 1). The goal of this document was to ensure that all subjects were well-informed as to the nature of these interviews so that if anyone feared she may be confronted with traumatic events from her past that she would prefer not to discuss, she may choose not to participate in this study. The document also provided an opportunity to clarify that subjects are not being sought on the basis of having been victimized by a perpetrator of sexual misconduct, but with the expectation that they may have shared messages about perpetrators or suspected perpetrators.

5.2.1.2 Thorough pre-brief.

Interviewers read a pre-briefing to every participant at the beginning of the interview (Appendix 2). This statement summarized what to expect in the interview (e.g.,

outline of question topics, approximate length of time, etc.), explained the goals of conducting the interview, described the process for protecting the confidentiality of the participants, and warned the participants that topics of sexual harassment and sexual assault may arise during the interview. The individuals were urged to only relay information or events they felt comfortable discussing. Interviewers also described the concept of consent and introduced an activity they did before beginning the interview.

5.2.1.3 Consent.

The topic of consent was raised as a touchpoint for how these interviews were conducted. This was primarily to create an atmosphere of psychological safety by introducing this concept that gives the participant agency and control throughout the interview. It also aimed to situate the interviewer – and by extension, the research project – away from the perpetrators who may be discussed in the interviews. This project did not take a neutral view of sexual misconduct and unashamedly sides with victims and potential victims of any unwanted sexual behavior. I wished for interview participants to see that this project is aligned with whisper networks in their goal to curb instances of sexual harassment and workplace sexual assault. These acts involve a lack of consent, and interviewers attempted to demonstrate that they stand in opposition to this behavior by championing consent. I hope this facilitated trust between the participants and the interviewers and led to more candid, open data and reduced the risk of making these interviews traumatizing.

Intimacy Directors International is an organization that trains and certifies individuals to act as intimacy directors and coordinators in theatre, film, and television. These intimacy specialists are brought into rehearsal and production when scenes call for

a portrayal sex, nudity, sexual trauma, or a high level of emotional intimacy. They ensure the physical and psychological safety of all cast and crew members present by establishing rules for professional behavior. The use of intimacy directors was not common practice a few decades ago, but they are becoming increasingly common in recent years (Appendix 7). Intimacy Directors International places a high premium on consent during the rehearsal process. One of the activities they employ involves allowing participants to practice saying "no". This exercise was adapted for this project's interviews. I hoped that by using an exercise designed for theatre practitioners, it would feel familiar and comfortable to the subjects. Some subjects may have even encountered it during their own work with intimacy directors.

The activity began with the interviewer explaining that participants are encouraged to say "no" to any portion of the interview they choose. The interviewer stressed that the individual always has authority to give or deny consent. However, the interviewer also acknowledged that in many cases, it can be challenging to say no and that people can benefit from practicing saying, "no", in order to experience it in the present context with the relevant personnel (i.e. the interviewer) and make the act of denying consent feel more acceptable. Participants were then instructed to practice refusing to answer at least two of a series of five mock questions. This allowed the individual the opportunity to practice denying and providing consent and making choices about when she wishes to choose one avenue or the other. Although this exercise may have seemed overly cautious or sensitive to some participants, it reinforced the premium this study and its interviewers place on the concept of consent. Several participants mentioned the exercise in their interviews and remarked that they liked doing it.

5.2.1.4 List of resources.

At the conclusion of the interview, the interviewer emailed the participant a list of contact information for various resources (Appendix 5). The contacts included resources related to law enforcement, coping with sexual assault, mental health issues, and issues of trauma. The list of resources was developed from resources provided by the University of Kentucky's Violence Intervention and Prevention Center and provides contact information for several nationwide groups.

5.3 Measures for Obtaining Data

For this study, participants were asked to disclose information that by its nature was kept from public discussion in the past and may still be known to a select group of people. The usefulness of this study relies in large part on the participants' sense of safety and willingness to be honest. It may also be the case that they feel comfortable being candid given the current post-#metoo social climate; however, I did not assume this is the case. It was my hope that the interviewers were able to establish trust quickly with the participants because of their common professional history and their personal ties. By establishing trust and rapport, the interviewees would be more likely to discuss these formerly secretive topics. They may also have felt more comfortable speaking freely because of the confidentiality I assured them. Their identities were known only to the interviewer and would never be revealed to me.

This study was approved by the University Kentucky's Office of Research Integrity. I followed all directions from the institutional review board (IRB). All interviewers submitted appropriate affiliate paperwork because they were associated with other institutions. They also demonstrated their completion of an approved human

subjects research course. When recruiting participants, the interviewers followed all IRB guidelines including not making cold calls. During the interview process, participants were read and given a detailed consent form, and interviewers followed the interview protocol approved by the IRB. This interview protocol also employed the principles of funneling, reciprocity, and jargon to further encourage openness from the subjects.

5.3.1 Funneling

To foster greater openness over the course of the interview, questions (Appendix 2 & 4) were asked in a funneling method whereby questions gradually become more personal and probing over the course of the protocol. The interviewer began by asking some basic information about the participants, such as how long they have been acting and in which cities and communities they have spent the most time acting. Participants were asked to describe and give their impressions of the theatre communities and theatre companies in those areas. This should have encompassed both the broader community of actors and the organizations for whom they may work. Interviewers then asked individuals questions related to whisper network communications they may have received, and finally, questions about any whisper network messages the participants may have initiated.

5.3.2 Reciprocity

This interview made use of reciprocity as a strategy for encouraging disclosure from individuals. The interview protocol (Appendix 2) listed several opportunities for the interviewer to tell stories of their own experiences in theatre communities or with whisper networks. By demonstrating their willingness to divulge a personal story, the interviewer may set a tone of candor and frankness. The subject may have felt the

environment was one where such stories can safely be told. She may also have felt compelled to share her own story out of a desire to provide reciprocity. The mild social pressure the participant felt to offer a disclosure of a similar nature may have overcame some reluctance on her part to breach what were previously understood to be boundaries of confidentiality.

The stories may have also served to trigger memories on the part of individuals. These interviewers were asking questions that relate to the entire professional life of the interviewees, which may stretch years or decades into the past. Simply asking questions in the abstract may not have been sufficient to stimulate the participants' memories regarding conversations or meetings in their past that may have been long ago, brief in duration, unremarkable at the time, or otherwise difficult to remember. Hearing related stories from the interviewer may have assisted the interviewee in recalling specific information related to her experience with whisper networks. Similarly, the document the participants received when approached to participate (Appendix 1) may have also turned their thoughts towards past experiences, so that they may enter the interview with some memories already in mind.

5.3.3 Theatre jargon

The protocol was written with theatre practitioners in mind and makes use of theatre jargon to establish a familiar language between the interviewer and the subject. The formatting of the protocol uses some syntactical techniques also used in play scripts in order to communicate ideas to interviewers using a shared system of writing. The jargon is defined in the annotated interview protocol (Appendix 4) for the benefit of the layperson. Interviewers were also encouraged to adjust protocol language (subject to my

approval) to match their own preferred vocabulary. The responses of the subjects also contained jargon, slang, and other language specific to the theatre world. My personal decades of experience in professional, community, children's, and academic theatre assisted me as I began the process of analyzing the data.

5.3.4 Sociolinguistic Considerations

It is valuable to recognize that there was some relationship between whisper networks and the interviews themselves. The interviewers employed for this research were chosen because of their closeness to the acting community and a belief that such closeness would garner greater candor and trust from the participants. However, this closeness may have also made the data slightly more challenging to analyze. Both the interviewers and participants could be considered to be in the same *community of practice* (Eckert, 2006). Eckert notes that *communities of practice* often share certain linguistic practices as a functional matter.

As noted above, they often use theatre jargon when speaking to one another. However, other linguistic cues exist as well. The theatre industry is one where all participants, but especially actors, have a strong disincentive to criticize directors and others in positions of power. Should word of their complaints reach the director in question, the actor might expect to never be cast by that director. Should other directors learn of the actor's critiques, they may choose not to cast the actor for fear of being the subject of the actor's future complaints. The interviews were peppered with overly diplomatic descriptions of directors, seemingly out of habit, while also detailing that same director's misconduct. When actors seemed reticent to be too critical of a director, the interviewers were often quick to provide vocal cues indicating they understood what

the participants intended to say and why they were reluctant to fully articulate their thoughts in a frank way.

Had the participants been speaking with interviewers who were not part of their *community of practice*, these interviews may have sounded notably different. It should be assumed that these actors were exercising *audience design* in their interviews. Bell (1984) describes audience design as the practice by which speakers tailor their speech chiefly based on the audience to whom they are speaking. In this case, the primary audience was the interviewers who are in a shared *community of practice*, but the secondary audience is outside of that community, namely, me. The interviewers could be part of the same group of women with whom they are in whisper networks. Indeed, these interviews may not be only about whisper networks, but they could also constitute whisper network communications themselves. Participants were encouraged to share stories of their personal experiences and stories from their own whisper network experiences. Although they were instructed at the beginning of the interview not to use actual names, many interviewers told me that after the interview's conclusion, the participants would frequently confide the actual identities of their stories to the interviewers.

Participants knew that I would be analyzing the data later and did not speak as frequently as they probably would have if the interviewers had been the only audience. However, the interviews did occasionally blur the lines between discussions of a whisper network and two individuals participating in a whisper network themselves. Keeping this in mind and occasionally having to parse out the difference between the two types of conversation would be an important part of analyzing the data.

5.4 Data and Analysis

In the tradition of Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, and Steinmetz (1991) who asserted that "the language of positivistic research is not congruent with or adequate to qualitative work" (p. 95), I considered not the *validity* or *reliability* of my research design so much as its *trustworthiness,* to borrow a term from Lincoln and Guba (1985). Lincoln and Guba believed that trustworthiness is established by demonstrating *credibility*, *authenticity*, *transferability*, and *dependability* in the course of seeking, gathering, and analyzing data. Credibility is derived from the researcher's level of exposure to the field. Thick description is necessary to ensure that findings are transferable between the research and subjects and that those findings are represented authentically. A researcher should also conduct a thorough personal inventory and audit of his or her work in order to demonstrate dependability.

5.4.1 Credibility

In considering my credibility with regards to the interview process, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that one way a researcher earns credibility is through prolonged engagement in the field. I have participated in theatre as an actor, director, and fight choreographer since adolescence and hold a terminal degree in the subject. I have worked on a few dozen plays, films, and music videos and developed personal and professional relationships with many theatre practitioners. Though it was never my primary source of income, I have an understanding of how the industry functions. I am familiar with its culture, customs, and language. Most of the last twenty-five years of my life has been spent "in the field" or adjacent to it.

However, in my case, the duration of time spent with people like my subjects might never produce the level of trust and rapport needed to make the data seem credible.

As a cis-gendered, heterosexual man, I may too closely resemble the men who are often subjects of whisper networks. Were I to have conducted the interviews myself, a reader would be rightly skeptical that the subjects felt fully empowered to be candid in their responses. The interviewers I selected were not only women, but actors and other theatre practitioners who have spent several years, if not decades, working in the professional, community, and academic theatre worlds. These interviewers also recruited the subjects. Thus, subjects and interviewers were already acquaintances or acquaintances-of-acquaintances. My hope was to further increase the subjects' feeling of safety and comfort by maintaining their confidentiality not only from readers of this dissertation, but from myself.

Although my credibility lends itself to understand the professional context in which these whisper networks exist, I do not believe I have the credibility to gather valuable data myself. Once the data had been gathered, my experience proved valuable to understanding the context of the interviews. Because these were conversations between two theatre people, I expected the language to be full of slang, jargon, and idioms, as well as cultural benchmarks that might be misinterpreted or lost on someone without a background in theatre.

5.4.2 Dependability

In considering my dependability regarding data analysis, coding written transcripts is a process with which I have very little experience. However, in my previous career as director of the Virginia Commonwealth University's Standardized Patient Program, I spent much of my seven and half year tenure viewing and assessing simulated interactions between standardized patients (also known as simulated patients or patient

actors) and healthcare providers or students. It is impossible to know how many partial or complete simulations I observed, but the number is easily in the thousands. I observed some of these conversations while sitting in the same room as the participants, but in most cases, I watched on video monitors either simultaneously or afterwards. When watching these videos, I was often tasked with assessing students and providers on a wide range of skills and competencies and assessing the standardization, accuracy, acting ability, and professionalism of the standardized patients. Over my years of watching these interactions, I believe I have become very sensitive to the interactions that can occur during these dyads and can articulate the nuances I observe in these complex interactions with some level of expertise.

In spite of the great benefits provided by video recording conversations, I did not believe this was a feasible course of action for this project. Observing body language and facial expressions can be very instructive, but for three reasons, I did not use them to record these interviews. First, it was logistically impractical. Several interviewers in different parts of the country were conducting interviews simultaneously, and the modest funding assigned to this project would not permit the purchase of several video cameras. Recording video calls and storing and sharing these large files would have required the purchase of additional secure file transfer protocol (SFTP) program memberships for all interviewers. Second, several interviews were conducted via telephone. This permitted interviewers to contact subjects who lacked access to video conferencing to gather data from a wider array of actors. However, if video recordings had been required, such interviews might not have occurred. Third, video recording the interviews might have threatened the promise of confidentiality I wished to offer the interview subjects. Any

video that would provide the quality necessary to scrutinize facial expressions would have provided sufficient detail for me to identify the subject if I knew her. An audio recording might reveal a person's identity, but in most cases, it offers a promise of far more privacy than video. One participant did request to have her voice digitally altered on her recording.

5.4.3 Authenticity and transferability

Coding the audio files directly allowed for more increased authenticity in the representation of the data and more reliable transference of the data between the source, and me, the coder. Although the interviews in the present research study are not unstructured conversations, it was my hope that interviewers and subjects would approach one another as peers and colleagues. The interviewers were encouraged to share their own experiences and recollections in the service of developing rapport with the subjects. To create an environment where subjects feel comfortable revealing the content of whisper network messages, these semi-structured interviews may have been more successful by being less structured than many traditional interviews.

Using CAQDAS software to code audio files of the interviews preserved the authenticity of nuanced and sophisticated interactions between the interviewers and their subjects. Melander, Sävenstedt, Olsson, and Wälivaara (2018) found that coding recordings of interactions between nurses and patients during assessments for dementia allowed them to "reduce the risk of neglecting important aspects of naturally occurring speech when transcribing" (p. 583). While gathering the narrative accounts of patients in Sierra Leone's heath sector, Pieterese (2016) found that using NVIVO10 to code audio files directly allowed him consider in his analysis "the ambient noises, the pauses and the

silences as much as the words that were spoken" (p. 105). Collyer, Bourke, and Temple-Smith (2018) used CAQDAS to code the audio files of their interviews directly because they believed it would "reduce the number of interpretive stages" (p. 377). Similarly, Antonucci (2016) found that coding audio of her interviews allowed her to be "'sensorially closer' to the data" (p. 29). She also found the process to be faster and more efficient than coding transcripts. This is an important consideration in my case since finding other individuals with my credibility would have been too difficult to make using multiple coders a practical consideration. The use of multiple coders as a means of demonstrating validity would not be a requirement according to Wolcott (1990), who asserted that validity is concerned with persuading other scholars rather than understanding a population or phenomenon. To be certain, this endeavor is one that seeks to understand a phenomenon through the interpretation of rich data. The goal of this study is not to make a persuasive case about nature of whisper networks in a general sense. I do not wish to demonstrate that whisper networks behave in a certain predictable fashion. This project's analysis is aimed at describing in detail how the whisper networks encountered by this study's participants function and what they seek to accomplish.

CHAPTER 6. ANALYSIS

The data collected for this project consists of 36 interviews conducted by four different interviewers. Interviews ranged from 15 minutes to 112 minutes, but most were between 25 and 40 minutes ($\bar{x}$ = 31:12). The participants ranged in age from 29 to 65, but most were in their mid-30s ($\bar{x}$ = 33.5). Two participants identified themselves as Black, three identified as Latina, one identified as multiracial, one identified as White and Indigenous, one identified as Asian, and the other 28 identified themselves as White.

Although participants were not required to provide a detailed accounting of their professional work, there are several facts that can be gleaned from the interviews that paint a portrait of these women's lives as actors. Many participants continued to work as actors while some others had shifted their careers towards teaching, directing, administrating, or working in a field outside of theatre. The participants' acting work has been featured in community, small professional, regional, off-Broadway, and Broadway theaters. Between them, they mentioned working in states including New York, Texas, Georgia, Illinois, Missouri, South Dakota, California, Utah, Florida, Oregon, Washington, Virginia, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Wisconsin to name a few. Although the demographics and work experience of this sample may not exactly mirror the acting industry in the United States, portions of most population segments are reflected in this sample.

This section will explain the process of coding these interviews and reveal the most relevant findings from the interviews. In describing these findings, I will also identify salient themes that emerged during the analysis of the gathered data. Commentary around the themes and their relationships to this study's research question will be discussed in the subsequent chapter.

6.1 Initial Interaction with the Data and the Coding Process

Before coding any interviews, I listened to each recording in its entirety. My intent was to get a sense for the broad perspectives, attitudes, and whisper-network-related thoughts of each participant. In some cases, the participant was barely aware of her participation in a whisper network or saw those communications as merely gossip. In other cases, a participant saw herself as using whisper networks in a way that provided

her and her fellow women with protection and agency. Some participants seemed to approach these interviews with a degree of skepticism towards the usefulness of such a study. Others expressed open gratitude that this research was taking place. Some participants tended to go on tangents mid-sentence or use lots of sarcasm or use accents and character voices when recounting the words of others. I noted these characteristics and idiosyncrasies in their files and referred to them throughout coding and transcription. These over-arching attitudes and perspectives provided important context as I began to code sections of the recordings and later transcribe those sections.

During the transcription process, I found that certain passages benefitted from some editorial comments on my part. I wanted to convey nuances and emotional content that could not be communicated by reading the words they used alone. Actors are trained to express their intentions not only with their vocabulary, but with every physical and vocal tool at their disposal, and the participants in this study frequently made use of these skills during their interviews. The subject matter of these interviews excited and frustrated many of the participants. Many of them were very emotional and animated throughout their interviews. Merely printing a transcription of the words used would deprive the reader of the excitement and full emotional weight of these interviews.

To best represent the full intentions of their interviews, I have made notes in the exemplars below. In tribute to the theatrical convention used for more than a century in many published scripts, I have made my comments in italics within brackets. In theatrical scripts, these kinds of notes often give direction to an actor regarding how a line should be read. In this dissertation, the notes detail how the words were said or what additional meaning they might have carried. A statement of emotion such as "[*angry*]" is meant to

indicate that the following clause was said in anger. I have made every effort not to speculate beyond what appears to have been obviously implied by the interview participants when including these notes in my quotations.

I have also used these notes to occasionally indicate a physical movement or gesture made by the participant. Although I could not see the gesture, myself, I made note of it when it was made apparent by silence in the recording, the reaction of the interviewer, or other context clues in the recording. When the actual gesture or motion was not clear, I have made note of what I believe the intent of the gesture to be.

6.1.1 First Level of Coding

After familiarizing myself with the overall tone and substance of each interview, I began to code sections of the interview participants' responses. In the first level of coding, I attempted to catalog the participants' responses to the questions they were directly asked. Several of the questions towards the beginning of the interview were intended to allow the participants to discuss their professional background as a means of making them more comfortable with the interview process. Although very little of the data from these questions related to this study's research goals, the participants' responses provided context for their perspectives and a clearer picture of this study's sample.

At the conclusion of this first round of coding, I had a comprehensively documented and segmented all the participants' answers to the interview questions. Using the interface from the CAQDAS NVIVO12, I was then able to search for excerpts by interview question within the audio files. This process also provided increased familiarity

with the data. I was beginning to notice themes amidst the data based on frequent occurrences of topics and compelling responses of the participants.

6.1.2 Second Level of Coding

For the second level of coding, I reexamined the data and coded for themes within the interviews that would be relevant to the research questions. In some cases, those themes were suggested by the research questions themselves. For example, RQ3 asks about elements of narrative rationality; thus, it is practical to expect that those elements, coherence, fidelity, and focalization, would each be a useful theme. On the other hand, the data indicated that other elements of narrative rationality were also at play that were not typically mentioned by narrative theorists. Those elements also became themes in this second round of coding.

6.1.3 Third Level of Coding

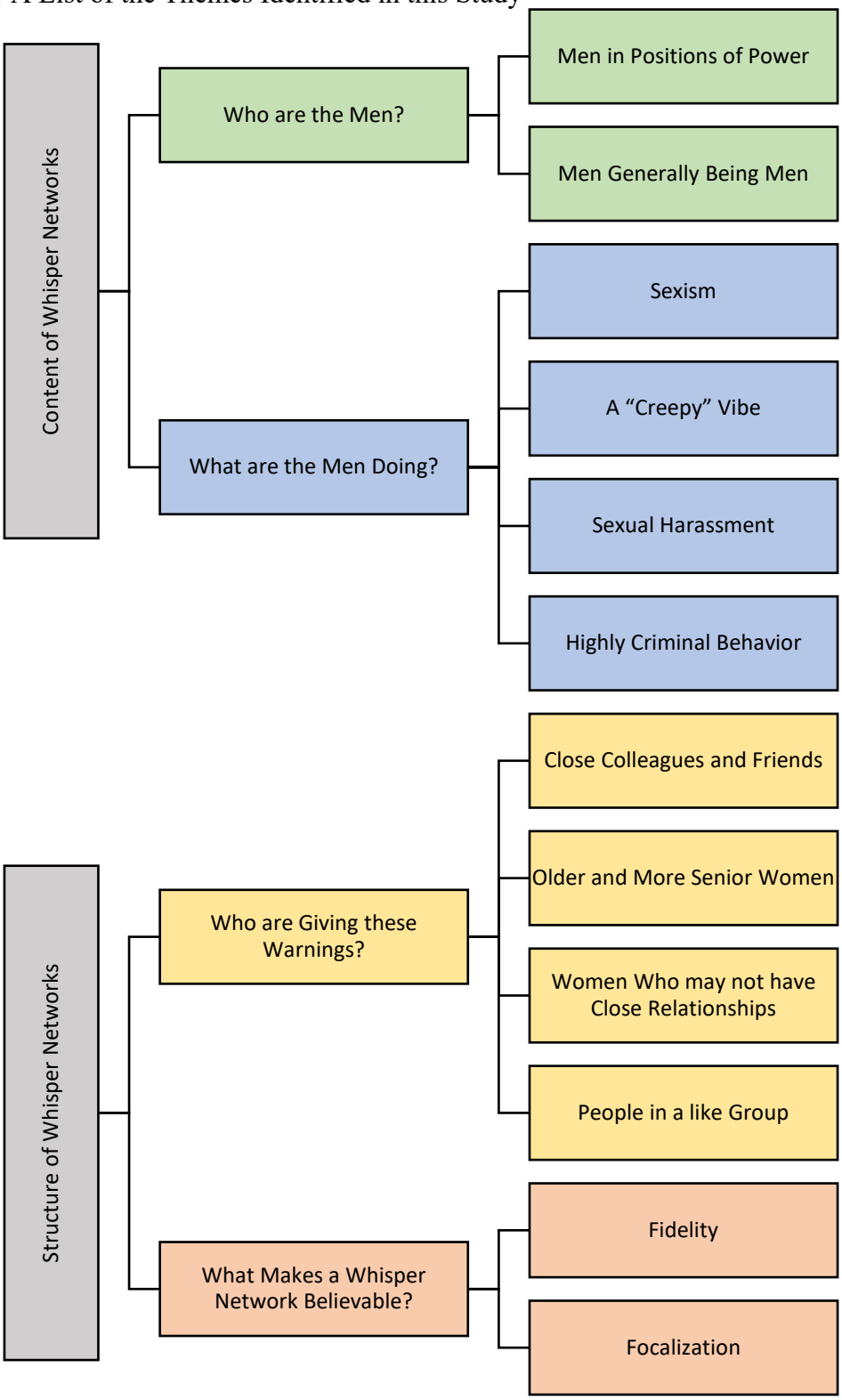
After directly addressing the interview questions in the first round of coding and the research questions in the second round of coding, I coded the data a third and final time in search of themes that were overlooked previously. Some of those themes have provided additional insight to this study's research questions. Other themes illuminated the limitations of this study. While some of the remaining themes may have been less relevant to the present study, they may point towards other avenues for future research or policy recommendations.

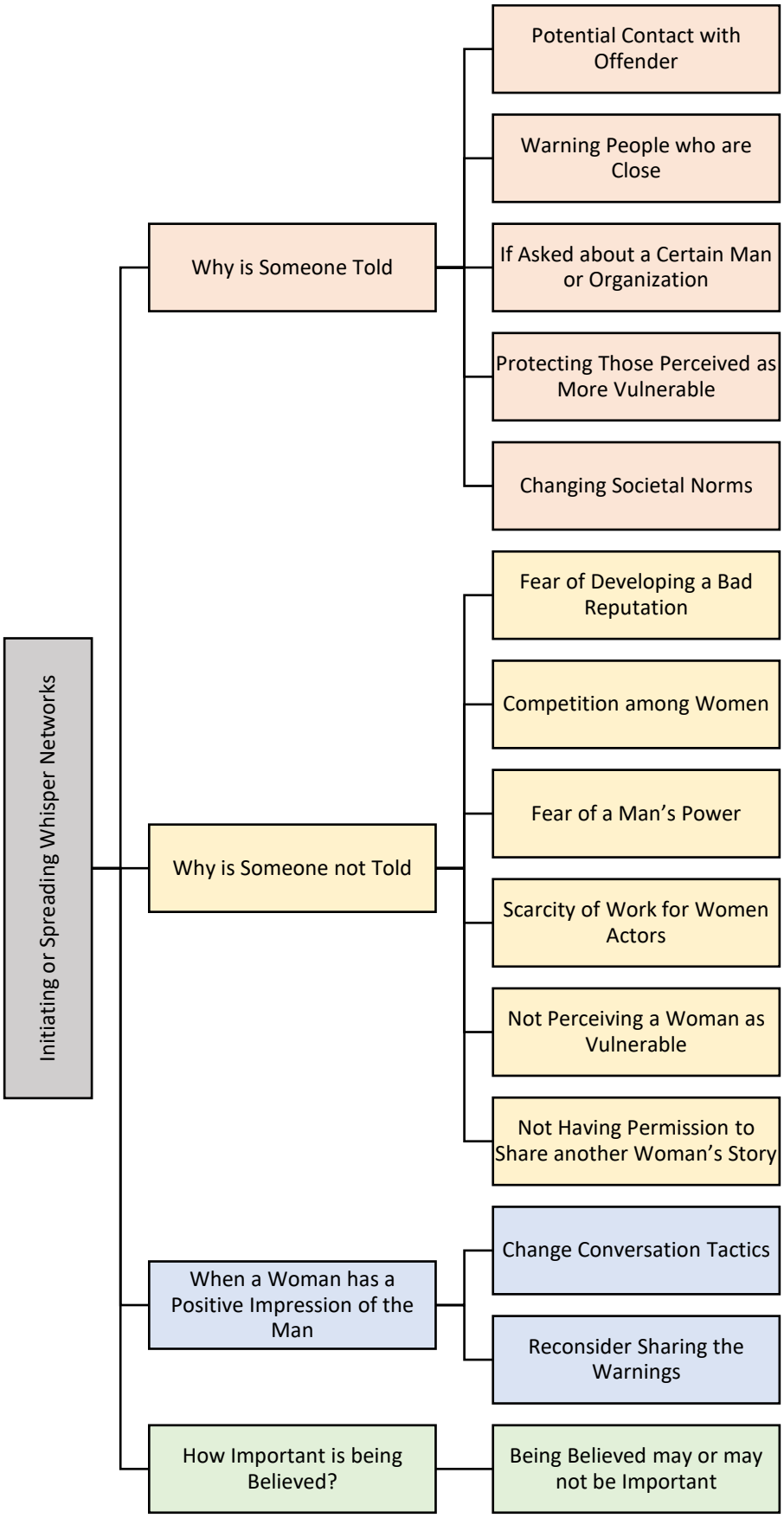
6.2 Findings

The following section will list the relevant themes found in the data. I initially named several dozen themes that were used for coding nodes in the coding software, but I chose to consolidate some of those themes after finding redundancies and similarities

between some of these initial themes. Figure 1 contains a concise list of the themes mentioned in this section and is repeated in Appendix 6. The remainder of this chapter will cover these themes in this order.

Figure 1 A List of the Themes Identified in this Study




Initiating or Spreading Whisper Networks
Why is Someone Told
Potential Contact with Offender
Warning People who are Close
If Asked about a Certain Man or Organization
Protecting Those Perceived as More Vulnerable
Changing Societal Norms
Why is Someone not Told
Fear of Developing a Bad Reputation
Competition among Women
Fear of a Man's Power
Scarcity of Work for Women Actors
Not Perceiving a Woman as Vulnerable
Not Having Permission to Share another Woman's Story
When a Woman has a Positive Impression of the Man
Change Conversation Tactics
Reconsider Sharing the Warnings
How Important is being Believed?
Being Believed may or may not be Important

6.2.1 Content of Whisper Network Messages

One of the most fundamental aspects of whisper networks this study hoped to understand is content of the whisper network messages themselves. This study specifically seeks to answer two questions:

1. Who are the men that are the subjects of these messages? What are their roles in the theatre industry? What is common to these offending men?
2. What are the men doing? What kind of behaviors are being described in whisper network warnings? What characteristics of the men are being described?

Nearly all whisper network messages mentioned in these interviews contain these two elements: (a) the identity of the man and (b) the man's misconduct. In a few cases, a group such as a theatre company or drama school may be the subject of the whisper network message rather than a single man. A small number of whisper network messages described by participants were also very vague about the offending man's behavior. A woman may have been warned to "watch out" for a man without being told what he has done in the past or without the suggestion of what he might do in the future. However, most whisper network messages described by participants in this study contain a subject and a description of what he is doing.

6.2.1.1 Who are the Men?

Interview participants mentioned men who were the subject of a whisper networks (SWN men) in virtually every position related to the theatre industry. Other actors were mentioned, as well as men who work in production, men who work in theater administration, men who work in technical roles, and men who are prominent donors to theaters. Charlotte, a 33-year-old White woman, was asked what jobs SWN men typically

held. She responded, "[*frustrated*] Oh, God. I think probably in all jobs. [*as if beginning a list*] I've heard it [about] directors or near drama school, I'd just see it in teachers. People who were doing tech. Yeah, every sort of job." Charlotte's description indicates that nearly any man working in theatre might be capable of misconduct or a potential SWN man. However, there are some commonalities that appear as participants' recount which men tend to be subjects of whisper networks. Two themes do reoccur frequently amongst the participants. They tended to mention (a) men who hold a position of power as well as (b) a perception that men in general can be expected to behave poorly.

6.2.1.1.1 Theme: Men in Positions of Power.

The topic of power arose in many interviews. Esther, a 35-year-old White woman, claimed that SWN men in the theatre world have several places where power can be exerted. A show's director has a large amount of formal power. As the final arbiter of most decisions throughout a play's production, he is constantly making choices and exerting his creative vision over the process. From the perspective of an actor, this begins as early as the audition process. Chloe, a 33-year-old Asian woman, said of SWN men, "The ones who are directors are the ones who are really concerning, because they are in the position of power. They do dictate who gets cast." Although some members of a production may also be involved in the casting process, the director typically has the final say in who gets a job and who does not (see Appendix 7).

