See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil: Theorizing network silence around sexual harassment

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#MeToo has inspired the voices of millions of people (mostly women) to speak up about sexual harassment at work. The high-profile cases that reignited this movement have revealed that sexual harassment is and has been shrouded in silence, sometimes for decades. In the face of sexual harassment, managers, witnesses and targets often remain silent, wittingly or unwittingly protecting perpetrators and allowing harassment to persist. In this integrated conceptual review, we introduce the concept of network silence around sexual harassment, and theorize that social network compositions and belief systems can promote network silence. Specifically, network composition (harasser and male centrality) and belief systems (harassment myths and valorizing masculinity) combine to instill network silence around sexual harassment. Moreover, such belief systems elevate harassers and men to central positions within networks, who in turn may promote problematic belief systems, creating a mutually reinforcing dynamic. We theorize that network silence contributes to the persistence of sexual harassment due to the lack of consequences for perpetrators and support for victims, which further reinforces silence. Collectively, this process generates a culture of sexual harassment. We identify ways that organizations can employ an understanding of social networks to intervene in the social forces that give rise to silence surrounding sexual harassment.

Keywords: Network centrality, sexual harassment, network silence, social networks, workplace harassment

"*…if Harvey's behavior is the most reprehensible thing one can imagine, a not-so-distant second is the current flood of sanctimonious denial and condemnation…I was there and I saw you. I talked about it with you. You, the big producers. You, the big directors. You the big agents. You, the big financiers…you, the big actors; you, the big actresses… everybody-fucking-knew."* (Scott Rosenberg, writer-producer, 2017)

"The investigator told me that none of the members named in my statement – neither perpetrators nor bystanders – could recall any of the incidents I mentioned…[it was] the wall of silence. No one could remember having seen a blow-up doll in a watch commander's office, though it had been legend around the detachment…Nobody remembered the dildos or requests to kiss it better or a multitude of other vulgar incidents. Nobody substantiated any of my claims...I don't blame the witnesses who said they didn't remember…They have to go to work every day and trust that their co-workers have their backs. They can't very well offer a statement in support of a rat." (Janet Merlo, RCMP Officer, 2013)

In the wake of the 2017 Harvey Weinstein scandal, in which more than 60 women shared stories of being sexually harassed and assaulted by him, questions abound as to how he was able to get away with the behavior for 30 years. Many, including writer-producer Scott Rosenberg, claimed that company executives, colleagues, and acquaintances knew about (or at least suspected) Weinstein's abuses, but stayed silent. In 2016 and again in 2019, the Canadian government settled class action sexual harassment lawsuits against the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) that totaled $200M. In contrast to the Weinstein example, which depicts a single serial harasser, the RCMP cases detail widespread harassment perpetrated by many people across decades. Again, witnesses and authority figures who knew about the harassment remained silent.

The common element in these cases is that many individuals, including managers and those in powerful positions, were aware of the misconduct, but failed to speak up. Why didn't victims[1] report harassers? Why didn't witnesses voice concerns? Underlying these questions is

[1] Scholarly and lay writings use various terms to refer to sexually harassed persons, including "victims", "targets", and "survivors." The term "victim" is problematic owing to connotations of helplessness and passivity. The notion of "target" fails to capture non-targeted harassment in the ambient environment (e.g., sexualized cartoons, porn, anti-female comments overheard in a public work space). Another option is "survivor," but this can seem excessive for the most common forms of sexual harassment – for instance, it seems overly dramatic to say that one

the assumption that reporting to those in authority is the ultimate solution to sexual harassment; if an organization knows about a problem, it will take swift action to correct it. However, few harassment victims and witnesses report (e.g., Lonsway et al., 2013; Rosenthal et al., 2016), and when they do, few complaints result in swift penalties against men who harass[2] (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2018). The reality is that, with sexual harassment, silence is safer. Why is that and what can we do to change it? These questions motivated the current paper. Our goal is to understand why those who experience or are aware of sexual harassment often say and do nothing. Our focus is not on explaining the psychology of harassers (others have theorized this, e.g., Berdahl, 2007; Pryor et al., 1993), but rather on explaining the social dynamics of silence around sexual harassment.

To understand silence surrounding sexual harassment, we turn to the literature on social networks. Sexual harassment occurs in the context of a social network in which many actors, including victims, perpetrators, witnesses, and authority figures are interconnected. Social networks are powerful drivers of the beliefs and behaviors of their members (Brass et al., 1998). Our principal argument is that certain network compositions and belief systems serve to socially compel network silence, which enables sexual harassment to persist.

This paper makes three key contributions. First, we offer a novel theoretical lens to the concept of silence around sexual harassment. Prior research on this topic has centered the victim as the person who is silent but responsible for speaking up, taking an individual perspective that dominates the literature on voice and silence more broadly (e.g., Morrison, 2014). Studies have

"survived" being the butt of a sexist joke. Lacking a better alternative, we use these terms interchangeably throughout this article, while recognizing their shortcomings.

[2] More often than not, sexual harassment victims are women and perpetrators are men (Berdahl & Raver, 2011). Our paper focuses on this most common manifestation of sexual harassment.

examined how victims speak up (e.g., Swim & Hyers, 1999), when victims report (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 1995), and why victims remain silent (e.g., Bergman et al., 2002). The present paper shifts the phenomenon of silence (and voice) away from victims to the social network in which sexual harassment occurs. We consider silence around sexual harassment to be broader than the silence of one individual, and in doing so, theorize silence as a network phenomenon. We introduce the concept of network silence around sexual harassment, which we define as having three components: being silent, silencing, and not hearing. This shift in focus from the micro to the meso level has two implications: (1) it casts a much wider net on the scope of responsibility for silence beyond victims to members of a social network, including witnesses and authority figures; and (2) it highlights how silence is socially generated by examining the network elements that coerce and support silence.

Second, we delineate social network features that foster network silence around sexual harassment. We propose that network composition (harassers and men in relatively central positions; victims, allies, and women in less central ones) and network belief systems (valorizing masculinity and supporting sexual harassment myths) give rise to network silence around sexual harassment. We describe how these social network forces generate silence through social learning and influence. In turn, network silence fuels sexual harassment persistence. This analysis of the social network forces that contribute to network silence and persistence is new to the sexual harassment literature and offers another layer of depth to the sexual harassment phenomenon. It highlights the systemic nature of sexual harassment and silence that surrounds it, created by the interconnectedness of network members (witnesses, authorities, and others). By taking a network approach, we help to explain a recurring problem that has remained

undertheorized: namely, the underreporting of sexual harassment by not only victims, but also all those who know about it. Figure 1 presents our theoretical model.

