Sexual Harassment as a Narrative Contest

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how stories shape both the perpetration of sexual harassment and the experiences of victims during and after sexual harassment. During and after the experience of sexual harassment, a narrative contest transpires between the harasser, victim, and others who contribute to the contest by engaging in the formal and informal conversations that follow known experiences of harassment in the workplace. I analyze 22 public statements, interviews, and investigative reports, including statements from men accused of sexual harassment, women who were sexually harassed, and bystanders. A narrative framework, including concepts of narrative believability and story credibility, is used to theorize the entrenchment of sexual harassment and its race and gender patterns. I discern how narrative contests between harassers and victims of sexual harassment influence action and inaction, and thereby support harm but may inform resistance.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Sexual harassment is uninvited verbal, physical and/or visual stimuli, or proposals of sexual or degrading exchange relations, occurring in social spaces over which targets have limited control. While the relevant stimuli/proposals may be sexual in nature, the sexual harassment designation is also applied to non-sexual, hostile stimuli related to a target's gender. Sexual harassment causes emotional unease and inhibits daily routines or goals. It occurs everywhere that individuals are in close proximity, including workplaces, schools, streets, bars, restaurants, airplanes and other modes of public transportation, and hotel rooms. While considerable cross-disciplinary research has been conducted on sexual harassment – for example, from psychology, law, sociology, management, organization, politics, medicine, higher education, and more – criminology has been slow to engage, arguably because in many cases the action is not illegal or not treated as such (Uggen et al. 2021).[1]

This dissertation begins to fill that gap in criminology. Animated by a social harm perspective from critical criminology – the idea that we ought to theorize harms and not only 'crimes' – my goal is to theorize sexual harassment in the workplace in terms of narrative. One fundamental proposition of this project is that sexual harassment is not only about the action and reaction of the harasser and victim. Rather, I maintain and demonstrate that the sexual

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[1] In the United States, if a victim chooses to pursue sexual harassment allegations, the reporting pathway is usually through the institution's human resources office, or if legal action is taken, it is in the form of civil fines (Uggen et al. 2021). Most other countries have similar pathways for workplace harassment, through human resources and civil fines, though some countries have made sexual harassment a criminal offense (Lerouge 2013; Talboys et al. 2017).

harassment experience encompasses the sexual harassment actions and a multitude of encounters and actions that follow, including interactions with bystanders, institutional responses to the victim and any other interactions until there is a resolution of the sexual harassment experience. Significant to the resolution of sexual harassment is storytelling after an accusation of sexual harassment.

According to Kreps (1993), "communication is the primary medium through which sexual harassment is expressed" (p. 1). Indeed, sexual harassment is a harm that is constructed narratively from start to finish: harassers use discursive practices to "do" sexual harassment; victims use discursive practices to make sense of their victimization and to respond to their harassers; and, if victims report the harassment, harassers use discursive practices to counter the accusations made against them. Moreover, 'cases' of sexual harassment are often plagued with an absence of physical evidence, meaning the story told *is* the evidence and the outcome hinges on the actor who is believed and who has successfully narrated their side of the story. Accordingly, central to this project is the notion of sexual harassment as narrative contest.

The Narrative Contest

Throughout the experience of sexual harassment, and after a sexual harassment accusation is made, a narrative contest transpires between the victim and the accused. During this narrative contest, each actor shapes their version of 'what happened', with the general purpose of being believed, trusted, and not discredited. The narrative contest is not a fair one as it is always tethered to "hierarchal relations of domination and subordination" (Plummer 2019: 30). The current social positions of the actors help determine whether the victim or the accused gets heard or is believed by others. Plummer (2019) refers to these hierarchical differences as

"narrative inequalities" (p. 16) which, in cases of sexual harassment, occurs when women, and especially women of color, are disbelieved or unheard in the narrative contest.

Of interest to this project is the idea that the narrative contest of sexual harassment does not only involve the harasser and victim. In addition to the two main actors, narrative contests are socially influenced and manipulated by a multitude of voices including bystanders, the law, the work institution, and the media, and each "voice" in this narrative contest can alter the story of sexual harassment. As Mullins and Kirkwood (2021) state, "narratives are shaped, edited and refined through interactions with others" (p. 317). These other actors can markedly change the narrative, even causing the victim to doubt her own story and accept the narrative of others. The ability of others to alter or challenge sexual harassment narratives depends on societal constructions of who gets heard and who gets believed and influences the outcome for the victim and harasser.

The unfairness of the narrative contest is a common concern for victims because of the way sexual harassment is performed. Sexual harassment often begins with a slow buildup of comments, creating unique challenges for victims who choose to report the harassment to institutional authorities if their story is fragmented or does not fit with the common definitions of sexual harassment. Thus, telling the story of sexual harassment can be challenging for multiple reasons, causing many victims to choose silence over speech.

The Stepwise Nature of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is a harm that is performed through communication and may begin as unwanted compliments or requests, particularly when it is done in the workplace or in school

settings where the harasser and victim are in ongoing close proximity[2]. When sexual harassment

occurs in the workplace, it is usually performed in steps - a comment here and there - and often

just approaches the limits of acceptability at each 'step', which causes this harm to initially go

unrecognized as sexual harassment. I refer to this buildup or progression of unwanted

communication and behavior by harassers as the stepwise nature of sexual harassment.

Because much sexual harassment is performed serially, via verbal or light physical

innuendos, approaching, but not traversing the limits of acceptability, it is challenging for

victims to construct a coherent, culturally recognizable, and parsimonious story of the overall

harm. When victims are unable to tell a convincing story of sexual harassment, or if harassers are

easily able to counter their story, the story may not seem credible to others in the workplace. The

inability to tell a coherent story may cause the victim to be reluctant to report sexual harassment.

This stepwise progression thus hones the imbalance of power between parties to the narrative

contest, with the burden of coherent narration on the victim, not the harasser. Consequently, it is

because sexual harassment can be difficult to explain and the explanations can be easy to

counter, that *how* the story gets told becomes critical.

Believability: Narrative Inequalities and Epistemological Injustice

The narrative contest between the victim and harasser during the sexual harassment

experience is asymmetrical. This narrative inequality occurs because of differential power,

resources, and believability, which impact how the victim may construct and relate her story of

harassment. Narrative inequalities have a direct impact on the narrative contest when

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[2] One-time offences (e.g., a police officer harassing a citizen he is detaining) may differ in

performance – or may be more direct - because the encounter time is limited.

believability and epistemic injustice are at play. Victims may suffer epistemic injustice and be discredited because of their gender, race, age, social status, and other sources oppression, denying the victim's truth about the harassment event. When victim believability is questioned, bystanders view the victim as untrustworthy.

Who gets believed may also be impacted by who gets to tell their story the loudest, or whose story is circulated most broadly. Some people do not get a forum for storytelling, and some do, but depending on the social and/or economic status of the individual actors, the forums and audiences may be differently available for different people. For example, a powerful offender of harassment may be able to tell his story during a press conference, whereas his victim is unable to do the same. When this occurs, tellability is skewed in favor of one actor over the other during the narrative contest. In addition, workplace tolerance of sexual harassment or organizational hierarchies wherein the harasser is higher ranking compared to the victim, can cause accounts from victims to be treated as suspect. Each of these narrative inequalities, all of which stem from power, affects who gets believed in the narrative contest of sexual harassment.

Narrative Theoretical Lenses

The current project seeks to clarify how sexual harassment gets constituted narratively by subjecting secondary discourse data to narrative and other discourse analytic techniques. I deploy narrative criminology and narrative victimology to frame the study. Both paradigms foreground stories. *Narrative criminology* (Presser 2009) is grounded in the idea that stories (e.g., of self and of harmdoing) shape social actions and patterns including those that cause harm. Likewise, *narrative victimology* (Pemberton, Mulder, and Aarten 2019; Walklate et al. 2019) is grounded in the idea that victims make sense of harmful experience and self through stories.

Although narrative inquiries were once considered too subjective, they are now broadly accepted social research tools (Ewick and Silbey 1998; Loseke 2007). Indeed, as Connelly and Clandinin (2006) state, "Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience…To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study" (p. 375). For both harm doers and victims, narratives operate like "a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful" (Connelly and Clandinin 2006:375).

I am specifically interested in the narrative contest that involves harassers, victims, bystanders, institutional representatives and in some cases, the media. Each additional voice that becomes involved the narrative can cause greater harm after an incident of sexual harassment because of the various versions of subsequent narratives told by others which often serve to discredit the victim. Narrative criminology is poised to clarify how sexually harassing others, or turning a blind eye to sexual harassment, has been made acceptable or normalized by harassers and bystanders. Similarly, narrative victimology can clarify how victims of sexual harassment make sense of their victimization in the context of ongoing life stories. Narratologists have distinguished between the "skeleton of [the story], the who, what, where, when, and why" and *how* the story is told (Plummer 2019:4-5). This project will examine both. I will examine *what* the victims, harassers and bystanders in this project said about the sexual harassment experiences before I turn to *how* each constructed their version of the story of sexual harassment.