The artistic directors of theatre companies also hold power over actors. They may be able to influence directors who work at their organizations to cast or not cast certain actors. An artistic director may also direct shows himself (see Appendix 7). Chaya, a 29-year-old White woman, said that most SWN men in her experience were "usually, [a]

director or artistic director. Actually, most often, artistic director, I'd say, and possibly, they were directing at the same time." Artistic directors may also communicate with artistic directors of other theatre companies and recommend or recommend against casting certain actors.

Even men who may not have the formal power to hire and fire actors may use their influence within the community to discourage the casting of women with whom they do not wish to work. Several participants referred to male actors who were beloved in their communities and wielded their influence to reward and punish their fellow actors by suggesting casting decisions to directors. In talking about male actors in her community, Julia, a 32-year-old White woman, said:

> (*deeply frustrated*) There's so much about sexism and even sexual harassment and sexual assault that when you talk about power – (*pausing to regain composure*) I feel like often times those dynamics play out in the theatre community more as power trips. As I have seen, men who take advantage of the efforts and the work and the talent of the women and femme folks around them, and then when things go badly, (*exasperated*) blame things on those same femme folks, (*growing in frustration*) because it is easy to do because they have more power.

To Julia, sexism in the theatre community and the larger community often led to male actors having greater power and influence than women actors. In addition to men using this power to protect their reputations, she and other participants witnessed men using it to retaliate against women by whom they felt threatened or who had accused them of improprieties.

Beyond the world of professional theatre, several participants mentioned SWN men in academic theatre. Esther, a 35-year-old White woman, mentioned men who make inappropriate sexual advances towards women actors and said, "I was talking to a friend of mine today who, when she was in graduate school, the head of her theatre department was doing this [making sexual overture's] to her when she was still in school." Although an academic department chair may not hold the same kind of power with regards to an actor's career as someone in the professional world, that person has considerable power regarding his students' academic careers. Beyond theatre departments at colleges and universities, Los Angeles and New York also have several independent acting schools. These often have small cadres of faculty, perhaps even a single individual, who are subject to very little oversight (see Appendix 7). Interview participants who had worked in these cities mentioned some of the teachers at these establishments as being men with reputations for subjecting their students to misconduct. Leah, a 45-year-old White woman who worked in Los Angeles as a young actress, remembered,

> There was a specific studio theater. I don't know if it was – [*pausing to think*] they may have done some shows, but it was a place where you'd go to study. Very prestigious, and yeah, it was just that whole guru, boundary-crossing thing going on there.

Although Leah did not recall specific harmful behaviors in which the acting teacher at the teaching studio may have partaken, she vividly remembered that he held tremendous influence over his students, and his school's autonomy left him unconstrained by structures of accountability. The world of theatre provides similar kinds of unfettered

power to men working in a variety of jobs and roles. However, not all men may need to feel protected by the power of their jobs.

6.2.1.1.2 Theme: Men Generally Being Men.

Several women felt that men did not need the benefit of formal, job-related power to permit their misconduct. Charlotte, a 33-year-old White woman, said of men behaving inappropriately:

> It's hard having this conversation, in a way, because I think so much of it's just how men act, and you don't really think of it like a warning, you just think, "[*resigned*] Oh, that's really annoying, but it's not really going to affect my day."

To Charlotte, the unsuitable behavior of men was something she had decided not to attempt to rectify when confronted by it on a regular basis. Rather, she had decided to learn to cope with it. Such behavior was so normalized in her environment that she associated it not with men in power but with men as a group. Similarly, Ella, a 35-year-old White woman, said, "There's the men that you like. [*sighing*] There's the really obnoxious men that you're sort of like, '[*confused and indignant*] Why are you even here? You're very mediocre at this.'" For Ella, the craft of acting at which she labored and toiled was a place they looked upon as fertile ground to indulge in their bad behavior.

The sexuality of the men also seemed to play a role in their sense of entitlement to commit misconduct. Theatre has long been considered a place where gay men feel relatively safe. Given the common perception that the acting field has a majority of gay men and women, straight men may feel like an in-demand commodity (see Appendix 7). In describing her experience with SWN men, Amelia, a 32-year-old White woman, said,

> [*indignantly*] I feel like we would often talk about - especially when I was doing more musical theatre before grad school - we would talk about the straight guys in musical theatre, and how they always were jerks. And were very full of themselves because there weren't a lot of straight men, and they could go for whatever woman they were interested in in the cast, and so, that was just my feeling towards straight me in musical theatre in general. [*pausing to consider*] It felt like that's a belief that most of us held.

Her perception was echoed by several interview participants including Esther, a 35-year-old White woman, who talked explicitly about her experience and perception of straight men:

> I think I probably keep men at more of a distance. Especially straight men because I don't trust them. In my experience they can be a little aggressive, and they think that they can bully people, especially women, into getting what they want from them, because they're used to being able to get what they want, and they're not used to hearing, no.

Esther and other interview participants described the personal and professional desire that straight men felt to be a contributing factor in their senses of privilege that likely led them to behave inappropriate with women. This behavior may include a wide array of undesirable actions and characteristics that will be discussed in detail next.

6.2.1.2 What Are the Men Doing?

The SWN men described by participants were often portrayed as performing a wide range of misconduct. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, I will be using the term misconduct in a broad sense to describe behaviors and character traits that were

judged to be unwanted or unliked by the women sharing the whisper network messages. The misconduct may fall anywhere on a spectrum of leading women actors to feel discomforted to being violent in nature to breaking the law. The misconduct described in whisper networks, according to the interview participants, generally fit into one of five themes: (a) men who exhibit sexism, (b) men who are creepy, (c) men who sexually harass their women colleagues, and (d) men who participate in highly criminal behavior.

6.2.1.2.1 THEME: SEXISM.

Perhaps sexism is interwoven into the other four themes in this section, because it makes each of them possible. If the SWN men were not inclined to think less of women or treat them differently than men, they might not be acting creepy around them, sexually harassing them, raping them, or feeling the need to cover up such behavior. However, there were times in these interviews when participants specifically identified sexism, itself, as the topic of whisper network messages. London, a 29-year-old Black woman, said, "I've been warned about men in the community so far as the fact that they don't take women seriously as professionals or that they tend to be more sexist." London does not detail how this sexism or the unwillingness to see women as professionals may manifest itself, but that a sexist perspective was the subject of a whisper network message is noteworthy. The implication of such a warning might be to prepare potential cast members for a wide range of behaviors stemming from the man's sexism.

In some cases, this sexism might be visible during the production process. Ella, a 29-year-old White woman, spoke to a phenomenon mentioned by two other participants regarding sexist attitudes among gay male directors. She said, "For non-heterosexual men, there's been a lot of, '[*imitating a protective, maternal figure]* Just so you know,

they're gonna treat you like walking scenery, and it's gonna be [*stretching the word "all"*] all about the men in the show.'" The implications of the warnings being given to Ella were that these gay male directors wanted to highlight men in the show and downplay or even ignore the stories of the women on stage. This preoccupation with men might extend to women were treated in rehearsals, too. Their creativity and concerns might not be given the same deference as those of men. Ella and her colleagues may not have feared the kind of unwanted sexual advances or coercion described over and over in this data, but the people who shared these warnings were, evidently, concerned about being respected and treated professionally in other ways.

6.2.1.2.2 THEME: A CREEPY VIBE.

The word "creepy" came up dozens of times in this study's data. The word was used by nearly all this study's participants and is described as appearing in whisper network messages frequently. Charlotte, a 33-year-old White woman, said,

> Yeah, that word "creepy" kind of comes up a lot. Or kind of predatory. Or just rumors, "[*mimicking a nonchalant attitude*] Oh, he's slept with them" … Yeah, weirdly, I can think of three different men who were described as creepy, and it's not a word that I would use that often. But, yeah, in that context, I can think of three different people.

In Charlotte's case, the definition of "creepy" may be broad and describe a wide range of behaviors and traits. In her interview, Anna, a 27-year-old White woman, recounted a whisper network message where she was warned that a man was creepy. She said, "The one that first came to mind, it wasn't physical. It was more verbal and 'I got a creepy vibe. The way he looked at me. The jokes he makes.' That sort of thing." Although the

person warning Anna may not have seen this SWN man as a potential physical threat, she still felt she deserved to be warned about the man's behavior.

Interview participants seemed to share a perception that warning one another about men who might be socially awkward or might occasionally act in slightly undesirable ways might unfairly stain the reputation of the man they discussed. Gabriella, a 29-year-old White woman, said, "Sometimes it's as simple - and this is something I don't always like - but sometimes it is as simple as the feeling you get with the way somebody interacts with you, and it's sometimes easy to become hypersensitive." Gabriella was concerned that feeling uncomfortable around a man might cause her to unfairly judge him or assume that he is capable of more egregious actions. This was mirrored by other interview participants.

Weighing the decision to warn another woman about a creepy man often outweighed the desire to give these men the benefit of the doubt. Although a man's creepiness might be minimally offensive on its own, it might portend the potential for more predatory behavior. Miriam, a 32-year-old White woman, was asked what behaviors might make her likely to warn other women about a man. She replied, "I would definitely say creepy, like, 'Just watch out for him.'" For Miriam, a man's creepiness might be only the most obvious sign of a dangerous man. There may be stories women share that justify this kind of caution. In a situation described by Eva, a 35-year-old White woman who worked primarily in the Washington, D.C. area, warnings about creepy behavior preceded more criminal behavior:

> For one of them who was the director of a show I assistant directed, the behavior described was just sort of generally creepy around young women. And then also

instances of past, alleged sexual harassment or sexual assault perpetrated by this person in different cities. Not in D.C.

Warnings about creepiness may be intended to allow women to make their own decisions about working with a man whose personality may be objectionable, but they may also be intended to warn women about men who might be capable of much worse behavior, such as sexual harassment.

6.2.1.2.3 Theme: Sexual Harassment.

The harassment described in whisper network messages takes several forms. It may include (a) men who blatantly attempt to identify women with whom they are working for sexual relationships or "showmances", (b) men who make inappropriate comments or behave lewdly, (c) men who make women uncomfortable by unnecessarily sexualizing them for the supposed purposes of the show, (d) men who deviate from professional behavior with their coworkers, (e) men who engage in coercion of some kind with female actors, and (f) men who engage in unwanted touching or other kinds of physical misconduct.

Isabella, a 31-year-old Latina woman, recalled seeing firsthand the attitude some men in power have towards their work environment. Speaking about a director, she said, "Then, I did another show with him, and during that show, he said to me and to somebody not involved in the show, '[*casually*] Do you think I should just cast her so I get a chance at fucking her?'" The notion that casting decisions might be made based on a director's desire to make that woman a sexual conquest was not unusual in this study's data. Julia, a 34-year-old White woman, remembered hearing a warning about a theatre company. She was told, "Casting choices made where it was like, 'This is a fat character,

but that director doesn't want to fuck a fat character so we're gonna cast a thin person and put them in a fat suit.'" These warnings speak to the disrespect that some directors have towards women actors, but also reveal the degree of power they wield. An actor knows that a director has a tremendous amount of power – if not complete power – in casting a show and deciding who gets a job. Armed with that knowledge, an actor may consciously avoid offending or upsetting a director should they meet him during or outside an audition. However, to be expected to be sexually desirable to that man in order to secure employment is likely beyond what an actor would view as a safe working environment.

In some cases, the SWN man's attempts to sleep with a woman after casting her were explained by interview participants. Hannah, a 41-year-old White woman, described a message she heard about a director:

> This certain person was described as complimentary, [*with suspicion*] like every time - you kind of knew he was going to be coming on to you because he layered the compliments on. So much so that eventually someone did report him for his behavior. Eventually it led to - You get complimented, you get complimented, you get complimented and after a while you realize either I need to shut this person down, or this is just going to keep continuing and escalating.

In the situation Hannah was told about, the woman finds herself in a dilemma where she either must submit to enduring this man's advances again and again, or she must rebuff the man and jeopardize never being cast by him in the future or even risk him telling other directors not to cast her.

Several women interviewed in this study brought up the issue of age difference being a factor in these warnings. Specifically, younger women were warned about older

men who might hope to sleep with them. Chloe, a 33-year-old Asian woman, described a friend warning a younger colleague about a director with whom they were all working at the time:

> They were starting to maybe form a relationship with a guy, and my friend had pulled her aside and said, "Hey, this person's super dangerous. He's a predator. You are a lot younger than him. He has done all the [same] stuff to me as he has done to you. I can show you the text messages, and they will be identical. It will be the same book. It will be the same song. It will be the same poet that he talked about. Don't fall for this person."

Chloe's friend believed the man to be someone who used a predictable series of tactics with many women and would likely employ them with this young woman. In this case, the director might have had a strategy of using romantic overtures to seduce a woman. Anna, a 27-year-old White woman, remembered hearing about a man who would attempt to adopt the role of a mentor that he could then convert into a sexual relationship:

> The things I was told about - it was also a director - and I was warned that they would essentially go after young aspiring female actors and befriend them and take them under their wing. And it would no longer become mentor/mentee, and they would use their power to manipulate what had previously been mentorship.

Taking advantage of his position authority was also seen as a tactic used by predatory men in academic theatre. Zoe, a 27-year-old White woman, spoke about a friend from her college theatre department who received a warning from a whisper network about a professor:

> One of the students in my undergrad program definitely got warned like, "He's definitely a lady's man. Just watch out." Not that he would do anything without your consent, but that he was just looking for sex where he could get it.

To Zoe, this professor may not have seemed especially threatening because his carnal motives were restrained by a respect for consent, but for a professor to hunt among his undergraduate students for sexual conquests stretches the ethical guidelines to which many college faculty are bound.

Not to excuse this kind of exploitative behavior, but some people perceive using theatre as a hunting ground for casual sex to be part of the industry's culture. There is even a word that alludes to the practice: "showmance", a portmanteau of the words "show" and "romance", it is generally used to refer to a fleeting, casual sexual relationship that only lasts for the duration of a show (see Appendix 7). Maya, a 31-year-old multiracial woman, described the prevalence of these kind of relationships and how they can affect professionalism in the field of theatre:

> There's so many showmances, and so it's hard to know what's appropriate, what's inappropriate when you're stuck in the thick of it. Even with myself when I was underage, I was messin' around with one of my cast members who was older, and I probably should not have been doing that, and I don't know if people even knew.

Maya points out that that, as an industry, theatre may do a poor job of providing clear expectations of professionalism. Some may not even see it as a place that requires standards of professionalism, because they do not see it as their primary place of work. Especially among non-union actors, non-acting fulltime jobs are frequently held by actors

to supplement their artistic endeavors (see Appendix 7). Ella, a 35-year-old White woman, was asked about her relationship with men in theatre and said:

> It depends, obviously. There's lots of different men in the industry. My ex-husband was in the industry. So, there was that. I tended to try to not date people in the industry if I could help it even though I did marry someone in the industry. It's hard. It's your social life, too. It's where you spend most of your time.

Between her day job and rehearsals, Ella had little time to meet men outside of the theatre environment and eventually married a man who directed her in a play. This would not constitute a showmance, but Ella's response does speak to how common dating relationships and sexual relationships are in the theatre world. Some SWN men are known to take advantage of this environment fecund with sexual energy. Avery, a 32-year-old White woman, recalled a whisper network message she heard about a man. She repeated it, saying, "He likes to sleep with his costars. He always has a showmance."

Occasionally, the overtures men would make also seemed to fall into the realm of language and behavior that was inappropriate or lewd. Grace, a 38-year-old White woman, acknowledged that some women might perceive certain actions differently:

> I think the most common issue is inappropriate comments. And that's always so challenging because different people take different comments in different ways, and there are different intentions. But we know that really, the intention is kind of irrelevant in this day in age. And if things that a man – [*raising pitch of voice for emphasis*] particularly in a power position – is [SIC] saying make women in the company uncomfortable. That's a problem that women should be made aware of, for sure.

As many other interview participants have explained, Grace highlights the role that power and age play in determining the propriety of a man's behavior. Alexandra, a 54-year-old White woman, expressed similar concerns about how a wide discrepancy between a SWN man and a woman can color her views of an interaction:

> It was more harassment, because he would make sexually explicit comments in the name of joking, and not at any body's expense - usually. [*wearily*] But just the jokes and the inappropriateness of it in general and the inappropriateness of it with his age, not recognizing that with a [*adds emphasis with voice*] 60-year age difference - I mean, if it's inappropriate, it's inappropriate - but with someone that young, it's a whole other level on top of it.

Beyond the verbal harassment that Grace and Alexandra mention, these inappropriate advances may include a physical element. Sophia, a 50-year-old Latina woman, recalled being warned about a director. The women in her whisper network said of the man, "They're very flirtatious. They'll be touching a lot, and they'll be admiring you a lot." She did not specify the nature of this touching, but it might be something subtle, such as what Rivka, a 49-year-old White woman, recounted in warnings about a man. The warnings stated the SWN man was:

> Really just making advances. Uncomfortable advances to let someone know that they're very attracted to them or maybe even sit too closely to them. Just saying inappropriate things to a female that are out of line and really made them feel uncomfortable.

Sitting too close to a woman is perhaps tame compared to the lewd comments and behavior that some participants described. Victoria, a 37-year-old White woman, was

warned about a fellow actor whose behavior was “more [*pausing then lowering her voice with disapproval*] personal. How they acted off-stage with women. Talking about his personal anatomy and thinking that’s okay.” Hannah, a 41-year-old White woman, also described a man who was even more lewd with his castmates:

> There is a man that I have really warned [*emphasizing the word*] everybody about in my current community that was shoving his tongue down your throat, showing you his penis. Stuff that was, like, [*very disapproving tone*] definitely not okay. Inappropriate joking, stuff like that that is laughed off in the world [of rehearsal] and then afterwards, you're like, "[*having a sudden realization*] Oh, that was definitely crossing a line."

Hannah’s story also points to the previously mentioned problem that expectations of professional behavior in theatre may not always be the same as other fields and industries.

The theatre industry differs from most industries in that actors frequently portray unprofessional behavior for the sake of a performance. In the course of a normal workday, most lawyers would not be expected to kiss a coworker at the office the way that an actor in *Hamilton* might. Most computer programmers would not be expected to portray a violent fight in their workplace the way actors in *MacBeth* would. Most dentists would not expect to be completely nude in front of a large group of people the way and actor in *Angels in America* would. Actors have expectations that certain plays require them to do things they might not be comfortable doing in their lives offstage. However, when they are directed to do things that feel gratuitous to the play, it may make them feel exploited.

Several interview participants described hearing about directors who used their creative authority to sexualize female actors in ways that made them uncomfortable. Chaya, a 29-year-old White woman, described these kinds of warnings in an understated way:

> And it's interesting the way we do talk around it. It's like, "You know, they're kind of, like, [*lowering pitch of voice and implying a shared knowledge of these kind of people*] one of those guys." The kind of thing where you know what they're saying which is like, you might be talked down to, or you may just get a vibe that you're less important, or they want you to be more sexual than you want to be in any given situation.

That these kinds of messages are often vague or euphemistic does not make them less meaningful, according to Chaya. Perhaps she is suggesting that sexism and unnecessary sexualization are so common, most actors would guess that was what she meant by "one of those guys." Julia, a 34-year-old White woman, described the warnings she received about a director in her community:

> I think a lot of it was comments. Even clothing choices. Sometimes directors who would over and over and over again put women in tiny, leather, sort of bondage-y get ups even when it [wasn't necessary to the show] and the whole show was structured around that and the men were not dressed like that, but the women consistently were put in situations where they were dressed like that.

Ella, a 35-year-old White woman, also described a director as notoriously "Putting you in scandalous outfits that you're not comfortable in." These directors may rationalize such

directions by declaring them part of his creative vision, but actors may not feel that to be ample justification for the sense of exploitation and discomfort they may experience.

Using improvisation in rehearsals is a technique employed by many directors to build relationships or make creative discoveries. Sometimes these improvisations involve only actors, and other times – although frowned upon – a director may include himself in the improvisations (see Appendix 7). Alexandra, a 54-year-old White woman, recounted whisper network messages about a director in her community, described as creepy, who frequently employed improvisations as part of the rehearsal process of his shows:

> I think the creepy was described as analyzing scripts with sexual subtexts that may or may not actually enhance the understanding of a script or the production itself. Then again, creating exercises, improvs that were questionable that seemed more to satisfy a sexual interest of the director as opposed to actually working on the real subtext of the script…So the behaviors - It would just be inappropriate rehearsal time where you couldn't quite pinpoint, "Is this really a part of the plot, because in my character analysis, they actually don't have any sexual chemistry at all." So, to do improvs that try to pull that out in order to make it more interesting than it was on the page - It didn't fly. It felt creepy.

Alexandra found these rehearsal techniques and creative decisions to bely the director's role in creating an entertaining and engaging play but rather revealed more prurient, self-centered objectives. While the intentions behind these directors' decisions may be questioned by their actors, their prerogative to make such choices is generally not. However, some women described men whose workplace behavior went beyond the bounds of what is expected in the theater.

Miriam, a 32-year-old White woman, spoke about some men in theatre having a "blind spot" to their own sexism. In the case of one artistic director, that lack of awareness resulted in rehearsals at his theater feeling very unsafe:

> And then the same thing with the artistic director, just going back to the blind spot - It's like, "I don't feel safe in the room." Yeah, that's a huge one. "I don't feel safe in the room." Whether that be, actually there's some shit that's gonna go down or like, "I have to get naked in this show, and there's just not a lot of care around it." Or it will be this director holding more space for the men, and any kind of dynamic they're choosing to run the space with, he'll cater to that versus women's safety, emotionally or physically.

Miriam does not detail what this man might have done or allowed at his theater, but given the experiences some other women had with men, many women actors may feel they have ample reason to fear someone who permits a workplace to be lax in standards of professionalism. Gabriella, a 29-year-old White woman, described how an actor might push the bounds of what is acceptable in theatre while hoping to be seen as just engaging in the creative process:

> Touching in a way that is [*emphasizing*] not professional or not essential to the show that's going on. Or sometimes things like, if it's an actor, sometimes it's like improvisational behavior on stage that's not professional. So, let's say, if you have a choreographed fight, it would be - not even frowned upon - it would be a fireable offense if you changed the choreography and actually hit someone or something like that. It's just dangerous to change those things that you've set. So, if there's something intimate like a kiss or a touch, and then someone decides

> they're going to change what they did and say that it's because they were in the moment or something like that.

What Gabriella describes is an actor doing what is often encouraged in acting: exploring character choices during the rehearsal process; however, actors should confine such explorations to the choreography and blocking given to them (see Appendix 7).

Abigail, a 41-year-old White woman, described warnings she heard about directors who would violate the norms of theatre while trying to portray their behavior as part of traditional theatrical practices. Sometimes, directors may take one actor's place when rehearsing a scene to demonstrate how they want an actor to do a certain thing. This is known as "stepping-in" or "being in-the-moment" (see Appendix 7). However, Abigail had heard warnings about a director who was known for "being literally hands-on in direction or being in-the-moment as an acting partner and not navigating it together. Just sort of forcing themselves on you."

Several interview participants spoke about how theatre people tend to be very willing to engage in friendly physical touching. Hugging even casual acquaintances was described as common. However, there was also a consensus that some men took this too far. Lily, a 55-year-old White woman, spoke about a director in her community:

> Who everybody knew from whisper networks was despicable. He was kind of a creep around ladies. He would put his arm around you in an audition or had reportedly slept with women that he had recruited to his company. He had reportedly sexually harassed women or made them feel less than so that he could feel better. Or he had just brought them in - again this whisper network was, "This guy will have you take your clothes off in an audition." He did it to an actress for

> "Steambath" where she did have to take her clothes off in the audition, but the line was, "If you can't do it in the audition, you can't do it in the show." [*pausing, then irate*] Which is bullshit. [*loudly*] Everybody knows it. [*pausing, then sighing*] All women should know it, but I'm sure there were a couple women who were like, "Ah, well." Shrug. "I'll take my clothes off because it means this guy will take me seriously as an actress."

The adage that someone who cannot do something in an audition cannot be trusted to do that thing during the show may or may not be true as it relates to performing a dialect or juggling or doing a dance (see Appendix 7). However, the audition room is not usually an appropriate place for an actor to undress.

Occasionally, a director may choose to work individually with an actor, but the place and time where that occurs must be factored in to determining what is normal and what is appropriate (see Appendix 7). Esther, a 35-year-old White woman, recalled a story about a director and a young actor:

> I was at a summer theater and the artistic director was in a show with this young woman who was playing opposite him. He would text her that he was going to come over to her place and run lines with her at eleven o'clock at night. After speaking with her, I don't believe anything happened between them, but she expressed to me that she didn't feel [comfortable with the situation] - like, "He'd text me, and I'd be in my pajamas. And he'd be like, 'I'm coming over'". [*exasperated*] Like, what's she supposed to do? Yes, she should say, "no," but what if she doesn't feel comfortable saying, "no," to the artistic director of that company who's, like, fifteen years older than her? [*irate*] How inappropriate is

> that? [*shouting*] And why doesn't he know better? How does he think that that's okay? [*pointedly with disapproval*] He's married. He's a married man that's in a position of power over this young woman. [*severely*] It's not okay. Whether or not something's happening, it's not okay.

This artistic director was not only insisting on coming to this woman's home late at night, but Esther notes that his age and position of authority created a power differential that might have left the woman unwilling to rebuff his advances. The use of power was also described by women who saw men using it in another form of sexual harassment: coercion.

Several women described stories about men who used their power in the theatre world to pressure women into having sex or doing something else they would rather not do. Esther, a 35-year-old White woman, describes how substantial that power differential can be in the theatre industry:

> You know, if you're in a show with a director, there's a power dynamic. Even if they're asking you to do something that isn't directly sexual in nature. If they're asking you to do something you don't want to do, and you're in a position where you're afraid to say, no, because there could be repercussions to your career, That's not fair. [*pausing and reiterating*] It's not fair.

And though Esther does not suggest what a director might ask of an actor, Sophia, a 50-year-old Latina woman, spoke about a director who was known to coerce his actresses into sex. She said, "Just like – [*describing the scene*] dressing room, late at night, you know, after hours. Getting women or girls or whatever it was to do – something sexual

using the allure of the position or the theater." Samantha, a 50-year-old White woman, recounted warnings about directors who wield their power in particularly blatant ways:

> The stuff that I've mainly heard about with men asking women out on dates in inappropriate scenarios (in auditions, after rehearsals) in a way that made the woman feel like employment could be on the line. I've heard about that. I've never experienced it personally, but I know that some women have.

To openly ask a woman who is auditioning for a role in a show a man is directing out on a date places that woman in a position of putting her livelihood at risk by saying, no. Similarly, a woman may feel conflicted in telling a man to respect her physical boundaries.

The final form of sexual harassment mentioned was unwanted touching or physical misconduct of some kind. This topic came up many times in the interviews for this subject. In most cases, women shared stories about men who engaged in physical contact that tended to make women somewhat uncomfortable. For example, Maya, a 31-year-old multiracial woman, described warnings about a man who "would hug you too long," and Ella, a 35-year-old White woman, was told about a male actor who would often give "uninvited neck massages." The context of this touching often mattered, too, in terms of how the propriety of the act was judged. London, a 29-year-old Black woman, recalled hearing a story from a coworker at a summer theatre job:

> The other intern mentioned that there was a lot of hands on shoulders types of things when it didn't seem quite necessary. There was a lot of - from the other intern - qualifying of, "Well, at first I thought it was just to get my attention." But it started to seem excessive to her, and she was clear to say it was never a body

> part that she thought was a sexual body part, but even if the contact was fatherly - because I think that person had a daughter that was around our age - it just seemed unprofessional to her.

In the case of this story, the amount of touching and the age difference between the director and the intern led what might have otherwise seemed unremarkable to feel unsettling.

Other interview participants described physical contact that made them feel very uncomfortable. Lily, a 55-year-old White woman, heard stories about another actor:

> He would creep on women. He would put his arm around them to talk to them. He would put his arm intimately – [*pausing*] like, when he would hug them, he would come [*elongating her words*] all the way around and reach their underboob.

This kind of wanton, repeated sexual grabbing was described by several participants. Samantha, a 50-year-old White woman, described the whisper network of actors in Los Angeles:

> I lived in L.A. for a long time, and there were several movie stars where it was always - There was something about the power, fame, and money that people had that made them much more dangerous than small town theater actors. So, I remember being quite explicitly told about certain big-deal movie stars that I knew would be at events that I attended that were dangerous. "[*very serious*] Be careful of this person. He [*emphasizing "will"*] will put his hands on you" kind of thing.

Samantha also importantly notes the way that celebrity can allow someone to feel entitled to sexually harass someone with few resources to defend herself or who might believe her

professional future is tied to her silence regarding this man's behavior. In an industry where such sexual harassment is permitted, more egregious criminal behavior may occur, too.

6.2.1.2.4 THEME: HIGHLY CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR.

Some of the actions that constitute sexual harassment are illegal, but others may not rise to that level. However, unquestionably criminal behaviors were described in this data. Some interview participants claimed to have heard stories about men who had sexually assaulted or raped women with whom they worked. Madison, a 29-year-old White woman, and Eva, a 35-year-old White woman both recalled hearing stories about men who had developed reputations for having extramarital affairs and were later accused of rape and assault. Madison said:

> There was an instance – [*clarifying*] it only came up once or twice - a dear friend of mine I made working on a show in D.C.: she had remarked that this guy was infamous in the community for being very talented, getting cast a lot. He's a straight man. He was gross. He acted gross around women. It appeared like he had issues with infidelity. He would cheat on his partners and hit on other women and come on way too strong and make them feel uncomfortable. Recently, he's been outed for rape. More than one woman has come forward, and he's gone to court for one or two instances of raping one or two women. And those are just the one's we've heard about.

Eva described the whisper network warning she received:

> One was an assault in a different city that was described that this man had done. and then the same man, I heard allegations of sexual harassment in a different city

> where he had worked. I heard about him pursuing actresses that he directed on particular shows despite being married. So, I heard about him cheating on his wife with actresses he was directing. And then [the same man had] an unnamed sexual assault allegation. And then [the same man had] general sexual harassment concerns related to him.

Neither woman mentioned where any of these assaults were alleged to have taken place. Sarah, a 35-year-old White woman, described hearing about a director who raped a woman actress at a cast party.

Anna, a 27-year-old White woman, was told by her friend that a man had raped her in college. When Anna discovered that she was cast alongside this man, she reported his misconduct to the artistic director. She told her story as follows:

> In college, my best friend went to a different university, and she was raped on campus by one of her classmates. And then that summer, I was working summer stock and on one of the emails, I saw the name of her rapist. And we were going to be working together out-of-state in a place that had no cell phone reception, where we wouldn't have cars. I knew that she had filed a police report. She hadn't pressed charges. And I also knew that she had gone through the school to do a case, and a case that found him in violation of the school's sexual assault policy. So, I contacted the artistic director of the theater that had employed me, and I said, "Look. I saw this person's name. I had gone to their Facebook to confirm it was the same person, and they had announced where they were going to be working. So, I was able to confirm it." All I said was, "[*calmly*] I know they were found in violation of their school's sexual assault policy." At the time, I thought

> that was public record. It turns out, once the case was closed, it was no longer public record. So, that artistic director had a professional relationship with somebody at the school where the trial took place. They [the artistic director] contacted them [the school employee], and then the individual - the rapist - bowed out of the contract. So, I can assume that what happened was the teacher at the school said, "Look man, they know. You need to step down." And they [the SWN man] did, and then I didn't have to work with them [the SWN man], [*with relief*] and it was great because if he would have remained working there, I would not have gone there.