Importantly, our third contribution identifies ways to prevent and break network silence. People frequently speak up about sexual harassment, but as we show, are silenced or unheard due to social forces. We develop novel network-focused solutions aimed at interrupting dysfunctional social dynamics and creating a network that resists sexual harassment. These solutions involve capitalizing on social networks to dispel problematic belief systems, transforming social networks to better integrate women, and circumventing social networks to ensure that speaking out against sexual harassment becomes a safe and effective option. These solutions target the specific theoretical antecedents of network silence identified in the model and, if implemented, would give rise to voice and corrective action around sexual harassment.

In the next section, we briefly review research on sexual harassment and organizational silence. We then develop the construct of network silence and unpack the literature on social networks to show how the centrality of harassers and of men, together with social belief systems, compel silence around sexual harassment. We theorize network silence as both a cause and a consequence of the persistence of sexual harassment. Finally, we show how an understanding of these social forces can inform intervention efforts aimed at combatting sexual harassment.

Central Concepts

Sexual Harassment

In its broadest sense, sexual or "sex-based" harassment refers to behavior that humiliates or demeans people based on sex or gender (Berdahl, 2007). This definition encompasses three categories of conduct: sexual coercion (e.g., promising rewards or threatening penalties to coerce sexual cooperation), unwanted sexual attention (e.g., unwanted touching, pressure for dates), and

gender harassment (acts that convey hostile or degrading attitudes toward people based on gender; for reviews, see Berdahl & Raver, 2011; Cortina & Berdahl, 2008; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Willness, Steel, & Lee, 2007). Harvey Weinstein's behavior exemplifies unwanted sexual attention and coercion; however, most sex-based harassment entails gender harassment, involving "put-downs" not "come-ons" (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Leskinen et al., 2011; Leskinen & Cortina, 2014). Gender harassment includes acts that derogate or humiliate people in sex-based ways, even when those acts are not "sexual" (e.g., mockery of masculine women, sabotage of women's equipment). Much of the misconduct that took place at the RCMP, for example, entailed gender harassment.

Sex-based harassment stems from a desire for sex-based dominance, rendered through the assertion of the perpetrator's superiority and/or the target's inferiority based on sex (Berdahl, 2007; Maass et al., 2003). Sexual dominance, coercion, and control; sexual objectification, touching, and unwanted attention; and gendered teasing, put-downs, and humiliation can all accomplish these ends. Importantly, the desire and ability to dominate others based on sex are formed in a system that stratifies status and power by sex; the way victims are harassed, and the fact that harassment of women by men is the most prevalent type of sex-based harassment, reflect this inequality (Berdahl, 2007).

Network Silence around Sexual Harassment

An important finding in the sexual harassment literature is that people often remain silent about harassment. Research has focused on individual-level silence: victims opting to keep quiet (e.g., by not filing formal complaints). For instance, studies suggest that nine out of every ten sexual harassment victims never report their abuse to anyone in authority (e.g., Lonsway et al., 2013; Rosenthal et al., 2016). Victims engage in "being silent" for a variety of reasons. Many

women believe that sexual harassment reporting will be ineffective (Gutek & Koss, 1993). Some stay silent to avoid causing problems for their harassers (e.g., Gutek & Bikson, 1985). When victims do speak out about harassment, many experience retaliation (e.g., Bergman et al., 2002; Cortina & Magley, 2003). These reasons for victim silence reflect the acquiescent, defensive, and pro-social motives for silence identified by Dyne et al. (2003). Multiple motives are often at play: victims think nothing will change if they speak up (acquiescent silence), fear retaliation from the perpetrator (defensive silence), and worry that the perpetrator could lose his job if they speak up (prosocial silence). In sum, being silent is a common victim response to sexual harassment, often aimed at protecting the self from further harm (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 1995). This aligns with common conceptions of silence as individually motivated acts (e.g., Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Dyne et al., 2003).

While the sexual harassment literature has focused on the silence of victims, silence around sexual harassment is much more pervasive than this. It is not just victims who are silent about sexual harassment, but also members of entire networks. We therefore introduce the concept of network silence around sexual harassment, which we define as silence that is transmitted through a social network through social network dynamics, and includes three elements: being silent, silencing, and not hearing. We theorize network silence as a phenomenon that is socially generated among network members, including victims, witnesses, and authority figures. Our definition of network silence aligns with Morrison and Milliken (2000) by conceptualizing silence as a collective process. Morrison and Milliken define organizational silence as a collective act of withholding ideas and opinions, either because voicing them would have no effect or because doing so would be dangerous. We expand on their definition in three ways. First, whereas their notion of organizational silence operates at the organizational level of

analysis, we posit that network silence occurs in the context of a social network, which may not include all members in an organization and may span organizational boundaries (e.g., professional networks). Second, we conceive of network silence as transmitted through social processes such as social learning (Bandura, 1977) and social influence (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2005). In their model, Morrison and Milliken briefly describe how social network dynamics can contribute to organizational silence. We take a magnifying glass to this idea and theorize that these network dynamics are key to generating collective silence. Third, we conceptualize network silence in terms of three inter-related elements: being silent, silencing, and not hearing. *Being silent* refers to the act of network members withholding concerns or complaints about sexual harassment. At first glance, this may be construed as an individual act and not a network construct. However, we conceptualize being silent as behavior that is socially learned and compelled, as we explain more below. *Silencing* is an active effort among network members to discourage and prevent others from voicing concerns or filing complaints. Silencing communicates to others that they should not express their concerns around sexual harassment. *Not hearing* occurs after someone has tried to complain or speak up, but network members dismiss, trivialize, or invalidate the concerns, or they gaslight the complainants by manipulating them into questioning their experiences. Not hearing communicates to others that the concerns raised are not worthy of attention or response.

We theorize that these three sub-components constitute network silence. While being silent, silencing, and not hearing can be transmitted in multiple ways, we draw on two focal mechanisms – social learning and pressures for conformity – to illustrate how these sub-components of network silence are transmitted through a social network. According to social learning theory, people learn how to act by observing the behavior of others in a social

environment, modeling it, and then seeing if they and others are punished or rewarded for the behavior (Bandura, 1977). Conformity operates in a similar way. Conformity refers to changing one's behavior to match or mimic the way others behave (see Cialdini & Goldstein, 2003 for a review). One of the key motivations for conformity is perceived consensus (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2003). People conform to the behavior of others when they perceive that there is a consensus within a group as to appropriate behavior. The more people who display a behavior, the stronger the drive to conform (Latané, 1981).

When members of a social network are silent around sexual harassment, other members are likely to observe and model this silence. Further, when members of a social network engage in silencing (e.g., threatening or warning others of negative consequences for speaking up), this form of punishment encourages being silent and models silencing to others. Similarly, refusing to hear those who do speak up sends strong cues about the norms for silence around this behavior within a social network. Not hearing concerns about sexual harassment by refusing to listen, belittling concerns, or making excuses for the harasser, negatively reinforces silence by denying or removing a stimulus (attention, concern, support) when voice is exercised. These social learning and influence processes suggest that the three elements of network silence are reciprocally related. Through punishment, reward, reinforcement, and mimicry, network members learn to be silent, to silence each other, and to not hear when it comes to sexual harassment, making these three sub-components of network silence form a mutually reinforcing pattern.