Chapter Summary

This introductory chapter laid out the main concepts that are central to this project – specifically, the stepwise nature of sexual harassment and the "narrative contest" of much harassment including workplace harassment, to which multiple parties contribute. This dissertation proceeds with an extensive background of sexual harassment in the U.S. I examine harasser, victim and bystander motivations and discourse techniques before turning to the data where I examine multiple facets of transcripts about sexual harassment experiences in two distinct workplaces. This study puts narrative at the center of the action of sexual harassment and its harms. I begin with the premise that sexual harassment is communication and the experience and narration of the story of harassment not only involves the victim and the harasser, but also includes bystanders, institutional representatives and in high profile cases, the media. I am interested in how the story of harassment is told and retold by various storytellers to understand how the narratives shape harmful action, constructs the outcome of reporting, and predicts future harassing behaviors.

The literature review in the first three chapters of this project provide multiple insights for my analysis, and specifically that (1) sexual harassment is rooted in power dynamics; (2) an important dimension of said power dynamics is epistemic oppression; (3) sexual harassment is discursive, meaning, narratives are central to this harm; and (4) narratives assimilate other discursive mechanisms for harmdoing, such as neutralizations, but given the temporal aspect of narratives, they are especially relevant to protracted harms like sexual harassment.

Chapter 2 will review sexual harassment definitions, the extent and pervasiveness of sexual harassment, different types, how race impacts the experience, and common spaces outside of the average workplace where sexual harassment occurs. The strategy for this chapter is to

understand and underscore how power is always present in sexual harassment experiences by examining many aspects of how, when, where and why sexual harassment is performed.

Chapters 3 and 4 discuss the theories and concepts used in this project which give background into the various discursive cultural mechanisms that enable harmdoing and examines how victims of sexual harassment often become targets again through secondary victimization. Chapter 3 examines narrative criminology and narrative victimology, which together, offer new theoretical approaches for the examination of sexual harassment by considering how stories and storytelling dynamics shape the enactment of harm, and by considering how stories and storytelling dynamics shape the experience for victims during and after being harmed. Chapter 4 examines the impacts of victimization and how bystanders and others either aid or further harm targets of sexual harassment by siding with the harasser or through silence and turning a blind eye to known victimization. In addition, this chapter reviews an important dimension of the power dynamic of sexual harassment – epistemic privilege and epistemic oppression (Fricker 2007).

Chapter 5 presents methodology and methods. It describes both the theoretical lenses used in this project – narrative criminology and narrative victimology – and the data and data analysis procedures.

Chapter 6 launches my analysis of the two sexual harassment cases and showcases dimensions of the sexual harassment experience. This chapter examines *what* was said and is organized by the three most common themes my analysis uncovered concerning the sexual harassment experience. The three main themes I found were power and powerlessness, retaliation, and bystander complicity.

Chapter 7 has two functions. The first part of this chapter examines the techniques that harassers used to give themselves permission to harm where I found evidence of harassment myths and victim reduction and oppression. The second part of this chapter examines the initial response by victims, which signified their engagement in the narrative contest. Responses by the victims to their harassers included both verbal and non-verbal responses, initially aimed at diffusing the harassment encounters.

Chapter 8 explains the difficulties that victims faced when attempting to report sexual harassment to authorities. This chapter observes the center of the action where the narrative contest is ongoing, and how and why it is an unfair contest, usually for the victim. This chapter is laid out in two distinct sections: victim credibility, where findings of epistemic injustice and disbelief of the victim caused victims stories to go unheard; and story credibility, where the stepwise nature of sexual harassment affected how *stories* were not believed.

Chapter 9 explores the narratives that "go together" – that is, accounts from harassers, victims, and bystanders on the same sexual harassment experience. This chapter explores how versions of the same story of harassment differed depending on the speaker. Using statements from all actors involved allowed me to evaluate, among other things, storytelling exchanges and institutional effects.

Finally, Chapter 10 draws conclusions about how power is critical to sexual harassment and is equally critical to the narrative contest as many individuals participate in the narrative contest of sexual harassment in the workplace. It highlights the issues of difficulties finding individuals who have sexually harassed because either harassment goes unreported, or when it is reported, is handled internally and confidentially. It also recognizes that this project was made possible by victims who did *eventually* come forward about their sexual harassment experience.

This chapter issues a call for more research on how race and other factors affect the sexual harassment experience. Most of all it, showcases how sexual harassment is performed via a stepwise approach, creating obstacles for victims as they try to produce a coherent story of the harassment for others.

Chapter 2. Sexual Harassment in the U.S.: Definitions, Pervasiveness, Power, and Spaces

Prior to 1974, in the United States, there was no classification for the face-to-face degradations that women (and men) encountered on the streets[3], in the workplace, schools, in state custody, and other social spaces are shaped by social hierarchy (Saguy and Rees 2021). Sexual harassment became a defined term in 1975 when Lin Farley, a faculty member at Cornell University, testified about conversations she had with her students who were women about their experiences with sexual misconduct at the university. The feminist movement had laid the foundation (Baker 2007). Subsequently, attorney Catherine MacKinnon (1979) linked sexual harassment and discrimination, by creating a definition of sexual harassment that was legally acknowledged, allowing for legal sanctions in the workplace. Today, in the United States, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defines sexual harassment in work settings as "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature" (EEOC 1964). Two types of sexual harassment have been distinguished by law in the United States.

Definitions

Quid pro quo sexual harassment includes proposals of sexual interactions with threats or promises of adverse occupational sanctions such as termination or being overlooked for a promotion by a supervisor if the victim does not comply with a sexual request. It is, in effect, sexual bribery. Hostile environment sexual harassment is unwanted conduct that is "intimidating, hostile or offensive" and includes remarks, pranks, or touching which is "persistent or severe" (EEOC 1980; OCR 2001). These actions do not have to be sexual, according to the EEOC, to

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[3] Street harassment still resists any formal response.

qualify as sexual harassment but may consist of offensive remarks about a person's gender. The victim and harasser may be of the opposite sex or the same sex. The EEOC (1980) states that an incident that makes "any reasonable person" feel uncomfortable or intimidated can be considered harassment. Because sexual harassment is illegal, victims are entitled to confront the harasser, file a formal complaint with a supervisor, or take the harasser to court.

In the United States, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), which regulates the application of Title IX, enforces the statute against sexual harassment of students in educational institutions, including grade schools, high schools, colleges, and universities, that receive federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Education (1997). Quid pro quo sexual harassment in the school setting includes employees' allowing or denying students participation in certain educational programs or activities based on the students' compliance with and acceptance of unwanted verbal or nonverbal sexual attention or request for physical sexual interaction. Such suggestions are illegal regardless of whether the student avoids or participates in order to escape the perceived threat. Hostile environment harassment includes persistent or severe unwanted sexual propositions or any other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature by an employee, another student, or anyone else, which inhibits a student's ability to benefit from the school's program (OCR 2001). Gender harassment is a common form of hostile harassment sexual harassment. These laws require that all educational institutions follow certain procedures to address any sexual harassment claims as soon as they are made aware of any incidents. If they do not, the school can be held liable, and the student is entitled to sue (Fineran 2002:18).

While the above paragraphs give the different legal definitions of sexual harassment, scholars have struggled to define sexual harassment in a meaningful way that encompasses a range of experiences that everyone can agree constitutes sexual harassment, regardless of

background, societal influences, age, race, and so on. Fitzgerald, Gelfand, and Drasgow (1995)

identify three types of behavior that qualify as sexual harassment: sexual coercion (e.g., offering

a promotion or warning of dismissal if sexual requests are not accepted); unwanted sexual

attention (e.g., uninvited sexual verbal or physical advances); and gender harassment (e.g., lewd

jokes and sexual comments). Sexual harassment can be sexually driven – this may include

harassers making sexual remarks or overtures with the goal of a sexual encounter - however,

most often, it is about letting the target know they are either unwelcome or not respected (Reskin

and Padavic 1994). Although anyone can be sexually harassed, in most cases, men are harassers

and women are victims (Fitzgerald 2017).

Pervasiveness of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment appears to be common. As MacKinnon (1979) once stated, men's

victimization of women "is sufficiently pervasive in American society as to be nearly invisible"

(p. 1). In fact, it is estimated that one out of every two women in the United States (Fitzgerald

and Cortina 2018) has experienced occupational or public sexual harassment. Around the world,

an estimated 40 to 50 percent of employees have experienced sexual harassment, according to

the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). Other surveys suggest that three out of

every four women in the UK, 79 percent of women in India, 86 percent of women in Thailand,

and 86 percent of women in Brazil have experienced public or workplace harassment (ActionAid

2021). As Garvey (1986:75) states, "Unwanted sexual attention may be the single most

widespread occupational hazard in the workplace today."

Moreover, sexual harassment occurs everywhere. While not comprehensive, the

following exposition of sexual harassment research is meant to provide a glimpse into the

landscape of how wide-spread sexual harassment is among a multitude of workplaces and public

spaces. In addition, the following reveals how sexual harassment has no age, race, or class

restrictions. Anyone from prison inmates to famous actors can be sexually harassed by others.