This was one of the only stories in any of the interviews where a woman reported a man to a theater administrator, and it was the only of those where a woman felt positively about the outcome of reporting the man.

Understanding and documenting whisper networks requires a thorough description of the content of their messages. The above themes describing who the men in the messages are and what they are doing are fundamentals parts of the network. However, whisper networks are also made of senders and receivers of these messages. Comprehending the nature of a whisper network also demands being able to articulate who the participants in a whisper network are, and how they evaluate the truthfulness of the messages therein.

6.2.2 Structure of Whisper Networks

In considering the composition of whisper networks, this study considered two questions: (a) who are giving these warnings and (b) what makes these warnings believable? The former question simply aims to establish what kind of people make up a

whisper network. The latter question supposes that more believable messages strengthen the functionality and growth potential of a whisper network. If a woman does not believe a warning to be true, it may diminish her assessment of the credibility of the woman who warned her, and she might have less reason to share the warning with another woman. I sought to identify themes related to who was giving the warnings.

6.2.2.1 Who are giving these warnings?

Who are initiating whisper network messages, and who are continuing to pass them through the network? What roles in the theatre community do these message-senders have? The interview participants were asked who shared warnings with them. A wide variety of answers were given, and several themes emerged. Some of these themes may seem contradictory, but perhaps they are mutually exclusive and speak to the diversity of whisper networks. The predominant themes that emerged were (a) close colleagues and friends, (b) older or more senior women, (c) women who may not be close, and (d) people in a like group.

6.2.2.1.1 Theme: Close Colleagues and Friends.

When asked about the people who shared whisper network messages with them, the most common response from interview participants was other women with whom they already had close relationships. In some cases, these were other women who they referred to as friends. Grace, a 38-year-old White woman, said of her whisper networks, "Most often it will be close friends when you're talking about, 'How was this experience?' And they'll say, '[*imitating a casual voice*] Here has one small issue you should be aware of.'" In the hypothetical conversation Grace provides as an example, she is gathering professional information from other colleagues who are friends in the

industry. Miriam, a 32-year-old White woman, expressed the importance of having a close relationship forged through a common work experience. She said her whisper networks were made of:

> Mostly just friends. I don't think it's ever been like, "[*feigning urgency*] Oh, we're colleagues, and we've never worked together before, but let me tell you this." It's always been like, "[*calm but direct*] We've worked together. We're friends. Let me get you in on this."

The bond created by working together on a play was also described by Avery, a 32-year-old White woman. She remembered, “It would usually be people that I was close with. I don't remember having this conversation with anyone who I didn't already have that, ‘Hey, we're sharing a dressing room. We're both in this play together’ sort of relationship.” Avery and other interview participants expressed that the nature of sharing a dressing room can accelerate the development of a relationship. The vulnerability required to dress and undress together hastened intimacy. Actors often find themselves with unstructured time together before, during and after a show. If two actors have small roles in a show, they may spend hours together in a dressing room each night of a performance.

Although Avery does not describe relationships that necessarily extend over working together several times, Julia, a 34-year-old White woman, however, did. She said warnings tended to come from:

> Close friends. People that I had done lots of theater with or spent a lot of time with, and people who knew well enough to know that if they brought something like that up that I would believe them. Not that most of the women in that

> community wouldn't believe it, but I do think there's a way in which, generally, you're not as likely to share with somebody who might go, "[cheerfully] Oh, I don't know. I like that guy!"

In Julia's case, the close relationship was critical because she feared warning a woman who might already have a positive perception of the SWN man. However, she did express a desire to share warnings with those women to whom she is close. Other women noted receiving warnings from women who were not peers, but who were senior in the theatre community.

6.2.2.1.2 Theme: Older and More Senior Women.

Women actors who have worked in their respective communities for a several years may feel a sense of accountability or protectiveness towards their more junior colleagues. Other women may feel a similar desire to protect women based on having a more senior role in the community. This may be an informal, elder role or a formal position in a theater or other organization in the theatre community.

Some interview participants described getting warnings from women who were older or more experienced than them. Lily, a 55-year-old White woman, described getting warnings as a young woman. She recalled, "I came to town in '96 after college, and in '96, I was in my 30s so it would have been women who were 15, 20 years older than me." The women Lily referred to may have had more experience in her community and may have collected warnings and had first-hand experiences of their own. Chaya, a 29-year-old White woman, also described receiving warnings from older women in her community. She said, "Often times it's older women who have had some experience, and I'm totally in a position of trying to get as much insight from them as possible, and so

they see me more as a mentee, a little bit." She describes a mentoring relationship that existed beyond just an age difference.

In the case of some participants, that seniority can be much less than the decades mentioned by Lily. Mia, a 32-year-old Latina woman, recounted being warned by more senior students in college:

> Specifically, in undergrad it was older students, women that had been in these men's classrooms. Women that had either had their own experience and actually told me about their experience, so it was pretty first hand. I had an experience myself with this teacher with just like, creepy vibes.

The upperclassmen Mia described may have been very close to her in age, but sharing their experience with underclassmen included sharing warnings about a faculty member they saw as creepy. Zoe, a 27-year-old White woman, had a similar experience at her college:

> That was open knowledge that I think the seniors of the department told us. Partly because they knew the girl that was in the ongoing relationship. One of the professors was in an active relationship. One of the professors had had a relationship with one of the students in the past. They married and then eventually divorced.

At Zoe and Mia's colleges, the women – who may have only had a few more years of experience than the new girls – seem to have considered it part of their roles as upperclassmen to protect the newcomers to their communities.

Some women who share warnings may not be older or have spent more time in the community, but they may have jobs that give them a certain level of formal authority. Mia also said:

> The people that gave me these warnings were women that had been in this particular theater and in this community for probably about five years before me. Older dancers, and, in fact, one of them was our equity deputy, and she was the co-choreographer for the show, and she was definitely a veteran at that point.

The equity deputy has a role of additional power among the cast due to her relationship to the union (see Appendix 7). A woman might even have a non-acting role imbued with some kind of authority that might cause her to take a protective view towards women actors. Grace, a 38-year-old White woman said:

> But in one case, I was impressed by a high-level female staff person in the theater. [She] actually called a number of the women who work for her and said, "I've heard that there are issues with this certain person. Can you tell me if that's a problem?" And I thought that was nice that she took the initiative and responsibility to reach out to some of the younger actresses.

The woman Grace describes was not sharing a dressing room with the actors, but nonetheless felt compelled to reach out to them. However, some participants describe women who share warnings with very little relationship at all.

6.2.2.1.3 Theme: Women Who may not have Close Relationships.

Although some women may depend on the perception of a close relationship in order to pass along a whisper network message, other women may be comfortable doing so with women with whom they share no particular closeness. Some participants did not

feel limited to sharing warnings with friends and close colleagues. Rivka, a 49-year-old White woman, said that the women who have warned her about men in the past might have very little relationship with her. She casually said they were “just other actors.” Sharing warnings with other women who worked in theatre but otherwise knew little about each other was a commonly described theme. Charlotte, a 33-year-old White woman, said the women who gave her warnings were mostly:

> People I didn't know that well. When I went to the audition, it was somebody else who had worked there, and I think I just kind of mentioned in passing that I was going to the audition, and she was like, "[*serious but not too alarmed*] Be careful with that guy." And she just sort of told me things she had heard he'd done and had done to her.

In Charlotte’s case, she was cautioned by an actor who warned her knowing that she would at least interact with the SWN man during the audition and would have much more contact with the man should she be cast in the show. However, given that Charlotte had yet to even audition, such a circumstance was hardly certain.

Ava, a 31-year-old White and Indigenous woman, described her experience going to a large audition such as the University/Resident Theatre Association (URTA) auditions. These are crowded, centralized auditions where actors audition for a large audience of representatives from theaters and university programs. At the URTA auditions I attended as an actor, these auditions took place in the ballroom of a large hotel near Times Square. The representatives then requested to have callbacks with actors they liked in their guestrooms upstairs. Actors would be notified of the organizations who

were interested in them and sign up for times to meet in these guestrooms. When Ava attended URTA, she recalled being warned about men and organizations by strangers:

> Some of them were strangers passing by, such as, if I was writing my name on the company's post on a hotel door. As I was signing my name, other auditionees would walk by and say, "Just so you know, there's that."

In her experience, Ava was an actor being warned by other actors, but Ella, a 35-year-old White woman, described warnings as not being limited to the acting community:

> Other times, it's just other people in the business. You're just having a conversation and a name would come up, and you're like, "Oh, I got invited to be a choreographer for this production." "[*ominously*] Is so-and-so doing that production? Well you should know that this is my experience with this person." Or, "So-and-so said that this was her experience with this person. So, I've avoided working with this person. Just be aware of that going in." Stuff like that.

Ella did not see whisper network messages as being limited to actors. As a choreographer, Ella would still have the potential to interact several times with a SWN man. The same might be true of a director, dialect coach, costumer, stage manager, or other position. Although these women who might exchange warnings may not have close personal or working relationships, they did share a common field of work. Sharing other commonalities may provide a suitable environment for sharing whisper network messages.

6.2.2.1.4 Theme: People in a like group.

Women with like identity traits may be more likely to form a whisper network according to the interview participants. Before establishing a relationship, women may

share warnings with other women who are in the same group of some kind. This includes race and ethnicity, age, professional level, and type. In the context of acting, “type” is a nebulous concept that often refers to the kind of roles for which an actor is likely to be cast. An actor’s type is usually dictated by her physical stature, appearance, attitude, vocal qualities, and stage presence (see Appendix 7). Chloe, a 33-year-old Asian woman, says of the women who warn her about potentially dangerous men, “They’re my friends. They’re my friends around my age and type. Actor friends.” Chloe specifically notes that these women are in the same age range and occupation, but she also says they are the same “type.”

In the case of Chloe, she may be including other women of her race or other non-White women. Isabella, a 31-year-old Latina woman, says she would be most likely to include “another woman of color” in a whisper network. Similarly, London, a 29-year-old Black woman, expressed reluctance to share whisper network messages with White women because she was less likely to trust them.

However, race is likely not the only factor that can create a like grouping of women. Charlotte, a 33-year-old White woman, used a broader characterization of what might constitute these like groups:

> People who would be on the same level as you. So, if you're acting, other actors. It definitely wouldn't come down from [someone with] any sort of [higher level of] power dynamic. A director wouldn't be like, "You have to watch out for that tech guy, by the way."

Charlotte identified power as a factor that might create or prevent the growth of a whisper network, and those networks are likely to be confined to women who share like amounts

of power within their profession. Interview participants did not discuss in detail how these groups were formed within the theatre industry, but in this era, social media may play an important role in connecting women with similar interests.

6.2.2.2 What Makes Whisper Network Messages More or Less Believable?

The believability of a whisper network message seems to be of high importance to the women interviewed for this study. Although the interview participants did not mention many circumstances or events that would make them less likely to believe a fellow woman's warning about a man, the factors that made a woman more likely to believe these warnings tended to fall into one of two categories. I have chosen to refer to these two themes by terms for elements of narrative theory: (a) fidelity and (b) focalization. Fidelity is the degree to which a story is consistent with a person's current perspective on events. Focalization is the amount of credibility of the storyteller. Though interview participants did not discuss the things that might make them less likely to believe a warning, a whisper network message lacking either of these two elements might spark a deeper degree of skepticism.

6.2.2.2.1 Theme: Fidelity

A person listening to a warning about a man's misconduct may judge whether it is consistent with her current perception of the world in several ways. She may consider whether the story matches her experience with the man, what she perceives to be other women's perception of the man, or how she expects men in theatre or men generally to behave. Although warnings may be short in nature, interview participants seemed to be

willing to use their imaginations and past experiences to fill in gaps or expand the warnings that may have lacked details.

Many women said they believed a warning, because they already felt uneasy around the man before getting the warning. London, a 29-year-old Black woman, said just this:

> I have never had one of the women who has had those kind of conversations with me say something that I didn't, kind of, have a feeling about or didn't after they had the conversation with me, see the seeds of that kind of behavior in the person.

These thoughts were repeated by many interview participants who were interviewed for this study. They seldom reported hearing warnings that truly shocked them by naming a man with whom they felt completely safe and comfortable or whose behavior was always appropriate and professional.

Alexandra, a 54-year-old White woman, describes how several similar stories about the same man can reinforce each other. She said:

> In the case of some of these creepers, it hadn't progressed to a point of true fear. It was more of a managing kind of thing and being prepared to feel corroborated, [*with relief*] that it's not just you thinking this person's creepy. So, they're passing along a legacy of creep. and a legacy of [a] history [of women] saying, "[*gravely*] This may happen. Know you're not crazy and be prepared to deal with it. To shut that shit down."

For Alexandra, the network of women sharing stories and strategies for how to deal with a SWN man helped codify her expectations of him. So, when she heard a story that was consistent with these other stories, she was prepared to believe it.

Some women's life and work experience had left them willing to believe that nearly any man could be capable of perpetrating misconduct against women. Esther, a 35-year-old White woman, described her personal evolution in this direction:

> Because I never would have believed these things, like, ten years ago. I would have been like, "[*incredulously*] That's crazy. Who the fuck would do that?" In terms of a man doing some of the stuff I've heard men do. I would have been like, "There's no way!" So, I wouldn't have believed it. [*sighing*] But now, ten years later, seeing it firsthand, having experienced it - Some of it's so subtle that you're like, "Wait. What's happening right now?" Like I wouldn't have thought twice about this ten years ago. I would have gone along with it. But now, I'm like, "Hold on a minute! What are you doing here? What is this wording?"

Not only is Esther more likely to believe women, but she claims to be more likely to intervene when confronted with misconduct. The nature of a warning's consistency with a woman's conception of men, the theatre industry, and men in the theatre industry appears from these interviews to be a powerful motivator to women who are assessing whether or not they find warnings to be credible. Considering the person telling the story was another theme present in these interviews.

6.2.2.2.2 Theme: Focalization.

Many of the interview participants in this study described focalization – the credibility of the storyteller – as playing a significant role in whether they believed whisper network messages. Zoe, a 27-year-old White woman, responded to being asked what makes her more likely to believe a woman, she said, "[*gravely serious*] Because the person herself told me. And as someone who has experienced sexual assault before, I

could just tell by how she was telling it that something had actually happened." Because she had personal experience with sexual assault, Zoe felt capable of evaluating whether or not someone was telling her the truth about misconduct.

In the case of Avery, a 32-year-old White woman, she felt persuaded by the professional experience of the women who warned her. Explaining why she has found certain whisper network messages believable in the past, she said:

> Frequently they [warnings] would come from women who were used to working with these men, who had many times, and therefore, clearly had figured out the solution. Had figured out how to ingratiate themselves or make themselves more likable or how to get their way in an instance when they weren't able to speak their mind freely they were still able to subvert the behavior so they could get what they wanted. So, I trusted that those women had had those experiences.

The ability of the women to whom Avery referred to be successful while working with these SWN men gave these women and their warnings credibility in her mind. A woman might also establish credibility through their personal relationship.

Rivka, a 49-year-old White woman, found herself believing women who shared warnings with her, because she had close, friendly relationships with them. When asked if she believed warnings she received in the past, she replied:

> I did. I did. I did because, first of all, I trusted these people. They weren't just actors. They were actor-friends. Also, I witnessed enough of my own to know that - I know what this person might be capable of. But also, it's just a matter of trust as far as the relationship with my fellow actors.

For Rivka, the personal and professional relationships she had with the women bringing her into a whisper network compelled her to believe them. Rivka also cites her personal experience as contributing to her willingness to believe the warnings. This combination of focalization and fidelity was echoed by several women in this study. It is not clear that one is valued over the other, but both were mentioned as being important throughout this study's interviews. Considering their own likelihood to believe another woman's warnings might play a role in whether women choose to share their own warnings.

6.2.3 Initiating or Spreading Whisper Network Messages

The final category of interview questions dealt with when a why a woman might or might not choose to initiate or spread a warning through a whisper network. Interviewers probed the participants regarding (a) why they would tell another woman about the misconduct of a man, (b) why someone would be excluded from a whisper network, (c) who would they want to include in a whisper network, and (d) the importance of being believed. Although some women were quick to claim they had utilized whisper networks in their professional pasts, many were reluctant to say so in an explicit way. They often were reluctant to categorize the information they shared as warnings because it was not accompanied by a suggestion of how to act given the SWN man. However, all of the interview participants were at least willing to engage in hypothetical speculation about what they might do in a situation where they were working with a man who engaged in misconduct.

6.2.3.1 Why is Someone Told?

Interview participants were asked under what circumstances they would warn a specific person. This question was more oriented towards what events might transpire

that could make the woman more likely to initiate a whisper network rather than focusing on the behavior of the man or the identity of the woman to be warned. The interview participants' answers were sometimes hypothetical and sometimes based on times when they chose to warn another woman, saw another woman being warned, or were warned themselves. The most common reasons a woman might choose to warn another fell into one of five themes: (a) a woman might have contact with a SWN man, (b) a woman might be a close friend or colleague, (c) a woman might ask about a SWN man or his organization, (d) a woman might appear especially vulnerable, or (e) changing societal norms.

6.2.3.1.1 Theme: Potential Contact with Offender.

A commonly provided reason for sharing a whisper network message was an expectation that a woman might work with an offending man at some point. When asked when she might feel the need to warn another woman about a man, Julia, a 34-year-old White woman, succinctly replied, "The when is any time I find out they're working with this guy." This lack of hesitation was echoed by several women who claimed to know especially damning information about a certain man. Sarah, a 37-year-old White woman, spoke with similar fervency:

> If I ever saw this person again with a female, I would want to walk up to this person immediately and just say, "Run for your life. Don't be friends with him. Don't have anything to do with him. Don't trust him. No matter what he tells you about what he's gonna do for your career, Nuh-uh."

In this case, Sarah was not even clear that the woman might need to have a potential working relationship with the man. Perhaps any contact might warrant giving a woman advice to beware of this man.

In some interviews, the women expressed that potentially working with the man was not only a suitable impetus for sharing a whisper network message, but it was a necessary condition for doing so. Emma, a 30-year-old White woman, said:

> I think, if I saw someone I knew was working with him I would feel comfortable saying something. I think what's harder is in a broad spectrum just to be like, "[*imitating whisper*] Hey, did you know so-and-so assaulted my friend," or "Hey, I just want you to know that so-and-so..." [*expressing discomfort with the idea*] Because that feels more gossipy as opposed to if he has the direct potential to harm someone else.

Without the potential of the woman to work with the SWN man, Emma would worry she might come across as spreading gossip and rumors, but if the woman was going to or might work with him, Emma felt more confident that her message would be accepted as the warning it was meant to be.

Because so many of the SWN men described in these interviews were directors or artistic directors, most of the interview participants articulated a desire to warn women actors who might audition or be cast in a play directed by the man. However, Charlotte, a 33-year-old White woman who works as an actor and a director, also described warning fellow directors about SWN men who are actors:

> I've definitely done it on the director's side of being like, "Don't have that person in your cast," or "Don't hire them." And I'm slightly ashamed that I use that more

> because I'm saying, "[*vocally winking*] It really disrupts your dynamic," rather than saying, "[*loudly*] He's a terrible person." [*Laughs*.] But that's implied in saying, "[*calmly*] He really disrupts your dynamic and is not pleasant."

Charlotte also described the euphemistic language that is often used in spreading whisper network messages. This language may be part of establishing credibility with colleagues the woman does not know especially well. This same kind of circuitous language may not be used in warning that fall within the next theme, because establishing credibility may not be necessary.

6.2.3.1.2 Theme: Warning People with Close Relationships.

Some interview participants noted that the presence of a close relationship with another actor could create the circumstances where they might share a warning. In some cases, the close friend or colleague might be likely to work with or encounter the SWN man, but this was not always mentioned as a requirement for sharing a warning. Eva, a 35-year-old White woman, described how the possibility of another woman working with the questionable man was irrelevant to her:

> I don't think that they would need to have some type of explicit forthcoming relationship for me to warn someone about working with him. If we were in the right conversation where we were talking about issues like this, and I were comfortable talking to the woman and trusted her and respected her, I think I would – in the course of conversation – warn her about working with a person even if she didn't have, like, a contract coming up with him.

For Eva, her relationship with the other woman could create the conditions conducive to her sharing a warning.

The nature of the warning may matter. Maya, a 31-year-old multiracial woman, said, “A lot of times, if I knew I had a personal experience, then I would definitely pass along the message to my close-knit people.” Here, Maya seems to say that the warning would come from firsthand experience with the man. However, that may not have to be the case for all women.

Several interview participants believed that the unique nature of the backstage environment may often facilitate relationships becoming closer between women working together on a show. Gabriella, a 29-year-old White woman, said, “It depends on who it is, sure, but when you're sharing a dressing room with somebody, of course you're going to end up talking about personal things.” Although Gabriella hedged her language, some interview participants were more inclusive in their descriptions of the power of backstage to form relationships and alliances. Avery, a 32-year-old White woman, said:

> I think I have become very close to a lot of women in theatre. [*enthusiastically*] I think there's a solidarity to it. There's like that - you share a dressing room. When you share a dressing room with six women, [*almost laughing*] you're gonna get to know each other in an intimate way.

For Avery and several other women, the frequent necessity to dress and undress in front of one’s colleagues sets the theatre industry apart from most other fields (see Appendix 7). Doing so, they implied requires a willingness to be vulnerable that can also serve as a catalyst for building relationships. Emma, a 30-year-old White woman, said:

> That's probably why I feel closest to some of these people who I don't maintain regular contact with, because when you're sitting in a dressing room backstage – [*sigh*] I don't know. There's something about that space that open's people up.

> [*half of a laugh*] It's so funny, I'm thinking, I know more about people's marriages that were falling apart. I definitely spoke about my relationships that were falling apart.

Emma's feelings were consistent with many other interview participants who felt that working as an actor lent itself to create closer relationships faster than most other jobs, mostly by virtue of the dressing room and backstage environments. These are places that are commonly described as being spaces where personal conversations frequently occur. It is also likely they are places where professional information is exchanged with candor.

6.2.3.1.3 Theme: If Asked about a Certain Man or Organization.

Given the nature of the theatre industry, actors frequently solicit and share information about working conditions and colleagues with one another (see Appendix 7). Most actors work at many theaters and with many directors over the course of their careers (see Appendix 7), and while they rely on someone else choosing to cast them in a show, they do have the choice of which shows and which theaters they will audition. An actor's criteria for choosing to audition for a show may include many things including the play, itself, how much the actors are paid, the amount of attention the show is likely to receive, the theater at which the show will be presented, and often, the other people working on the show including actors, the director, technical staff, and designers. Actors are likely to ask one another about people with whom they are considering working or with whom they may want to work at some point in time (see Appendix 7). These questions may not be intended to discover information about misconduct, but an actor with information might take such an opportunity to share a warning. This is what Emma, a 30-year-old White woman, said:

> Or if someone came to me and said, "[*casually*] Oh, I saw you worked with so and so on this show. How was he?" Like, if I was given the opening, I don't think I would have a problem speaking honestly.

Emma would see this solicitation of information broadly and use it to share a whisper network message.

These messages may not be limited to questions about individuals. Leah, a 45-year-old White woman, recalled hearing stories about a misconduct at a small acting school where she worked in Los Angeles. Although these warnings were not relevant to her personal career goals, the information was still valuable to her. Regarding these warnings, she recalled:

> I definitely filed them away, but the one theater school that was brought up a lot, I had no interest in training at, but I just remembered it in case I ran into someone who was thinking of studying there. So, that I would begin a whisper network in a way.

Leah was not attempting to share these warnings with anyone who would listen in order to create a community-wide perception of the school. However, she did find it important to share the information with those who would ask.

Actors are not the only members of the theatre community who share information about other members. Directors may choose to speak with each other to share their experiences about working with certain actors, designers, or technicians (see Appendix 7). Alexandra, a 54-year-old White woman who has worked as an actor and director, said of her conversations with fellow directors, “if someone who is directing a show says, ‘Hey, I know [you worked with] Steve. Steve auditioned. What do you think of Steve?’

Then I would say, ‘Well, in my experience, Steve brings this quality to the process.’" Alexandra describes passing along her warning in an especially euphemistic fashion and putting it in the context of how the SWN man fits into the professional process. She sees these conversations as happening not under special circumstances of discussing a man’s misconduct with a colleague, but within the context of a typical professional conversation involving information seeking and sharing about a wide range of topics. Some interview participants described situations they felt warranted more proactive warnings.

6.2.3.1.4 Theme: Protecting Those Perceived as More Vulnerable in the Community.

Some of the women in these interviews felt that certain women were more vulnerable to the misconduct of SWN men than others and ought to be warned. In many cases, younger women were generally seen as being more vulnerable, often because the men in question had a reputation for targeting them. Leah, a 45-year-old White woman who acts and works as faculty in a university theatre department, articulated this concern about young women:

> I think if I saw an abrupt change in a student, or if I brought up, "[*with concern*] Have you taken X class with Professor V?" "[*imitating a dismissive student*] Oh, no, I don't wanna talk about that." If there was a reaction there [I would be concerned]. This sounds terrible coming out of my mouth, but I'm just going to say it, because it's coming out. [*pause*] I think there are those female students I see that if I know they're the person's type or extremely attractive or mature or very talented, any of those things that I think may be very tempting for someone to cross a boundary, then I have a little extra antenna, you know? I mean, I have

> an antenna for everyone, but it's nature, so I kind of know who might be more susceptible.

When identifying these younger students who Leah believes are more likely to be preyed upon, Leah does so out of a desire to protect these students and young actors. Leah may feel her role as a teacher comes with a charge to look after her students. The age between her and her students may further enhance her desire to protect them. However, others described wanting to protect those who were not so different from themselves.

Not all desires to protect may come from a maternalistic view that older women actors are responsible for protecting younger ones. Mia, a 32-year-old Latina woman, remembers warning fellow undergraduate students while in college:

> When I was a little bit older in undergrad - when I was a junior or a senior - I did, myself, warn younger women that were coming into the program about this scenario. So, the traits would be certain looks, the way that he would look at us or our bodies. Certain moments where you'd be alone in a classroom, I guess I would warn them against being alone with him.

As an undergraduate warning other undergraduates, Mia did not have a radically different status from the women in her whisper network. However, her brief experience and access to knowledge seem to have made her feel empowered to protect those women who lacked those things.

The difference in experience of another woman may not even be the issues that makes them appear vulnerable. Ella, a 35-year-old White woman, said:

> I think just in general, if it's a young person that I feel like - or maybe not even a young person, but just someone I feel is in a vulnerable state, I always like to say,

> "This has been my experience, and this is what I've heard though I haven't seen anything - " If it's something I've heard. I just feel like, especially women in this industry – that is still dominated by men even in 2020 – it's really important to look out for one another.

Because of what she saw as the outsized influence of men in the theatre industry, Ella believed that nearly any woman could be in a vulnerable space when they are near a SWN man. While different traits may signal vulnerability to different women, all of the above participants felt that sharing whisper network messages was a tool in protecting those who are at greater risk of exploitation or victimization. While men may have long enjoyed most powerful jobs in theatre, larger cultural and society changes are impacting how many women view their decisions to share warnings about men.

6.2.3.1.5 Theme: Changing Societal Norms.

Some interview participants expressed that changing norms and views in society have created an environment that is more conducive to sharing warnings. Sophia, a 50-year-old Latina woman, explains how the environment used to feel for women actors:

> Because I think there's also a big wish - at least, there was when I noticed - for a long time, people didn't want to be seen as - not talking bad about someone [*struggles to find words*] to be found out. Like, we didn't have a right to be warned. Like we didn't have a right to warn each other, because it's like if you deal with this person, that's what you deal with.

Several of the interview participants who were older than 40 echoed Sophia's description of the theatre industry. According to these women, dealing with misconduct was seen as the inevitable result of women choosing to work with certain men. Some remembered

being told it was just part of working in theatre. Sharing warnings was viewed as spreading gossip and an indication that the women spreading that information were incapable of working at the level of these men if they were too sensitive to deal with the misconduct. However, interview participants mostly seemed to agree that changes were afoot in the culture.

Avery, a 32-year-old White woman, noticed this change herself. Describing rampant sexual harassment in theatre, she said:

> It was so a part of the culture for so long, and it's only in the last few years that it's becoming something we can all point to and say, "That's actually bad and wrong." So, for a long time, my instinct was to make it more of a joke and be like, "Oh, did he ever ask you out? I have a funny story about it." As opposed to, "Hey, I have to tell you something. Did that ever happen to you?" So, there's more solidarity.

Avery described feeling more empowered not only to share warnings but to acknowledge and agree that certain behaviors are wrong and inappropriate. Some interview participants pinpointed the #metoo movement as a pivotal moment in bringing about this change. Miriam, a 32-year-old White woman, described how she now responds to receiving whisper network warning:

> I think before #metoo, I would be like, "[*casually*] Oh, thanks for the tip," and now I know to definitely keep my walls up. And just keep myself a little protected. But I would definitely go in and be like, "Whatever. I like them [the SWN man] so much. I don't know if she knows what she's talking about. I don't know her intentions." And, I think, fall into the patriarchy structure of believe-

> him-first or give him the benefit of the doubt or try and get him to like me because he's in a high position or he's a well-known actor. But post-#metoo, I've just switched it, and I'm like, [*forcefully*] full benefit of the doubt to whoever's telling me.

For Miriam, the #metoo movement altered how she thinks about and responds to the warnings she receives. She does not think of them as gossip, and she is more willing to believe them when one is passed on to her. The movement has created an environment where more women are more willing to share warnings and more women are more willing to believe them. However, "more" does not mean "all", and this may dictate which women are excluded from a whisper network. Are there other reasons, too?

6.2.3.2 Why is Someone not Given a Whisper Network Message?

Contrasting the conditions that women portrayed as conducive to sharing messages, interview participants described several reasons they would feel less willing to share a message. Although the reasons they cited were varied in nature, they tended to fit into one of six themes: (a) fear of developing a bad reputation, (b) competition among women, (c) fear of the man's power, (d) the scarcity of acting work for women, (e) not perceiving another woman as vulnerable to the misconduct of a man, and (f) not feeling they had the right to share another woman's story. In some cases, the presence of one or multiple themes may have been sufficient to dissuade them from sharing warnings with other women. In other instances, interview participants described sharing whisper network messages despite these compelling reasons to stay silent. In fact, the first four of

these themes center around the women's fears that sharing a whisper network message could hinder or even end their careers.

6.2.3.2.1 Theme: Fear of developing a bad reputation.

Throughout these interviews, many women expressed fear of developing a bad reputation in the theatre community after being singled out for spreading warnings about men. Zoe, a 27-year-old White woman, expressed why she is cautious about sharing a warning with another woman:

> It's always a risk to say something like that to somebody partly because you could be wrong, and you could be wronging someone who was innocent, and you may just have gotten a weird vibe for whatever reason. But also, because then you could get a reputation for someone who was gossipy or maligning people. Or if this person likes the man that you are warning her about, you could be jeopardizing a relationship that's just fine. Or she may disrespect me, and she may cut off my access or opportunities elsewhere. You never know quite who is able to mess with you because everyone is interconnected in such a distinct way.