> *P1*. Network silence is comprised of three reciprocally related, socially compelled elements: being silent, silencing, and not hearing.

Social Network Features that Foster Network Silence

The literatures on sexual harassment and organizational silence have emphasized the role of the individual. Yet workplace sexual harassment occurs within webs of interconnections among victims, perpetrators, coworkers, managers, and others. In other words, there is a powerful social network at play, which we argue can promote silence and protect perpetrators.

Organizational members are embedded within networks of social relationships (e.g., Scott, 1991) consisting of different actors and connections (ties) between them. These ties provide behavioral opportunities and constraints, helping to explain their social behavior—both ethical and unethical (Brass, 1998, 2012; Mitchell, 1969). In this article, we focus on social networks within organizations and professions. We argue that network composition, and the belief systems that travel through them, can promote network silence around sexual harassment.

To our knowledge, only one prior study has considered the role of social networks in sexual harassment: Cunningham, Drumwright and Foster (2019). These researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 37 employees in organizations with persistent sexual harassment. The authors concluded that perpetrators build "networks of complicity" to insulate themselves from sanctions and to disseminate myths and misinformation. These networks of complicity metastasize as perpetrators feel increasingly immune from punishment, put unqualified people into positions of power who are loyal to them, and create a toxic climate devoid of trust and cooperation. We build on Cunningham and colleagues' ideas to theorize how social networks encourage network silence around sexual harassment, whether perpetrated by a lone actor or by multiple individuals in a work or professional setting. We focus on two specific features of social networks: network composition and network belief systems.

Social Network Composition

We argue that network silence will be promoted in networks characterized by the centrality of (1) sexual harassers and (2) men.

Centrality of Sexual Harassers

While some people occupy central positions within their social networks—giving them status, power, access to resources, and freedom of movement—others occupy more peripheral positions that make them more vulnerable and dependent on well-connected network members (e.g., Ibarra, 1993; Ibarra et al., 2010; Greguletz et al., 2019). A person's centrality/periphery in a social network therefore plays an important role in the likelihood that others in that network will speak up against/protect them. Perpetrators of harassment, like all others, are embedded within social networks. In what follows, we argue that when harassers hold central positions relative to others in the network (e.g., victims and their allies), this will contribute to network silence around sexual harassment. Centrality of the harasser will depend on their number and strength of ties, and their ability to bridge structural holes.

Number of ties. As noted by Scott Rosenberg, network members in the Weinstein case benefited from Weinstein's well-connected position: "He was making our movies. Throwing the biggest parties. Taking us to the Golden Globes!" They benefited from his ability to give them access to the things they wanted. However, those who spoke up feared repercussions: "You'll never work in this town again," according to Rosenberg. Weinstein's ability to influence a wide range of network connections made silence safer for people who wanted a career in the business. Similarly, male RCMP officers who far outnumbered female officers were able to collaborate as a well-connected social group to ensure network silence. They could count on their relative number of central ties within the force to back them up, and on women's relative isolation to ensure that victims did not have the support required to fight their harassment.

The number of ties a person has with others in a network plays an important role in determining that person's centrality or marginality in that network (Freeman, 1978; Opsahl, et al., 2010). In many social networks, a majority of people have relatively few connections to others, while a small number of people possess a large number of ties, giving them access to more information and influence (Jenssen & Koenig, 2002; Mehra et al., 2006; Seibert et al. 2001; Wong et al., 2006). The relative number of ties a person has compared to others in a network gives them relative power in the network (Sparrowe et al., 2001), enables them to mobilize collective action and support (Marwell et al., 1988; Ibarra, 1992), and allows them to make decisions for other network members (Bodin & Crona, 2009). An uneven distribution of ties leads to asymmetric relations of influence (Bodin & Crona, 2009; Borgatti et al., 2009).

People who are able to make others dependent on them by possessing valuable knowledge or resources gain power (Pfeffer, 1989) and can act unethically with less risk of getting caught or penalized (Brass et al. 1998). This asymmetry increases opportunities and payoffs for the well-connected individual, while putting the less-connected party at a disadvantage (Brass et al. 1998). Namely, less-connected individuals have to get in the highly connected person's good graces, either to preserve access to valuable resources or to limit the risk of retaliation (Nielsen, 2003). Furthermore, building ties with well-connected others can help lower-placed people gain status (Brass, 1984; Lin, Ensel, & Vaughn, 1981). In contrast, because of their advantageous position, well-connected individuals have less need to reciprocate the trust and the emotional investment of those who are less-connected, creating an asymmetry in their relationship (Carley et al., 2002). This asymmetry, in turn, makes the well-connected party more likely to exclude others from moral treatment (Brass et al., 1998).

We theorize that network silence will emerge in networks in which harassers have many ties relative to other network members. The power granted to well-connected harassers may make others less willing to speak up against them, leading to network members remaining silent. People who benefit from favors from the connected harasser(s) may be reluctant to give up those advantages, and may be more willing to turn a blind eye to bad behavior, because silence brings continued rewards. Furthermore, network members who observe the silence and silencing of others may fear retaliation from well-connected perpetrators and their network ties, and may worry that speaking up will harm their career prospects. Moreover, harassers with many ties could use their ties to silence others by marginalizing them. If silence is broken, harassers with many ties can also use their connections to ensure that complaints fall on deaf ears. Well-connected individuals can control information flow to their advantage; they are more likely to know when complaints arise, and can mobilize their ties to protect them by either silencing would-be reporters or not hearing (dismissing or trivializing) complaints of sexual harassment. For these reasons, we posit that:

> *P2*. Network silence around sexual harassment will be more likely when harassers have many ties within the network relative to other network members.

Strength of ties. In his public apology to Weinstein's victims, Rosenberg stated: "[Weinstein] had a monarch's volcanic generosity when it came to those within his circle. And a Mafia don's *fervent need for abject loyalty* from his capos and soldiers" [emphasis added]. That is, if one expected to benefit from being close to Weinstein, they had better be loyal. In the RCMP example, Merlo stated that her organization demands loyalty from its employees. Substantiating her complaints about sexual harassment would have been both professionally and physically dangerous for her coworkers, who rely on other officers to keep them safe in work scenarios that can involve life or death. According to Granovetter (1973), ties between people

within social networks can be either strong or weak, depending on the frequency of interaction, emotional connection, and reciprocity. Strong relationships, such as those found in Weinstein's circle, the RCMP, and in professional cliques more generally, require an investment of time and energy but are valuable because they evoke mutual feelings of trust, loyalty, cooperation, intimacy, empathy, and urge people to reciprocate (Granovetter, 1973; McDonald, 2011). Relationships are often strengthened by multiplex ties (Verbrugge, 1979; Burt, R., 1983), characterized by more than one type of relationship, such as working together but also socializing and developing friendship bonds. When people have multiple connections to the same professional tie, the tie is stronger and the costs of breaking it greater (Nielsen, 2003).