Likewise, harassers equally differ in age, race, or class designations, as they may be doctors,

prison guards, or hotel guests. As Pina, Gannon, and Saunders (2009) observe, "Sexual harassers

appear to permeate all social strata, occupational levels, and age categories" (p. 129). Women are

sexually harassed by supervisors, colleagues, and subordinates who are men (Pina et al. 2009)

and even in work environments that are dominated by women, such as nursing, women are

predominately sexually harassed by patients or other nurses who are men (Robbins, Bender and

Finnis 1997). Individuals are sexually harassed in universities and occupational settings

(Fitzgerald, Shullman, et al. 1988; Rospenda, Richman and, Shannon 2009), and by teachers and

classmates in school settings (Hill and Kearl 2011). Guests sexually harass cleaning staff in

hotels (Kensbock et al. 2015). Doctors sexually harass nurses in hospitals (Williams 1996) and

women physicians are sexually harassed by their patients (Phillips and Schneider 1993). Prison

guards sexually harass prisoners, (Stinson et al. 2014; Thuma 2015, 2019), and men in law

enforcement sexually harass women police officers and citizens (Bell, et al. 1999; Maher 2003).

Smart phone technology has given individuals new ways to sexually harass through texting

(Henry and Powell 2015) and the recent Covid-19 pandemic has presented additional ways for

achieving harassment via video conferencing and messaging (Rangaswami and Gevargiz 2021).

    While sexual harassment can be an isolated event, persistent harassment by one

perpetrator against one victim appears to be common. There is a paucity of research that

specifically speaks to the duration that victims are sexually harassed in the workplace, however,

the victims in this project each spoke of multiple sexual harassment experiences occurring over

months or years. They expressed awareness that other victims were repeatedly sexually harassed

and considered sexual harassment to be a normalized activity in their workplaces, providing

anectodical evidence that prolonged workplace sexual harassment appears to be common.

Several scholars have similarly noted that sexual harassment, and especially gender harassment,

is often a prolonged experience for targets, lasting over time (Rospenda et al. 2000; Fitzgerald

and Cortina 2021).

Power and Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is clearly rooted in power dynamics wherein some are subjugated by

others – workers subordinated to bosses, women to men, people of color to whites and so on.

While it is believed that the most common dynamic of sexual harassment in the workplace is

women who are sexually harassed by supervisors who are men, McLaughlin et al. (2012) found

that women supervisors in organizations traditionally associated with and populated by men,

such as policing, military, and heavy manufacturing, are more likely to be sexually harassed by

co-workers or subordinates, using their gendered power, often to "put them in their place"

causing women in positions of power to become targets of sexual harassment by individuals in

equal or lower positions of occupational power (McLaughlin et al. 2012). This type of

contrapower harassment occurs when the target possesses more organizational power than the

harasser (Rospenda et al. 1998).

Most often, contrapower harassment "perpetuates, enforces, and polices gender norms at

work that seek to feminize women and masculinize men" (Cortina and Areguin 2020:9). This

type of gender/sex-based harassment is the most common form of sexual harassment and

showcases how gendered power is used as punishment for men or women who breach masculine

or feminine norms (Rabelo and Cortina 2014). Sex-based harassment is defined as "behavior that derogates, demeans, or humiliates and individual" based on the individual's sex (Berdahl 2007:644). While most scholars focus on sexual harassment that is sexually motivated, individuals experience nonsexual forms of harassment more often than sex-based harassment, according to sociological research (Leskinen et al. 2011; Fitzgerald and Cortina 2018).

Another theory of sexual harassment of women by men in masculine occupations is sex-role spillover (Gutek 1985), which suggests that when women work in masculine occupations, sexual harassment may be done as a reminder that the women should behave like "wives" and stop encroaching on men's' occupations (Gutek and Cohen 1987). For example, men will often make sexist jokes to undermine women and "keep them in their place" in masculine workplace cultures (Collinson and Collinson 1996:31). Indeed, workplaces that are dominated by men, such as the military, policing, or manufacturing report widespread harassing behaviors. In 1997, Schneider et al. surveyed women who worked in academia and private organizations and found that on average, 88 percent who had been sexually harassed encountered gender harassment. Leskinen et al. (2011) had similar findings with 90 percent of women claiming they were gender harassed and found that the majority of these incidents did not include coercion or unwanted sexual attention.

While less common, both men and women experience same-sex harassment, usually in the form of degradation and humiliation, however, it is more common for men to experience same-sex harassment (DuBois et al. 1998). Until recently, sexual harassment of men has been understudied, as Fineran (2002) states, "Sexual harassment that occurs between peers who are the same gender is frequently ignored" (p. 65). Although little research has been conducted on adult same-sex sexual harassment, the prevalence of peer harassment within student populations

appears to be widespread and includes same-sex sexual harassment (Fineran 2002). In addition, in masculine organizations, men who do not fit the traditional hegemonic masculine ideal are subjected to sexual harassment, usually by other men, because the victim is considered weak or effeminate (Berdahl 2007). When men do not conform to the norms of hegemonic masculinity, "they are harassed as *not-men*, [or] in other words, as women" (Fitzgerald and Cortina 2018:4), and that type of harassment, which targets men, is most often also committed by men (Cortina and Areguin 2020).

When men are sexually harassed by women, Konrad and Gutek (1986) argue that men are less likely to perceive sexual advances as threatening, and often report that such behavior is inconsequential. In addition, men may not perceive harassing behaviors as sexual harassment because they often "lack a cultural reference point that would give meaning to them as a unified construct or phenomenon," whereas most women are aware of the phenomenon of sexual harassment (Uggen and Blackstone 2004:69). Also, some research has found that men find behaviors by other men to be harassing when *they* are ridiculed for not joining in making fun of women (Schneider et al. 1997).

Racialized Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment research most frequently examines the sexual harassment of "women." However, we are never just women: we are women of a particular race, age, class, sexual orientation, gender orientation, ability, and so on. The sexual harassment of women of color is rarely given separate attention, even though the history of Black women enduring sexual harassment victimization is much longer than that of white women. However, recent research indicates that sexual harassment experiences of minority women differ from sexual harassment experiences of white women (Berenstain 2020). Racialized sexual harassment calls attention to

the simultaneity of racism and sexism in the harassment of women of color. The U.S. has a long history of Black women suffering white men's sexual assault during slavery (Collins 2000). Moreover, Black women have endured sexual harassment victimization by employers "since long before white women entered the workforce in droves and became vulnerable to workplace harassment themselves" (Berenstain 2020:10). Thus, when oppression stems from race and class, racist and sexist beliefs by others towards already oppressed individuals can "produce especially harmful outcomes [especially] for working-class women of color" (Berenstain 2020:25) because when women of color are sexually harassed, they are on the receiving end of both racism and harassment, enduring multiple harms within the same experience which will often cause greater posttraumatic stress (Woods, Buchanan, and Settles 2009).

While scholars agree that studies of sexual harassment have ignored the racialized experience of minority women, studies of the racialized experience of white women have also been overlooked. That is, what dimension does whiteness add to the sexual harassment experience in different contexts and locations? Limited research has been done by way of examining what differences whiteness versus blackness has on the sexual harassment experience.

However, differences in the perceptions of sexual harassment and how victims respond to sexual harassment have been examined by some scholars and those differences seem to be affected by race – that is, Black women are less likely to tolerate and may be more likely to report sexual harassment than white women. The theory behind this is grounded in race and discrimination, because Black women are already a member of an oppressed, minority group and therefore, more sensitive to any form of discrimination (Rosen and Martin 1998).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw 1991; Collins 2000) is also highly relevant, yet infrequently brought to bear on research of sexual harassment. The theory asserts that systems of oppression are inseparable. Race, class, gender, and still other positionings are crucial in understanding victimization and oppression. While research suggests that over half of all adult women experience sexual harassment at work or during college (Fitzgerald and Cortina 2018), past studies found that women of color reported higher rates of sexual harassment that white women, as findings ranged from 60 percent to 80 percent (Mansfield, Koch, Henderson, & Vicary 1991; Paludi 1996; Cortina, Swan, Fitzgerald, and Waldo 1998). Moreover, some evidence suggests that the experience of sexual harassment is more severe for women of color (Gruber and Bjorn 1982). A recent study of 474 astronomers and planetary scientists found that women of color reported higher rates of sexual harassment and assault than white women or men (Clancy et al. 2017). In this same study, forty percent of women of color said they felt unsafe because of their gender or race and 28 percent of women of color said they felt unsafe specifically because of their race.

Kalof, et al. (2001) argue, "because sexual harassment is about power, we would expect less powerful people (e.g., women, minorities, and younger individuals) to be particularly vulnerable to harassers" (p. 283). Power is consequential to racialized sexual harassment and intersectionality because women of color are already marginalized based on their race and gender, leaving them vulnerable to harassment by middle-class, white men or others who have greater power and credibility. As Cassino and Besen-Cassino (2019) state, if sexual harassment is about power over the victim, men may target Black women more frequently than white women because Black women have less societal power. Thus, power, embedded in race, gender and

status hierarchies, is a predictor and shaper of sexual harassment both in and out of the workplace.