Zoe described a few ways in which sharing a warning may be undesirable. She noted that if the warning is coming secondhand, she cannot be certain of its veracity. There is no way to guarantee her anonymity as someone sending the message. The message may also reach someone who is friends with or protective of the SWN man. This woman may also attempt to impede the career the woman sharing messages about a man she likes. Zoe also pointed out that warnings that are unpopular may be classified as gossip and dismissed as being less likely to be factual.

The perception of close-knit ties within the theatre make a person's reputation especially valuable. Chaya, a 29-year-old White woman, describes the theatre industry as being small even at higher professional levels. When asked if she would share whisper network messages with other women, she said, "[*self-deprecating, as if admitting a fault*] I share. [*laughs*] I'm a sharer. I try not to put a lot of names and things out there if it's been a negative experience. The community is small, even reaching into regional theaters." Regional theaters often employ actors from outside the community, but Chaya asserted that an actor's reputation can follow him or her as they travel between theaters.

Some interview participants said that while this fear of being labeled as a malevolent gossip might be enough to discourage spreading certain warnings, it would not dissuade them from doing so in all instances. Grace, a 38-year-old White woman, made this distinction:

> I'd like to think if I thought the situation were dangerous, I would warn anybody that I cared about. I think in general though, we would have to be very close, because there is still a little bit of that stigma around women who tell tales, and I'd want to be sure that anyone I was talking about this situation with wasn't someone who would go on and say, "[*feigning hysterics*] Oh my gosh, well, this girl said the most awful thing to me about this person at this theater, and I just can't believe -" Not that I think many people would, but if it's someone you don't know well, there's always that danger that you could get a reputation.

As mentioned in a previous theme, a close relationship with another woman is an important condition for allowing the sharing of warnings for Grace. Knowing the other woman well is the best way to ensure she will not go on to deride her reputation. Grace

mentioned being worried about being labeled a gossip, but that may not be the only thing women fear.

Avery, a 32-year-old White woman, spoke about her fear of developing a reputation as someone with whom it is unpleasant to work:

> I think it's very important because there is such a cultural sense of being difficult and hard to work with. And it would be very easy for that kind of a warning or just a suggestion or a complaint being filed - something formal or informal - feeling it was a reflection on me as a performer or any person. That it's not interpreted as, "[*disgusted*] Oh my God! She's so difficult," or, "She's so hard to work with."

Several interview participants expressed the importance of having a reputation as a person who is pleasant or fun to work with. They implied that such a reputation was more likely to get them cast in productions, and women who were viewed as difficult to work with or overly sensitive were less likely to be cast.

Charlotte, a 33-year-old White woman, expressed regret for not warning others out of fear of the damage it might have to her reputation. She recalled:

> I didn't say anything even though I kind of felt like I should have done so later. [sighs] The reason that I didn't was that the thing seemed so small and so unprovable. And I was like, "[nervously] If I say something, it's gonna be my word against somebody else's, and I don't have the evidence or the gumption to say," and I spoke to a few friends about it. One of my friends that I really respect was like, "[matter of factly] It would be your career that's ruined not their's."

Perhaps her friend was implying that the man would be more likely to be believed than Charlotte. She also may have been suggesting that a reputation for being fun and pleasant was a more important trait for a woman than a man having a reputation as not committing misconduct. Charlotte and her friend do not mention who they suspect might participate in denigrating her reputation, but they might have a special fear of other women because of the competition that is perceived as existing between women in theatre.

6.2.3.2.2 Theme: Competition among Women.

Several interview participants spoke about a sense of competition among women actors. While some plays may have a majority female cast, this is less common than majority male casts, and many theatre communities have just as many women actors as men, if not more. This arithmetical reality lends itself to a greater supply and lower demand for women actors (see Appendix 7). Leah, a 45-year-old White woman, said of her relationships with women in the theatre:

> They were mixed. Some close friends, but at that time, and it might have been where I was emotionally. Sometimes there was a bit of competition for romantic attention. I remember having more misunderstandings with women, things like that. There was some competition over roles, things like that. But I also had some good friends, too.

Leah's suggestion that her experience with competitive women was more isolated to when she was younger was reflected by several interview participants.

Ella, a 35-year-old White woman, noted that her current experience feels less fraught with professional rivalries. She said, "It changed over the years. I remember when I was younger, there was a lot of not really enough roles for us, so it was a toxic,

competitive [environment].” Like Ella, Hannah, a 41-year-old White woman, also identified the competition for roles as the source of more generalized competition among women actors. Recalling her time acting in New York city, Hannah said:

> I was in my early 20's, so of course there's that competitive edge. So, in New York, there's basically 50 of you when you walk in a room, but there would really be like one or two, where you'd be like, "[*frustrated*] Aw, man. It's either gonna be me or her because it's always her or me."

This competition may be especially pronounced in large acting markets. While women who worked throughout the country described competition with other women actors, New York City was brought up as a place of particular antagonism. Amelia, a 32-year-old White woman, said:

> In New York, I would say that it felt very competitive. I had a few close friends. Those were very, very close relationships. I think because we lived in such a competitive environment, the friends that I did have, I felt like we formed a really strong bond.

However, even in smaller acting communities, competition for roles can still leave actors feeling resentment towards one another.

Isabella, a 31-year-old Latina woman, has primarily acted in the Charlotte area which she and other interview participants described as a large city with an undersized theatre industry. She recalled, “The minute that you get a title role that somebody else who did not get any sort of title role in the ensembles in, I started to feel conflict.” Isabella went on to describe how that competitiveness can impact the spread of whisper network messages. She felt that it developed a skepticism for the motives of other

women. Isabella described this suspicion, saying, “I think that it's almost like, ‘[*with distrust*] What do you have to gain?’ That's the question behind the eyes. "[*probing for an ulterior motive*] What do you have to gain by giving me this information? Why are you giving me this information?" In an environment rife with competition among ambitious women vying for a limited number of acting opportunities, it may be a challenge for many women actors to trust one another. Caution and paranoia may dictate how they view other their colleagues. Isabella and others describe fearing other women, but many interview participants also spoke of fearing the men who were subjects of the warnings.

6.2.3.2.3 Theme: Fear of a Man’s Power.

Some interview participants cited their reluctance to share warnings about men because those men wielded power in their communities. They feared that if the men discovered that they were sharing warnings about their misconduct, the men would retaliate against them. Julia, a 34-year-old White woman, said she appreciated warnings about theater companies and organizations:

> It was helpful to know the landscape even if those weren't companies I was gonna connect with anyway, and to know, like, "Oh, this is somebody whose probably been doing some shitty things, but also someone who has a lot of power. So, be careful when and how you mention these things, because it could definitely get you [*singing with nervous humor*] in some trouble."

She seems to have implied that sharing a warning with the wrong person could result in the SWN man learning she was telling other women about his misconduct. In Julia’s example, it’s possible that the men’s power was useful not only in exacting retribution, but, also, in developing loyalty amongst women in his organization. This loyalty might

cause some women to tell the SWN man that another woman had told them about his misconduct.

That power may also be used to overtly prevent a woman who has shared whisper network messages from getting cast in future plays. Miriam, a 32-year-old White woman, explained why she tended not to share warnings with other women:

> I guess protecting myself. I think I may be more protecting the men, but I guess there is that element of, it's kind of scary to speak up about someone who is very well liked and in a big power position as far as casting and hiring and how this city works in the theater. I don't want to be the only one saying something. I don't want to ruin my career or not work there again or have it be spread across town that I'm too sensitive or something. So, I just really hold it to myself.

Miriam's fear of having a SWN man in power share unflattering information with other directors and casting directors is not without historical precedence. Film director Peter Jackson reported that he blacklisted actresses Ashley Judd and Mira Sorvino after hearing negative reports on them from Miramax, Harvey Weinstein's former production company. Both women had refused to have a physical relationship with Weinstein (Redden, 2017).

The man's power may be used in less calculated ways. Anna, a 27-year-old White woman from Washington, DC, shared a personal story:

> There's a member of my current community who violated me, and I have told some close friends about it, but I have not – [*pausing to think*] you know, I haven't gone to the press. I haven't shared it publicly, and I do wonder what would happen if we were in a show together. How would I handle that? Would I be able

> to just be quiet and continue on? That would depend on how we were cast in the show. So that is something I think about. [*more frustrated*] Also, I know that they are very beloved and have a much larger influence in the DC area than I do. So, yeah, I do feel like if I were to share that, I would be ostracized.

Anna seems to fear a more nuanced power where members of her theatre community would side against her because of the man's positive reputation. These fears about having damage done to their reputation are even more salient given the perception so many women actors have that potential jobs are limited to begin with.

6.2.3.2.4 Theme: Scarcity of Work for Women Actors.

Gathering labor statistics on the number of women actors compared with the number of men actors is impossible. Many actors may go for lengthy periods without working because they are not getting cast. It is also common for actors to leave acting either temporarily or permanently to pursue work in other sectors (see Appendix 7). From the data that is available, we do know that that there are nearly as many actors of either gender who belong to Actors Equity Association, the union for actors, and among graduates from acting programs at universities (Actor's Equity, 2017). However, there are fewer roles available in theatre for women than there are for men (see Appendix 7). This results in less demand for women actors while many communities have an equal supply of actors between the two genders. Whether this creates an environment where women are more likely than men to be unscrupulous as they compete for roles is beyond the scope of this study, but this is the perception that was voiced in some interviews.

Some interview participants described the dilemma they face regarding their fear of limiting their own access to the few jobs that are available. Anna, a 27-year-old White

woman, described feeling torn between her desire to work with men about who she has been warned. and her desire to get work:

> It's so much more difficult. It's not like you work at an office. Acting jobs feel so much harder to come by. So, do you really want to give up an opportunity. But at the same time, it's your life, it's your well-being. Do you also want to torture yourself for job?

When considering working on a play with a SWN man, Anna must weigh the quality of the work and how much it pays against the likelihood of encountering the man's misconduct and how egregious she may find it. As she notes, theatre differs from many jobs in that she is unlikely to find the stability to stay in a single working environment for several months let alone years. She is likely to have to search for new jobs after that show has closed, and she may have to make the same calculation all over again.

Olivia, a 31-year-old White woman, was asked when she was likely to share a warning with another woman. She reflected:

> And it's a question I've been asking myself, too. If I shared the information that I have – [*pauses and thinks*] I think that's a larger question for women in America. If I know something and share it, is that going to help anyone? Is a change going to be made? Or did I just expose myself as someone who's been abusive, and now they don't want to work with me anymore? I think that's a specific issue with women in theatre, because on top of all our societal struggles of being told we are objects, we are now entering a community where we are the product. Our bodies are the product. Our voices are the product. Our presentation is the product. So, when you say, "I don't want my body to be touched that way. I don't want to be

> treated this way," then, you're essentially saying, "You can't use me as this product you've been trying to sell this whole time." And I think that's part of why women don't set up boundaries for themselves when it comes to theatre contracts.

The objectification that Olivia refers to, may be one some women actors are more comfortable with than others, but the line between a woman's body as a product being sold and exploitation may be challenging for some women to identify. It may also be a line that men choose to move, push, or step across, and women must grapple with the decision to stay quiet or risk alienation in their industry.

The economic realities of a career as an actor may compel women to stay silent or work with men about whom they have heard warnings. Ella, a 35-year-old White woman, told a story about being cast in a show with a SWN man:

> And at that time I heard that, it really scared me, but I was at a point where I couldn't say, no, to the money. So, I had to take the job. And I didn't see anything with me during the job, but I did, unfortunately, see several instances with other people.

Ella said she went on to warn other women about this man but regretted working with him after being warned. However, as she pointed out, her personal financial situation at the time made turning down work seem impossible. Had Ella had more financial stability, she might have been more willing to pass on that show. However, if she had not been considered vulnerable, she might not have been warned in the first place.

6.2.3.2.5 Theme: Not Perceiving a Woman as Vulnerable.

As mentioned previously, women who were perceived as more vulnerable, often by virtue of their youth or newness to the community, were seen as more likely to inspire

the sharing of a whisper network message. However, a woman who seems to be less vulnerable might be less likely to receive a warning. Women who participated in these interviews identified women as appearing less vulnerable if the women were (a) in a romantic relationship with another person, (b) had an aggressive attitude, (c) had a body type perceived as less sexually desirable, or (d) were past the age of perceived sexual desirability.

Chloe, a 33-year-old Asian woman, described how being in a relationship may have excluded her from whisper networks. She said:

> I think I have a pretty unique perspective, because I came in as a married woman to the theatre scene, and I think a lot of times men have more respect for other men than they do for women. So, if you have a boyfriend, then that's one thing, but if you have a husband, they won't mess with you…I don't know if people wouldn't warn me about a certain guy because I'm married, and they have the assumption that I have a very healthy marriage.

Chloe expected that other women might see her as less vulnerable to a SWN man's misconduct because she is married and having a husband offers her protection. This may not be merely physical protection but a protection that comes from a respect between men who may choose not to harass a woman out of respect for her husband or boyfriend. As Chloe also notes, the perception that she has a healthy marriage may contribute to her being seen as less vulnerable. This is perhaps because she is seen as less likely to be interested in the overtures of another man.

A few interview participants mentioned that they generally have an aggressive attitude towards men that might discourage misbehavior or misconduct from men who

could just as easily direct themselves towards women with more passive personalities. Samantha, a 50-year-old White woman, claimed to have never been included in a whisper network because of her attitude:

> No one has ever warned me, and because of who I am as a human being and because I don't give off a vibe, I think, that some predatory men can find appealing. I give off – [*pauses*] I tend to frighten those guys, because I'm a bit of a tough gal. I have never felt coerced or in danger. That's just me.

Samantha's experience was not common amongst these interviews, but a few queer interview participants also indicated that having an attitude that was more masculine and communicated their sexual orientation was effective at deterring the misconduct of men.

A woman's body type might also make her appear less vulnerable. Julia, a 34-year-old White woman, refers to herself as a "fat actress" in her interview. She supposed that her body type makes her appear less likely to be the victim of a man's misconduct, and she has seldom been warned about men from other women.

Similarly, a woman may be perceived as less vulnerable because of her age. Lily, a 55-year-old White woman, believed she was not seen as vulnerable to men, but still heard whisper network messages:

> That's the thing. I don't know that people warned me so much as shared with me, because I was not necessarily going to be a person that he would prey on because I was older than the women they were talking about.

The messages Lily was hearing may have been shared as gossip or may have been told to her in hopes that she could pass them along to other women who might be vulnerable to the SWN man.

In these cases, the assessment of vulnerability carries two stages of judgement. First, the woman withholding the warning assumes that the SWN man would not endanger the woman because he would not engage in such misconduct with a woman to whom he was not attracted or assumed to be unavailable. Second, that woman who has heard about the man assumes the other woman has characteristics that would make the man uninterested. It may or may not be true that a certain man would not prey upon a woman who is too old or not the right body type, but the women who are excluding other women from whisper networks are judging those women to be too old or too heavy, probably without knowledge of the man's true preferences. Judgments and assumptions play several parts in whisper networks including when a woman chooses to share another woman's story.

6.2.3.2.6 Theme: Not Having Permission to Share Someone Else's Story.

A victim of sexual harassment or sexual assault may feel a particular loss of her own agency as a result of the perpetrator's actions. In being sensitive to that feeling of loss-of-control, a victim's friends and colleagues may want to empower her by doing whatever they can to help her regain a sense of autonomy. Telling other people about the woman's experience without her permission to do so may feel as though it is counter to this goal. Some interview participants expressed reluctance to share a warning about a man without knowing if they had the permission to do so. Chaya, a 29-year-old White woman, said, "I try not to speak from anyone else's experience." It is unclear if Chaya would not share a warning about a man at all or if she might share a vague warning without going into details of another woman's story. Shandy, a 32-year-old White woman, was asked if she was given warnings about men who engaged in specific kinds

of misconduct. She replied, “I think my answer is, yes, but, also, hard to say, because people get a little cagy about the details. Especially when they're not their own details to share.” Shandy was told to beware of a certain man but was not given a clear explanation of why or told explicitly what kinds of things he was alleged to have done.

Esther, a 35-year-old White woman, expressed her personal discomfort with sharing the details of another woman’s story:

> I also don't like spreading other people's information. If it's not my story to tell, I'm not gonna tell some other woman's story for them. I'm not gonna tell a whole bunch of people that this one particular person had this experience. That's not my place, you know what I mean?

She did clarify that she would give other women a warning about a man without revealing details of the woman’s story. Esther did say that she believed sharing warnings to be a valuable part of protecting other women although she may not be willing to provide all the information she has about the man. In creating these whisper networks to protect other women, participants in these networks such as Esther must choose whom they will tell and about what they will tell those people.

6.2.3.3 With Whom Would the Subjects share a Whisper Network Message?

In order to probe deeper into who gets selected for a whisper network, interviewers asked about special circumstances that might influence their choice to spread a whisper network message. The interview participants were asked where their willingness to share a warning with a woman would be swayed if they knew the woman already had a favorable impression of the offending man. They responded that such a

preexisting impression would likely cause them to either (a) alter their tactical approach to the conversation or (b) reconsider sharing the warning at all.

6.2.3.3.1 Theme: Change Conversation Tactics.

When a woman knows another woman has a positive impression of a SWN man, the first woman may employ different tactics conversational tactics when sharing a warning with her than she would if she did not know the second woman's impression of the man or knew it to be less than positive. Rather than simply delivering a whisper network message, she might choose to try other methods of better understanding the second woman's thoughts about the SWN man or deliver the message in a less threatening manner.

Using inquiry to better ascertain another woman's opinions about a SWN man was a technique that appeared in the data. Shandy, a 32-year-old White woman, described using questions to understand the other woman's perspective. Asked if she would refrain from warning such a woman, she replied:

> No, but it would change the language around the conversation. I would ask her as sort of an expert witness. I would be like, "[*with genuine curiosity*] Oh, you worked with him before, and did you have a good experience because I've heard these rumors?" So, no, it wouldn't deter me. It would just shift the quality of the discussion for me.

By learning more about the other woman's thoughts about the SWN man, Shandy might choose to provide a warning in a fashion that might initiate less conflict or be vaguer in nature. This use of questions to gauge the other woman's perception was echoed by other interview participants. Victoria, a 37-year-old White woman said:

> It would cause me to ask a lot of questions. "What was your experience? Here are some things that I've heard." For sure, because I would want to hear more about that person's experience, but no, it does not discredit the other women's stories at all.

The possible reality of this situation was acknowledged by several women in a similar way that Victoria expresses herself. They agree that some women may like a SWN man because they have not experienced his misconduct firsthand. However, the positive experiences of some women do not prevent them from believing the women who share warnings about his misconduct.

Knowing a woman thinks positively about a man may cause a woman to take a less urgent tact with her, but it may not deter her from sending a whisper network message. Madison, a 29-year-old White woman, went so far as to report having just such a conversation the day before her interview:

> I don't think it would impact my decision to warn her so much as it would - I would maybe begin any conversation with, "[*friendly*] Hey, you've worked with so-and-so. What was your experience like? Would you be open to talking about these things that I've heard or that we both have probably heard?" I had a conversation like that yesterday where someone that I know personally has worked with this same artistic director we both worked with who's now since been fired. And I was like, "[*with urgency*] We've gotta talk about so-and-so. Have you experienced anything weird? How do you feel about what's going on?" She and I had a conversation about it, even though I knew she was his friend, and I knew that this person didn't necessarily have a bad experience with them.

Despite knowing that this woman was friends with the SWN man, Madison felt it was important to share this warning with the woman. However, in anticipation of receiving pushback from the woman, she tried to frame it as a conversation where they could both share their experiences.

London, a 29-year-old Black woman, also said she would feel compelled to share a warning under such conditions. However, she would employ a different tactic:

> It would impact the way I told her, but not the fact that I would tell her. I think I would in that case, if that woman worked with that man and said, "Oh, he was really delightful." I would say something like, "[*sincerely*] I'm glad that he treated you well. My experience is this," or, "This is how I interpreted this moment." Just so that that was out there in the open, but I wouldn't necessarily tell that woman she was wrong.

London would offer her personal testimony not to discount the other woman's opinion but to offer a different perspective. This gentler approach does not disregard the other woman's opinion of the man but does give London the opportunity to pass along a warning about the man. Other women may use other techniques for dealing with this potentially challenging situation. London and several other participants claim they would not be deterred from sharing a warning, but not all women felt that way.

6.2.3.3.2 Theme: Reconsider Sharing the Warnings.

If they knew a woman already had a positive perception of a SWN man, some women said they would refrain from sharing their warnings with those women. There were a wide variety of explanations for why they would be disinclined to tell these

women stories about the men with whom they had a positive relationship. Eva, a 35-year-old White woman, explained her hesitancy:

> I sort of tend to believe everyone's experience. So, if someone else had a pleasant experience or an experience without incident working with a person who also has complaints against him, I'm not necessarily going to - in the course of a conversation - bring up all the evidence against that person that she doesn't have a problem with.

Eva did not rule out telling the other woman if asked or if the topic of the man's behavior arose naturally, but initiating that conversation was not her preference.

For some interview participants, this choice not to share may be based on personal experience. Anna, a 27-year-old White woman, retold her story of sharing her story with a group of women:

> I've seen the blowback in that scenario. It wasn't about sexual misconduct, but I saw a male actor's temper flare up in a physical way, and I brought that up to a group of his friends, [*surprised and a little hurt*] and they were all very defensive of him. So, yeah, I do think that if somebody knows someone, and they're friends with them, they're going to be less likely to believe there's a fault in that character.

Anna saw the close relationships the women had with the SWN man as preventing them from accepting her story.

Isabella, a 31-year-old Latina woman, went further to suggest that a man's friends might not only disregard the message but deride the messenger. Asked if she would warn a woman who she knew liked the SWN man, she said:

> Like him in the sense of, "He's my friend?" [*scoffing*] Oh, yeah. I definitely won't say anything negative, because I don't need the extra drama in my life. To have people be like, "[*feigning a whisper*] Oh, this is what such-and-such said about you." Because it's always, "This is what such-and-such said about you," not, "This is what they know about you."

Isabella described the positive nature of the relationship as underpinning a resistance to believing her warnings. However, personal relationships may not be the only reason.

Julia, a 34-year-old White woman, saw deeper forces at play that might cause a woman to believe a man she liked over a woman who spoke of his misconduct. When asked if she would share a warning with such a woman, Julia responded:

> Yes. I probably wouldn't. Because I think that - especially if it was a white woman - there's so much of our conditioning that surrounds upholding the systems that are in place and support us that I think if this woman already had a good relationship with a director or someone in power, I don't know that I would trust that they would believe me over them.

Julia saw that many women can derive personal benefits from their friendships or professional relationships with powerful men. It may not be to their advantage to believe these messages. It might also be that whether or not they believe the warnings, they do not want to damage the career of a man who may continue to forward their careers, too.

The possibility also exists that the woman has decided she can accept the misconduct of men, because she already has for so long. Chaya, a 29-year-old White woman, was asked if she would warn a woman about a SWN man she knew the woman already liked. She replied:

> Only if I had worked with him more. [*Laughs*] "[*imitating the start of a serious discussion*] Listen, honey..." [*Laughs*] There are a lot of strong women who will work again and again with an asshole, because they can handle it, and those women need to be in the room, and so, trying to deter them is like - you know. Unless it was something very serious - and well, I'd already have reported it to someone higher anyway.

A woman might have many reasons for tolerating the misconduct of a man. Chaya attributed this to a woman's strength. It may also be part of her expectations for how some men have always behaved in the theatre world. Regardless, Chaya and many others hoped to avoid warning women who were friends with a SWN man. Among other negative repercussions, it could result in the woman not believed.

6.2.3.4 How Important is Being Believed?

Interviewers asked participants whether it would be important to them to feel believed if they shared a warning about a man. Most women declared it to be important to them. It was so important to Emma, a 30-year-old White woman, that expecting to be believed and supported by another woman was conditional to her sharing a warning with her. She said:

> I guess what keeps me from saying things is if she were to react in any way other than like, "[*irate*] Fuck that dude!" If she were to react like, "[*exaggerated rationalizing*] Oh, maybe it was a misunderstanding." [*disgusted*] Anything like that, I think that's probably it, because then it looks like I'm spreading gossip or something.

Emma feared being judged as someone who was sharing messages with selfish, prurient motives rather than to protect.

It spite of how important being believed is to women like Emma, it is hardly a foregone conclusion. Chloe, a 33-year-old Asian woman, expressed that being believed was not something she could always expect:

> I feel like it's often my female friends who don't believe me. I had a mentor who directed me in a show, and the person who played my father touched my butt at a party, and I told her about it, and [*angry*] she ended up being his girlfriend. [*sigh*] I don't know. Maybe I'm not a very good storyteller when it comes to my own trauma, and people go, "Oh, well, maybe she was drunk." I don't know.

This experience left Chloe feeling betrayed. It may be more difficult for her to reach out and trust other women in the future. It has also made Chloe question her ability to share warnings in a way that will be effective. For Chloe and Emma, being believed is extremely important.

6.2.3.4.1 THEME: BEING BELIEVED MAY OR MAY NOT BE IMPORTANT.

The degree of importance a woman placed on being believed varied but usually fell on either the extreme of mattering a great deal or not mattering at all. For interview participants who responded that it was important to be believed, this was often their most emotionally enthusiastic answer. They often spoke with passion and vehemence unmatched at any other point in their interviews. When asked if being believed was important to her, Victoria, a 37-year-old White woman responded:

> [*almost shouting*] One hundred percent. That's my number one thing. [*almost hurt*] Not being believed, especially when I'm telling the truth, that's the worst

> feeling in the world when you're not being believed, and I think especially with subjects like this when it's the quote/unquote hard to prove and what not. Yeah, absolutely. [*pausing after each syllable for emphasis*] One hundred percent.

Victoria's unequivocal language highlights the personal affront she feels when not being believed. Rivka, a 49-year-old White woman, also spoke about the pain she would expect to feel if she were not believed:

> [*quietly and slowly but with deep sincerity*] It would feel very important. I would almost feel violated if I thought people thought that I was just lying about my experiences. It would just be very violating to me. It would be hurtful. To think that I'm not sincere in my - whether my warnings or my experiences - I think it would be heartbreaking to not be believed.

Rivka and Victoria's enthusiastic comments allude to some of the common reasons mentioned throughout interviews for wanting to be believed.

Participants articulated an importance in being believed due to their notions that (a) their personal reputations were important, (b) supporting women's voices is important, and (c) not being believed can lead to self-doubt. Zoe, a 27-year-old White woman, spoke about the dangers of not being believed and how they could contribute to a woman developing a negative reputation. She said:

> It's always a risk to say something like that to somebody partly because you could be wrong, and you could be wronging someone who was innocent, and you may just have gotten a weird vibe for whatever reason. But also, because then you could get a reputation for someone who was gossipy or maligning people. Or if this person likes the man that you are warning her about, you could be

> jeopardizing a relationship that's just fine. Or she may disrespect me, and she may cut off my access or opportunities elsewhere. You never know quite who is able to mess with you because everyone is interconnected in such a distinct way.

As mentioned earlier, theatre communities often feel very interconnected and a bad reputation can quickly spread as Zoe indicated. Such a reputation may incline directors and casting directors to avoid casting an actor regardless of her suitability for the part. Avery, a 32-year-old White woman, further details the ways that developing a bad reputation can damage an actor's career. When asked about the importance of being believed when sharing a warning, Avery said:

> So, there's something where you don't say it because you don't want people to not hire you or think you're difficult or to think you're snitching on them or whatever. So, it's important to be believed. And usually I have been because the behavior of the men speaks for itself.

Avery asserted that her credibility was buttressed by the SWN men who acted in a way consistent with her warnings. Perhaps other women have not been able to rely on SWN men who so reliably engage in inappropriate behavior as the men Avery had in mind.

Several interview participants said they made it a point to believe all women who shared warnings about men. Madison, a 29-year-old White woman, discussed how she felt doing so was an essential part of continuing social trends towards gender equality. When asked if it was important to her to be believed, she said:

> Oh my gosh! So important. [*urgently*] That is the foundation of the #metoo movement. That's [not being believed] the foundation of patriarchal systems that suppress women, that make them feel silenced, that protect them. It's like a man's

> word means more than a woman. [*insistently*] You have to believe women. And what confuses people that maybe aren't on board with this movement is that they think that a woman's word could matter more than a man's. That's not what that is. That's not what feminism is. [*frustrated*] Seventeen or however many people came forward about Bill Cosby and people still wanted to believe Bill Cosby more than the women because he was famous. One man shouldn't outweigh seventeen women because you saw him on a show and thought he was charming.

Madison insisted that it is important for women to be granted the same benefit of the doubt provided to a SWN man. She decried that this continues to not be the case. Hannah, a 41-year-old White woman, explained why she thinks there is good reason to believe women:

> I wouldn't put myself out on the line - like this right here, having this conversation - when these women come forward, [I believe them] because there's so much on the line. Who would be like, "[*mocking a malevolent tone*] I'm gonna dig up these dark secrets from my past or somebody else's past and put them all out there?" It better be real. It better be true, or I'm gonna completely rake myself over the coals for nothing.

Hannah noted that women risk so much by sharing whisper network messages. To her, this risk should be respected and taken into account in judging the believability of a warning.

Some interview participants reached the conclusion that it is important to believe other women after their own experiences not being believed. Miriam, a 32-year-old White woman, told a story about her experience working on a show with a man who

several women witnessed engaging in inappropriate behavior. The cast and crew eventually had a large meeting to address the accusations where Madison says the women were shouted down by the men. She remembered:

> I think that was one of the hardest things that was happening during *The Crucible* was that we had a male dominated cast not believing and not caring about how women were feeling, and they had no experience of what it was like to be in the position that we were in. They were just blaming it on us being sensitive or accusatory for no reason. That's huge. I think that's probably the biggest reason for us not saying anything, because when we do there's such backlash. I've never had an instance where I've spoken out against an assault or harassment where it wasn't met with extreme defensiveness or gas lighting or backlash. And it just makes it harder. I'm like, "Yeah. This wasn't worth it."

After this experience, Madison has become less likely to share a warning. She remembers the pain of her experience and would like to avoid that in the future. At the same time, she has a more personal understanding of what women risk when they share warnings and is more likely to believe other women.

A few interview participants also said that not being believed could cause a woman to question herself. For them, being believed was important because it protected their confidence, self-image, and emotional well-being. Leah, a 45-year-old White woman, explained that being believed provided important validation in a situation where the woman already feels vulnerable. When asked if it would be important for her to be believed, she replied, “[*emphatically*] Of the utmost importance. You’re already questioning yourself. You don’t need other people that don’t believe you.”

Maya, a 31-year-old multiracial woman, gave a more pointed response suggesting that failure to believe a woman could driver her into crisis. She said being believed was, “very important. Because it makes you think you’re crazy if no one believes you. Like, did it actually happen?” Maya’s choice of the word “crazy” may be extreme, but it may reflect the true mental health crisis experienced by women who are not believed.