Because of the investment that goes into developing strong relationships, people are selective in their choices of whom they invest their social energy in, and consequently tend to maintain a small number of strong ties (Podolny & Baron, 1997). Networks with strong ties tend to become homogenous in their beliefs (Campbell et al., 1986), making it hard to eliminate belief systems that pervade them (such as harassment myths, described below). Tie strength can also influence moral responsibility felt towards another person. People are selective about whom they consider worthy of moral treatment. People identify and empathize with others similar to them (Brass et al., 1998), while those who seem different may fall outside one's scope of justice (Opotow, 1990; Mitchell et al., 2015). Thus, while strong ties will be treated in a respectful and moral manner, this need not apply to weak ties.

With respect to network silence around sexual harassment, we argue that network members with strong ties to the harasser will be more likely to remain silent about sexual harassment, and are more likely to protect that person by silencing and failing to hear others when they try to speak out. First, strong ties develop slowly and require a large investment,

making the cost of losing a strong tie high. These strong ties, once developed, are bound by a norm of reciprocity, making people more likely to conform and remain loyal. In addition, because strong ties often involve multiplex ties (e.g., based on work, friendship), network members will be inclined to protect harassers with whom they are strongly tied, as reporting misconduct could cause disturbances to many aspects of their lives. Thus, they will be motivated to remain silent regarding sexual harassment. Additionally, victims and their allies who are aware of strong ties between the harasser and others may perceive that a harassment complaint in such a close-knit network may fall on deaf ears, making them more likely to remain silent. Second, network members with strong ties to the harasser will be motivated to protect their interests, causing them to actively silence others, while victims and their allies may engage in silencing as protection from retaliation by the harasser's strong ties. Finally, network members with strong ties to the perpetrator may consider the victim to fall outside their scope of moral behavior and may minimize or refuse to hear concerns raised by those who speak up.

> *P3.* Network silence around sexual harassment will be more likely when harassers have strong ties within the network.

Bridging structural holes. Rosenberg also stated: "[Weinstein] introduced us to the most amazing people (Meetings with Vice President Gore! Clubbing with Quentin and Uma! Drinks with Salman Rushdie and Ralph Fiennes! Dinners with Mick Jagger and Warren-freaking-Beatty!)" (Fleming, 2017). Not only was Weinstein central in Rosenberg's network, but he also had ample brokerage opportunities (Burt, R., 1992; 1997): the ability to connect people in one network to important others outside the network. In the RCMP, promotion to higher ranks depends on the ability to take training courses and accumulate experience working in different divisions across the country, opportunities that depend on referrals by one's supervisor. Newly transferred women are especially targeted for harassment, hindering their performance and

making them and witnesses to their harassment hesitant to speak out against it lest doing so costs them desired training and other opportunities (Merlo, 2013).

When a focal individual is connected to people or groups who are disconnected from each other, the gaps between connections constitute *structural holes*, and that individual is said to function as a *bridge* between the disconnected members of the network (Burt, R., 1992). People benefit from acting as bridges in networks riddled with holes. By virtue of their connection to disconnected others and their access to higher-level connections (Seibert et al. 2001), bridges are the first to learn about opportunities. They are also in a unique position to manipulate information and broker connections between others to benefit themselves (Burt, R., et al., 1998). That is, they can act as gatekeepers and decide whether information flows between groups. Structural holes thus give the person bridging them considerable power.

Seen through the lens of silence around sexual harassment, harassers who are the only point of connection (i.e., bridge) between different groups will be protected by their unique position. Bridges can be crucial to the success of others because they are able to foster connections between people and grant access to financial and other resources (e.g., Ancona & Caldwell, 1992; Burt, R., 2001). This may encourage network members to be silent or to silence others, so as to protect their own interests or protect themselves from retaliation by harassers in strategic bridging positions. Furthermore, harassers who are bridges can take advantage of their position by actively isolating victims and ensuring that misconduct is concealed from others; this not only limits the ability of others to observe and grasp the gravity of harassment, but also prevents victims from identifying each other and joining forces. That is, by virtue of being the only thing connecting otherwise separate entities, perpetrators can prevent victims from knowing there are others being harassed, and prevent witnesses from observing the harassment. Because

of this isolation, victims and their allies are more likely to remain silent and feel unheard by others. Their complaints are more likely to fall to deaf ears, with other network members believing the harassment to be rare or an isolated incident. We thus propose that:

> *P4.* Network silence around sexual harassment will be more likely when harassers bridge structural holes within the network.

Centrality of Men

People tend to connect with those they perceive as similar to themselves, otherwise known as *homophily* (McPherson et al., 2001). Homophily limits the information people receive, the beliefs they form, and the interactions they experience because similar others tend to hold similar views and experiences. Most people are inclined to develop homophilous ties (ties with similar others); however, members of privileged groups are more likely to do so than members of marginalized groups (Greguletz et al., 2019; McPherson et al., 2001). Men develop more and stronger ties with other men than they do with women, a phenomenon documented in work (Greguletz et al., 2019) and personal relationships (Popielarz, 1999). Studies have found that men's networks tend to be more sex-homophilous than women's networks, especially in establishments where men form a strong majority (Brass, 1985; Ibarra, 1992, 1997). Such male-homophilous networks are marked by instrumental, status-loaded ties (Ibarra 1992, 1997; Lincoln & Miller, 1979), lending men connections to powerful others in their organizational and professional networks. Sex-homophilous networks tend to leave women out of key information loops and decision-making processes at work (Brass, 1985; Greguletz et al., 2019). Some women strive to create ties with men as opposed to women, believing it will increase their status within the male-dominated network, but these ties are often weak or precarious.

As peripheral people in male-dominated social networks (Kanter, 1977), women tend to enjoy fewer and more uniplex ties than men. That is, men in these environments have many

similar others with whom to connect over both work and personal interests, whereas women have access to fewer similar others, and may connect with some at work and others as friends, with fewer contacts serving as both (i.e., fewer multiplex ties). This, in turn, means that women are more isolated than men in male-dominated networks (Kanter, 1977). Women experience more structural holes between themselves and other network members, giving men opportunities to serve as bridges between women and others, and further increasing men's centrality relative to women within the network (Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999). Even when women serve as bridges in social networks, they do not benefit from these positions the same ways that men do (Greguletz et al., 2019), especially in male-dominated networks in which high-status women are seen as illegitimate (R. Burt, 1998). While men acquire power in networks by brokering and maneuvering structural holes, women need to build strong ties and bring added value to a network (Ibarra, 1997). Thus, men's personal networks tend to be characterized by the opportunity to fill structural holes between others, a position that can be beneficial in controlling information and relationships. Following this inequality, even well-connected women may be less able to harness the benefits of structural holes to the same extent as their male colleagues, making them less likely to become central in their networks.