Another predictor and shaper of how sexual harassment is performed is not only seen in the different manifestations of harassment – gender, same-sex, and racial sexual harassment – but also the location - the workplace, public spaces, and higher education institutions. Thus, while the analysis in this project will focus on two specific brick and mortar workplaces where sexual harassment allegations were made public, the background review in the next section will also include several of the most common contexts of sexual harassment, including harassment that occurs in workplaces that are dominated by men, street harassment, and harassment done by police agents to citizens and inmates.

The purpose of this extended background is to understand how different situational variables (e.g., street harassment versus harassment by police officers to inmates) may determine different narrative reactions and responses. In addition, a broader understanding of sexual harassment experiences outside of the workplace, or in very specific workplace environments (e.g., the military), is important as we move forward with this research, beyond this project, for our understanding of how narratives are constructed surrounding the same harm – sexual harassment – when experienced in different workplace settings and with different power hierarchies between the victim and harasser.

Different Contexts and Characteristics of Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment performance takes on different characteristics, ranging from compliments on a persons' physical appearance to hostile, gendered insults. How sexual harassment is performed depends on physical location, as well as the gender, culture, age, and

race, of the harassers and victims. Thus, the different sexual harassment settings have an impact

on how the harm is performed by the harasser and how it is perceived, understood, and storied by

the victim. For example, Kabat-Farr and Cortina (2014) collected survey data from women and

men who worked in academia, the court system, and the military, and found that hostile,

gendered harassment (i.e., non-sexual harassment intended to create a hostile environment for

the victim because of their gender), was 1.2 times more likely to occur in occupations with few

women. In another study which surveyed 525 graduate students at a large public university,

Rosenthal, Smidt and Freyd (2016), found that over 69.8 percent of students who were women

reported some type of sexual harassment victimization that was usually sexual in nature (sexual

coercion, unwanted touching, or unwanted sexual communication). Their analysis revealed that

harassers were peers, faculty or staff, and the outcome of the harassment caused many women to

feel unsafe on campus and unsupported by the university. These two studies highlight how

different locations and social spaces may assist in creating different types of sexual harassment

experiences.

     Below, I briefly introduce several of the most common contexts of sexual harassment,

and while these are not mutually exclusive, for the sake of exposition, I present them separately

for a better understanding of the prevalence (if known) and the characteristics of how sexual

harassment is performed in these different contexts. This examination will paint a picture of how

power, oppression, and situational variables determine different narrative actions and responses,

which is critical to this project as the data examines two starkly different situational locations as

well as racial components to sexual harassment.

Carceral Spaces and Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment can occur anywhere, but especially where people hold dramatically different power positions. It is not surprising, then, that sexual harassment is a frequent occurrence in carceral sites. A National Inmate Survey (NIS-3) conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics between 2012-2015, counted 36,578 claims of sexual victimization, by staff against prisoners in correctional facilities, including 22,268 incidents of sexual misconduct and 14,310 incidents of sexual harassment. However, as reporting inconsistencies of sexual harassment in the workplace and beyond are common, Beck (2015) asserts that the frequency of sexual harassment in prisons is even more indeterminate because of hierarchical power and social status discrepancies between employees and harassers, which discourages victims from reporting harassment out of fear of further punishment or embarrassment.

According to Maher (2003), sexual harassment of citizens by police is also presumably high and underreported. Victims may choose not to report incidents carried out by the police out of fear of retaliation, and reputed 'codes of silence', which produce police coverups and disregard of known incidents of harassing behaviors. Maher (2003) goes on to say that because policing is an occupation that is dominated by men, which is often combined with acceptable levels of occupational violence (i.e., police officers' jobs direct them to "get involved" when something bad has happened), that police are also given opportunities to sexually harass others because of their unique positions of situational power, spatial isolation of encounters, and credibility compared to lawbreakers. Maher (2003) has described common forms of sexual misconduct by police, including but not limited to harassment, including looking up vehicle registration to see what women look like and subsequently "showing up" at their homes, spying on women inside their homes, pulling women over to frisk them unnecessarily, demanding

sexual favors in return for not giving speeding tickets, and sexual assault or rape. In addition, as policing continues to be dominated by men and is masculine in character, and the harassment of women police officers remains ongoing (Kurtz and Upton 2017).

Sexual Harassment in Academia

Sexual harassment also appears to be widespread at colleges and universities. Rosenthal et al., (2016) found that 38 percent of women graduate students and 50 percent to 90 percent of women undergraduate students indicated they had experienced sexual harassment during college (Rosenthal et al. 2016). A meta-analysis survey conducted in 2003 by Ilies et al. found that 58 percent of women who were faculty and staff in academia had experienced workplace sexual harassment. Moreover, additional findings from ARC3 (Campus Climate on Sexual Misconduct) surveys concluded that women who were students in science, engineering, and medicine (SEM) were 220 percent more likely to experience sexual harassment by faculty and staff than women in other majors (National Academy of Sciences 2018). The most common sexual harassment experience in academia is gender or hostile harassment, followed by unwanted verbal sexual advances, and finally, sexual coercion (Fitzgerald and Cortina 2018).

Unique characteristics of academic settings set them apart from other workplaces, and may allow sexual harassment to ensue, such as "adherence and commitment to the principles of academic freedom, shared governance, and due process make it particularly difficult to address sexual harassment allegations, and consequently, sexual harassing behaviors often continue" (Tenbrunsel, Rees, and Diekmann 2019:249). Academic freedom encourages faculty, staff, and students to "push back" on policies and ideas that are seen as infringing on individual rights. Shared governance – the process though which faculty, staff and, sometimes, students participate in the development of policies and in decision-making that affect the institution – yields widely

distributed oversight, often with faculty who have taken on leadership roles out of obligation, sometimes temporarily, and with little to no training for that supervisory role. Due process, or the fair treatment of all parties involved in legal procedures, is often thwarted because of tenure, which is a hierarchal status that protects faculty from termination. Put differently, a victim's case may not be properly heard by decision makers if the harasser is tenured, and therefore protected from many of the sanctions that do not apply in normal occupations. In short, academia's hierarchical power structures assist harassers and harm victims.

Street Harassment

While dissimilar from the other "types" of harassment in this section, street harassment is widespread, occurring in any public space where people gather or pass by, therefore, the inclusion of street harassment in this section is meant to demonstrate how sexual harassment has no barriers, as it can occur anywhere people are present. Street harassment is generally defined as "unwanted sexual attention from strangers in public" (Wesselmann and Kelly 2010:451) and broadly involves an assortment of pestering impositions, such as being yelled at or followed by a stranger on the street (Gardner 1995; Vera-Gray 2016) or being touched in public spaces such as public transport, shops, or bars (Vera-Gray 2016). Surveys report that between 30 and 100 percent of women encounter street harassment, (Logan 2015:201), and there are currently no laws against street harassment in United States[4].

In addition, while street harassment is recognized as being widespread, little empirical research has been dedicated to it, limiting our understanding of its frequency, how it manifests,

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[4] France passed an "outrages sexistes" law in August 2018, which allows for on-the-spot fines for street harassment of up to €750 ($823) (BBC 2019).

and the meaning it holds for the individuals who harass and victims who experience the harassment (Vera-Gray 2016). Targets of street or public harassment are, evidently, often racial minorities an LGBTQ+ individuals (Gardner 1995). Street harassment can take on many different forms from seemingly innocent compliments to racist expletives, Unsolicited comments by men to women in public are said to function as a type of social control by informing women that they are trespassing in public places that are "owned" by men (Vera-Gray 2016). Indeed the "intimidating qualities of sexual street harassment reminds women of their possible punishment for such trespassing: violence and sexual assault" (Kissling 1991:454). Thus, while street harassment may seem innocuous to bystanders and even some victims, others who are harassed may experience an extreme discomfort, including fear for their safety.

Chapter Summary

Sexual harassment is widespread, affecting numerous people and occurring in numerous social spaces. Depending on the study, between 20 and 100 percent of women are sexually harassed in their lifetime. This chapter presented an overview of the prevalence of sexual harassment both within and outside of the workplace as a critical background for the understanding of the prevalence of this harm. The power of sexual harassment and the power of the narrative are central to this project, and this chapter examined the power dynamics at play anytime sexual harassment is experienced, to foreshadow how that power is utilized in the construction of the narrative contest. Power and gender are always part of the experience of sexual harassment, even in same-sex sexual harassment, where the victim is usually considered "less than" by the harasser. Even women in higher professional status positions are sexually

harassed by men who are their subordinates, who use their gendered power to "put women in their place".

The next chapter will examine my theoretical framework for this project. Specifically, I will review narrative criminology and narrative victimology which are the lenses I am using in this project to analyze statements from sexual harassment perpetrators, victims, bystanders, and other actors involved in the co-construction of the harassment narrative. I will also examine several early criminological concepts which laid groundwork for narrative criminology. I connect how harassers use various techniques that enable harm-doing, which give themselves permission to sexually harass others. In other words, justifying or neutralizing the harms of harassment becomes a socially negotiated process derived from old myths that is subsequently forged through the telling of stories after individuals have harassed.

Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework: Cultural Mechanisms for Harmdoing

Sexual harassment has a discursive dimension which is central to this project. Accordingly, ample attention is given to discursive actions during the performance of sexual harassment and the creation narrative contest that follows. An understanding of how narratives are inspired and put into action is grounded in this chapter. This chapter first lays out my theoretical framework which includes narrative criminology, narrative victimology and the discursive approaches that inspired them. Each posits that the things people say, shape harm or motivate subsequent actions. I also examine how the narrative contest of sexual harassment is co-created by the victim and harasser, but also, though institutional structures that may discourage reporting, contributing to the narrative contest by silencing the victim. Finally, I will explore how mass media play a role in the narrative contest by sharing stories of sexual harassment widely and publicly. In sum, this chapter will lay the groundwork for the theoretical lenses used in this project in analyzing statements from sexual harassment perpetrators, victims, bystanders, and other actors involved in the co-construction of the harassment narrative.

We are born into a world of continuous storytelling that preceded us. As adults, our behaviors and actions are guided by the things that people say, which include our own stories and the stories of others, as we make sense of daily encounters and experiences through the creation and recreation of stories. As humans, our narrative identities are shaped through stories that are part of our social and cultural surroundings. Stories are created and communicated within specific contexts of history and institutional cultures, and the way stories are told and heard include both the speakers' and listeners' personal histories under the "current" norms of storytelling (Ewick and Silbey 1995; Holstein and Gubrium 2000).

Narratives are garnering significant scholarly attention and increased utilization in social research as they reveal how humans create, recreate, and uphold cultural meanings (Loseke 2007; Ewick and Silbey 1998). Narrative criminology (Presser 2009) is leading the way in examining how the "process of meaning making inspires action" (Fleetwood 2015:384) and is aptly poised to further our understanding of sexual harassment through the stories of men who have been accused of sexual harassment and bystanders who formally or informally support harassers. Similarly, narrative victimology (Pemberton, Mulder, and Aarten 2019; Walklate et al. 2019), helps to frame the factors that shape the stories of victims in the aftermath of sexual harassment.

Narrative Criminology

Narrative criminology, an emergent paradigm considers the influence of stories on committing, perpetuating, or refraining from criminal and other harmful acts and patterns. Stories "inform and animate us and thus guide our actions" (Presser and Sandberg 2019:131). Individuals and groups construct narratives to explain how they self-identify, explain past actions, and predict future actions, and these narratives are based on culturally accepted and available stories that are familiar to their particular social position (Presser 2009, 2010). Narratives can produce harm or create positive change in society as "stories shape our social world; they inspire us to do or resist harms" (Fleetwood et al. 2019:1). In addition, narrative criminologists are not concerned with the validity of the narrator's assertions (Sandberg 2010). As Presser (2016:139) asserts, "We wonder about the impact of stories; it matters little whether they are 'true' or 'false'."

Narrative criminology posits that the story told by harassers after harmdoing may also explain how and why the harmful event occurred (Presser 2009; Fleetwood et al. 2019). As Jack Katz (1988) observes, offenders choose their actions based on their awareness of the "narrative possibilities" (p. 302). Put differently, offending, like any other behavior, may be guided by a desired story to be told in future. For example, Curtis Jackson-Jacobs (2004) discovered that some men would initiate fights so they could later tell "good stories" about themselves (p. 232). Similarly, Trice and Roman (1970) found that "good stories" were constructed by Alcoholics Anonymous members who embellished their "hitting bottom" stories of drinking so their "comeback" stories of sobriety would be even more remarkable to others (p. 543).

Several early criminological concepts laid groundwork for narrative criminology including identities, neutralization theory, moral disengagement, and accounts. While these theories do not take the same holistic view of the offender's story (Maruna and Copes 2005; Presser 2009), they helped inform narrative criminology by demonstrating how the stories that individuals tell "bridge the gap between action and expectation" (Fleetwood et al. 2019:2), revealing the potential of what we can learn from storytelling. Narrative criminology frames studies of harms including individual harms, such as rape and spousal abuse (Fitzgerald and Douglas 2020; Fleetwood 2020); mass harms, such as genocide and mass murder (Presser 2012, 2016); self-harms, including drug and alcohol abuse (Tutenges and Sandberg 2013; Sandberg, Tutenges, and Copes 2015); institutionalized harms, such as poverty, meat-eating (Presser, 2013), criminal desistance (Maruna 2001); and, harms created by the legal system such as incarceration (Fleetwood 2015). Sexual harassment is another harm that is aptly poised to be examined through the lens of narrative criminology, as narrative research can help us discover how stories have impacted "doing" harassment.

A development within narrative criminology is the examination of silence as a part of storytelling. While statements help us understand harmful events, often what is *not said* by the offender is significant and possibly more significant to the victim (Presser 2019; Presser 2023), especially when it comes to the harm of sexual harassment. For example, when met with a sexual harassment allegation, the accused may not only try to create ambiguity with his response to the allegation, but he may silence the victim, thus challenging her narrative about her experience. Indeed, the stories told by the powerful can silence the stories of the oppressed (Plummer 2019) and offenders are significantly motivated by the outcome they want to achieve, which is most often to deny the facts by claiming innocence or blaming the victim, so they can maintain their self-image and remove perceptions of guilt (Presser 2004).

Narrative Victimology

Narrative victimology emerged from narrative criminology to examine how the victimization experience is rooted in stories and how successful (re)narration in the aftermath of victimization can help reestablish the victim's sense of self (Pemberton, Mulder, and Aarten 2019; Walklate et al. 2019). Victims compose narratives to explain how they were harmed and how they are adjusting in the aftermath (Hourigan 2019), and narrative victimology seeks to understand how stories shape the experience of victimization, how victims understand the harms that have been done to them, and how the narration of those harms may motivate subsequent actions (Pemberton, Mulder and Aarten 2019). As with narrative criminology, the truthfulness of the victim's story is not the main concern, as stories of victimization are continually repeated and reimagined through the lens of the victim's changing circumstances and point of view throughout time (Pemberton, Mulder and Aarten 2019). While positive life events are enjoyable

to recount, negative life events are said to be *necessary* to recount so that victims can regain control over their stories (Pemberton, Mulder and Aarten 2019). Victimization can be unavoidable, for example, being the victim of a terminal disease, but most often scholars refer to victimization as something that is done to someone by someone else. Of importance to narrative victimology is what the victim experiences after an intentional harmful action – opposed to an accident - which impacts how the victim is able to cope and makes sense of the victimization (Pemberton, Aarten, and Mulder 2018).

Victimization can have lasting effects which can be overwhelming as these effects can remove the sense of control over the victims' life, along with their connection with others (Herman 1992). Victimization can create a loss of self-identity (Crossley 2000), a disbelief of previous fundamental life assumptions (Janoff-Bulman 2004), a loss of the sense of control in one's life; and importantly, the inability to recognize one's own life story resulting from a memory disruption that can cause the victim to no longer see their path forward (Pemberton, Aarten and Mulder 2019). Crossley (2000) refers to this disruption as a *narrative disruption* or *narrative rupture*, which causes the victim's "routine 'lived' sense of time and identity" to become disrupted and thus, fractures the victim's connection to their "old self" and others. (p. 541). This narrative rupture also disrupts the victim's sense of "place" in society until the victim is able to reacclimate (Pemberton, Aarten, and Mulder 2015). In the absence of the ability to reacclimate, time will cease to move on, and the victim will remain in a state of victimization (Pemberton, Mulder, and Aarten 2015). In effect, victimization causes future experiences to always be entangled with the victimization experience. That is, how we experience future events after victimization will differ from how we would have experienced those events had we not been victimized (Pemberton, Mulder, and Aarten 2019).

Bystanders play a crucial role in the experience of sexual harassment, including in the narrative construction of the story of harassment after accusations have been made known within organizations. In addition, bystander reactions can advance or stall the victim's recovery and restoration of the self, post-victimization. A phenomenon called secondary victimization (Williams 1984) may occur when victims speak out after being harmed and bystanders react with disbelief, disregard, or resentment towards the victim, rather than the offender. Although the subfield of narrative victimology is still young, numerous studies have examined the narratives of victims of harm including, violent loss (Janoff-Bulman 2004), trauma (Crossley 2000; McGarry and Walklate 2015), rape (Trinch 2014), intimate partner violence (Trinch 2007) and mass harms, (Langer 1991; Delbo 1995). Narrative victimology is likewise poised to examine sexual harassment victimization through the stories that victims share in the aftermath of this harm.

Cultural Mechanisms that Enable Harm-Doing

Narratives integrate other discursive devices for harmdoing (e.g., neutralizations), but the time-based dimension of narratives cause them to be especially relevant to prolonged harms like gendered or hostile sexual harassment. Because sexual harassment is discursively performed and responded to, and often done over extended periods of time (unlike a shooting event or another crime that has a brief time dimension), understanding these discursive mechanisms for harmdoing through the lenses of narrative criminology are significant as we further our understanding of this harmful experience.