Olivia, a 31-year-old White woman, shared a personal experience of being victimized by a man. Although it is not a story about a whisper network, it does illustrate the profound psychological trauma that can be done to women who are not believed when they tell someone about what happened to them. When asked if it was important to her to be believed, she replied:

> [*adamantly*] It's insanely important. Especially because the kind of abuse I've received through my life isn't as clear cut as somebody jumped out from a bush and raped me, you know? Which I think is how most people perceive assault and accept assault as being true. It scares me to share my truth and have someone be like - Well, actually, this actually happened to me the first time I was raped. I was in college, and I went to the counselor, and I was so confused about what had just happened to my body, and why I was so sick, and I shared my experience with them, and they said, "[*patronizingly*] Oh, that's not so bad." And My 18-year-old self went, "[*casually*] Okay. I guess it's not that bad. I guess I'm just being emotional." Because I know I’m an emotional person. I want to keep that in check. So, I went three years being physically ill. I did one show [with the man who raped me] that was a restoration play, so you know it's just all, "[*imitating loutish joking*] Let's pick up this woman, and just do whatever we want with her

> situation." And I couldn't get through the rehearsals without being physically ill. Every time he looked at me and touched me, because I knew in a second, they were going to sling me over their shoulder and rape me off stage, and that's when I finally went to therapy for the first time and was able to identify what had happened to me and how I could move forward from that experience. [*emphatically*] So, the one experience of having my rape, my assault diminished has made me so scared to share what I know is true, but what I know could be misinterpreted.

Not only did Olivia's deniers exacerbate her trauma, but they also caused her to question her own judgement to such a point that she may have resisted sharing warnings with other women. In spite of how important being believed is to Olivia and most other participants, there were a few women in the interviews who claimed not to find it important to them at all.

Some interview participants stated that being believed when sharing whisper network messages was not important to them. Although more women expressed with great fervor how important it was to feel believed, because several women also spoke with conviction and enthusiasm to the contrary, I felt it was worthy of being its own theme.

There were a few reasons that were given such as those who felt that telling the truth should be enough. Anna, a 27-year-old White woman, explained why being believed is irrelevant to whether she shares a warning:

> Especially when it comes to things that have happened to me personally, that I've personally seen, it's the truth, and the truth is kind of non-negotiable and if you

> don't believe me, it's still the truth. In terms of someone else's story, that's where it feels trickier because while I assume that's the truth, I also am not a witness.

Some women also made the distinction that being believed mattered more when the warning was based on personal experience as opposed to a third person's experience. For Anna, her confidence in her own story is likely to be greater than someone else's story, but in either case, she is not concerned with whether people choose to believe what she knows to be true. Mia, a 32-year-old Latina woman, expressed similar sentiments, saying, "As long as I was speaking from my truth, I would just hope that they would make the best decision for them."

It may be that the sharer of the warnings feels her overriding duty is sharing information rather than continuing to provide protection. Elizabeth, a 75-year-old White woman, said, "I've done my part if I say something. If she doesn't want to hear it or is willing to take her chances or is in denial or whatever, whatever, whatever. If I've done my part [*shrug*]." Elizabeth expressed a willingness to be responsible only so far as sharing the warning is concerned. She does not feel the need to defend her own credibility or convince the other woman of the truth.

Some of Elizabeth's attitude may be related to her age relative to most of the other interview participants who were in their twenties and thirties. Lily, a 55-year-old White woman, said this explicitly:

> At this point, I don't care what people think. Twenty years ago, I think I was just trying to share information. Being believed - I had gotten used to these guys inexplicably having power, and me having not power. So, being believed was kind of beside the point. I wanted to share information. I didn't expect to get

> stronger or more powerful over them because of it. I just felt like I was beholden to the powers at work, and as long as these guys stayed in power, and nobody was questioning them, nobody was questioning their behavior – [*exasperated*] I mean, Harvey Weinstein ran Miramax for 30 years before anybody said stop masturbating in front of people. Why did it take Rose McGowan getting ostracized before people started going, "Wait a minute." [*indignant and incredulous*] And for then, a series of articles come out, and then a whole bunch of things?

It may be that Elizabeth and Lily have reached a point in their lives or careers where they do not have the same kind of concerns as many of the younger women in these interviews. They may also have been shaped by decades of enduring unmitigated misconduct and harassment during a time when it was more tolerated.

The disagreements between interview participants over the importance of being believed is indicative of the variety of often conflicting opinions that arose in my analysis of these interviews. Some women claimed to only share warnings with close friends; others said they would warn anyone. Some said they received whisper network messages frequently; some claimed to have never received them. Some participants believed in sharing messages to protect more vulnerable women in their communities; others felt the need to protect themselves from the competitive atmosphere among women actors. Some viewed whisper networks as essential mechanisms for protecting each other; some remained wary of sharing what they saw as gossip. In the next section, I will attempt to understand and explain some of the complexities and nuances that lie within the data.

CHAPTER 7. DISCUSSION

This chapter will focus on answering the research questions posed by the study, highlighting findings of particular interest, and comparing the findings of this study to current perceptions of whisper networks. The themes outlined in the previous chapter described the chief findings in the data, but more can be interpreted upon the further examination. These themes are not independent artifacts, but related ideas that may elucidate some of the sophisticated and complex attributes of whisper networks. Answers to the research questions and a greater understanding of the nature of whisper networks may be found in considering these themes and how they relate to one another. The research questions asked in this study seek to explore the nature of whisper networks by investigating (a) the content of whisper networks (RQ1), (b) access to whisper networks (RQ2), (c) the factors network members weigh in evaluating messages (RQ3), and (d) the influence of messages on their decision-making (RQ4).

7.1 The Content of Whisper Network Messages

The previous chapter provides many examples of the stories shared in whisper network messages and divides these stories into dominant themes. The themes and remaining data indicate that most whisper network messages described by the interview participants detail either a SWN man's (a) viewpoints, (b) personality, or (c) behaviors. As mentioned previously, this study uses the term "misconduct" to broadly refer to all negatively-viewed outlooks, attitudes, and actions. A whisper network message may also have content that falls into more than one of these categories if the message is sufficiently complex or the SWN man's misconduct is sufficiently prolific. The first of these larger categories of content I will discuss is the viewpoints of SWN men.

7.1.1 Viewpoints

Many whisper network messages warned of men who had a point of view that was objectionable. His perspective may or may not have resulted in further physical misconduct, but it typically was seen as indicative of the man's distasteful views. This category is particularly relevant to the themes of *Men in Positions of Power* and *Sexism*. It is because of the powerful positions the men hold that their viewpoints matter. A man who lacked creative or business authority but was also sexist might be less of a problem to the women around him. However, a director, designer, or artistic director frequently makes choice about plays that reflect his view of the world.

In some cases, the views and perspectives of these men are reflected in their creative work. Several interview participants said they were often made uncomfortable by male directors they felt were unnecessarily and gratuitously sexualizing the roles of women in their plays. Actors found themselves in more revealing costumes than seemed necessary for the show. They were sometimes asked to be more seductive towards another character or to include more sexual innuendo in their performances. In some instances, this gratuitous sexualization was done irrespective of their sexual orientation. While the women did not fear being a victim of the man's personal predations because he was gay, but they questioned his decision to objectify the women in the show or portray them as inferior to men.

In other cases, the sexism and views of the director may have been seen as fostering an unsafe working environment. The man may have seemed to lack the sensitivity and care that the women see as part of a professional rehearsal process. Some interview participants described these men as being blind to the psychological, emotional,

and perhaps even physical needs of women actors. Rehearsing and performing a scene that involves a rape, nudity, or any kind of trauma or intimacy demands certain protections for all involved. However, directors were often indifferent to these special circumstances and chose to rehearse these scenes without some of the more common protocols such as limiting attendance at rehearsal or working with an intimacy director (Appendix 7). The director and other members of the production team are responsible for ensuring that no one feels unsafe or exploited in these conditions.

If an actor is in a vulnerable state, the leaders in the room are tasked with ensuring that no other members of the audience, cast, or crew can molest, harm, or exploit them. Miriam, one interview participant, witnessed a male actor assault a woman actor during a rehearsal. The scene being rehearsed was one of intimate partner violence, and the male actor lost control during a rehearsal and hurt his castmate. However, Miriam explained that she held the director more culpable than the actor, because of what she felt was an environment of carelessness and casual sexism. Participants seemed more forgiving of an actor who behaved inappropriately during a moment of poor judgement than a director who allowed the rehearsal space to be a place where those events were tolerated.

Many of the whisper network messages described in these interviews were about men in power whose views were seen as having unctuous, bigoted, or even dangerous viewpoints. Although these men were not always described as personally perpetrating harassment or violence on anyone, their perspectives were frequently credited with creating art that seemed sexist and allowing rehearsals to devolve into unsafe, unprofessional spaces. Although these directors may not have been engaging in predatory behavior towards women themselves, they were often seen as creating an environment

that might serve as a safe harbor for more predatory or violent men. Another large category of whisper network content dealt with men whose personality traits directly affected the women with whom they worked.

7.1.2 Personality

A second major category of whisper network messages were warnings about a man's personality. Messages within the theme *A "Creepy" Vibe* are consistent with this. However, there may be some other aspects of a man's personality that are described. Interview participants recounted being warned about men with a wide range of objectionable personality traits from short tempered to mean to dismissive to arrogant and more. Some interview participants described men who did not commit any acts of harassment or violence, but they found them to be egotistical and manipulative towards the actors in the cast. As they saw it, this made for an unpleasant working environment. When considering the length and intensity of the hours an actor may spend with a director during the production of a play, this could be valuable knowledge to the next woman who might audition to work with this man. This is one of the reasons actors frequently share information about the people with whom they might work on a production (Appendix 7). Given the long hours and often low pay associated with most acting jobs, working with kind, fun people can be a perk while working with unpleasant people can be a major deterrent. Working with dangerous people should be a non-starter for any actor, but many are willing to shoulder a certain amount of risk in order to work on what they anticipate will be an artistically notable or lucrative show.

A man's personality may also impact his creative decisions. Several men were described as only casting women they found to be very attractive. Whisper network

messages were shared that the directors were partial to casting women with certain physical characteristics. In these cases, the warnings were not accusing these directors of acting inappropriately towards the women they cast, but they were warned by other women who felt that these directors were casting only the women to whom they were sexually attracted. Even if a woman is not worried that a man might make unwanted sexual advances towards her, she may prefer not to risk feeling like she was only cast because the director found her attractive. Most of these directors were associated with wanting to surround themselves with beautiful women, but they were generally not known to harass or act violently towards women. However, a large number of the whisper network messages recounted during these interviews dealt with just that.

7.1.3 Behaviors

Many – perhaps a plurality – of the whisper network messages described by interview participants described the behavior of men. In this category, most behavior involves a man doing something to a woman. In some cases, it could be an act or something the man said that was not directed at a single person or at anyone in particular. Those behaviors tend to fall into non-sexual and sexual subcategories.

7.1.3.1 Non-Sexual.

These non-sexual behaviors tend to fall outside the themes of whisper network content outlined in the previous chapter. Nonetheless, warnings about misconduct of a non-sexual behavior to appear to be spread commonly through whisper networks. These behaviors may include expressing anger in unprofessional ways, bullying, committing acts of violence, or other types of misconduct. Interview participants identified these

behaviors as being directed towards men and women. However, men were never mentioned as being included in a whisper network.

Directors who exploit the lack of accountability often afforded to them during a production were described by some women. Actors who are bullied, berated, or physically hurt may not feel they have anyone to whom they could speak about the director's behavior. Even if the director answered to a different artistic director or managing director, the actor may not feel comfortable or safe reporting abuse to those people. Sometimes the abuse is reserved for women, but other interview participants described men who engaged in non-sexual misconduct towards men, too.

The subject of substance abuse and addiction arose during several interviews. Some interview participants felt that an individual's proclivity towards such activities might be objectionable itself or lead to other objectionable behavior. Interview participants may have viewed these men's use of alcohol as the cause of their sexual or non-sexual misconduct or both. However, one actor described the non-sexual behavior as still existing in the same context and space as a man's sexual behavior, even when the misconduct was not overtly sexual. This blending of sexual and non-sexual misconduct was described in other interviews, too. Many of the most upsetting and frightening stories from these interviews revolve around stories of men's sexual behavior.

7.1.3.2 Sexual.

Sexual behaviors tend to be misconduct that target the sexuality or physicality of a woman. Esther, a 35-year-old White woman, recalled that she, like most other interview participants, had received warnings about men who engaged in "sexual harassment, manipulative types of behavior, inappropriate comments or touching". Several other

interview participants also described being warned about men who engaged in grooming[2], sexual assault, and rape. These behaviors are often easy to recognize and are documented throughout this dissertation. However, in some cases, warnings may be about a man who has not exhibited these behaviors, but women believe he might. Whisper networks can be used to share information among women who may not fear for their safety, but still hope to avoid or be prepared for men who make unwanted sexual advances.

Many of the whisper network messages described in these interviews were warnings about what the women often considered to be mild behavior. Sometimes directors, artistic directors, or other actors would ask women on dates or suggest sexual relationships. These are often attempts at consensual relationships, but they may be pursued in a working environment where such advances feel out-of-place or inappropriate. There may also be a power differential between the SWM man and the women he pursues. This differential may be based on the man's formal position as director or artistic director, or it may come from the man's experience or prestige in the theatre community. In the messages many participants mentioned, there is often an implication that the SWN man has a consensual sexual relationship as a final goal, but in the process of achieving that may run afoul of professionalism.

Many of these men may not be willing to risk breaking the law, but they may be willing to deceive the women with whom they are hoping to have sex. Several women described being warned about men who would pursue women while concealing other relationships or attempting to hide a prolific past of womanizing. They found themselves

[2] Grooming refers to "manipulative behaviors that the abuser uses to gain access to a potential victim, coerce them to agree to the abuse, and reduce the risk of being caught" (RAINN, 2020)

pulled into a whisper network by a friend who wanted to warn them that these men had a reputation of making advances towards women actors. There is no indication that these friends assumed the men might do anything predatory, illegal, or violent to her, but they may have just wanted Isabella to know that these men might not be honest.

Women also described men who had a habit of grooming women. They might or might not try to initiate a sexual relationship with those women, but they appeared to be preparing them for such. Some participants told of whisper network messages pertaining to men who seemed to have a habit of casting young, attractive women. These women were often asked to come to rehearsals even when their scenes were scheduled to be worked. The men would shower them with compliments and sometimes promise professional opportunities in the future. These men may not have attempted to pursue the women they were grooming, but interview participants speculated that the men enjoyed the attention and gratitude they were able to earn from these women. Often these messages were given to women the message-sender believed were the type of woman the SWN man typically groomed. Warning women who might appear likely targets of a man is one reason a woman might choose to include a woman in a whisper network, but there are other possible reasons to explore, too.

7.2 Inclusion and Exclusion of Whisper Networks

Whisper networks grow through a process of sharing messages. Each time a message is shared, the message-sender chooses to invite the message-receiver into the network. This choice to share means that senders are gatekeepers of the networks and decide who is brought into the network and who is not. This study hoped to understand why some people are brought into whisper networks and why others are not. Many of the

themes outlined in the previous chapter alluded to this question, but there is additional data that should be considered in explaining why some women are included in whisper networks and other women are excluded from them.

7.2.1 Factors for Inclusion

The choice to share a whisper network message is one that most women take very seriously. As mentioned before, many women see this decision as one rife with risk. When a woman does choose to extend a warning to another woman, that decision tends to rest on her consideration of (a) the relevance of the woman's relationship with the man, (b) her familiarity with the other woman, and (c) a desire to protect vulnerable actors. It is unclear if one or a combination of these factors must be met or if some factors outweigh others. For each woman, this calculation may be different.

7.2.1.1 Relevance of the Woman's Relationship to the Man.

When deciding whether to warn a woman about a SWN man, that potential message-sender may consider how close the potential message-receiver's relationship with that man is or could be. Is she auditioning for a show he is directing? Might she audition for a show he is directing? Will she have a small role in the show, or will they work long hours together? Has she worked with the man before? Does she already seem to have an opinion of the man? As mentioned in the previous chapter, if a woman believes another woman has a positive view of a SWN man, it may alter if or how she warns that woman. This is documented in the description of the themes *Change Conversation Tactics* and *Reconsider Sharing the Warning*.

As described in the above section on the theme *Potential Contact with the Offender*, it is common for a woman to warn another woman who may work with the

man or be likely to spend time with him in some capacity. If a woman is assessed to be unlikely to encounter a SWN man, information may be withheld from her. In the experience of some interview participants, they were not included in a whisper network about a man until they began to establish a relationship with that man. To many women, any time a whisper network grows, the risk increases that the messages could become public, the whisper network could be exposed, and women could face retaliation or reprisal. On the other hand, when more women are excluded from the network, there is a perception that they may be vulnerable to the man's misconduct. This tension between growing and not growing a whisper network seems to exist in the minds of many of the women interviewed in this study, and many decide to draw a line based on their assessment of the likelihood of another woman encountering a SWN man. If a woman is unlikely to work with a man, it may not be worth the risk to include her in the network. However, once they were known to have spent time with him, they were brought into the whisper network, sometimes by more than one woman.

This relationship with the man may be seen as necessary regardless of the message's content. When a woman is expected to work with a SWN man, she may receive messages of minor misconduct or dangerous and egregious behavior. While the nature of the SWN man's infraction does not seem to make a warning more or less likely to be shared when a woman is expected to form a relationship with the man, a woman may still hesitate from giving sharing a whisper network message with a woman to whom she, herself, does not have a sufficiently strong relationship.

7.2.1.2 Familiarity with the Other Woman.

A frequent subject in these interviews was the degree of familiarity between the women sharing whisper network messages. Themes that fall under this category include *Close Colleagues and Friends*, *Warning People Who are Close*, and *Women Who may not have Close Relationships*. In the previous chapter, I described how many – if not most – of the interview participants said they would only share a warning with a woman to whom they were close. This is generally based on a sense some women expressed that women they do not know may represent some risk. They feel confident that women with whom they are close will protect their identity and not share their messages with those who cannot be trusted. Women they do not know, may intentionally or inadvertently betray their trust, and the woman may find herself on the receiving end of reprisals for sharing whisper network messages.

However, some other women expressed that they were willing to share warnings with women who were strangers. This inconsistency may point to the individualized nature of whisper networks. Each one may operate differently based on the women who are in it. While some may be tightly knit groups of close friends, others may be loosely held together networks of women who barely know each other. It may be that most lie somewhere between the two.

7.2.1.2.1 CLOSENESS MAY MATTER.

Because so many women fear being publicly identified or identified by the SWN man as the sharer of a whisper network message, many women are only willing to warn other women with whom they are close. They do not want to risk being the subject of retaliation and are not willing to share a message with someone they do not trust. Several interview participants claimed to be unwilling to share information about a SWN man

with anyone who is not a friend. Friendship and closeness were defined in a variety of ways. For some participants, a relationship outside of work and outside the theatre must exist to consider a person close. More often, women spoke of the closeness that often derived from fellowship in the theatre. Several participants described the time spent in group dressing rooms as facilitating intimacy with other women. Many of the women in interviews detailed an affinity they feel towards other women in theatre based on a sense of shared struggle and toil. The scarcity of roles for women actors (Appendix 7) may create competition, but it also seems to create closeness and empathy for many of the women interviewed.

Although women can be protective about the other women they invite into a whisper network, in some cases, if a woman believes that someone else has made that information public knowledge (perhaps through an online posting or other public accusation), she does not feel constrained in the same way. When she cannot be identified as the source of the warnings, she is more likely to pass them along. Some other women do not feel the need to be so cautious about choosing recipients of their warnings.

7.2.1.2.2 Closeness may not Matter.

Some interview participants claimed to be willing to share warnings with nearly anyone. These women tended to be those who were less afraid of the consequences that might accompany being caught passing whisper network messages. They also tended to be the same women who found being believed when sharing warnings to be less important. In some cases, these women proclaimed to have a rigid set of values that might outweigh their fear of retribution. Some of these interview participants were older.

They had, perhaps, reached a phase in their careers when they no longer feared having the reputation as someone who told other women about the misconduct of men.

It may also be that these women who claimed to be willing to share a warning with anyone were afraid of potential retribution, but that fear was outweighed by their desire to protect other women from SWN men. It may be that they felt a particular sense of responsibility to younger women or women who were also women of color. Perhaps learning a woman was going to be in a show with a director they knew to be predatory was so troublesome that they deemed it worth the risk that they could be discovered and labeled as a gossip. It might also be that some women have a special sensitivity towards vulnerable actors.

7.2.1.3 Wanting to Protect Vulnerable Actors.

Throughout these interviews, participants described the camaraderie they felt with other women in theatre. Although some did mention competition among women actors for roles, many more spoke of the bond they felt with other women in their industry. They spoke of the connections they were able to form over their frustration with a lack of good jobs for women, a lack of quality roles for women, a lack of women directors, pressure to maintain a certain body type, and the challenges of acting while also fulfilling responsibilities of a girlfriend, a wife, or a mother. This sense of connection may be part of what leads some women to desire so badly to protect those women they see as vulnerable to the predations of SWN men. Older women in the community may also be reminded of the challenges they endured as young actors and feel protective of more junior actors. Messages related to the themes *Protecting Those Perceived as More Vulnerable*, and *Older and More Senior Women* may fall into this category.

In some cases, the vulnerability that is noticed may be that woman's relative professional inexperience. London, a 29-year-old Black woman, said that she is more likely to give a warning to a woman "Especially if it's someone who is newer to the industry. And it feels like they don't quite have the connections to feel established in that environment yet." This motivation for sharing warnings was echoed in several other interviews. Without a knowledge of standard practice in theatre, it is particularly easy for a newer actor to be manipulated and exploited. And if they are subject to a man's misconduct, without an understanding of the theatre community's rules and norms, she may be unaware by what avenues she can pursue help, protection, or redress.

It is also possible that the woman's personal circumstances could make her appear particularly vulnerable to a man's misconduct. A few women alluded to the vulnerability they felt as young women in the theatre industry. Even in small communities, women described feeling intimidated by older men, particularly those in positions of power. They generally did not specify whether they received such warnings herself as young women and wants to provide similar support, or if they did not receive that kind of support and want young women to feel a kind of aid and encouragement they felt they did not receive.

This desire to protect vulnerable women was reiterated by many of the interview participants. Their perception that men were exploiting these vulnerabilities seemed to heighten their anger. In many cases, it did appear to be their anger that allowed them to overcome the risks associated with spreading whisper network messages. However, some women are not swayed thusly and choose not to broaden their whisper networks to certain women.

7.2.2 Factors for Exclusion

Some women are left out whisper networks. In some instances, this may be more passive exclusion such as an oversight or accident and in other cases, it may be a more active decision not to share a warning with a specific woman. There may be many reasons for such passive exclusions, but this study identified two main categories of reasons for active exclusion: (a) a lack of trust in other women and (b) a perception that a woman lacked vulnerability.

7.2.2.1 Lack of Trust with Other Women.

Although these interviews paint a picture of the theatre industry as a place of welcome and camaraderie for many women, some have a different experience, often based on their impression of the theatre community in which they are based. This subcategory includes messages that apply to the themes *Fear of Developing a Bad Reputation*, *Competition among Women*, and *Scarcity of Work for Women Actors*. Interview participants described some acting environments that are particularly competitive among women. New York and Los Angeles are described this way, but it could apply to other communities, too. In these kinds of competitive environments, some women fear that other women will go to great lengths to achieve an advantage over their competitors. This could even involve outing a woman as someone who spreads rumors about men or is too sensitive about how men behave in rehearsal.

Although only a few of the most competitive communities were identified as especially toxic in terms of the lack of trust that existed between women actors, a few women did reference individuals within their communities whom they did not trust. References to these kinds of women were uncommon, and this lack of trust may have

been a function of dynamics unique to the interview participant and the woman she did not trust. Sometimes a personal squabble with another woman might make her untrustworthy and perhaps, only temporarily.

Participants indicated that under these circumstances they may be unwilling to share warnings with women they fear would use those warnings against them. Although the women may have potential conflict with the man or be vulnerable to him, this may not be enough to overcome the lack of trust the other woman might feel towards her. In other cases, she might not view that woman as potentially susceptible to a man's misconduct.

7.2.2.2 Apparent Lack of Vulnerability.

Some women might be excluded from whisper network because women in the network do not view them as being vulnerable to the man's behavior. None of the women interviewed admitted to excluding other women for this reason, but several of the participants speculated that they did not hear many messages about men because they were judged to not be at risk of being victimized by a predatory man. These interview participants guessed that their exclusion was rooted either in their outward bearing or their characteristics that seemed to make them less sexually attractive.

A few women who were interviewed claimed to have received very few whisper network messages at all due to their attitudes. Victoria, a 37-year-old White woman, described how she had cultivated a "don't-fuck-with-me-attitude" that seemed to protect her from men. Samantha, a 50-year-old White woman, also described how her personality was intimidating to men. Both women said that they suspected that other women saw their personas and judged them to not need the protection of a whisper

network. However, such judgments may not be accurate. A dangerous or predacious man may not be deterred by a bristly personality.

Some interview participants speculated that they were excluded from whisper networks based on their age, body type, race, sexual orientation, relationship status, or attitude. Some of these reasons are particularly sad as they may point to an internalized misogyny that causes a woman to think – however subconsciously it might be – that a woman might be too old, too overweight, or not enough of the man's type to be a potential victim. Predatory men do not necessarily limit their misconduct to women that meet conventional standards of beauty. These men are also not necessarily dissuaded from molesting women because they might appear to be unavailable either because of their sexuality or relationship status. If these men had respect for the woman's preferences not to date men or to remain monogamous, they would probably not be quite so disrespectful of their desire not to be harassed or assaulted without their consent.

I suspect that if most women were to reflect deeply on their judgments about who would and would not be vulnerable to SWN man, they would be far more willing to include more women than they do. Many women may know that a predatory man may visit his misconduct upon women regardless of whether she conforms to cultural norms of beauty or sexual availability. However, the conflation in our heads of stories about romance and sexuality with stories about sexual misconduct can be a powerful force in reinforcing sexist narratives in a way that benefits predators. Participants mentioned several times that they sought to use whisper networks to protect women who were young and pretty. The elements of storytelling and how they apply to whisper networks will be examined next.

7.3 Narrative Elements in Whisper Network Messages

As discussed earlier, narrative rationality is the process by which elements of a story impact the decision-making and behavior of an individual who hears the story. The three elements most associated with narrative rationality, and the three elements this study examined are coherence, fidelity, and focalization. Many allusions to the importance of fidelity and focalization appeared throughout the interviews, but there was virtually no evidence that coherence played a role in how the interview participants assessed the whisper network messages they heard. Next, I will detail the findings related to each of these elements.

7.3.1 Narrative Coherence

Narrative coherence is the degree to which the elements of a story make sense together. When parts of a story do not follow a clear chronology or appear logically inconsistent with one another, it lacks coherence. Defenders of narrative theory assert that a story lacking coherence is likely to be evaluated by the listener as less likely to be true. Thus, the story is unlikely to have as strong of an impact on the listener's decision-making as one that is more coherent. When interview participants were asked about the parts of a whisper network message that made it more believable, none mentioned anything that could be reasonably characterized as narrative coherence. No one said she needs a story to make sense in order to believe it. This is not to say anyone claimed to believe stories they had heard in spite of those stories not making sense. It is only to say that the data never revealed the internal logic and narrative cohesion of a story as a factor in assessing the believability of a story.

7.3.1.1 Lack of Appearance in the Data.

There may be a few reasons this element does not appear in the data of this study. Some interview participants may not hear logically incoherent whisper network messages, and thus, they may be unaware that coherence is an element they use for evaluating stories. If a person never heard a story that did not make sense, one might expect that person to be unable to articulate the importance of narrative coherence, because all stories have made sense in that person's experience. These interviews were structured in a semi-open-ended fashion, and participants were not prompted to consider coherence of story and to assess its importance to them.

It may also be that the other narrative elements play a comparatively oversized role in how the interview participants assess whisper network messages. These interviews did not ask participants to catalog every reason why they were likely to believe a warning. They also did not educate interview participants on the elements of narrative theory or provide them with much time for self-reflection.

The absence of references to coherence may also be related to something that was repeated often in the interviews: stories within the whisper network messages are often terse and lack specifics. The topic of understated whisper network messages came up many times. Although some whisper network messages did contain detailed and thoroughly told stories, these appear to be in the minority. According to some participants, the warnings they received rarely detailed what a man did or to whom he did it. They were simply told to "watch out for" or "be careful around" a certain man. In these cases, the coherence of the story is very difficult to evaluate, because it has almost none of the elements of a story one would expect. Women are left to their own imaginations to speculate on the man's misconduct.

Understated warnings may even downplay the misconduct itself. Mia, a 32-year-old Latina woman, described having heard warnings about the misconduct of a male director prior to working with him. She believed the misconduct described in these warnings was something she could tolerate. However, upon working with the director, she found his behavior to be more manipulative and unprofessional than the warnings she had received had described. Mia did not go on to say why she might suspect the warnings she heard were of behavior less egregious than what she experienced. Perhaps the women warning her were just describing what they knew or had heard. Perhaps the women were withholding information from Mia. They may have thought doing so would protect her, or they may have expected her to fill-in the untold portions of the story herself. They may have seen themselves as conforming to the whisper network convention of understatement and assumed she would read between the lines.

The stories of whisper network messages are often completed by the message-receiver. The storytelling is a joint exercise where an understated message is provided to a woman who is expected to infer the rest of the story using her life experience or her imagination. If the message-receiver is so often completing a partial story given to her from another woman, why would the story lack coherence? It seems unlikely a woman might tell herself a story that is logically inconsistent. It may be more likely she would have to contend with parts of a story that were inconsistent with her view of the world.

7.3.2 Narrative Fidelity

The element of narrative fidelity was frequently described by interview participants as key to how they assessed the veracity of the whisper network messages they heard. Many of the participants said that they were most likely to believe a whisper

network message was true if the story being told was consistent with how they viewed the world. There are numerous examples in the previous chapter when discussing the theme *Fidelity*.

The relevant parts of their world view were sometimes very general and other times very specific. General views of the world might include their beliefs about men, abuse, the theatre industry, power, or manipulation, among others. A more specific view might be the woman's perception of the SWN man, a theatre company, or a victimized woman. Very few interview participants reported hearing whisper network messages that were contradictory to their general perspectives. While it was more common for them to recount a warning about a man they believed to be unlikely to engage in misconduct, these kinds of messages do not appear to have been common. Generally, the content of whisper network messages seemed consistent with the perception women already had of the world.

Whisper network messages rarely seemed to be shocking to the women in these interviews. Some interview participants saw misconduct as common. Shandy, a 32-year-old White woman, made an observation that seemed consistent with the apparent perception of many interview participants:

> I think that there is a tendency between heterosexual men and women they're interested in where it is normalized to be aggressive and to pursue. It's normalized for men to try to take action to a woman who they are interested in. And that is problematic, and also normalized, so when someone tells me a story about a straight man with power lightly or heavily exerting his power to pursue a woman it just sounds true to me. Like, that's what happens, I think.

Although no other interviews express this exact same idea in the same way, many comments from interview participants have led me to believe they would agree with this statement. Men pursuing women for sex or relationships was often described and not necessarily seen as inconsistent with norms of theatre. When there is a power differential between the woman being pursued and the pursuant man, this can easily become fertile ground for an abuse of that power. Shandy speaks to certain gender stereotypes being so culturally endemic that normal, accepted behavior can easily drift into a kind of misconduct. Many interview participants seem to share this perception that some men might not be serial predators but may have taken advantage of their status in inappropriate ways.