In networks dominated by men, we argue that network silence is more likely to emerge. First, in such networks members are motivated to protect "their own," making men more likely to be silent or to silence others when the harasser is a man and the victim is a woman. Second, men who are part of male-dominated networks are likely to perceive a male harasser as someone who is more relevant as a social tie, compared to a less-connected female victim, encouraging them to be silent or silence others for instrumental reasons. Furthermore, considering the advantageous position of men in male-dominated networks, victims and witnesses may recognize

that speaking up against a male harasser may not be well-received by other men in the network, motivating victims and other members of the network to conform by being silent and silencing others about harassment. Finally, men are more likely to trivialize sexual harassment than women (Diehl et al., 2014; Lonsway et al., 2008), so complaints of sexual harassment are less likely to be "heard" and taken seriously in contexts dominated by men. In short, we propose that:

> *P5*. Network silence around sexual harassment will be more likely in male-dominated networks.

To be clear, not all men sexually harass, protect harassers, or perpetuate silence. Most harassers are men—not the other way around. While the presence of a male-dominated network increases the likelihood of network silence, the belief systems of a network can further increase this likelihood. We propose that network composition and belief systems can by themselves, and especially when combined, set such a process of network silence around sexual harassment in motion. Next, we turn to the topic of belief systems that prevail within the network.

Network Belief Systems

While the centrality of harassers and men in a social network may encourage network silence around sexual harassment, this does not mean that all network members will remain silent. If sexual harassment is widely viewed as an unacceptable violation of professional norms, victims and witnesses may speak out and expect support and remedy. If instead sexual harassment is met with a shrug or a "boys will be boys" attitude, network silence is likely.

"Boys will be boys" views are rooted in social belief systems that naturalize male superiority and rule-breaking (Carbone, et al., 2019). Social beliefs come to life through repeated interactions between organizational members and become relatively stable patterns of behavior that are institutionalized (Barley, 1990). Because members of a social network experience and adapt to a common environment (Borgatti et al., 2009), and influence each other through social

learning and conformity processes, network members become increasingly homogeneous in their views and behaviors. Through these processes, belief systems that diminish women and endorse their abuse can pervade social networks, increasing the chance of network silence around the sexual harassment of women. We focus on two interrelated belief systems: views that (1) valorize men and masculinity, and (2) deny and justify men's abuses of women.

Valorizing Masculinity

Organizations that perform work that is strongly associated with men tend to valorize masculinity (Acker, 1990). From the wolfs of Wall Street to the producers and directors of major motion pictures to construction workers to police officers, male-typed work is, by definition, dominated by men in both numbers and power. "Having what it takes" to perform the work becomes conflated with being a "real" man, even if the latter has nothing to do with performance or even impedes it (e.g., never expressing uncertainty; cf. Ely & Meyerson, 2010). In such environments, women and femininity become devalued and stigmatized, while the opposite is true of men and masculinity. Hard won and easily lost (Vandello & Bosson, 2013), masculinity becomes the coin of the realm and crucial to repeatedly prove. A central tenet of masculinity is superiority to and dominance over women (e.g., Brannon 1976; Connell 1987, 1995; Kupers, 2005; Pascoe & Bridges, 2016). When men are motivated to protect and enhance their identity as men, they are more likely to engage in sexual harassment (e.g., Alonso, 2018; Berdahl, 2007; Maass et al., 2003). Organizations that valorize masculinity encourage *masculinity contests* among employees (of all genders) to prove their worth (Berdahl et al., 2018); they tend to have significantly higher rates of sexual harassment than other organizations (Glick et al., 2018).

We argue that when masculinity-valorizing beliefs pervade a network, this not only increases the likelihood of sexual harassment but also encourages silence, silencing, and the

inability or unwillingness to hear concerns about harassment. Such belief systems normalize male dominance over women, encouraging support for those who enact displays of masculine superiority and prowess. Networks that valorize masculinity are likely to reward those who convince others they are "real men" with high status, making them central within the network. When these central players sexually harass – something "real men" are wont to do – network members are likely to be silent about it, and rally to defend and protect harassers by silencing and not hearing others. Because women and "effeminate" men (common targets of sexual harassment, cf. Waldo et al., 1998) are devalued and marginalized in networks that valorize masculinity, witnesses will have little motive to hear or take actions to support these victims.

> *P6.* Network silence around sexual harassment will be more likely in networks pervaded by beliefs that valorize masculinity.

Sexual Harassment Myths

Social network processes may also help prop up and propagate false beliefs (or myths) specific to the sexual harassment of women. Research into this topic began in the 1970s with the study of *rape myths*, referring to "prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists" (Burt, M., 1980; p. 217). Recent research has identified a parallel set of myths pertaining to sexual harassment (Lonsway et al., 2008).

Baked into the patriarchal cultures of many organizations, sexual harassment myths serve two aims: denial and justification. That is, some of these myths deny that any wrongdoing has occurred, often by questioning the motives and veracity of victim reports (e.g., myths that women routinely lie about sexual harassment, file false charges) or downplaying the gravity of the offenses (beliefs that women exaggerate minor misdeeds, make much ado about nothing). When sexual harassment becomes undeniable, myths justify it, by absolving harassers of

responsibility (e.g., suggesting "boys will be boys") and/or blaming victims (e.g., asking why they failed to fend off the sexual advances, or what they did to invite them).

These beliefs about sexual harassment are myths in that they are patently false, as demonstrated by abundant empirical evidence to the contrary. For instance, extensive research has shown that, rather than filing false claims of sexual victimization, women are far more likely to experience such victimization and never report it (e.g., Fielding, 2018; Lonsway et al., 2013; NASEM, 2018). On average, men are more accepting of sexual harassment myths than women (Diehl et al., 2014; Lonsway et al., 2008), and men who accept the myths are more likely to harass women if given the chance (Diehl et al., 2012). Myth endorsement correlates with traditional and hostile attitudes toward women, speaking to a larger infrastructure of beliefs about gender, gender roles, and gendered violence (Lonsway et al., 2008).

Sexual harassment myths make it exceedingly difficult for victims, witnesses, or anyone else in a social network to speak up about sexual harassment. In social networks where many members subscribe to these belief systems, people are more likely to question others' motives for reporting harassment (such as is the case when harassment claims are seen as a revenge tool). Meanwhile victims are more likely to assume blame for the harassment, and therefore stay silent about it. When someone does report sexual harassment in such a context, the report is more likely to fall on deaf ears. Network members may therefore caution other would-be reporters against complaining, effectively silencing them. Why would someone take the risky step of reporting a harasser, especially one who is central in the social network, if widespread fallacies will derail the report and degrade the reporter? In networks pervaded by these falsehoods about sexual harassment, the safest course of action is silence:

> *P7*. Network silence around sexual harassment will be more likely in networks pervaded by sexual harassment myths.