A key purpose of a narrative is "to make moral meaning of situations and events" (Presser 2018:10). As Presser (2004) discusses, men who have been convicted of violent

criminal acts will often use stories about their past, referring to themselves as having been bad before, to project themselves as morally good now. Most often, men accused of sexual harassment either justify or deny accusations by using various techniques of harm-promoting discourses that serve to portray themselves as blameless, and these techniques are frequently carried out by transferring blame to the victim to create doubt about her story. Certainly, for any of these techniques to be successful, they must be culturally recognizable to the intended listeners and use familiar narratives that "everyone knows" (Scott and Lyman 1968:53). In this way, harm-promoting discourses are part of a "socially approved, culturally shared language, interwoven into the belief systems of the people who invoke or honor them" (Weiss 2009:811). When accused of sexual harassment, it is common for men to argue that women: have lied about or exaggerated sexual harassment claims; have ulterior motivates for making sexual harassment claims (e.g., to damage their reputation); or are inviting harassment by either dressing provocatively or not explicitly resisting their sexual advances (Lonsway et al. 2008; Bongiorno et al. 2020).

Denials and rebuttals that are aimed at the victim, ultimately give the offender permission to blame the victim while giving bystanders and institutions permission to avoid intervening on the victim's behalf. Stanley Cohen (2001) discusses three types of denial which he asserts are used by individuals depending on what they are trying to deny: (1) literal - a blatant denial e.g., "I never harassed her"; (2) interpretive - not denying the facts, but altering the meaning, e.g., "I didn't say anything sexual – I only complimented her"; and (3) implicatory -not denying the facts, but denying the implications e.g., "she sleeps with everybody, so it doesn't matter if I touched her". In the case of sexual harassment, various forms of denials are used to normalize

the action, blame the organizational culture, blame the victim, or minimize the victim, in ways similar to rape myths.

Below, I will examine theoretical approaches including harassment myths (Burt 1980; Cowen 2000), justifications and neutralizations (Sykes and Matza 1957), moral disengagement (Bandura et al. 1996), or excuses and accounts (Scott and Lyman 1968), that posit that the things people say, shape harm. Frequently, the common responses to sexual harassment accusations are constructed using culturally embedded stories about harassment victims via harassment myths and cognitive adjustments which "give permission" to do harm while maintaining oppression of victims by virtually silencing their narratives.

Myths

Myths are stories that are maintained from the culture, in fairy tales, religious teachings, media interpretations and various traditions (Plummer 2019). Harassment myths can create a narrative oppression for victims who try to tell their stories of harassment. *Rape myths* (Burt 1980), and *victim-blaming myths* (Cowen 2000), have long been identified as cognitive adjustments that "give permission" to offenders who perform harmful behavior, including sexual harms. Rape myths have been repeated over centuries and include harmful and incorrect views about women, asserting they can defend against rape, they want to be raped, they are lying about being raped, and rape is warranted.

Using research on rape myth as a guide, Lonsway, Cortina, and Magley (2008) created a measurement tool, the Illinois Sexual Harassment Myth Acceptance Scale, which is used to understand the phenomenon surrounding sexual harassment myths, which include: women fabricate or overstate complaints; women make up complaints for ulterior reasons, such as damaging another's career; receiving sexual advances is a compliment; and, if sexual harassment

occurs, the woman should make it stop by herself. Harassment myths are repeated over time, through stories, which sustains them in our culture and permits sexual harassment to continue, unabated. Consequently, in cultures where harassment myths are believed, a woman's reputation is jeopardized by reporting harassment, while the harasser's reputation remains untarnished (Hart 2019).

While it is assumed that men most often believe harassment myths, some women also believe them (Burt 1991), and rather than feeling empathy for the victim, those women may ostracize the victim and side with the harasser (Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1995). When harassment myths are part of the institutional culture, they provide a kind of public resource that permits individuals to reject an accusation of harassment by blaming the victim for being too sensitive or by denying any harm was done. For example, when porn star Jessica Drake accused former President, Donald Trump of kissing her without consent, Trump responded, "You know, this one that came out recently, 'He grabbed me, and he grabbed me on the arm.' Oh, I'm sure she's never been grabbed before," mocking her and suggesting that as a porn star, this is something she should expect (Cosmopolitan 2016).

When race intersects with sexual harassment myths, an additional element of hierarchy is exploited by the powerful over oppressed individuals. Andrea Ritchie (2017) examines *sexualized myths*, which are racially gendered and used to justify "brutal social control that maintains racially gendered hierarchies" (p. 42). These sexualized myths are pervasive in police interactions with women, and especially women of color, and guide their decisions about who to use sexual violence against, based largely on the woman's appearance (Ritchie 2017). Indeed, myths "allow their holders to dismiss, ignore, or otherwise detach themselves from the targets of

their attitudes and actions" (Snyder and Miene 1994:47), as they help to reproduce harassment and protect harassers.

Scholars have asserted that rape and sexual harassment myths reflect the fundamental undercurrents of how gender and power interact in our culture (Burt 1980; Lonsway, Cortina and Magley 2008). Sexual harassment myths bear some resemblance to other cultural mechanisms that give permission to do harm, as these myths justify bad actions by claiming that no harm was done, or the victim "asked for" the harassing behaviors based on her demeanor and so on. Below, I will examine several relevant theories that harassers use to similarly give themselves permission to harm or justify harmdoing after the fact.

Neutralizations

Neutralization theory, one of the most well-known theories about the effects of discourses on harmful action and posits that actors justify bad actions using techniques of neutralization allowing the actor to feel morally just (Sykes and Matza 1957:667). Sykes and Matza, in presenting neutralization theory, identified five techniques of neutralization: denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of the victim, condemnation of the condemned, and appeal to higher loyalties (Sykes and Matza 1957). While neutralization theory has in mind a juvenile offender, it is also well-placed, in the context of sexual harassment, to imagine the 'offender' as a powerful man.

After an accusation of harm-doing like sexual harassment has been made, the accused may try to neutralize his guilt to others by crafting a narrative about the harmful event that reduces or eliminates his culpability, allowing him to move back and forth between moral and deviant behavior, a concept understood as neutralization and drift (Matza 1964). The use of neutralization techniques allows individuals to view themselves as a "good person," maintaining

social expectations while occasionally violating social norms (Sandberg, Copes, and Pedersen 2019). In the context of sexual harassment, neutralizations allow harassers to behave inappropriately – by making inappropriate comments or actions – but then alleviate their feelings of guilt or shame. Both neutralizations and accounts (which I describe below), examine how discourse is used as a tool to justify individual action so offenders can maintain their moral self-image by aligning their bad actions with expectations of societal norms.

Accounts

Scott and Lyman (1968) refer to accounts as either justifying or excusing behaviors for which people are held to account. Excuses are used by individuals who admit they performed a harmful action but deny full responsibility. For example, killing in war as a direct order from a ranking officer. Justifications are used by individuals who admit that they did *something,* but the action was not wrong. For example, beating up a child molester because they are evil. Regarding sexual harms, though not their central concern, Scott and Lyman (1968) reference an *appeal to biological drives*, which emphasizes the belief that biological aspects create sexual traits in men that control their behavior, or put differently, men cannot help it when it comes to sexual behaviors, and these biological influences release men from taking full responsibility from sexual harms towards women. Goffman's (1971) *remedial work*, an extension of Scott and Lyman's (1968) accounts, identifies four tactics used by offenders that he associates with accounts: denial, blame, minimizing, and reducing competence. His work asserts that when an individual does harm to another, they engage in "remedial work" via narratives to mitigate the offense into something that can be viewed as acceptable by others.

Moral Disengagement

Moral disengagement differs from the three previous concepts – myths, neutralizations, and accounts – as offenders distance themselves from societal norms to commit harm and then maintain that their bad behaviors are justified. Moral disengagement (Bandura et al. 1996) is accomplished when wrongdoers utilize moral justifications to create a narrative that explains a harmful action and may involve diminishing, misrepresenting, or denying the action as immoral; blaming or ridiculing the victim and others who witnessed the event; or blaming other circumstances, such as the institutional culture. According to the theory of moral disengagement, individuals do not commit harmful actions unless they have cognitively validated those actions to themselves, creating a moral justification to make them acceptable or even appropriate to commit (Bandura et al. 1996). As such, the self-regulating practice of moral disengagement may facilitate and reinforce harmful acts (Bandura 1999) such as sexual harassment, with the construction of a self-narrative that diminishes the harm or blames the victim. In the context of this project, Page and Pina (2015) assert that sexual harassment will only harm the harasser when it is "exposed and perceived by others as morally unjust" (p. 76). Thus, harassers often use tactics of moral disengagement to minimize the potential exposure of their role in harm.