Many women stated that abuse and misconduct by men – particularly men in power – are simply commonplace in our society. Madison, a 29-year-old White woman, went so far as to say that anyone who does not believe misconduct occurs frequently "must live under a rock" or be "in complete denial". Madison and several others describe believing other women's warnings because misconduct is so prevalent. However, these interviews indicate that the identity of the woman giving the warning may be very relevant, too.

7.3.3 Narrative Focalization

Many of the interview participants expressed that they considered the person sharing the warning when evaluating whisper network messages. This kind of attention to narrative focalization was revealed when the women said they were more likely to believe a story based on their relationship to the message-sender, their assessment of the motivations of the message-sender, and the personality employed by message-sender. It

is not clear that one facet of the storyteller is more compelling than another. Many of the interview participants likely weigh all these factors against one another. Perhaps they also weigh them against narrative fidelity, too, but this was not revealed in the data.

Several interview participants said that they were more likely to believe the warnings of women with whom they were close. Chloe, a 33-year-old Asian woman, explained why she gave more credibility to the whisper messages shared with her from her friends. She said, “I don't think my friends would lie to me especially with the kind of information that could jeopardize someone's future as an actor.” Chloe trusts her friends not only because of their relationship, but because she understands the risk her friends may be taking by sharing a whisper network message. Not only does she trust them due to her affinity for them, but also because of her understanding of their professional lives.

These interviews contained some women’s speculations on the motivations of women sharing warnings. Women were willing to question whether other women would profit by sharing a whisper network message. Esther, a 35-year-old White woman, said of women who have warned her about men, “For the most part, they have nothing to gain. It's not like they're trying to get anything out of it. In that case, it's like, ‘Why would they do this? Why would they lie? What's the point?’” Although some women’s motives may be scrutinized such as what was described in the previous section on the theme *Competition among Women*, this level of skepticism appears far less frequently in the data than a willingness to believe other women and give them the benefit of the doubt. However, what did appear frequently was a sense of self-consciousness about how women’s own warnings and their accompanying motivations were perceived by others. Several interview participants described how they tried to craft their messages in such a

way to minimize the perception that they were motivated by selfishness, personal animus, or professional ambition. As mentioned above, many women seem to prefer to provide understated warnings, and one reason may be to differentiate them from gossip.

In some cases, the message-receiver's knowledge of the message-sender allows her to make a judgment about her motivations. In other cases, the personality of the message-sender may provide sufficient insight to her motivation. For example, Olivia, a 31-year-old White woman, explained that she would be more likely to believe a woman who calmly sits her down in a private place to warn her than another woman who seemed to be trying to impress a group of actors in a tour van engaging in lively gossip. The tone that Olivia described does not seem to undercut the message directly, so much as is undercuts the woman sharing the message. Several of the women interviewed expressed a respect towards whisper network messages. They believed that they carry power and require risk on the part of the sender. Some of the interview participants found it very distasteful when they would see another woman sharing a whisper network message in a way that was flip or cavalier. These women are less likely to believe a woman who they do not like. This decision-making is consistent with much of the writing about the narrative paradigm, but there were other reasons for believing or not believing messages in these interviews that may lay outside most writings on the theory.

7.4 Impact of Narrative Elements on Behavior

Narrative theory is based on the idea that stories we hear impact our decision-making and our behaviors. If a whisper network's function is to warn women to beware of potentially dangerous men, it is valuable to ask whether the stories shared in these networks contribute to this end. If a woman hears a story about a man's misconduct and

believes it, could this also change how she will act in the future? The warnings described in these interviews were often unaccompanied by an explicit call to action or suggestion of behavior. The interview participants were more likely to describe whisper network messages as stories of misconduct with an implicit warning to be cautious around the man. Did women heed these warnings whether they were explicit or implicit? What constitutes heeding an implicit warning? If a recommendation for how to behave with a SWN man is never spoken out loud, determining whether it was heeded or not can be a challenge.

7.4.1 Heeding Warnings

Several interview participants did describe how they chose to heed the warnings shared with them. Sometimes that included not working with SWN men. Several interview participants described times when they chose not to work with a man because other women had warned them about the man's misconduct. One example of this was described by Rivka, a 49-year-old White woman. She described how other actors had warned her about a local director who they had found to be creepy. She was eventually approached by the director after he saw her perform in a play. He suggested that she audition for a role in an upcoming play he was directing. Rivka found the nature of his approach to be unsavory. She chose not to audition for that show. However, when he later directed a play in which she had long wanted to act, she auditioned and was cast. During rehearsals for that show, she never witnessed the man engaging in any kind of misconduct. Rivka's description of the warnings contains the element of narrative fidelity in that she found herself more likely to believe messages where the man's behavior was consistent with those warnings. She had heard that he was creepy, and when he

approached her and asked her to audition, he was creepy towards her. She then chose not to audition for the show for which he asked her to audition. However, when a show that was particularly appealing to her was being produced, she did choose to audition for it. Presumably, she entered this production with clear eyes towards how the man might behave and with caution and vigilance. Several women described how they were willing to limit their work with SWN men to products they found especially exciting. When they did choose to work with the man, they described keeping their distance from the man, avoiding too much familiarity with him, or being wary of his behavior. Most of them seemed to consider this to be heeding a warning.

Having this kind of vigilance may be the intent of the warnings in a whisper network. While some whisper network messages may warn women against having any contact with a SWN man, most of the warnings described in these interviews suggested less drastic behavioral changes. A few interview participants mentioned the risk that often accompanies an acting job. This could be the risks associated with performing in a physically demanding show. There are professional risks associated with performing in a touring show, a show in another city, or a show with an especially long run. Some women spoke to the reality that the scarcity of jobs makes it difficult for an actor to turn down a job offer just because a man might act unprofessionally. This is seen as another on a list of risks that could accompany an acting job, and they are encouraged to stay watchful. Many whisper network messages lack even this level of specificity in their warnings, and women are sometimes left on their own to choose what heeding a warning would mean.

Even though some women were occasionally unsure about how to heed a warning or to know what to do with a certain warning, no woman in these interviews expressed a desire to have never been given a warning. Even when a woman is told not to work with a man and does so anyway, as some participants admitted to doing, not one seems to regret being invited into a whisper network. A few women reported hearing whisper network messages about men they knew and liked. Some flatly rejected the messages as misunderstandings or lies. Others were unwilling to reject the experience of another woman but were quick to say their interactions with the SWN men had always been positive. However, in none of these instances did the participants express any sense that whisper networks lacked value or were dangerous. While gossip was often seen in a negative light as something idle and indulgent, whisper network communications seemed to occupy a more sacred space. Even when the warnings of whisper network communications could not or would not be heeded, they seemed to be respected.

7.5 Findings of Particular Interest

A few revelations from this study that stand out are worth additional discussion. Though related to the research questions, they deserve to be highlighted separately. The data from this study indicates three conclusions of note: (a) whisper networks are likely diverse in nature, (b) how women choose to heed a warning can be complex, and (c) there may be elements of the narrative paradigm beyond those typically discussed by scholars. Each of these items deserves further consideration.

7.5.1 The Diverse Nature of Whisper Networks

Although interview participants seemed to have a common concept of the purpose of whisper networks, to warn other women about the misconduct of men, they are diverse

in function and composition. Even among this relatively small sample, a broad range of types of whisper networks emerged. Several interview participants described whisper networks and their approaches to them in differing ways. This heterogeny in their answers does not necessarily cast doubt on their credibility or the validity of the data; rather, it may point towards the ways in which whisper networks may develop differently among different women. Individual women have their own reasons for choosing what messages to share and with whom to share them. These individualized decisions lead to whisper networks that behave differently and are built differently. This study seeks to understand the structure of whisper networks (RQ2) and the content of the messages they spread (RQ1), but the reality of these networks may be that whisper networks may look and act very differently from one another in some respects.

The degree of closeness between two women can be an important variable in whether a woman chooses to share a warning about a man. Some women claimed to only share warnings with very close friends. However, some interview participants said they had warned strangers about SWN men. Many other women used criteria somewhere between these extremes to choose who they invited into a whisper network. It is also worth considering that women in a whisper network might have differing opinions on this matter; some women may warn strangers while others may only warn friends. The closeness of another person is typically an indication that the other woman can be trusted with the information. Untrustworthy women might intentionally or unintentionally allow the content of the messages and the identity of the whisper network messages to flow to someone who might exercise retribution against those women. Perhaps those women who

claim to be unconcerned with closeness either do not fear reprisals or believe that most any woman would endeavor to keep whisper network communications clandestine.

In some cases, the interview participants would only warn a woman about a man's misconduct if she knew that woman was likely to work with that man. However, others would give fellow actors warnings about men regardless of how likely it might be that the other woman might work with that man. The whisper networks described in these interviews varied greatly in the strength of the bonds tying the networks together. Some were small, close-knit groups of women who had known one another for a long time and kept a close hold on their information. Others were sprawling networks where many of the participants would have never met one another or know who else is in the network beyond who told them and who they told.

Interview participants also had differing views on the content of warnings they were willing to pass to other women. Some would only warn other women about men who engaged in criminal behavior such as sexual assault or rape. Many other participants were willing to warn women about men who they saw as having "creepy" personalities. The data also revealed a range of opinions about how certain the women were about the man's misconduct. Some women were careful to only share experiences that had happened directly to them or in front of them. However, some women were willing to share warnings about men even when they could not identify the origin of the allegation. The women who participated in these interviews have belonged to whisper networks that share a broad range of information from many different sources.

These variables related to the content and construction of whisper networks can lead to a wide variety of whisper networks. A whisper network might exist describing

outrageous, criminal behavior that exists across a wide group of people not closely bound by relationships of any kind. This was the case with the network described by Peterson (2017) where women actresses throughout Los Angeles warned one another about Harvey Weinstein for years before his criminal indictments. Conversely, there likely exist whisper networks made of a small group of friends who have warned each other about some undesirable, but not criminal behavior they have witnessed a man exhibit. Perhaps, they think he lingers too long when he hugs women, hello, or he looks at younger women a little too leeringly. They might not worry he would ever hurt them, but they might be sufficiently concerned so as to warn their close friends who might also work with them. Many other whisper networks could exist with endless permutations of content and construction.

It is beyond the scope of this study to determine which whisper networks are most common. However, I would like to create a small taxonomy for describing these different kinds of whisper networks. Breadth is used to describe the strength of the relationships in a whisper network. The weaker the relationships in a network are, the wider the network. Depth is used to describe the severity of the whisper network content. The more harmful or dangerous the misconduct is, the deeper the network. The Harvey Weinstein whisper network in Los Angeles was extremely wide and very, very deep. Most of the networks described in this study were moderate in width and tended towards the shallow. Using this kind of language to describe the shape of whisper networks may help other scholars describe and study whisper networks in future research. This study has revealed to me that whisper networks can be complicated in their nature. This complexity can also extend to how women respond to the warnings they are given.

7.5.2 A Broader View of Heeding a Warning

Heeding a warning, may not be a simple process. This study has sought to ascertain whether narrative theory would predict a woman's likelihood to follow the warnings given to her in a whisper network message. The interviewers' questions presupposed that interview participants would be able to simply identify recommendations for behavior within the warnings and report whether or not they chose to follow those suggestions. However, women did not always find it easy to recognize a straightforward recommendation, and some who did, found great value in whisper networks and believed their messages even when choosing not to follow the recommendations.

Although sometimes a woman may be given specific suggestions about how to deal with a SWN man, she may not always feel like she can follow those directions. However, the warning may still benefit her. Even if she cannot avoid working with a man, knowing he has a reputation for misconduct may change how she behaves around him. Some women described reluctantly choosing to work with a man but behaving in an impersonal and sometimes cold fashion towards the SWN men. It may be that the standoffish attitude they adopted prevented the men from attempting any misconduct with or in front of them.

Some whisper network messages may include suggestions about how to behave around a SWN man. Ella, a 35-year-old White woman, said of the recommendations attached to warnings, "A lot of times it's, 'Just be prepared to have serious boundaries and have those trampled on.'" She was forewarned that she needed to keep the SWN man

at a metaphorical distance and to anticipate his unwillingness to accept her behavior. The message-senders were counseling her not only on how to behave but what to expect.

In other cases, the warnings may be even more detailed. Avery, a 32-year-old White woman, described the kinds of warnings she has received:

> A lot of times it would be older women, like, older than me, not necessarily senior citizens, but women in their thirties, forties when I was in my teens and twenties who I would be in a play with. Who would say - So, much of my experience has been with gay men in positions of power. So, in the conversations that I can point to, it was less about, "Oh, he's going to try to sleep with you." It was more like, "Be this kind of actor. Be this kind of person in the room, and he'll like you." It was like, "You have to get him on your side. You have to get him to like you." So, it was a lot of policing of behavior. It was a lot of advice. When there would be verbal abuse in the room, or some situation where - it would be advice giving after an incident. Like, "Here's how to cope. Here's how to look better next time that happens."

Avery's account depicts a series of warnings throughout the production process. She was first being told how to get the director to notice her. She was then told how to ingratiate herself to the man. Finally, she was given instructions on how to behave in the wake of his eventual misconduct so that she would not be alienated. Avery was approaching the audition process with a clear recommendation of how to behave in order to be professionally successful in her endeavor but also how to personally process the misconduct she might witness. These warnings approached personal and professional counseling. While most whisper network warnings were terse and understated, some

whisper networks appear to function in far more complex and sophisticated fashions. These interviews did not reveal many warnings with such detailed or thorough suggestions.

While most warnings tend to point towards individual actions a person can take, some may also suggest more corporate behaviors. In some warnings, there are no suggestions of behavior to be heeded. The man's past misconduct is described – perhaps only obliquely – and condemned, but the message-senders seem resigned to the misconduct occurring. However, the common knowledge of the man's misconduct does seem to create a bond among the women in the cast. The whisper network develops a unified response to the man and assists one another in coping with his behavior. Heeding the warning becomes less about an individual action and more about forming a pact of support in the event of forthcoming misconduct.

It may be that whisper networks are a means of sharing support among women. Whether a woman chooses to report a man, confront a man, use additional caution with a man, refuse to work with a man, or not to change her behavior at all, the whisper network into which she has been invited may provide her with emotional support from women with a common knowledge of working with a SWF man. If a SWN man victimizes a woman who has been warned about him, at the very least, she will know that she is not alone in this experience. Perhaps a whisper network can even buoy her in the events that she is victimized by one SWN man while being warned about another. The warnings offered by whisper networks do not appear to be conditional. The data never revealed any transactional nature to these warnings. None of the participants interviewed ever recounted situations where they or anyone else in a whisper network expected any kind of

compensation – neither through money, respect, favors, or any other currency – in exchange for being included in a whisper network. Nor did any woman express owing some kind of debt to those who warned her. The networks described by the participants were overwhelmingly magnanimous and free in their nature. The only thing the women seemed to hope for sharing a warning was allyship. Although whisper networks do not intend to develop closeness in the way that gossip does, that may be an unintended consequence of some of them. The networks may be a place to seek resources of mental or emotional support or just a place to find other women who understand what she has gone through and are willing to listen.

7.5.3 Additional Narrative Elements

While theorists who employ the narrative theory in their research tend to describe those hearing stories as evaluating their believability based on coherence, fidelity, and focalization, there may be other factors that influence these evaluations. This dissertation considered these elements (RQ3), but it may be an incomplete list. The current data suggests that interview participants also considered (a) group impact, (b) cultural context, and (c) the objectivity of the story when choosing whether to believe a warning. Considering these other factors is valuable to forming a sophisticated understanding of whisper networks.

7.5.3.1 The Group's Impact.

Hearing similar stories from multiple sources might make a woman more likely to believe a whisper network message. When several people share similar warnings about a SWN man, it may make the warning more credible. Kayla, a 33-year-old Black woman, described the impact hearing multiple warnings can have, saying, "It wasn't just [Kayla]

having an isolated experience. It was a group that saw the behavior." The veracity of the claim no longer hinges only upon Kayla's credibility. It is strengthened by the other message-senders' credibility. The repetition of the details may also increase its believability. Anna, a 27-year-old White woman, recalled hearing several very similar warnings about a predatory man. She explained, "I didn't know the person, and there were also [*emphasized and elongated*] so many people saying the same things that I found that perfectly plausible." Hearing the identical details about the same man were more persuasive to Anna than if she had only heard them from a single source.

These messages may come from different sources independent from one another, but they could also come from a group of women providing a shared whisper network message. A few interview participants described receiving a warning from a small group of other actors, usually in the same cast, rather than a single woman. This group warning was generally found to be persuasive. The participants may have been compelled by the combined credibility of the women sharing their experiences and the repetition of the same details. Although credibility is often considered as part of focalization, this data suggests that credibility may be summative. It may also be that the shared experience these individuals had with a group of women in the same place was powerful and persuasive. The group of women also display vulnerability and a willingness to accept risk by outing themselves and a portion of the network rather than taking a safer tact of having the message come from a single individual. Something similar may occur at a macroscopic level when a cultural movement and influence an individual's thinking about believing the stories she hears.

7.5.3.2 Cultural Context (i.e. #metoo).

Although the #metoo movement can trace its roots back to 2006, it did not reach the popular consciousness until 2017 (Guerra, 2017). Several interview participants remembered reading stories of sexual harassment and sexual assault shared on social media by friends and celebrities and having their beliefs about these topics changed dramatically. This cultural movement has compelled them to believe the warnings of other women. Some interview participants described how they tended to be skeptical of accusation of misconducted levied against men. However, reading stories posted on social media by friends and acquaintances recounting their experience as victims of sexual improprieties dramatically changed their predisposition towards believing women rather than being skeptical of their claims.

In some cases, interview participants indicated that the emotional and often overwhelming stories they heard induced a change of heart. In a testament to power of narrative predicted by narrative theory, the very personal storytelling that occurred on social media made a tremendous impact on some of the women interviewed. They have been so moved by the stories of their associates, that they no longer feel the same bias they may have once felt towards giving the benefit of the doubt to the accused. However, some participants claim to have made a very intentional decision to believe women when they claim to be victims as a matter of solidarity with the #metoo movement or women as a whole. They noted that believing women is foundational to movements that aim to support and empower women, and they want to align themselves with these groups and their goals. While these women find that stories coming from women are almost always credible, other women looked for stories that felt unbiased.

7.5.3.3 Objective Nature of the Story.

Whisper network messages that are seen as objective in their tone and perspective are more likely to be believed according to these interviews. This preference for objective messages seems to be related to the perception many interview participants have about gossip. Whisper networks and gossip are often seen as similar. Sarah, a 37-year-old White woman, said, "There's that fine line of being gossip-y and wanting someone to avoid the mistakes you've already made." Although Sarah views gossip and whisper network messages as being related, she also sees them as distinct in their purposes. Many other participants also made this distinction, but there did seem to be an acceptance that not everyone sees this difference with the same degree of clarity. Conflating gossip and whisper network messages may cause someone to be more likely to dismiss a warning given to her.

When a message is categorized as gossip, it may be given less credibility and lose its effectiveness to provide warning to other women. When women gossip, they are often assumed to have a goal of self-promotion, entertainment, creating an in-group/out-group dynamic, or relationship-building (Dunbar, 2004) as opposed to a motivation towards warning other women of men who might be dangerous. The resemblance of whisper network messages to gossip creates a tension that was articulated by some of the interview participants. Some described wanting their warnings about men to only be shared with care. They felt that more effective whisper network messages were passed in sober, solemn moments rather than settings of levity and jocularity. Warning another woman when alone with her in a quiet dressing room is seen as preferable to warning a group of women having lighthearted conversation on a tour bus. Women expressed concern that if their messages are categorized as gossip, that it would trivialize the true

danger they hoped to share. This was not seen as a rebuke of gossip. Several women admitted to enjoying gossip while reserving special treatment for whisper network messages. Their fear was not that gossiping would make them a less credible source when they shared a warning. They feared that presenting the warning in a careless way would make the warning itself less credible.

In some instances, the message-senders themselves may question how their warnings are perceived by others. Several interview participants described how they scrutinized their own decisions around how they chose to share a whisper network message. Miriam, a 32-year-old White woman, recalled a recent memory:

> It's interesting because I was just telling a woman I'm in a show with right now about that whole situation and afterwards I felt bad like, "[*disappointed*] Oh, that was really gossipy. It's not like me to do that." And she's like, "[*gracious but with conviction*] No, I've heard enough stories about this man, I will never do a show with him. And he needs to go."

Miriam felt compelled to warn another woman but worried afterwards that she would be judged as a gossip. However, the message-receiver did not see the warning as frivolous and chose to change her behavior based on receiving the message. Although those using the narrative paradigm as they conduct research pay special attention to the content of the stories, the women in these interviews often claimed to find the tone and context of the messages to be essential to their evaluations of the warnings they received or sent.

7.6 Comparisons with Extant Literature

As mentioned in the literature review above, there appear to be no existing academic studies on whisper networks. The references that do exist tend to be allusions or mentions in mainstream journalism or academic works primarily focused on other subjects. However, I will attempt to compare and contrast the results of this study with the ways in which writers and academics seem to perceive whisper networks. I will also compare how the analysis of this data situates itself within existing studies that use the narrative paradigm.

7.6.1 Current Perceptions of Whisper Networks

There may be ways in which the whisper networks described by these interview participants are similar or different from the perceptions of those who refer to whisper networks. Because many of those references are either made in passing or even made in an oblique fashion, aspects of the perceptions of others are sometimes inferences based on usage of the term or the context in which it occurs. My interpretations of these perceptions are mostly consistent with the descriptions of whisper networks found in these interviews. Although, there are a few places where they may differ.

Some references in academic literature reveal a perception of whisper networks that may be narrower than the ones utilized by the participants in this study. Although Tolentino's (2017) definition holds up when compared with these interviews, Hurren's (2018) definition should likely be expanded to include warnings about behavior beyond sexual harassment. While these interviews certainly include warnings about sexual harassment, they also include warnings about a much broader range of misconduct. References to whisper networks made by Anson (2019) claim that whisper networks become powerful when their messages become public. However, these interviews do

reveal accounts of SWN men who have lost work or opportunities for work because a whisper network had spread to women directors or producers who chose not to work with the man. The network gained power without going public while extending to women in positions of power.

One claim about whisper networks that was made by Losh (2018) could neither be supported or refuted by this study. She posited that whisper networks were insufficient in protecting victims because they exclude certain people. While this study does provide ample evidence that some women are excluded from whisper networks, it is unclear whether those outside the whisper network are left vulnerable from being ignored by whisper networks or whether the existence of whisper networks may create a larger umbrella of vigilance that may protect women not directly in the network. Drawing conclusions about the efficacy of whisper networks is outside the scope of this study. While nothing in this study explicitly contradicted Losh's claim, not a single interview participant in this study expressed any negative feelings towards whisper networks. Perhaps this is to be expected given the participants' willingness to be interviewed on the subject of whisper networks. Those with negative impressions of whisper networks might avoid participation. However, several participants did claim to have been excluded from whisper networks at various times in their careers, and none of them spoke negatively about whisper networks. The only negative perceptions towards whisper networks emerged from a theatre organization during the recruitment phase of this study.

One of the interviewers reached out to #NotInOurHouse, a group that developed the Chicago Theatre Standards in 2015 in response to allegations of a pattern of sexual harassment in the Chicago theatre community (Not in Our House, 2019). These standards

are freely disseminated to theaters across the county to help them establish protocols for preventing and addressing sexual harassment and sexual violence in the workplace. The interviewer described the work in which she was engaging on behalf of this project and asked the staff of #NotInOurHouse if they had an email list she could utilize to describe the interviews she hoped to conduct, share her contact information, and see if any women would be interested in being interviewed. The staff responded that they were unwilling to assist her in this way. They briefly explained that they did not support whisper networks. They are of the belief that whisper networks can foster misinformation and rumor and discourage actors and others in the theatre community from utilizing the protocols set forth in the Chicago Theatre Standards. When the interviewer replied that she was only investigating the nature of whisper networks and had no agenda to promote or defame them, she was told they were still unwilling to accommodate her request.

The valence of opinions on whisper networks may vary more than the participants of this study indicated, but the general perception of the nature of whisper networks in mainstream journalism and academic literature has largely been validated by this study. The whisper networks described in these interviews may behave differently from other networks given the context of the theatre industry, but they seem to operate similarly to the way most people who have written about whisper networks conceive them to work, and they certainly share the same goal. Given this consistency, I see no need to make any substantive changes to the definition of whisper networks I developed in a previous chapter. However, the same degree of consistency does not exist between the findings of this study and narrative theory.

7.6.2 Relevance to Narrative Theory

This study and its relation to current work in narrative theory deserves attention in two places. First, the nature of storytelling within whisper networks requires some consideration. Second, it is noteworthy that this research detected the presence of additional elements to narrative theory than those traditionally used by scholars. I have already written about the ways that heeding a message's warning may not be a simple process to analyze. While basic narrative theory would suggest that if a woman believed a whisper network message instructing her to avoid a certain man, her behavior would likely change to accommodate this belief. However, in the case of the women interviewed for this study, there seem to be many competing beliefs that may demand she prioritize some beliefs (e.g., "My career would benefit from working with this director", "I can tolerate the behavior described to me", "This is the price of being a woman in theatre", etc.) over her belief in the warning she received. Further analysis of the predictable power of narrative theory is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, there is value in devoting some attention to what this study may reveal about the nature of storytelling and the means by which we assess the believability of a story.

7.6.2.1 Shared Storytelling.

I chose to utilize the narrative paradigm in the collection and analysis of data based on an assumption that whisper network messages are stories. Although I have found this to be true, the stories do not always exist as I first assumed they would. My assumption about whisper network messages were that one woman told another a story or several stories about a man's misconduct. Although these kinds of messages were described by interview participants, many of them described messages that were vague

and terse. Descriptions of behavior were often restrained and underplayed the actual seriousness of the misconduct. Interview participants surmised the understated nature of whisper network messages was due to a combination of not wanting to appear like a gossip by spreading salacious stories or hoping to bolster the credibility of the warning by making it seem more objective. However, being told that a man is someone "you should watch out for" or that the man does not always behave professionally, does not leave the message-receiver with much of a story to interpret.

The interview participants of this study did not express such skepticism about whether these messages constituted storytelling. The storytelling was a shared process based on an assumption of shared experience. The message-sender would assume that the message-receiver, being a woman, would be familiar or accustomed to the misconduct of men. She might also be accustomed to receiving whisper network messages. By offering a warning with a small amount of information, the message-sender assumes the message-receiver will construct the remainder of the story in her mind based on her own experience with or adjacent to the misconduct of other men. The perpetuators of these networks assume that misconduct and abuse by men are so pervasive among the experiences of women, that nearly any woman will be able to guess at the nature of a man's misconduct based on very few clues with an acceptable degree of accuracy. If these women worked in a field where unprofessional men were rare, whisper network messages would likely be longer and more detailed, but for most of the interview participants, little more than an eye-roll and an arched eyebrow is needed to communicate that a man is the kind of man to be avoided.

In the process of the message-receiver filling in the story's gaps for herself, she may not get every or even many details exactly right in her imagination. However, the story is meant as a warning. The priority of the message-sender is to raise awareness about the dangerous nature of a man or to have the other woman avoid him. Her priority is not to share a full and accurate accounting of the man's misdeeds. Thus, it is unimportant if a woman's speculations are imprecise as long as she heeds the warning. A woman who imagines more sinister or hurtful misconduct may even be more likely to heed a warning than if she were told the truth about his milder behavior.

Scholarly work on narrative theory tends to focus on storytelling from a single source. However, whisper networks appear to contain storytelling that is a shared experience. One person begins the story as part of a warning. A second person completes the story in her mind. The first person assumes the second person will craft the story in a certain way, because she also assumes they both share somewhat common histories, experiences, and perceptions related to abuse and misconduct. There is an assumption that the other woman will have personal experience or some other women she knows will have told her about their personal experiences of men engaged in misconduct. A woman sharing part of a story with a man, such as myself, might not have the same confidence that I would imagine a story with the same kind of details and dynamics that occurred. Perhaps women would have told me about their experiences or I might have seen depictions in popular culture or social media, but there is no guarantee that I would be able to read between the lines of her message.

The lack of a coherent story conveyed by a single message-sender does not seem to make the stories less believable or the warnings less deserving of being heeded. When

a person finishes a story began by another person, they are likely capable of constructing a story with a high degree of coherence. However, these interviews do not suggest this is necessary. Many of these women found stories to be believable for reasons predicted by narrative theory and reasons that are not.

7.6.2.2 New Elements of Narrative Theory.

This study found fidelity and focalization to be important factors in how whisper network message-receivers assess the veracity of the warnings they receive. This is consistent with the current writing and work of many network theorists. When a woman is warned about the misconduct of a man, and her personal experience with him is consistent with the account, she is likely to believe the warning. When a woman is warned about the misconduct of a man, and her personal perception is that many men in her industry are capable of such behavior, she is likely to believe the warning. When a woman is warned about the misconduct of a man, and she finds the individual warning her to be credible, she is likely to believe the warning. However, this study did identify other elements that may have been overlooked by those who pioneered and continue to work in the narrative paradigm.

Interview participants for this study also report being inclined towards believing a warning when certain other elements are at play in the telling of a story. When a group of women has warned them, when the cultural context in which a warning is given is a compelling factor, and when the story appears to be objective in tone, they are more likely to believe a warning and to heed it. I detail these three elements above, but it is worth mentioning them again here. These elements should be considered for future study and examination.

The power of group influence was mentioned by several interview participants. They reported hearing a warning about a man. At first, they may have discounted it because it was inconsistent with their view of them, but after hearing the same warning from several other women, they began to believe it. They often reasoned that each woman put herself at risk by sharing the warning. In spite of their personal impressions of the man, they were swayed by the combined risk. It is an element that outweighed fidelity. The message-receivers have made a rational decision to trust others over themselves.

The influence of larger related cultural movements can impact the perspective of message-receivers. Interview participants discussed how the #metoo movement impacted their willingness to believe stories they might have previously discounted. They felt a connection to a larger movement and felt it was important to demonstrate solidarity with that movement by believing and siding with accusers. In today's hyper-tribal society, it is easy to imagine people being swayed by the tenets of other cultural movements to believe stories they might otherwise disregard on the basis of coherence, fidelity, or focalization.

Because the women in this study are very conscious of false accusations and being labeled a gossip, they placed a high premium on the value of whisper network messages that appeared objective. Although the credibility of the message-sender is described by the existing element focalization, this element stands on its own. When receiving warnings from strangers or women they barely know, interview participants claimed to evaluate the message apart from the sender. The women in these interviews are conscious that some people see whisper network messages as gossip or having vindictive intentions. Crafting warnings that situate their messages apart from these

motivations is important to them, and it impacts the way they evaluate the messages of other women.

Narrative theory predicts that those who hear compelling stories may change their behaviors in response to the stories which they have heard. In the case of whisper networks, the most critical part of the evaluation of a story is to assess its veracity. If it is judged to be true, some kind of behavioral change will typically occur. The women in these interviews are making their judgements of whisper network message on the basis of more than just fidelity, cohesion, and focalization. They are also swayed by the impact of the group, cultural context, and the objective nature of the story. These are all distinct elements that deserve debate and consideration among scholars. At the very least, they ought to broaden the definitions of the current elements of the narrative paradigm.

CHAPTER 8. LIMITATIONS & FUTURE STUDIES

As with all scholarly studies, this one has limitations. The results of the study require scrutiny due to a variety of factors. While I believe the data provides important new information to the existing understanding of whisper networks, our understanding of them remains incomplete and largely undocumented. This chapter will focus on the limitations of this study and the possibilities for future research on this topic.