Interplay between Network Composition and Belief Systems

We theorized above that network composition and belief systems contribute to elements of network silence. The composition of a network and the beliefs that travel through it are mutually reinforcing, as network members are likely to subscribe to the belief systems of central actors, and these belief systems are likely to define who is central. When harassers and men hold central positions in a network, they have the ability to promote sexual harassment myths and place a premium on masculinity. These belief systems, in turn, are likely to elevate men and harassers to central positions. A social network that valorizes masculinity encourages masculine traits of domination, devaluation of women, violence, and misogyny (Kupers, 2005), subjugating women and other marginalized persons (e.g., gay men, transgender persons), and elevating "real" men. Similarly, when belief systems within social networks deny and justify sexual harassment, network members fail to recognize harassment, or those who engage in it, as a problem. When network members believe that sexual harassment did not occur, that it was justified, or that it amounted to "no big deal," they privilege the claims of (mostly male) harassers over the claims of victims and their allies, and in doing so, give greater power to the former. As a result, social networks that propagate masculinity-valorizing beliefs and sexual harassment myths are more likely to elevate harassers and men to central positions.

> *P8.* Social networks that valorize masculinity and endorse sexual harassment myths are more likely to elevate harassers and men to central positions.

> *P9.* When harassers and men hold central positions within a network, belief systems that valorize masculinity and support sexual harassment myths are more likely to take hold.

Persistence of Sexual Harassment

Up to this point, we have focused on factors that contribute to network silence about sexual harassment. We now shift attention to consequences of network silence, namely, the

persistence of sexual harassment. We theorize that network silence increases the chance that sexual harassment will persist, and vice versa. The persistence of sexual harassment occurs as a result of network silence because: (1) network members, including authority figures within the network, do not take steps necessary to stop harassment or prevent it from recurring; (2) victims are not supported and, in fact, are often punished when they speak out (e.g., blaming them, accusing them of lying, failing to protect them from retaliation); and (3) perpetrators suffer no meaningful consequences for their actions (e.g., they are given a "slap on the wrist," they retain their position and status, people continue to work and remain friendly with them).

Network silence undermines the capacity to take action against sexual harassment because, if no one is speaking up (or those that do are not being heard), then there is nothing to take action against. When centrality and belief systems of social network members lead members to silence themselves and others, it reduces the perceived gravity of the situation making it less likely that anyone will take the problem seriously. Even when those who can take action are aware of sexual harassment, they may take silence as consent, leading them to believe that sexual harassment is normative and not serious. Moreover, although sexual harassment is best stopped through informal means (e.g., by changing the culture), some official actions (e.g., terminating harassers) may require investigations. When network silence prevails in social networks, network members, especially those who are well-connected or who have strong ties to central harassers, are less likely to participate in such investigations and are more likely to silence anyone who may want to participate. These same forces result in no interventions, no harasser punishment, no support for those who speak up, and potentially, retaliation against those who try to speak out. As such, sexual harassers often escape meaningful consequences (NASEM, 2018),

the result sometimes being that harassment persists for years despite authorities being well aware of it (as with both Weinstein and the RCMP).

It is important to recognize the dynamic interplay between network silence and sexual harassment persistence and how they mutually reinforce one another. Just as network silence can feed sexual harassment persistence, sexual harassment persistence can feed network silence. The more sexual harassment that network members witness without consequence, the more likely it is that they will believe that speaking up is dangerous or futile. That is, when network members observe that other network members, including authority figures, allow sexual harassment to persist without stopping it or punishing perpetrators, this itself will encourage network silence. When network members do nothing to combat sexual harassment, this creates a perception of network consensus of tolerance for harassing behavior, leading victims to believe that others will not acknowledge or believe their experiences. Furthermore, network members may perceive persistence as others taking the side of harassers, magnifying perceptions of the harasser's status and immunity, and making would-be reporters fear retaliation if they speak up. Finally, failures to correct sexual harassment can also contribute to the belief that even if people think that harassment is unacceptable, no one will dare stand up to powerful perpetrators, fueling feelings of helplessness on the part of all network members. All these processes will make network members less likely to address, report, or talk about sexual harassment.

> *P10*. Network silence and sexual harassment persistence are mutually reinforcing; network silence results in sexual harassment persistence (P10a) and sexual harassment persistence reinforces network silence (P10b).

Breaking Network Silence: Network-Based Solutions to Sexual Harassment

Preceding sections of this article explain how social network dynamics "pull for" network silence surrounding sexual harassment. While a logical next question could be – 'how do we get

more people to report sexual harassment?' – this question is problematic for several reasons. First, it ignores the fact that people *do* attempt to break silence all the time but, as we pointed out, are silenced and unheard by others within their network. In both the Weinstein and the RCMP examples, young actresses and constables repeatedly tried to speak up to no avail due to their marginalized position within networks. Second, according to Kanter (1977), a critical mass of women is needed to reduce some of the problems faced by gender imbalance in the workplace. However, as illustrated by the Weinstein and RCMP examples, it can sometimes take *decades* before victims gain the numbers and status to finally be heard and *hundreds* of women speaking up before the network silence around sexual harassment is broken. Moreover, this approach requires that those who are most vulnerable and negatively affected by sexual harassment to be responsible for breaking the silence. Compelling victims to voice, without recognizing the complexities of the social networks surrounding them, is thus not the solution.

Instead of focusing solely on how to get individual employees to speak out, organizations should instead intervene in the social forces giving rise to broader patterns of network silence. We suggest three categories of network-based solutions: (1) transforming social networks, (2) capitalizing on social networks, and (3) circumventing social networks. Each of these solutions is specifically designed to tackle one of the three contributors to a culture in which sexual harassment is able to persist: network composition, network beliefs, and network silence.

Transform Social Networks

The relative position of network members compared to the harasser plays a key role in contributing to network silence, inaction, and the persistence of sexual harassment. Therefore, an important strategy for interrupting these dynamics is to transform the composition of social

networks. Tactics for transforming networks include efforts to strengthen intersex ties, close structural holes, and make women more central.

Strengthen intersex network ties. Having numerous and strong ties to women in the network may reduce the likelihood that people will subscribe to sexual harassment myths, or to views that valorize masculinity, weakening the power of such belief systems in social networks. Research on mentoring shows that informal mentors benefit protégés more than formal mentors do, and that women (and men) benefit professionally more from having male than female mentors (Ragins & Cotton, 1999), likely due to men's relative power and centrality in their networks. Thus, teaching central men to effectively and safely mentor women (Johnson & Smith, 2018), and rewarding them for doing so, could strengthen women's connections in the network. There is evidence that when men have strong, enduring, and important ties to women and girls, they are less likely to subscribe to social belief systems that devalue them (Borrell-Porta et al., 2018; Shafer & Malhotra, 2011). Other evidence suggests that women who are married to men in the same profession are more likely to be integrated into social networks of men at work, and, in turn, protected and defended from sexual harassment (Moon & Stuart, 2018). As much as possible, then, social networks need strong intersex ties than can help break down beliefs that valorize masculinity. Organizations can facilitate such ties through team-building activities, work assignments, and arrangements that provide opportunities for positive intersex team work.