Victim Reduction and Oppression

Victim reduction follows some elements of the aforementioned theories which explain how offenders justify harm, including denial of victim or victim blaming. However, victim reduction is a specific technique as its goal is to make the target non-human or "less than" so the offender does not have to justify his actions as the target is not worthy of humane treatment. Prior to, and at the onset of the sexual harassment, the harasser will sometimes refer to their victims as inanimate objects, to diminish their human identities, making the inappropriate actions

more palatable for the harasser. As Presser (2015) asserts, gender and age are often used as a basis for target reduction in cases of domestic violence. This project similarly found that gender, age, *and* race were the common elements for target reduction for sexual harassment victims. Presser (2013) discusses *reducing* targets of harm, asserting that offenders do this to "(1) characterize the target in terms of very few interests or (2) to deny that the target has unique interests, distinguishable from others, including the perpetrator" (p. 22). Reducing the victim puts the target at arm's length, making her easier to harm as she is not seen as an equal or someone who must be respected to the offender. For example, when we eat non-human animals, we refer to them as "meat," which distances us from the harm that was inflicted on that animal. Sykes and Matza's (1957) denial of injury is consistent with victim reduction, as it asserts that offenders justify their bad actions by denying that the victim was harmed, often using reduction. For example, a harasser may state, "she asked for it because she was dressed like a hooker" after he has sexually harassed her. The victim as a person is replaced by a stereotype who was "asking" for sexual overtures by a harasser because of the way she was dressed.

By reducing the victim, the offender becomes detached from the harm he is inflicting. Victim reduction to non-human objects, such as "meat," is seen to shape sexual harassment and especially racialized sexual harassment. Victim reduction or objectification serves to place harassers in a higher status than their victims, giving permission to harm by using the logic that objects do not have basic human rights. In a study examining if implicit associations were more likely to alter the subjects' attitudes about rape and sexual harassment victims, Rudman and Mescher (2012) found that men were more aggressive and were more likely to sexually harass women if they associated women with animals or objects.

While both white and Black women experience victim reduction, Black women, who are subjected to multiple forms of oppression, are objectified more frequently than white women (Watson et al. 2015). Indeed, minoritized women are often reduced to objects and there is a long history, beginning with slavery, of Black women in the United States were rendered objects. The continued treatment of Black women in terms of food or body parts connects with that legacy. An example of continued disregard and objectification of Black women dating back to slavery is the display of Sara Baartman's sexual organs, brain, and skeleton in a Paris Museum until 1974. Sara Baartman's body shape was fascinating to white, wealthy men, so her domestic employer made her get on stage at in various entertainment venues wearing tight clothing to entertain white men, rendering her an object rather than human (Parkinson 2016).

Institutions and Cultural Acceptance of Sexual Harassment

Presser (2018:32) asserts, "The powerful organize *how* we think and thereby *what* we think." Organizational hierarchies are built upon and grounded in power with the leaders creating the rules for the employees who are employed in each workplace. Organizations create general meanings about actions that occur within organizational spaces, and the "organizational [or institutional] culture shapes workers' definitions of sexual harassment" (McLaughlin, Uggen, and Blackston 2012:628). Hierarchies within organizations determine the culture and acceptable behaviors for all interactions and experiences for the employees. Beginning with the start of capitalism, the economic system that created capitalism, paved the way for private ownership of production and goods, driving a greater divide between the poor and elite by establishing inherent hierarchies in the workplace that remain today. These workplace hierarchies allow individuals with more means to rise to the top through ownership or management in businesses

while hiring lower status individuals at a nominal working wage which maintains the social and occupational classifications of working class, middle class, and upper class.

Women's participation in the workforce came much later than men's participation because their "occupations" were as homemakers, creating additional gender inequalities in the capitalist hierarchy. As Connell (1987) argues, *hegemonic masculinity* within capitalist societies privileges ideologies of heterosexuality and the subordination of women in the workplace. While many women are rising to the top in organizations, the elite that rule organizations are still largely men, and the inequalities between the elite and the working class endure, with women largely remaining in lower status positions. Hartmann (2010) states, "…the problem in the family, the labor market, economy, and society is not simply a division of labor between men and women, but a division that places men in a superior, and women in a subordinate, position" (p. 5). Moreover, this capitalist division contributes to the inequalities not only between men and women, but among all citizens, across race, ethnicity, ability, age, and gender through discrimination, pay inequality, and continued gender stereotyping, resulting in gender-related harms such as workplace sexual harassment (Gimenez 2005). The power structure of relationships saturates the workplace, and the consequences of these interactions have implications for the not only the economic livelihood of individuals but also their emotional well-being (Hodson 2001).

If harm accepting beliefs become embedded in organizations, they become a part of the history of those institutions and "motivated by stories, continue to be storied in the present" (Fleetwood et al. 2019:18). Today, the institution of the workplace continues to be built upon a power structure with the elite or leadership team residing at the top and setting the tone for the organizational culture, by assigning the acceptable and unacceptable behavioral practices.

Scholars agree that organizational climate in the workplace is a strong indicator of sexual harassment tolerance or intolerance (Gruber 1998; McLaughlin et al. 2012). As Fitzgerald and Cortina (2018) state, "it is organizational conditions, rather than individual characteristics that are the most powerful predictors of sexual harassment" (p. 12). Workplace sexual harassment is more pervasive in organizations that tolerate harassing behaviors, usually occurring in institutions where men dominate by numbers and hierarchy (Hershcovis et al. 2021).

Master Narratives

Sexual harassment is a harm that persists because many institutions remain complicit in its concealment. Consequently, harms are upheld by doing nothing as much as by the actions of the harms themselves, and sexual harassment is constituted by countless individuals and institutions "doing nothing." When institutions allow sexual harassment to endure, even if just through inaction, they use their dominant narrative power to create a master narrative about accepted behavior. *Master narratives* are culturally shared stories that give direction for "fitting in" and explain how to properly participate in certain cultures, or in the case of the workplace, that particular institution, by detailing and governing how social constructs are created, typically in favor of the elite – usually men - or the workplace leadership team (Lyotard 1984). Master narratives communicate what people are expected to do in certain situations (Halverson et al. 2011) and marginalize those who attempt to defy those narratives (Henry and Milovanovic 2000). Master narratives also predict how the institution will respond to specific actions (MacKinnon 1979). Accordingly, narratives also "warn us about the consequences of nonconformity" (Ewick and Silbey 1995:213). As Bingham (1994:9) observes, "social structures are produced and reproduced in discursive practices" and thus, prevailing discursive norms within institutions can serve to maintain and normalize sexual harassment. Indeed, institutions

that reveal tolerance of sexual harassment through master narratives, create a culture that discourages victims from reporting harassment. If a victim goes against the dominant workplace narrative by reporting or speaking out against the culture of sexual harassment in that organization, the victim, not the harasser, is likely to be penalized further (McDonald 2012).

Conflicting Narratives

If sexual harassment is formally reported in an institution, the victim and harasser must share their stories of the harassment to individuals who are tasked with investigating the claims. Stillweli and Baumeister (1997) examined how victims and offenders recounted versions of harms they experienced or inflicted and found that victims described an injustice while underscoring the impact that the harm had on them, and perpetrators justified or denied the incident and minimized the harm done to the victim. This is a phenomenon that Pinker (2011) refers to as a *moralization gap*, which occurs when the experience narrated by the victim and the experience narrated by the offender diverge. Maruna (2001) asserts that the victim will view the experience as unfair and may inflate the victimization while offenders will justify their actions and diminish the harm done. When incidents of sexual harassment are made known to others by the victim, there is almost always a moralization gap between the story of the victim and the story of the harasser as the harasser tries to maintain his self-image by claiming his innocence. O'Donohue et al. (1998:123) discovered that "even in anonymous surveys, people are reluctant to admit to harassing someone," which may reveal the extent that harassers will go to in denying or counter-blaming victims of sexual harassment. A moralization gap can produce a powerful narrative response to sexual harassment allegations by minimizing the harm done to the victim, especially when the accused has a higher social status than the victim and has a sympathetic audience.

Institutional Suppression of Reporting: A Contribution to the Narrative Contest

Monica Horten (2016:17) states, "those who own the infrastructure have the ability to determine how things should be." Institutional cultures that tolerate sexual harassment may create barriers against victim-reporting by informally implying to employees that sexual harassment is simply a part of the organizational culture. When sexual harassment is done by someone in a position of power against someone less powerful, the stakes for reporting or confronting the harasser may be too high for the victim, as he or she may fear retaliation, loss of job, loss of friends who side with the harasser and other negative consequences. As Ahmed (2021:24) aptly asserts, "power is not simply what complaints are about; power shapes what happens when you complain." Thus, despite numerous surveys that find high rates of sexual harassment in various occupations, academia, military, on the streets, and more, underreporting by victims seems to be common because of institutional barriers or fear of retaliation (Fitzgerald and Cortina 2018).

Indeed, accepted institutional cultures set the standards of what complaints are heard, and consequently may shape if or how victims construct their stories of being harassed (Polletta 2009). A 2017 poll showed that 33 million U.S. women were sexually harassed at work, and ninety-five percent of those women reported that the harassers went unpunished. McCann, Tomaskovic-Devey, and Badgett (2018) found that 99.8 percent of women who were sexually harassed at work workplace did not file charges. Accordingly, it is not remarkable that three out of four people who experience sexual harassment at work choose not to make a formal report (Zillman 2017). Russell et al. (2021) observe that many victims attempt to handle sexual harassment on their own using coping tactics for various reasons including, fear of retaliation by the harasser and bystanders, distrust in the organization to respond, uncertainty if the experience

"counts" as sexual harassment, and a lack of clarity about how to report. Institutional disregard or acceptance of harassing behaviors is an ongoing issue that further harms victims of sexual harassment.