8.1 Limitations

This study is limited by many of the same factors that limit most qualitative research. The quality of the qualitative research is heavily dependent upon the skill of the researcher. Although I have been guided by an experienced and knowledgeable committee, I am a novice at interview-based research. As with many qualitative studies, I have been analyzing a very large amount of data, and the possibility of losing track of

details always exists despite my best efforts to keep my data organized. However, the most noteworthy limitations of this study probably lie in the sample and the recruitment process.

8.1.1 Sample

The sample used in this study was not randomly collected. Participants were recruited through a convenience and snowball method by the interviewers. I have no way of knowing which participants directly knew the interviewers and which were recommended by participants, because I instructed interviewers to keep all participant information confidential, including from me. The demographics of the participants do reflect those of the interviewers. Although this sample represents a broad group of ages and regions, the largest clusters of participants are from the same areas that interviewers have primarily lived and worked (i.e. Chicago, Charlotte, Los Angeles, Washington D. C.) and tend to be in their mid-30s like the interviewers. The four interviewers are White and a large majority of the participants are also White. Although this sample contains actors who have worked at every level of theatre from community to Broadway, most participants chiefly act in small professional theaters and occasionally regional theaters.

As mentioned throughout this dissertation, the theatre industry is unique from other fields in a variety of ways. While whisper networks likely exist in other contexts, using this data to generalize as to the nature of them would be unwise. The circumstances and nature of working in theatre are unique from most non-entertainment sectors. It also has a history as a home for libertines and those who do not wish to conform to cultural norms (as a theatre student, older faculty members would often regale me and others with astonishing tales of how decadent and debauched the departments had been in the 1970s).

The people who look for a vocation in theatre may also be different than most people. These interviews describe whisper networks as they exist in the theatre, primarily among actors who have mostly worked in small professional theaters for the last two decades.

8.1.2 Potential Participants who Felt They had Nothing to Contribute

Despite recruitment material specifying otherwise, some women might have chosen not to participate in this study based on a fear they would have nothing to contribute. Most of the interview participants stated at the outset of their interviews that they had a lot to say about misconduct and whisper networks. My impressions of the phenomena of whisper networks may have been skewed by the partially self-selecting pool of participants in this study, the majority of which seem to have thought about the subjects of this research at some length. This data is not balanced out by participants for whom this subject was foreign. No interview participants claimed to have never been a part of a whisper network. No one claimed to have never been warned about the misconduct of a man. It may be that many women actors enjoy professional working environments with male colleagues who always treat them respectfully, but that could not be inferred by the data in this study. All the participants in this study were familiar with whisper networks, though not necessarily by name, and all had witnessed or heard about misconduct from their male colleagues.

8.1.2.1 Potential Participants Not Familiar with Whisper Networks.

For many women, they may not have recognized the warnings they have received as warnings. Many participants expressed the importance of not conflating their warnings with gossip. Perhaps some women see no distinction between the two. Particularly given

the understated nature of whisper network messages, it is easy to imagine some women mistaking warnings for gossip and rumor. Those women might assume they had never been included in a whisper network and might assume they had nothing to contribute to this study. The term "whisper network" does not seem to be widely used. Nearly every time I have been asked about this project, I have had to explain what it means. When defining the term to women, I am often met with nods of understanding. The interviewers on this project reported similar experiences when recruiting interview participants. However, many potential recruits might have disregarded recruitment efforts at first glance due to their unfamiliarity with the term.

8.1.2.2 Aspects of the Theatre Industry can Make Recognizing Misconduct Challenging.

It is possible that potential interview participants chose not to be interviewed because they did not believe they had witnessed misconduct or had heard about it and did not think they had enough information to contribute to these interviews. To some degree, this was anticipated. Recruitment material specified that women would make good research participants regardless of their experience with misconduct or whisper networks. However, the interviews revealed that the nature of the theatre industry is so different from many other fields, and women who did have experience with misconduct might not have even realized it. It is also possible that some of the women who did participate in these interviews did not recognize some of the misconduct around them because of theatre's culture of touching and the other grey boundaries of the industry.

8.1.2.2.1 A Culture of Touching.

Many interview participants mentioned that touching is commonplace in theatre. This is sometime directly related to the work, and other times, it is a reflection of familiarity members of the community seek to express. Actors are frequently called upon to touch one another in the course of their jobs. Warmups in rehearsal, blocking during a scene, or choreography of a fight, dance, or love scene may all require them to touch other actors. Sometimes they may even be asked to touch another actor on his or her butt, groin, or breasts.

A few interview participants described greeting one another with hugs as the norm within the theatre community. One individual described how she was "not a hugger" and felt at odds with the culture of her industry. She explained that when she met new people in the theatre, they would often open their arms to embrace her, and she often felt compelled to hug them in order to avoid offending those people. She speculated that in most instances, the common occurrences of hugging were intended to be earnest gestures of welcoming and affection, and it was merely her preference not to use hugging as a default greeting. However, she and other participants felt that amidst the well-meaning physical contact, inappropriate touching took place.

Due to the proliferation of touching in theatre, many women found it was sometimes difficult to tell where the line of professional touching lies. Some interview participants described moments in a scene on stage when another actor's hands might graze her body in a way that made her feel uncomfortable but could have also been accidental. Others described men who would sometimes hug women too long or too closely or in some other way that made them uncomfortable. However, with all the

touching going on, many women admitted that they often struggled to distinguish between the inappropriate touching that occurred for the sake of sexual indulgence and the touching that was inadvertent. Some women were very hesitant to jump to conclusions and misjudge their male colleagues, and many women may be very generous to men in these situations. There may be many women who have chosen not to categorize a physical touch as sexual harassment or sexual assault, and do not consider themselves to have ever been victimized. These women may feel they have nothing to add to interviews such as the ones in this study, because they ignore the misconduct to which they have been a party. Just as many women struggle to differentiate between acceptable types of touching in the theatre, many may also have difficulty understanding boundaries of professionalism in the industry.

8.1.2.2.2 Grey Boundaries of Theatre.

Throughout these interviews, participants referenced aspects of working in theatre where some normative professional boundaries do not seem to exist as clearly as in other professions. They spoke about the lack of boundaries between social and professional relationships. They also spoke about behaviors that were common in the theatre that would be uncommon in most workplaces. In these spaces where professional expectations are unclear, men may be able to perpetrate misconduct without being held accountable. Women or other witnesses and victims may not recognize that the misconduct took place in the workplace.

Several interview participants described how personal and professional boundaries between actors were often very porous. Many of them described how they were often busy with day jobs in addition to their acting work and found little time to

socialize outside of work. As such, their colleagues in the theatre often became their primary pool of friends and romantic relationships. This may be common for many jobs, but actors who participated in these interviews indicated that many men saw rehearsal and backstage environments as appropriate places to flirt or solicit dates. While many participants admitted to dating or even marrying theatre colleagues, many others felt they were frequently the objects of unwanted flirting or propositions, and the men felt no hesitance about behaving that way at work.

This intermingling of professional and personal life is further complicated by explicit instructions that the two are indistinguishable. Julia, a 34-year-old White woman, remembers the professional advice she received in college:

> I would consider myself friends with most of the people I have worked with or in and around. I think on some level that friendship is kind of a grey word because there are people that if I saw them, I would be like, "Oh, hey! How are you doing? Tell me about what's happening with your dog or whatever." But there's this weird thing in the theatre where that is part of the professional experience. That's part of the professional expectation. In college, we were always being told, "You're always auditioning. It doesn't matter if you're in an elevator, a hotel. You're always auditioning. So, don't be mean to anybody. Be nice to everybody. Don't burn any bridges. Make everybody your friend. I think that some of those relationships that I thought of as friendly relationships broke down pretty quickly once I started going, "Wait a second," about any number of things.

Julia’s experience was not unique among the women in these interviews. Work often took place over dinner. Rehearsal often devolved into hanging out. They often described

socializing with colleagues and feeling uncertain about when they were supposed to maintain professional bearing and when they were merely socializing with friends. These women often found themselves being tolerant and deferential to men because they did not want to offend a colleague or someone who could provide them with future work.

It was also pointed out many times in these interviews that behavior backstage and during rehearsals was often far outside the bounds of what would be considered appropriate in most workplace environments. Hannah, a 41-year-old White woman, explained her view of relationships and conversation in theatre:

> I think in theatre, we get much closer. There are things that would be taboo in a normal work environment that are not in theatre. You talk about sex. You talk about body parts. You talk about things you would not talk about if you were sitting in a cubicle next to that person, but for some reason being in theatre, it's okay.

Many interview participants pointed out that obscenities and lewd jokes were common. Intimate conversations about sex were not seen as unusual. These are situations where misconduct could easily occur. Some women speculated that this kind of behavior is tolerated because theatre workers see themselves as artists who are unbeholden to stodgy societal rules. Others supposed that the content of plays often deal with unprofessional topics and cast and crew discussions of the play's content often becomes personal. It is possible that theatre culture's obscurity of misconduct has limited this study not only by limiting participation but by limiting whisper networks. Perhaps it should be seen as remarkable that so many whisper networks were able to be documented in this data despite challenges to identifying misconduct in the theatre industry.

8.2 Future Studies

Because of the limited nature of this study, whisper networks require much more study before anyone can claim to have a thorough, scholarly-informed understanding of them. Given the lack of current studies of whisper networks, there is ample room for research on the topic. A few areas of study might include (a) network analyses of whisper networks, (b) considering other contexts mentioned in these interviews, (c) broadening the definition of whisper networks, and (d) examining the role of social media in whisper network communications.

8.2.1 Network Analysis Methods

The work of this study focused on individuals' experiences with whisper networks. How is someone warned, what warnings do they received, and when do they warn others? However, there may be much to be learned by looking at how networks are structured. Applying network theory, such as that conducted by Peter Monge and Noshir Contractor, could be further illuminating.

Case studies of theaters, acting troupes, or theatre communities could utilize network theory to understand how networks include or exclude participants. These results could be compared with the conclusions of this study. Network analyses could also illuminate how these networks connect with other organizations and communities. The quality of this study's data was only possible by employing women to conduct interviews, and future researchers would do well to use women whenever possible to create a greater sense of trust and comfort between those gathering data and research participants.

8.2.2 Other Contexts Based on Allusions from Participants

The interview participants in this study alluded to several other contexts wherein whisper networks may also thrive. Some of the most chilling, egregious stories of misconduct were about faculty in university theatre departments. Women told of men who had raped, impregnated, coerced, systematically groomed, and threatened their students. They also spoke about robust whisper networks among women in their departments. One interview participant who is currently university faculty said she will warn young female students who fit a vulnerable profile about certain predatory men in her department.

Many of the participants have worked in fields that are tangentially related to theatre. Entertainment industries such as modeling and music were occasionally places where women in these studies have also worked. Many other women also worked as servers, bartenders, and hostesses in restaurants, because they found the work to pay well while also providing sufficient flexibility to pursue acting. All of these fields were mentioned as being rife with misconduct. The labor conditions of these industries are similar in some ways to theatre, and whisper networks likely exist there, too. Whisper networks may also exist in a variety of contexts not discussed in this study, and other researchers should endeavor to think creatively about where they might appear.

8.2.3 Broadening the Definition of Whisper Networks

This study developed a definition of whisper networks based on the common descriptions of them in academic and popular media. This literature chiefly focuses on women using whisper networks to warn one another about sexual misconduct. However, future researchers could look beyond gender and sexual misconduct to find whisper

networks that exist in many other environments. Historians might consider the notion of a whisper network when they describe how enslaved people heard about and made use of the underground railroad. Scholars could examine how whisper networks are employed by oppressed groups such as Uyghurs in Xinjiang, Haratin in Mauritania, or Rohingya in Rakhine. These people often find their safety and human rights threatened, but their speech is monitored and often limited by state powers or other organizations. These oppressed groups almost certainly communicate warnings to one another but must use extreme caution in how they send these messages. It might be valuable to understand how these networks compare to whisper networks among women warning each other about the improprieties of men.

8.2.4 Exploring the Role of Social Media and Electronic Media in Whisper Networks

Some of the participants of this study mentioned that groups exist on Facebook specific to cities or regions where women in theatre can share information about people with whom they work. Men who commit misconduct are frequent subjects of these private Facebook groups. Women in these studies has varying views on these groups. Some found them to be useful, while others thought they sometimes went to far in tarnishing the reputations of the men mentioned in them. Given the current popularity of social media research within the field of communication, many scholars could surely devise a wide range of questions to examine how social media is used to aid or amplify whisper networks. It might even be worth considering if these continue to be whisper networks or if they are something different.

8.2.5 Whisper Networks that Go Public

A recent phenomenon that may also be worthy of future examination is when a whisper network's messages become public knowledge. Many of the articles cited in the first two chapters of this dissertation refer to this occurrence related to whisper networks surrounding celebrities in the media. It may be that since the #metoo movement, whisper networks may form a kind of support for holding men accountable for their misconduct. Lindsey Boylan was the first former aid of New York Governor to accuse him of sexual misconduct (Haberman & McKinley, 2021). She did so through a post on the website Medium. In that post, she describes how she felt encouraged to speak publicly about Cuomo after learning she was not the only person experiencing his misconduct from a whisper network made up of his former and current aids (Boylan, 2021). Our changing culture may allow whisper networks to not only spread warnings but to hold SWN men accountable for their misdeeds.

CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSION

In concluding this dissertation, I wish to review what has been learned and explain its importance. One of the most personally illuminating findings of this study is the lack of professional standards in the theatre industry. Also, having never been a part of a whisper network, I have an appreciation for what they offer to women who use them. They offer more than I had originally thought to those within them, and they can reveal some of the challenges with which theatre must come to grips.

9.1 Summary of What has been Learned Through this Study

The data collected in this project makes a few clear observations about the nature of whisper networks as experienced by these women actors. Interview participants described the content of messages, the conditions for being included in a whisper network, and the role elements of storytelling play in their assessments of these messages. Some information was consistent across nearly all of the participants. However, other information differed between the women in this study and speaks to the diversity of whisper networks and the women who populate them.

Although there are many details related to whisper networks that were revealed by interview participants, the generally findings are as follows.

Whisper network messages may:

- Identify a specific man or men
- Identify a man in a position of power
- Describe a wide range of misconduct
- Are different in tone and content from gossip
- Tend to be understated or vague

Women may include other women in a whisper network when:

- The message-receiver is likely or unlikely to work with the man
- The message-receiver is a close friend, a complete stranger, or somewhere in between
- Something about the message-receiver might make her particularly vulnerable
- The message-receiver asked about a man
- The message-sender is a long-standing member of the community

- The message-sender holds a role of authority in the community
- Both women have a commonality that places them into the same in-group

Women may choose not to warn another woman when:

- They fear being labeled a gossip
- They fear retribution from the man
- They do not perceive the other woman as likely to be vulnerable to the man's misconduct

Women are most likely to believe messages:

- When the messages are consistent with their world views
- When the women trust the woman sending the message
- When the message is repeated by multiple women
- When the message seems objective in nature
- When the woman believes it is important to believe other women

Although women may not always avoid a man about whom she has been warned, they do appreciate being cautioned. They may choose to work with the man, but they will be wary of him and may warn other women about his past behavior.

9.2 Professionalism in Theatre

One of the startling findings for me in this research came when I considered the theatre industry against most other industries. A great deal of the misconduct that was described in these interviews as common would be very uncommon by comparison in fields with more clearly articulated standards of professionalism. As mentioned above, this is admittedly challenging in the theatre because of the ways that work and

socialization often blend together. However, there are steps that theatre communities could take to curtail misconduct in rehearsals and performances as well as other spaces around and outside the theater.

9.2.1 In Rehearsal and During Performances

Some common practices in the theatre would be shocking workplace behavior to someone from outside the industry. These practices should not be normalized in rehearsals and during performances. Interview participants described having male actors kiss them onstage with full tongues or touching them during a performance in ways that were not necessary or uncomfortable. They recalled that when confronted, the men would claim to be "in the moment" or "doing what the character would do."This is poor justification. When playing Hamlet, an actor cannot actually stab the actor playing Laertes and claim to have been acting as the character. The violence is simulated, and intimate contact can be simulated. When directors are unsure of their confidence in choreographing a physically intimate scene between two actors, they should make use of an intimacy director or choreographer.

Other participants described ways that directors would clumsily handle a kiss or a love scene between two actors. They would not give the actors time to get to know each other and their boundaries before forcing them into an intimate situation. They would not assess the comfort of the actors in appearing nude or partially nude. They would not show proper regard for the psychological safety of the actors. All of these issues can be curtailed by hiring an intimacy director or choreographer to assist in the rehearsal process.

Although intimacy directors and choreographers may not be as ubiquitous as fight choreographers in theatre, there presence is growing (see Appendix 7). Employing one would be an important budget consideration for a production, but few theatres would choose to produce MacBeth without allotting the funds to hire a fight choreographer. Productions with sex, nudity, or other kinds of intimacy should require similar considerations. Actors performing these delicate scenes can be nervous doing so under the best of circumstances, and they are planning to perform these intimate moments in front of audiences that may include strangers, friends, colleagues, and family. They ought not to fear the misconduct of other actors or crew during the rehearsal or performance.

9.2.2 Other Venues and Settings

There is often lots of socialization that occurs around theatre. Members of a cast and crew frequently socialize over dinner and drinks after rehearsals. Many theaters invite them to attend social events with patrons or board members. Cast parties are traditionally held to celebrate the opening or closing of a production. Alcohol is commonplace at these events. Throughout these interviews, it was noted that these occasions are common venues for misconduct. Men who might act professionally during rehearsals, behave inappropriately at these events. Several women noted their frustration with this because they felt expected to attend these events. Although these events are frequently presented as light-hearted social outings, some of the interview participants described them as feeling obligatory. They explained that part of the culture of theatre was attending these functions in order to demonstrate that they like and appreciate their fellow cast and crew members. Actors who do not come to these events or do not appear to be having a good time have lost opportunities to be cast in productions according to the

interview participants. In reality, these are professional events although not everyone there may treat them as such. The lack of clear expectations regarding professional in these spaces makes it all too easy for misconduct to occur.

These deviations from normal workplace professionalism do not always yield misconduct. However, they create an environment where it is all too easy and opportunities abound for impropriety to occur. Some traditionalists might claim that enacting standards of professionalism would restrict their freedom and stifle their creativity. However, so many talented artists and designers have operated within the realm of what would be considered normal workplace professionalism that a compelling case could be made that professionalism and creativity are perfectly compatible.

9.3 The Value of Whisper Networks

My initial impression of whisper networks revolved around their goal of sharing warnings in hope of protecting its members. While this goal is significant and perhaps, the primary organizing purpose of a whisper network. The value of whisper networks may extend beyond this. Based on the comments of the women who participated in this study, whisper networks can also provide moral and emotional support to the women who constitute them. Whisper networks seem to provide a means for resisting men who would seek to retaliate against accusations of misconduct. They also provide a system of support in an industry lacking the means for them to seek workplace protections or justice that our increasing common in so many other American workplaces.

9.3.1 Resisting the Anti-Whisper Network

Part of the value of whisper networks is in combating and resisting systemic sexism. The sexism to which I refer is the societal willingness to treat women with

greater skepticism than the men who deny engaging in any wrongdoing. Implicit in many of the interviews of this study – and explicit in a few – was the notion of an anti-whisper network. An anti-whisper network is a communication network that seeks to discredit the allegations made against SWN men when warnings become public. These anti-whisper networks can work swiftly and viciously. Directors, producers, and artistic directors share recommendations about which actors are easy to work with and which are not (see Appendix 7). Some participants said that they feared having a reputation as someone who was too sensitive or could not tolerate some ribaldry. They felt it could end their career.

The anti-whisper network may even go so far as to initiate lies to damage a woman's career. Desta (2018) reported on the ways that Harvey Weinstein targeted women actors who had refused his advances and discouraged their hiring by other producers and directors for years. He would often tell directors that a woman was too demanding, untalented, or difficult to work with. They listened, and several women actors struggled to find meaningful work for years.

The anti-whisper network has a benefit over whisper networks in that it does not need to operate clandestinely. Those who would utilize the anti-whisper network are trying to damage the reputation of their accusers. Perhaps that is to discredit them or perhaps it is to prevent them from getting work. Regardless, they want as many people as possible to hear their anti-whisper network messages. The more publicly known these messages are, the more difficult it may be for the women they target to combat these messages and regain their reputations. Interview participants overwhelmingly tended to believe the messages they received from a whisper network. Thus, they may serve as a means for women to regain a sense of credibility and rehabilitate their reputations being

damaged by the anti-whisper network. Certainly, in an industry such as theatre – an industry largely devoid of human resources departments and labor protections, they have very few means to exercise when they want to protect their right to work.

9.3.2 Lack of Mechanisms to Hold Men Accountable for Their Misconduct

The theatre industry lacks many of the structures and instruments that protect women from misconduct in many other fields. Theaters operate with a large amount of autonomy, and most cannot afford to hire skilled workers to address personnel complaints using the best practices of today's human resources departments. Even if some theaters have rules and protocols to address misconduct, actors frequently move from theater to theater. In some cases, whisper networks have a value as being the only tool women feel they have at their disposal to protect one another. As Esther, a 35-year-old White woman, exclaimed, "[*passionately, almost shouting*] A lot of times, I feel like it's [a whisper network] the only thing that we have to be able to make it known or warn each other about this type of behavior." Other women in these interviews spoke about how they saw whisper networks as critical in importance, and I want to conclude this dissertation by sharing some of their most poignant and vehement words about whisper networks.

Some interview participants felt that whisper networks necessary because of the relatively small organizational size of many theaters. Most small professional theaters are non-profits with tiny full-time staffs. Some have no full-time staff. When a woman witnesses misconduct or is herself a victim, she may struggle to know where to report her complaint even if she wanted to report the man. Kayla, a 33-year-old Black woman, said, "Who do you even go to? It's why I love when I have female stage managers." In almost

all theaters, stage managers are contract workers who are hired for specific shows in the same way that actors are usually hired for the run of a show. Even if Kayla finds a sympathetic stage manager, there is no guarantee she will work with her on the next show. Maya, a 31-year-old multiracial woman, described seeing an artistic director yell abusively at a child actor. She did not feel that the man's conduct rose to a level where she felt she needed to call the police, but as artistic director, the man had no one above him. She had no way to hold him accountable through traditional workplace means. All she could do was to warn her fellow actors about this man's temper and unprofessional behavior.

In fact, even if that man did report to someone, in small autonomous organizations like theaters, he might not be punished if his supervisor thought it unnecessary. Esther, a 35-year-old woman, told a story where this happened:

> I worked at a theater last summer, and there were numerous women that had a complaint about the artistic director, and a bunch of them went to his boss and talked with her about it, and they were told that he would be spoken to, and then I spoke with her privately for a while about it, because I had a number of women come to me and speak privately about it. I said to this woman, "[*optimistically, with encouragement*] You're in a unique position. You are one of the only people who has the power to actually do something about this." She seemed to understand, and we were told that he would be spoken to, and possibly be asked to take sexual harassment training or anger training or any sort of management training, [*pausing then with growing anger*] and not only was he not asked to do any of those things, he wasn't even spoken to about this. So, when you have at

> least five women go to someone's boss and report behavior and nothing is done, what more can we do? So, the only thing we really have is to at least tell each other that we're aware these things are happening and warn people who aren't aware that might be tricked or fooled or manipulated. And then, so that we all know we're not the only ones this has happened to. We're not crazy.

Esther was disappointed that her whisper network had made their complaint public – at least to the man's supervisor – and no action was ever levied against the man. In light of the theater management's unwillingness to act against the man, she felt her only remaining recourse was to warn other women about the man's behavior. The value of the whisper network lay in its independence from the formal organization. Regardless of how inept or unwilling to address misconduct a theater might be, Esther and her colleagues could always turn to the whisper network in an attempt to protect one another.

In the face of the theatre industry's inability to adequately protect women from misconduct, whisper networks provide a mechanism for women to feel empowered. They may not always be successful at protecting members of the network. Women may still choose to ignore a warning, and men may commit acts of misconduct in spite of women's raised vigilance. But as a tool, a whisper network cannot be taken away. There may be times when messages need to be shared with greater care or message-receivers need to be carefully selected, but part of the value of these networks is the fact that they are controlled by the women who are victims and witnesses. They allow women to warn one another about danger, and they provide the opportunity to offer support. In the space of a whisper network, women can tell offer support to one another. They can let each other know that they believe each other when they are being derided by powerful men in their

community. Like so many things of value, whisper networks come with a cost. Women who participate risk being uncovered for their participation. They risk their reputations and their careers. However, the prevalence of whisper networks speaks to the courage and magnanimity of women in the theatre community who accept these risks in hopes of protecting and supporting their colleagues and frequent competitors. These interviews speak of many instances of horrifying harassment and abuse, but they also speak to the strength and goodness of so many women actors.

APPENDIX 1. INITIAL EXPLANATION FOR POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Initial Explanation for Potential Subjects

[*The following information should be attached to any email correspondences sent to potential subjects when they are invited to be interviewed. It could also be printed out if subjects are approached in person.*]

Whisper Network Interviews

Why am I being asked for an interview?

You have been identified as someone who may be able to provide valuable information about the nature of whisper networks among women in the theatre community. These interviews are being conducted as part of a dissertation research project directed by a PhD student in Communication at the University of Kentucky.

What is a whisper network?

When a group of women secretly warn each other about men they believe may have engaged in some kind of misconduct, they have created a whisper network. The misconduct may be anything that is likely to be directed at women including sexual assault, sexual harassment, or even acting "creepy" around women.

How long will this interview take?

The interview length is dependent on how much you want to share, but averages between 15 minutes and one hour. Your interviewer is happy to speak to you as long as you like, but will not keep you longer than you want.

Where will these interviews take place?

You and the interviewer will choose a location where you are comfortable talking. You may choose to meet in person, over the phone or via video conference.

Will the interview be recorded?

Only audio will be recorded. After the interview, audio files will be sent to me who will store them in an offline hard drive. The interviewers will delete their copies of the files. Your interview will be assigned a number and never associated with your name.

Your interviewer may jot down some notes while you're talking to help her remember topics for the interview, but those will be destroyed after the interview.

How do I know if I'm a good person to be interviewed?

Interviewers are seeking anyone who identifies as a woman and has been an actor for some period of time. You may have acted in community theaters for a couple years in an amateur capacity or you may have been a working actor for decades. You may still be an actor. We're interested in all kinds of actors from around the country.

What kind of questions will I be asked?

The interviewer will ask you about your experience in the communities you lived in. What is/was it like to be an actor where you live? You will also be asked about how women in those communities communicated to one another about men who may act inappropriately towards women. Did you warn each other if a man had a reputation for behaving inappropriately? What kinds of behaviors would you be likely to tell other women about? How did you decide if you believed them or not? Have you ever warned another woman about a man like this?

I'm not sure if I have been part of a whisper network. Should I still be interviewed?

That's okay! You and your interviewer will talk about this subject. She will share some stories of her own that may assist your memory. It's possible you were in a whisper network and didn't know it. You also may not have been in one, and that's okay, too. We want to know either way.

Am I going to have to describe instances of sexual harassment or sexual assault?

These topics are likely to come up during the interviews, but we don't want you to talk about anything that makes you uncomfortable. You do not need to answer any question you do not wish to answer. Although the interviewer has a list of questions, you get to decide what the two of you talk about. If you need to pause or stop the interview at any time, we want you to do so.

Will I be asked to name the names of men who have been the topic of whisper networks?

You will not be asked to identify anyone by name who was spoken about in whisper networks or who may have participated in a whisper network. Actually, we prefer to not use anyone's name.

At the end of your interview, if you feel like you do want to talk to someone about a specific person, you can contact one of the organizations on the list of resources your interviewer will email you.

Who will know that I gave this interview?

You are free to tell whomever you like that you were interviewed for this study. However, we will not share your name or information with anyone. Your interviewer is the only person who will know who you are. She will share an audio recording of your interview with this study's author, but he will not know who you are. He will not share the audio recording with anyone. We are making every effort to ensure that all our interview subjects remain confidential.

What will happen after my interview?

You will be thanked for your time and given a list of mental health and sexual assault support resources just in case this interview brought up any subjects that were especially difficult for you. The study's author will use the interviews to write his dissertation and possibly a few articles for academic journals. Although quotes from your interview may be used in these publications, your name will never appear in them.

Where will I be able to read these publications?

If you would like to know about future publications resulting from your interview, let your interviewer know, and she will contact you when they become available.

APPENDIX 2. INTERVIEW PRE-BRIEF & POST-INTERVIEW BRIEF

[*The following statement should be read verbatim at the start of every interview*.]

You have been identified as someone who may be able to provide valuable information about the nature of whisper networks among women actors. These interviews are being conducted as part of a dissertation research project directed by a PhD student in Communication at the University of Kentucky.

When a group of women secretly warn each other about men they believe may have engaged in some kind of misconduct, they have created a whisper network. The misconduct may be anything that is likely to be directed at women including sexual assault, sexual harassment, or even acting "creepy" around women.

This is one of a series of interviews being conducted with women actors about whisper networks in the theatre industry. Although these questions will be about theatre, if you have relevant experiences from acting in film or television jobs, feel free to share those. Likewise, if you have relevant experiences in a theatre community where you were also working as a dancer, singer, musician, technician, designer, or director, feel free to share those experiences, too.

We will begin the interview in just a moment, but I want to make a few things clear first.

Confidentiality.

Protecting your confidentiality is paramount to everyone involved in this study. I will describe the steps we are taking to keep you confidential. However, you have the right to tell whomever you choose that you participated in this interview and to share with this person anything that was said during this interview.

I will be recording the audio of this interview and sharing it with the study's director. I will delete my copy of the audio file and the director will keep the only the de-identified version of the file on an offline hard drive.

No one other than me will know your name. We prefer that over the course of the interview, you make up names to use as pseudonyms if you want to tell me a story about real people. If you accidently use a real person's name, just let me know, and I will make sure that information is deleted before I send the audio file to the director.

These interviews will be analyzed and used in a dissertation and potentially other papers published in academic journals. Your name will never be used in any published document, but portions of this interview may be quoted in the paper.

Consent.

We want this interview to be a consensual activity for you at every point from beginning to end. At any point in this process, you can pause or stop the interview for any reason. You have complete control over what you want to share and not share during this interview. Choosing not to answer a question does not make any of the rest of the interview unusable or any less valuable to this project.

I understand that as an interview subject, you may feel pressure to answer questions even if they make you uncomfortable. Just to break the ice, let's do a quick exercise so you can practice choosing how you will exercise consent during this interview.

I'm going to ask you five practice questions. They aren't relevant to this study. Pick two or three to answer and two or three not to answer.

Question one. What is your favorite role you have played on stage?

[*Allow the subject to respond*.]

Okay.

Question two. What is your least favorite role you have played on stage?

[*Allow the subject to respond*.]

Okay.

Question three. Is there a play or musical you would like to be in, but haven't?

[*Allow the subject to respond*.]

Okay.

Question four. Is there a play or musical that seems to be very, very popular, but you just don't care for?

[*Allow the subject to respond*.]

Okay.

Question five. What is your least favorite costume you have ever had to wear in a show?

[*Allow the subject to respond*.]

Okay.

Great job! For the rest of the interview, you have complete control over what you want to answer and what you don't.