Close structural holes. When a lone individual bridges structural holes within a social network, that person is in control of the flow of information among other parties. Closing structural holes by creating opportunities to connect individuals or groups who lack connections to each other may reduce the ability of others to take advantage of these gaps. This, in turn, will set better conditions for networks to reduce silence and increase corrective action around sexual

harassment. If, for example, a harasser is the sole connection between victims who are in the same professional network but are disconnected from each other, the perpetrator can isolate them. Organizations or professional societies can create opportunities for isolated or marginalized individuals to connect with each other (e.g., via affinity groups), enabling and encouraging them to share their experiences in confidence with peers.

Increase women's numbers and centrality. As already noted, networks in which men are more numerous and central than women may be more likely to protect men who harass. This happens both due to men's relative power and the tendency to valorize masculinity within these networks, and due to men's relative likelihood to sympathize with other men and endorse sexual harassment myths (Diehl et al., 2014; Lonsway et al., 2008). One solution is to make women numerous and central within them. As noted earlier, there are complexities that make this solution, on its own, problematic. However, as part of a broader response, increasing women within networks can help. Organizations can start by recruiting, selecting, and retaining more women, but they should not stop there. Concentrating women in marginal roles, or in environments that are segregated by sex, will fail to solve the problem and may exacerbate it. Increasing the centrality of women in a network means involving them in equal numbers to men in the same occupations and ranks. This transformational strategy may require unpopular policies such as targeted hiring, but if successful, could improve the likelihood that women will be regarded as equals and treated with respect.

Capitalizing on Social Networks

Transformation of a social network is a major undertaking, and can take years. In the interim, organizations can capitalize on the social dynamics already at play in networks to effect change. We recommend two key strategies: educate central players and use cliques.

Educate central players. An important step toward breaking cycles of silence and inaction around sexual harassment involves correcting the belief systems that motivate, deny, and justify it. Research has found that education can help dispel these falsehoods. For example, teaching authority figures how to recognize and respond to insecure masculinity can help improve their interaction with others (Kahn, Goff & Glaser, 2016). Teaching men about dominant masculinity and how to externalize it (that is, how to decouple it from who they are as men) helps them take responsibility for and avoid perpetuating abusive behavior toward women (Augusta-Scott, 2009). Lonsway et al. (2008) found that attendees of an educational workshop on sexual harassment were less likely to endorse sexual harassment myths. Similarly, Diehl et al. (2014) found lower sexual harassment myth endorsement among men who completed a perspective-taking exercise that fostered empathy with female victims. We argue that – to be most effective – organizations should direct such educational efforts at central network players. In organizations with ongoing sexual harassment problems, central players are both likely to hold these belief systems and have the greatest influence over other network members. Altering their belief systems is thus critical to changing these belief systems in the rest of the network.

Organizations can educate key network members to replace fallacies with facts about unhealthy and dysfunctional masculinity pressures, the prevalence of sexual harassment, the forms it takes, the people who perpetrate it, and the rarity of false reports. For example, few people realize that masculine norms taken to the extreme predict decreases in employee health and performance (Glick et al., 2018); that most sexual harassment is a "put-down," not a "come-on" (e.g., Leskinen et al., 2011); and that women are far more likely to under-report sexual victimization than to fabricate or exaggerate claims (Fielding, 2018).

We acknowledge that education can be a challenge and that central players who subscribe to sexual harassment myths may be relatively difficult to train. Recent research found that even non-prejudiced people are willing to engage in discriminatory behaviors to accommodate those who are prejudiced if it will preserve harmony within the group (Vial et al., 2018). This demonstrates that social networks have a powerful influence on group behavior, but also implies that educating the most central players who have the most influence within these networks may have the strongest chance to alter network belief systems.

Use cliques. Professional cliques that exclude women can promote silence and protect perpetrators. As people fear alienating those loyal to the perpetrator(s), such cliques can be obstacles to progress. Skepticism about sexual harassment claims may travel more readily within male-only circles, especially given that men tend to endorse harassment myths more than women (Diehl et al., 2014; Lonsway et al., 2008). With this knowledge, organizations can co-opt the influence of cliques and the protection they provide to perpetrators.

For instance, organizations could co-opt male cliques by formalizing their work-related outings so that others can join. Traditionally all-male activities (e.g., playing poker, golfing) could be replaced with activities that appeal equally to all genders (e.g., playing bridge). These practices may break the norm of exclusivity and disrupt the flow of myths (with the added benefit of strengthening relationships for marginalized employees). Even if some men continue to operate as cliques—it is difficult to regulate "friendship" among coworkers—pressures to be inclusive may get them to rethink their practices and be more inclusive on other fronts.

Circumvent Social Networks

It may not always be possible to transform or capitalize on social networks, so our third category of strategies for interrupting silence and intervening in sexual harassment is to

circumvent those networks entirely. That is, formal silence-breaking processes (i.e., reporting) should be moved outside of the organizations that employ or represent those involved (cf. Crawford, 2016). This would be a radical departure from conventional reporting systems, housed entirely within such organizations. Those systems have made little dent in sexual harassment over the past 40 years (NASEM, 2018), suggesting that radical change is in order.

With conventional intra-organizational reporting procedures, every person involved in the complaint (e.g., HR manager, complaint recipient, investigator, adjudicator) is also embedded in the very social networks that house the harasser(s). Arbiters of investigations and discipline may face greater pressure to protect the company (e.g., from reputational or financial harm) than to protect the complainant, especially if the network supports problematic belief systems. If report recipients are part of the same social network as the alleged perpetrator, it can be challenging to evaluate the conduct objectively as they are subject to the same pressures as other network members. The perpetrator, moreover, may be a "star" player in the company, drawing in clients, revenue, or prestige. Broken down in this way, it becomes clear that social network dynamics make it exceedingly difficult for organizations to police themselves effectively.

Establish an external watchdog agency. Helping networks to be resistant to sexual harassment may require us to break away from convention by moving the reporting process outside of employing organizations or industry associations. External watchdog agencies, with no ties to these intra-professional social networks, could have responsibility for receiving complaints, conducting investigations, and determining penalties. Members of these external agencies should be neutral third parties, with no vested interest in the outcomes. If organizations follow the recommendations of these agencies, this could be a way to demonstrate "reasonable

care to prevent and correct promptly any sexually harassing behavior," as currently mandated by the U.S. Supreme Court (Burlington Industries v. Ellerth, 1998, p. 20).

Importantly, any agency serving this function of receiving complaints about, investigating, and recommending sanctions around sexual harassment must be independent from the social network involved, which is likely to promote silence and protect perpetrators. Such an agency must not be paid by the organization, as this would make funding dependent on organizational leaders who might be part of the problem. Unions are also not ideal for such a watchdog service, as many of their members are part of the harasser's network. Professional societies or industry associations may also have conflicts of interest when it comes to a willingness to discover and penalize sexual harassers. We thus recommend a government agency to assume this responsibility, ideally one that is well-funded, resourced, and accessible.

While this approach may seem radical, it is not unlike other regulatory systems already in existence. For instance, food safety regulations require governments to provide food inspection services for the physical safety of citizens. Other agencies are charged with regulating and investigating pharmaceuticals, illegal dumping, and financial fraud. This could be a first stage process of independent and objective intervention, before a costly and public lawsuit takes place. This approach would maximize the circumvention of problematic social networks, making it safer and more effective to speak out against sexual harassment.

Contributions and Future Research

In the present paper, we integrated the literatures on sexual harassment and social networks to identify why silence and inaction are common reactions to sexual harassment. We identified high network centrality of harassers and men as key factors that encourage this silence, and argued that such social networks are likely to transmit dysfunctional gender beliefs and

sexual harassment myths that further fuel silence. Drawing on insights from this critical integration, we identified novel strategies to transform the networks, disrupt the belief systems, and create a culture that supports silence-breakers and stops sexual harassment.

This critical integration contributes to our understanding of sexual harassment in a number of ways. First, we introduce the concept of network silence around sexual harassment, which includes three inter-related sub-factors: being silent, silencing, and not hearing. The construct of network silence contributes both to the sexual harassment and the silence literatures. In both domains, silence is typically conceived of at the individual level. It is a behavior that individuals choose based on appraisals about the context. In the silence literature, Morrison and Milliken (2000) developed a theory of organizational silence, and in this theory they identified social networks as one element that contributes to network silence. Our paper builds on their idea by expanding understandings of how network silence is socially determined. In doing so, we also contribute to the literature on sexual harassment by theorizing silence as a socially generated construct, and in doing so, shifting the scope of responsibility for voice and action away from victims and towards entire networks. We explain how being silent, silencing, and not hearing jointly contribute to network silence and network inaction. The idea that network dynamics can promote silence beyond the individual victim is critical to understanding why sexual harassment persists, sometimes for years, when many network members are aware of it.

Second, we identify two key social network attributes that promote silence around sexual harassment: network composition and belief systems. We theorize that network composition (i.e., harassers and men being central within networks) can influence network silence around sexual harassment, and can also influence problematic belief systems. Similarly, problematic belief systems can promote network silence, and can also elevate harassers and men to more

central positions. This model expands on earlier work by identifying silence as a network problem, not an individual problem, and fleshing out the network constructs that help to generate silence. Third, we theorize that a consequence of network silence is persistence of sexual harassment, as indicated by failures to take corrective action, support victims, and punish perpetrators; these failures in turn reinforces network silence. Thus, we argue that network silence is at the core of a culture that enables sexual harassment to persist. Finally, drawing on our analysis of social networks, we identify ways in which organizations can use (or circumvent) social networks to promote voice and prompt corrective action around sexual harassment.

Our theory may extend beyond sexual harassment to other forms of identity-based mistreatment embedded within social networks. For instance, incivility can be a modern-day form of discrimination, selectively targeted at women, people of color, and others outside the dominant group (Cortina, 2008). Silence around these abuses is likely to persist in circumstances where perpetrators are central within social networks, and in networks where racist and sexist beliefs prevail. Although networks may also influence silence around other unethical or illegal corporate activities, sexual harassment is somewhat unique in being based on deeply entrenched attitudes about sex and gender. Moreover, this harassment involves interpersonal abuse directed at another person within a network (unlike fraud, embezzlement, or corruption).

This critical integration theorizes that people are silent, silenced, and unheard around sexual harassment due to the composition of social networks and the beliefs that travel through them. We posit that key social network attributes make network silence an adaptive response for network members. This insight gives rise to a number of important research avenues. Are there other network attributes that contribute to silence around sexual harassment? Under what conditions are harassers most likely to achieve centrality within social networks? Can

organizational interventions that capitalize on, transform, and circumvent social networks help to break cycles of silence around sexual harassment, and perhaps even help to stop it from occurring in the first place? Do networks that have more central women, or where harassers are more peripheral, give rise to more voice around sexual harassment?

In this paper, we touch on the social processes – social learning theory and pressures for conformity – that help explain how silence transmits through networks. Future research that aims to test pieces of our model can contribute to the literature by further fleshing out the transmission mechanisms at play. Another key question that is worth exploring in future research, is whether and when voice is the answer. Our paper assumes that if network dynamics that fuel silence are disrupted, then victims and witnesses will be more likely to speak up about sexual harassment. Of course, reality is more complex than that. Beyond the constraints of social networks, individual circumstances will influence the extent to which people exercise voice. For instance, those with an extremely high commitment to social justice (cf. Miller et al., 2009) may be prone to voicing regardless of social network consequences, and those who are shy may not voice even when network conditions encourage it. Therefore, individual differences are important to consider in future research designs that study the role of social networks in silence around sexual harassment. Moreover, even when people voice, a variety of organizational factors must be in place for voice to be effective. As theorized by Near and Miceli (1995), factors such as the credibility of the whistleblower, the severity of the misdeed, and the power of the perpetrator will determine whether voice is effective. Thus, even in organizations where social networks encourage voice, the ability and willingness to voice will not necessarily resolve the problem.

Weinstein used his central position, strong ties, and structural holes to coerce and enforce silence around sexual harassment. His victims were young actresses who had weak ties within

the social network and were disconnected from each other. Higher-ranking RCMP officers collaborated to exclude, endanger, and sexually harass new female recruits who were similarly isolated within their network. In both cases, people were too afraid of damaging their position within their social networks to speak up. With Weinstein, it was only after some victims gained the protection of fame and centrality that they spoke up and were heard. And it was only then that witnesses started to speak out in support of these victims. In the RCMP, after her complaints about sexual harassment were ignored and denied for years, Janet Merlo and others watched their former troop mate, Catherine Galliford, describe her own sexual harassment on national television. Women across the RCMP began to share their stories with each other, and Merlo stepped forward as the lead plaintiff of a class-action sexual harassment lawsuit (Merlo, 2013). Over 330 women ultimately stepped forward to report sexual harassment within the RCMP (Woo, 2014), after years of network silence. Our theoretical integration offers crucial insights into how social networks and the belief systems that permeate them encode silence around sexual harassment, and how they can be changed to shatter this silence.

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Figure 1. Social Network Forces that Generate Network Silence and a Culture of Sexual Harassment.