Now, if it's alright with you, why don't we begin the interview?

[*Begin the interview*.]

[*At the conclusion of the interview, read the following statement verbatim*.]

On behalf of this project's director and me, I want to thank you so much for talking with me. Your participation in this project will be valuable to process of better understanding how women protect each other from predatory men.

I will send you an email with a list of sexual assault support and mental health resources just in case you would like to speak to anybody about something that may have come up during our conversation.

If you would like to be updated about any future publications that may derive from this interview, just send a reply to that email, and I will keep you up to date.

Do you have any questions before we start?

[*Allow the subject to ask questions and respond in kind*.]

Thanks again for your participation.

APPENDIX 3. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Questions

1. Let's talk generally about your experience as an actor.
    a. When did you start acting? What attracted you to acting? [*possible interviewer anecdote*]
    b. What are some of the shows you have worked on?
    c. Do you still act?
    d. Have you worked on shows in non-acting jobs?
2. Regarding the city you worked in the longest, how would you describe the theatre industry?
    a. What kind of houses do they have?
    b. Do many of the actors live in the area?
    c. Are many of the actors Equity?
    d. Do directors and designers tend to live in the area?
3. Describe [some of] the theatre community[ies] you have worked in?
    a. What are the sizes of the communities? About how many houses would you say they had?
    b. How would you characterize the relationships you had/have with people in that community? Did you make friends with many of those people or were most of your relationships purely professional?
    c. What are/were your relationships like with women in the community? [*possible interviewer anecdote*]

        i. Do you tend to share personal information or do conversations stick to professional information?

    d. What are/were your relationships like with men?

        i. Do you tend to share personal information or do conversations stick to professional information?

4. What kind of topics do you discuss with women in the community?

    a. Do/did you ever discuss men in the community? [*possible interviewer anecdote*]

5. Were there times when other women may have warned you about men in the community?

    a. Were there men who were described as acting creepy or seemed like someone you should be careful around? [*possible interviewer anecdote*]

    b. What job did the man have (e.g. actor, director, technician, etc.)?

    c. What kind of behaviors or personalities were described?

    d. Who were the people who gave you these warnings?

        i. What was your relationship to them?

    e. Did you find these warnings believable?

        i. If so, what made them believable?

        ii. If not, what made them less believable?

    f. Did you follow the warnings?

6. Were there times when other women may have warned you about men who had sexually harassed or assaulted someone? [*possible interviewer anecdote*]

    a. What job did the man have (e.g. actor, director, technician, etc.)?

b. What kind of behaviors were described?

c. Who were the people who gave you these warnings?

i. What was your relationship to them?

d. Did you find these warnings believable?

i. If so, what made them believable?

ii. If not, what made them less believable?

e. Did you follow the warnings?

7. When would you (or have you) consider warning other women about a man? [*possible interviewer anecdote*]

a. What kind of behaviors or characteristics would contribute to that decision?

b. What kind of relationship with the woman would you need to have?

c. What kind of relationship or possible future relationship with the man would the woman need to have?

d. If you knew the woman had already worked with the man and may have liked him, would that impact your decision to warn her?

e. How important to you would it be to feel believed?

APPENDIX 4. ANNOTATED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

[Annotations are in BOLDFACE.]

[Any underlined annotations indicate that a question is intended to refer to topics from research questions: RQ1: CONTENT; RQ2: INCLUSION/EXCLUSION; RQ3: COHERENCE, FIDELITY, FOCALIZATION or NARRATIVE RATIONALITY.]

[The first section is designed to ask general questions to make the subject feel comfortable sharing information with the interviewer.]

1. Let's talk generally about your experience as an actor.
    a. When did you start acting? What attracted you to acting? [*possible interviewer anecdote*]
    b. What are some of the shows ["Shows" would be understood by an actor to refer to musicals or straight plays.] you have worked on?
    c. Do you still act?
    d. Have worked on shows in non-acting jobs?

[The next two sections continue with broad topics but also provide context for the subject's working environment.]

2. Regarding the city you worked the longest, how would you describe the theatre industry?
    a. What kind of houses ["Houses" refers to theatre companies or playhouses. This refers more to an organization than a physical space. Most theatre practitioners would understand this question to refer to community theaters, small professional theaters, union theaters, regional theaters, or Broadway theaters.] do they have?
    b. Do many of the actors live in the area? [Some theatre artists tend to work where they live while others tend to travel more for work.]

c. Are many of the actors Equity? [Equity refers to the Actors Equity Association which is a union for actors and stagemanagers.]

d. Do directors and designers tend to live in the area?

3. Describe [some of] the theatre community[ies] you have worked in?

   a. What are the sizes of the communities? About how many houses would you say they had?

   b. How would you characterize the relationships you had/have with people in that community? Did you make friends with man of those people or were most of your relationships purely professional?

   c. What are/were your relationships like with women in the community? [*possible interviewer anecdote*]

      i. Do you tend to share personal information or do conversations stick to professional information?

   d. What are/were your relationships like with men?

      i. Do you tend to share personal information or do conversations stick to professional information?

[The next section narrows in towards whisper network conversations.]

4. What kind of topics do you discuss with women in the community? **[<u>CONTENT</u>]**

   a. Do/did you ever discuss men in the community? [*possible interviewer anecdote*]

5. Were there times when other women may have warned you about men in the community?

a. Were their men who were described as acting creepy or seemed like someone you should be careful around? **[CONTENT]** [*possible interviewer anecdote*]

b. What job did the man have (e.g. actor, director, technician, etc.)?

c. What kind of behaviors or personalities were described? **[CONTENT]**

d. Who were the people who gave you these warnings? **[INCLUSION/EXCLUSION]**

   i. What was your relationship to them? **[INCLUSION/EXCLUSION] [FOCALIZATION]**

e. Did you find these warnings believable?

   i. If so, what made them believable? **[COHERENCE, FIDELITY, FOCALIZATION]**

   ii. If not, what made them less believable? **[COHERENCE, FIDELITY, FOCALIZATION]**

f. Did you follow the warnings? **[NARRATIVE RATIONALITY]**

6. Were there times when other women may have warned you about men who had sexually harassed or assaulted someone? [*possible interviewer anecdote*]

   a. What job did the man have (e.g. actor, director, technician, etc.)?

   b. What kind of behaviors were described? **[CONTENT]**

   c. Who were the people who gave you these warnings? **[INCLUSION/EXCLUSION]**

      i. What was your relationship to them? **[INCLUSION/EXCLUSION] [FOCALIZATION]**

d. Did you find these warnings believable?

i. If so, what made them believable? **[COHERENCE, FIDELITY, FOCALIZATION]**

ii. If not, what made them less believable? **[COHERENCE, FIDELITY, FOCALIZATION]**

e. Did you follow the warnings? **[NARRATIVE RATIONALITY]**

7. When would you (or have you) consider warning other women about a man? [*possible interviewer anecdote*]

a. What kind of behaviors or characteristics would contribute to that decision? **[CONTENT]**

b. What kind of relationship with the woman would you need to have? **[INCLUSION/EXCLUSION]**

c. What kind of relationship or possible future relationship with the man would the woman need to have? **[INCLUSION/EXCLUSION]**

d. If you knew the woman had already worked with the man and may have liked him, would that impact your decision to warn her? **[INCLUSION/EXCLUSION] [FIDELITY] [FOCALIZATION]**

e. How important to you would it be to feel believed? **[INCLUSION/EXCLUSION] [NARRATIVE RATIONALITY]**

APPENDIX 5. RESOURCES FOR PARTICIPANTS

List of Resources Emailed to Subjects Post-Interview

RAINN (https://www.rainn.org/)
24/7 Crisis Hotline 1 (800) 565-HOPE (4673)
24/7 Live Chat (https://hotline.rainn.org/online/terms-of-service.jsp)

The Trevor Project (http://www.thetrevorproject.org/)
24/7 Crisis Hotline: 1 (866) 488-7386

Actors' Equity Association
(http://members.actorsequity.org/resources/harassment/safety/)
Bullying and Harassment Hotline: 1 (833) 550-0030

National Sexual Violence Resource Center (https://www.nsvrc.org/)

National Domestic Violence Hotline (http://www.thehotline.org/)

National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline (http://www.loveisrespect.org/)

Stalking Resource Center (http://victimsofcrime.org/our-programs/stalking-resource-center)

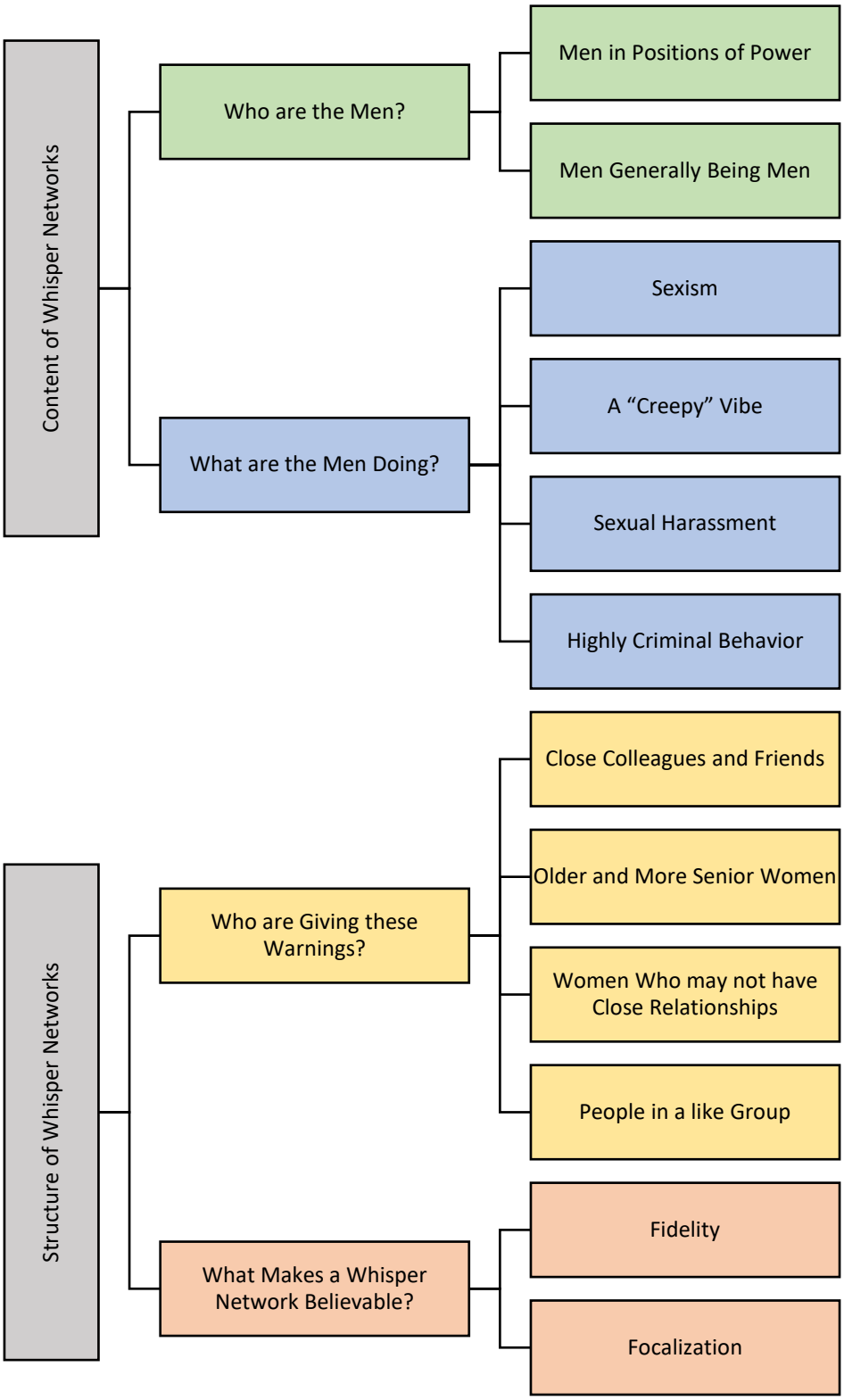
Know Your IX (https://www.knowyourix.org/)

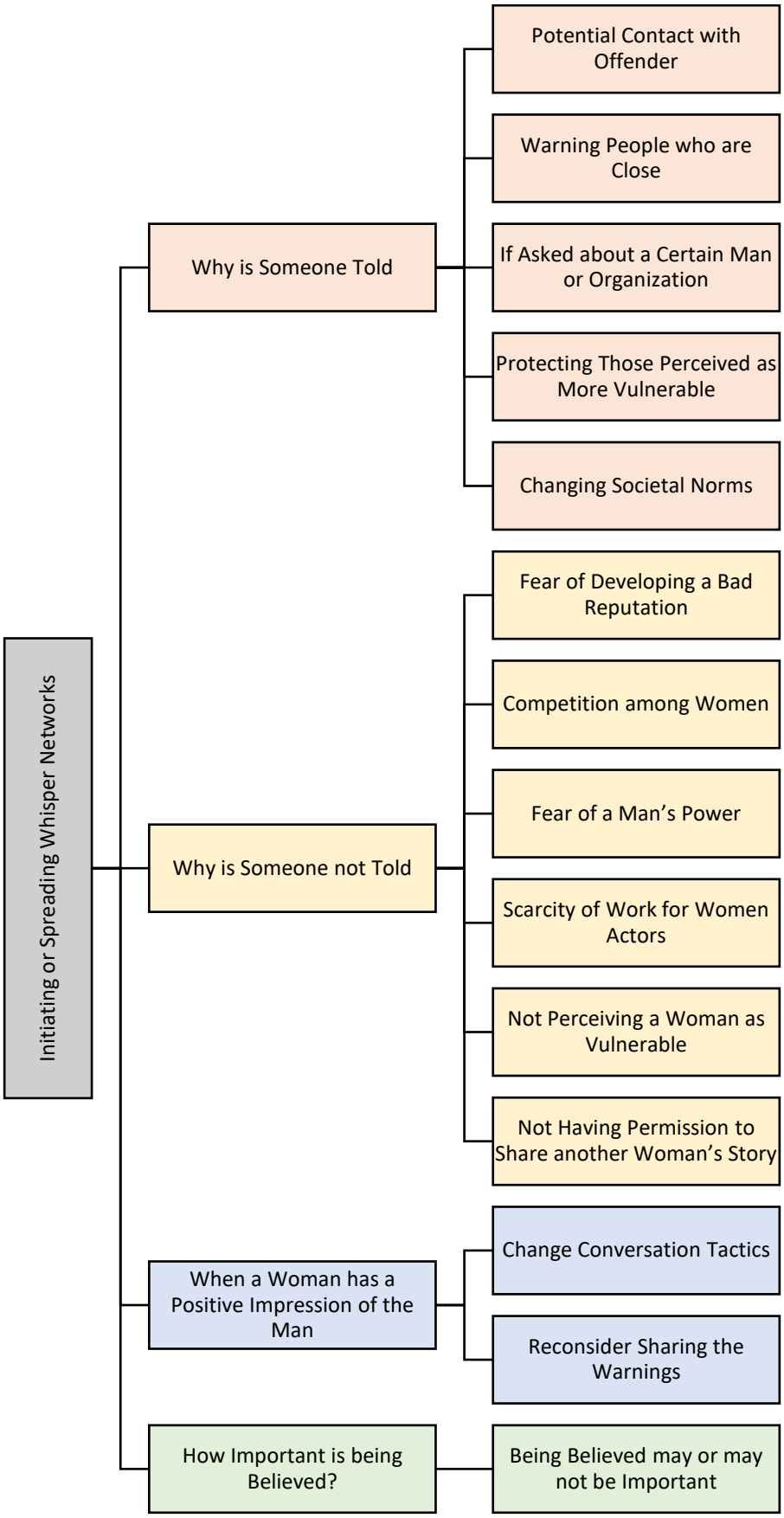
It's On Us (http://www.itsonus.org/pledge/)

Not in Our House (https://www.notinourhouse.org/)

Intimacy Directors International (https://www.teamidi.org/)

APPENDIX 6. LIST OF THEMES




Initiating or Spreading Whisper Networks
Why is Someone Told
Potential Contact with Offender
Warning People who are Close
If Asked about a Certain Man or Organization
Protecting Those Perceived as More Vulnerable
Changing Societal Norms
Why is Someone not Told
Fear of Developing a Bad Reputation
Competition among Women
Fear of a Man's Power
Scarcity of Work for Women Actors
Not Perceiving a Woman as Vulnerable
Not Having Permission to Share another Woman's Story
When a Woman has a Positive Impression of the Man
Change Conversation Tactics
Reconsider Sharing the Warnings
How Important is being Believed?
Being Believed may or may not be Important

APPENDIX 7. EXPERT SURVEYS

In order to provide credibility to some of the claims made in this dissertation, I have conducted a series of expert surveys. The subjects of these surveys have all had significant careers working in the theatre industry in a variety of roles. Each has their biography listed below. After agreeing to participate, experts were sent a survey online. They read a series of statements and were asked on a five-point Likert scale to agree or disagree (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). They were also given the opportunity to provide additional comments after each statement. Below are the statements followed by their mean scores and any comments they made.

David S. Leong's work has been seen on the stages of almost every major regional theatre in the U.S. over the past 40 years. He has directed or choreographed fights for over 300 productions on Broadway, the NY Metropolitan Opera, London's West End, the National Theatre, outdoor dramas, theme parks, and Shakespeare Festivals all around the world. From 1996-2017 David was chair of the VCU Department of Theatre where he trained over 50 MFA students who now teach at colleges and universities across the United States.

Penny Ayn Maas spent 21 years in NYC as a working actor/dancer/performer. During that span, she was in three Broadway shows for a total of almost 10 years of time. She has done film, tv, commercials, cruise ships, dinner theater etc. She now teaches at a Texas Christian University and directs regionally.

Marta Rainer is an internationally produced solo performance artist, an award-winning actress and performance artist, founding ensemble member of the New York Neo-Futurists, guest author of the podcast *Welcome to Night Vale*, a stage director, a produced feature-length screenwriter, and a published writer of fiction, non-fiction and drama. She has taught acting, playwriting, devised theatre, comedic and cabaret performance and more at institutions internationally, including New York Film Academy, Beijing Film Academy, New Voices for the Theatre (Playwright-in-Residence), Shanghai Film Arts Academy, and her alma mater New Actors Workshop/Antioch University, where she trained with Paul Sills, George Morrison and Mike Nichols. She studied Russian and Theatre Studies at Wellesley College, where she now serves as Director of Wellesley College Theatre, and Artistic Director of the professional company Wellesley Repertory Theatre.

Dr. Janna Segal is an Assistant Professor of Theatre Arts at the University of Louisville, and a freelance dramaturg. Her professional dramaturgical credits include work on productions in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, and Louisville. When working as

a production dramaturg, she is typically involved in casting processes and in attendance at roughly 50% of rehearsals.

As an actor, **Paul Michael Valley** has had the privilege of working on Broadway, Off Broadway, in Regional theaters across the nation. He has been a proud member of Actors Equity since 1988 and a member of SAG/AFTRA. On TV, he has performed in close to a thousand episodes of both daytime and prime-time, auditioned several thousand times for various projects. He trained at The Juilliard School, American University and several NY studios.

Scott Wichmann is a theatre, television, and film actor based in Richmond, Virginia. Over twenty years, Scott has appeared in productions at every major venue in the city including numerous roles at Richmond Triangle Players and Virginia Repertory Theatre. His film and television work includes: *The Good Lord Bird*; *Loving*; *Lincoln*, *Turn: Washington's Spies*. Scott holds a B.A. in Theatre and Speech from Wagner College and proudly serves as a Mass Communication Specialist in the U.S. Navy Reserve.

Survey

It is common for actors to work with a variety of theaters and directors over the course of a career.

$\bar{x} = 4.67$

Comments

Yes, except if they are a founding member of the company. For instance, a few of the actors at the American Shakespeare Center have been with the company since its founding over two decades ago. They are the exception to the general rule, though.
As an actor I tended to work for the same directors and theaters fairly frequently - and now as a director I get hired at the same theaters quite a lot and I tend to use actors I know and have worked with before.
Networking and relationships are vital for an actor's success and it can be difficult if one expects to "homestead" at one theatre. Plus, different professional theaters offer different varieties of storytelling to different audiences.
Since actors are rarely employed full time by a resident company, they are almost always changing jobs.
Not only is it common, but it is devoutly to be wished for.
It would be surprising if this were not the case, given no significant culture of repertory theatre companies in America

Especially among non-union actors, actors frequently hold non-acting full-time or part-time jobs to supplement their income.

$\bar{x} = 5$

Comments

Could restaurants even function without actors?
This is very true in the regional theatre world.
Non union Actors' salaries never pay enough to pay one's bills.
Even union actors must often maintain an outside source of income because wages as stipulated by Actors Equity for the most part are unable to cover the cost of living.
It's generally a necessity

When a film or television show shoots on location outside of New York or Los Angeles, local actors (who may work primarily in theatre) may be cast in smaller roles.

$\bar{x} = 4.67$

Comments

Usually it is extras who they pick locally and sometimes small roles.
This always happens because production companies cannot afford to pay "veteran" actors to play small roles due to additional expenses such a travel, housing and per-diem.

Many actors may go for lengthy periods without working because they are not getting cast.

$\bar{x} = 4.67$

Comments

My experience is that work begets work ... so some actors will get on a roll and work non-stop while those who don't book much early on will tend to not work for long stretches. It is like momentum.
On an annual basis, There are more actors than available roles.
....or they cannot audition because their non-theatre obligations don't permit them the time to audition/engage in a production

It is common for actors to leave acting either temporarily or permanently and pursue work in other sectors.

$\bar{x} = 5$

Comments

This is true either very early in an actor's career or very late.
Covid has caused so many in the business to find another job and abandon their love for showbiz.
Sadly, most actors are forced to leave acting due to many reasons - income, primarily, but also health, childcare or parental care, or moving to an area where work is unavailable.

While some plays may have a majority female cast, this is less common than majority male casts.

$\bar{x} = 5$

Comments

Definitely hard to find plays and musicals that have lots of female characters and that is problematic because most theatre departments have more female students than male.
There are always so many more "meaty" roles for men than women, and more women are competing for fewer roles. I'd be extremely frustrated if I were a female actor. So many plays and musicals center the straight, white male experience, and I've definitely benefitted from this throughout my life and career.
There is no doubt

Many theatre communities may have more or nearly as many women actors as men.

$\bar{x} = 4.83$

Comments

It does depend a bit on how "theatre communities" is defined. For instance, the ASC is a theatre community that, at least during my time, had more male actors than female.
Yes - there are always more women available and auditioning and a struggle, especially in casting musicals, to find male actors.
The above is true primarily if one looks at the whole country including non-union actors. However, in 2020, the ratio of male to female members of Actors Equity was fairly even. Men represented 50.5 % of Actor's Equity, with an average age of 48.3 years. In 2020, women represented 49.4 % of Actors Equity with an average age of 49.2.
The percentage of women students of the arts reflects this as well.
...and training programs as well

Many actors who are straight men may have a perception that there is a large number of women and gay men in the acting field which may make them (the straight men) a comparatively in-demand commodity.

$\bar{x} = 3.6$

Comments

Straight cis male actors may have that perception, especially given that dominant culture is heteronormative and misogynistic. I don't occupy the subject position of a straight male actor, and so don't feel equipped to speak with authority on their perceptions.
I hear this from the straight male actors and from the industry.
When I was in high school, I was one of two young men in theatre during my sophomore year. When my friends would needle me about being in theatre, (the implication being that it was "gay") I would brag about how many pretty girls there were in the theatre group as a defensive, knee-jerk comment to shield myself from the perception of being weak/effeminate/gay. During my junior and senior years, the number of young men in the group grew steadily, in part because I was so enthusiastic about my participation in the school plays that the weird, quasi-homophobic stigma no longer had any hold. One friend actually quit the baseball team to become an actor, which I thought was awesome.
Maybe twenty years ago, but no longer.

Although some members of a production may also be involved in the casting process, the director typically has the final say in who gets a job and who does not.

$\bar{x} = 4.5$

Comments

Typically, yes, although there are always exceptions. I have been involved in casting processes in which the artistic director or a producer has overridden the director's casting choices.
This is the general rule, but I have been pushed or influenced by producers in the past.
Usually, the director's call is the final one, unless the producer has someone they absolutely want to use.
This is more true in non for profit theatre. Commercial Broadway theatre requires the producer’s final say.
As the production grows in size or scope, the director has less and less power. In TV, far less than imagined. In film, it ranges from 0 - 100%. It is a VERY complicated process. An A+ talent and literary agency will "package" the clients it represents. Writer/Lead Actor/Director is merely a start.
It depends on the dynamic of the company. Often the producer can influence this decision because of a variety of factors, from budget to personal loyalty

The artistic director of a theatre organization may be able to influence directors who work at their organizations to cast or not cast certain actors.

$\bar{x} = 4.83$

Comments

This has definitely happened for me but almost always with deference.
Ultimately, the theatre's producers have to be comfortable with casting decisions. Sometimes a guest director is unaware of pre-exisiting relationships with or between certain actors.

Actors are likely to ask one another about people with whom they are considering working or with whom they may want to work at some point in time.

$\bar{x} = 5$

Comments

Word of mouth and rumors are big in theatre. There are websites devoted to honest assessment of directors/theaters/producers in the DFW area.
Always. Actors always ask about directors and vice-versa.

Directors may choose to speak with each other to share their experiences about working with certain actors, designers, or technicians.

$\bar{x} = 5$

Comments

Almost always.

If a role requires an actor to perform a special skill such as juggling or using a certain dialect, that actor may be expected to demonstrate that during an audition.

$\bar{x} = 4.5$

Comments

Yes but only if the notice asks for it.
...or demonstrate the acumen to demonstrate a comparable skill, with the promise of learning the required one.

It is generally considered inappropriate to ask an actor to undress during an audition if they are not told they will need to do so beforehand.

$\bar{x} = 4.83$

Comments

NEVER DO THIS IF YOU ARE A DIRECTOR. IF A DIRECTOR ASKS AN ACTOR TO DO THIS, GET OUT OF THE ROOM.

Using improvisation in rehearsals is a technique employed by some directors to build relationships or make creative discoveries. Sometimes these improvisations involve only actors, and other times a director may include himself/herself in the improvisations.

$\bar{x} = 4.33$

Comments

I think it depends on the project and whether it is a play or musical. I rarely use improv in musical theater rehearsals.

Although exploration of character choices are expected during a rehearsal, an actor who does not confine himself/herself to choreography of a fight or dance may be risking the safety of others.

$\bar{x} = 5$

Comments

It is vital that actors do exactly what they are given.
Set it and stick to it. Impulsively deviating from choreography can have disastrous results.

When rehearsing a scene, a director may "step-in" or take the place of an actor in a scene to demonstrate how he/she would like the actor to behave in a moment.

$\bar{x} = 3.5$

Comments

Yes, but trained directors are typically taught not to.
It happens occasionally, especially with younger/child actors but is generally frowned upon for pros.
Sometimes it's a technique to get exactly what you want. As an actors, I will often say "Show me." I'm not too precious, I want to get it the way the director envisions it.
This happens more so in high school and college theatre than professional.

This is done but it has always been frowned upon by everyone involved in the process. It is most often used to communicate as a last resort. But truly, if you want to enrage an actor, give them a line reading or act the scene.
This is a measure of last resort, and should only be deployed if solicited by an actor struggling to comprehend the director's communication. Some directors process kinesthetically, but that is different from replacing an actor to show them what to do unsolicited.

Sometimes during a rehearsal for a non-union show, a director may work individually with a single actor (i.e. no other stage managers, producers, or actors in the room).

$\bar{x} = 3.83$

Comments

Yes - I've seen that happen, but I personally always have a stage manager present.
I often experienced this as a non-union actor, although not very often. Usually it would be something like a monologue-- but the SM is an essential piece of the puzzle.
I have heard of this, but its a bad idea and should not be normalized.
Not wise for anyone.

When referring to an actor's "type", this is generally dictated by that actor's physical stature, appearance, attitude, vocal qualities, age, race/ethnicity, gender, and stage presence.

$\bar{x} = 4.5$

Comments

I think our industry is currently in the process of trying to get rid of "type" and substitute that for "brand".
I'm a comic supporting actor type- a 'character man', due to my size, stature, rubber face, and lack of chin.
One also includes the actors emotional essence.

The use of intimacy directors was not common practice a few decades ago, but they are becoming increasingly common in recent years.

$\bar{x} = 4.83$

Comments

Yes, this is the trend and very necessary.

They are so important. I'm so glad this has become a thing in the theatre, tv and film.

Beyond theatre departments at colleges and universities, Los Angeles and New York also have several independent acting schools. These often have small cadres of faculty, perhaps even a single individual, who are subject to very little oversight of their classroom behavior from a large governing body.

$\bar{x} = 4.83$

Comments

These acting programs are often seen as a little sketchy or cult-y.

A "showmance" generally refers to a fleeting, casual sexual relationship that only lasts the duration of a show.

$\bar{x} = 4.83$

Comments

It is easy for lead actors to fall for each other based on the chemistry generated on stage. Sometimes these will last beyond the production but usually not for long after.
Happens all the time. People are working long hours in close proximity and in very emotional, vulnerable, exciting, urgent circumstances. Talent and charisma sometimes create chemistry and sparks -- romance is a natural byproduct of that.
This is becoming less and less.

Actors often share a dressing room with other actors during a production.

$\bar{x} = 4.83$

Comments

Almost always, unless the actor is a major lead role or a star/celebrity.
Leading actors in professional theatres almost always have separate dressing rooms according to their contracts.

The equity deputy has a role of additional power or authority among the cast due to her/his relationship to Actor's Equity Association.

$\bar{x} = 4.67$

Comments

I would not say power, but definitely responsibility.
I see it more as support, but there is power in that supportive role

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VITA

Education

Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Pedagogy with a specialization in Movement. Virginia Commonwealth University. 2012

Bachelor of Arts. Major in Theatre Arts. Minor in Philosophy. University of Richmond. 2002

Selected Professional Positions

Consultant, Cork Communication. 2019 – Current.

Consultant, The Frontier Project. 2012 – 2015.

Division Administrator, Center for Human Simulation and Patient Safety, Virginia Commonwealth University School of Medicine. 2012 – 2017.

Operating Director. VCU Standardized Patient Program. 2011 – 2017.

Director, The Covenant School Summer Day Camp. 2008 – 2009.

High School and Middle School Drama Teacher, The Covenant School. 2007 – 2009.

Quartermaster Officer, United States Army [final rank: Captain]. 2003 – 2007.

Communication Merit Badge Instructor, Camp Shenandoah Boy Scout Camp. 1996.

Selected Honors

R. Lewis Donohew Graduate Fellowship, University of Kentucky. 2018.

Educational Innovation Award, VCU School of Medicine. 2013.

Meritorious Service Medal, United States Army. 2004 & 2007.

Alpha Psi Omega, Eta chapter. 2001.

Eagle Scout Award. 1998.

Professional Publications

Parker, K. A., Roberson, L. B., Ivanov, B., Carter R. E., & Riney, N. (2021). Participating in 12-step programs in recovery homes: The positive experience of structure, fellowship, and community of support. *The International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social and Community Studies 16*(1), 139-147. https://doi.org/10.18848/2324-7576/CGP/v16i01/139-1

Richard Edward Carter