Bandura (1999:197) states, "authorities act in ways that keep themselves intentionally uninformed" which he calls "decisional arrangements of foggy nonresponsibility." McDonald (2012) suggests that organizations may prioritize protecting their image over the victims' need for support and justice. Hulin, Fitzgerald, and Dragsow (1996) observe a phenomenon they call *organizational tolerance* of sexual harassment, where employees believe their institution disregards complaints of sexual harassment, creating a fear of reporting, and if reporting does occur, little or no punishment is assigned to the harasser. Hulin et al. assert that this organizational tolerance creates an environment for sexual harassment while causing additional harm to the victims who feel powerless, by creating perceived hurdles for being heard and getting help. Lonsway, Cortina, and Magley (2008) found similar outcomes in responses to harassment allegations by institutions, including denial of harassment in the absence of overwhelming evidence, or if the denial was unsuccessful, the institutions altered their response to justify the harm.

Institutions may publicly condemn sexual harassment while they are simultaneously working to silence women. When organizations that tolerate sexual harassment also encourage victims to report sexual harassment, they disregard the paradox of their institutional reporting procedures. That is, the tolerance of sexual harassment sends a confusing message to victims about speaking out (Clair 1993; Ford et al. 2021). As Clair (1993) explains, while organizations may outwardly encourage victims to report sexual harassment, the reporting procedures are often cloaked with strategic uncertainties that benefit the organization rather than the victim.

Moreover, these same organizations that tolerate sexual harassment and inhibit the victim from speaking out, "give permission" to the accused and bystanders to blame the victim to protect the institution and the harasser, or to allow the behavior to continue, uncontested.

Just as master narratives are created culturally (e.g., people get ahead through hard work), and institutions create dominant narratives about their culture, silence is also created at the top and is controlled by organizational power, as the powerful both negotiate and permit sexual harassment while silencing those who speak out against it (Conrad and Taylor 1994). Dominant stories can drive out stories told by the less powerful and can be used to "silence and shame, discriminate and displace, or stigmatize and scapegoat" (Plummer 2019:68). If a victim tells others about being sexually harassed in an organization where harassment is ignored, the victim's story may become public knowledge, and the victim may lose control of how her story is narrated and repeated to others as the bystanders engage in and manipulate her story of victimization (Petronio 2015). This engagement with the victims' story can happen because the investigation by the organization usually includes interviews with colleagues, subordinates and supervisors of the victim and harasser.

In addition, when sexual harassment complaints are made, many organizations require the victim to sign non-disclosure agreements or otherwise stipulate that they should not talk to anyone about the accusation during the investigation. This instruction to remain silent signifies to others that victim should not discuss her "side" of the story in the "public domain" of the workplace, which can "create an atmosphere of secrecy" (Clair 1993:127), and suspicion surrounding the legitimacy of harassment complaint (Ford et al. 2021). This request for "silence" is an active institutional procedure that thwarts victim's from speaking out about sexual harassment and can have the outcome of concealing the existence of harassment entirely (Ford et

al. 2021). As Baum (2019:5) asserts, "arguably, the prevalent use of Confidential Settlement Agreements in sexual harassment cases over past decades has not only had a severe, long-term adverse impact on victims' mental and physical health, but has created a barrier to the prevention of workplace sexual harassment, thereby enabling the harassment to proliferate."

Thus, once the investigation begins, many bystanders in the organization are aware of the claim of sexual harassment, and the identities of the victim and the accused. What commonly follows is colleagues discuss the complaint of harassment with each other and create their own narrative about the alleged incident(s), based on stories that are passed along as rumors. When this takes place, the victim is not able to stand up for herself, tell her side of the story, or counter the stories that are being told about her, because the organization has told her that she cannot discuss the experience. The outcome of non-disclosure agreements or warnings about speaking out is that the victim is prevented from sharing her side of the story with others which has multiple consequences including the inability to resolve the situation of sexual harassment and the impediment of her ability to re-narrate her future self.

Mediated Power: The Role of Mass Media in the Narrative Contest

While stories have always been central to the narrative constructions of our past, current, and future identities, most modern stories now include a media life. Media narratives can come in multiple forms, including social media, local and national news channels, online blogs, You Tube, and visual narratives (Plummer 2019) which include photos, graffiti, or art. These mediated narratives can be heard or seen by millions of others in seconds, creating opportunities for positive change or harmful outcomes to individuals and groups. The digital world in which we now live has created an instant path for stories to be told and heard around the world. The

media in all forms is a powerful conveyor of stories and this mediated power can affect positive change, potentially making room for historically unheard voices to be heard, and it can also cause harm at a rapid rate due to the instantaneous method for a multitude of digital narratives to be spread far and wide (Plummer 2019).

When it comes to the harms of sexual harassment, media and popular culture narratives can frame public perceptions of sexual harassment in ways that support the victims *or* the accused, and those perceptions can invade the institutions where sexual harassment occurs (McDonald 2012). At its worst, social media can give way to online cyberbullying, causing harmful secondary victimization as victims of sexual harassment have their narrative's co-opted by strangers who then participate in the narrative contest. While most often studied in adolescents and teens, adults are also cyberbullied in the workplace (Lipinski and Crothers 2014; Kowalski, Toth and Morgan 2017) with 30 percent of college students (Kowalski et al. 2012) and 18 percent of adults experiencing this type of harassment (Rosenthal et al. 2016). When rumors about sexual harassment victims in a workplace are spread online, these digital narratives can filter into the organization where the victim is an employee, and this can have a negative impact on the victim if employers and bystanders "buy into" the stories circulating online. In addition, public allegations and/or responses can create a form of social justice - or injustice –for or against the accused and/or the victim (Powell 2015).

Once a narrative is shared with outside "others," the original narrative of harassment may be completely altered, but because it is widely available, has the power to influence public perception of the victim or harasser. Mass media, such as national news organizations can tell a narrative from a variety of angles, turning the narrative contest into a "mega-narrative event" (Plummer 2019:15). When sexual harassment allegations are made against someone who is well-

known to the public, the transmission of the sexual harassment story may be quickly spread across state and country boundaries through various media and social media outlets.

While we often think of news outlets and social media as the major story producers and reproducers, consider the power that visual narratives had on public perception of the sexual harassment allegations made against former President, Donald Trump, who was often photographed with other world leaders or sitting at his desk in the West Wing. Indeed, certain structures or locations have a great deal of visual power and can create or alter public opinions or perceptions of various events (Plummer 2019). Even fictional television shows and movies can impact current beliefs. One example of a recent television series, *Mad Men*, depicts a workplace in the 1950's where sexual harassment was the norm and if a woman employee did not like how she was being treated, there was no recourse or sympathy. While a fictional series, the behavior was, by all historical accounts, an accurate portrayal, and we are not that far removed from that decade (and all of the decades that came before) where sexual harassment was common and an accepted part of workplaces that were dominated by men. The television series was widely popular with both men and women and represented the time before the term sexual harassment was coined. This show portrayed the *normalness* of sexual harassment which many of us enjoyed watching because we were either not paying attention to the irony of certain messages about sexual harassment that we are stiving so hard to fix, or we were lost in the plot and perhaps innocently not paying attention to those harms.

Indeed, our "media-saturated environment" informs our thinking through what we choose to believe from the news, magazines, and reality programs, which in turn affects the construction of ourselves (Ferrell and Sanders 1995:14). Media interpretations in all of its forms can impact

both individual and collective narratives, aiding in the construction or maintenance of master narratives surrounding cultural norms within institutions.

Chapter Summary

Presser and Sandberg (2015:1) state, "We know ourselves as one over time – one consistent moral actor or one unified group of moral actors – however numerous or varied the cultural story elements that we access and integrate into our self-stories." In other words, our narrative self-identities are informed by our social and cultural surroundings. While the narrative responses from men accused of sexual harassment are shaped by stereotypes and myths and that align with their personal goals, they are also shaped by the institutional culture that explains what behaviors are acceptable or unacceptable. This chapter examined how offenders utilize various discursive mechanisms to explain their harmful actions either prior to or after committing harm. While the traditional theories discussed provide valuable insights into criminal activity, they do not consider experiences such as non-criminal harms done by men (or women), as the focus is tied to criminal activity. Accordingly, narrative criminology is poised to fill the gap by examining the narratives of non-criminal offenders and narrative victimology is well-positioned to aid in the comprehensive understanding of harm by offering examinations from the victims of those harms. This chapter also explored how the power of communication by workplace institutions, bystanders, media, and legal barriers within the institution may serve to co-create the narrative contest of sexual harassment. As Dougherty (2001) asserts, all individuals within an organization, not only the individuals who are directly complicit in harassing behaviors, construct the environment of sexual harassment tolerance and thus, assist in the co-creation of the narrative contest about the sexual harassment allegation.

The next chapter will examine how victim credibility and story credibility impact victim narratives including re-narration after victimization, resistance to sexual harassment via social movements and the problems of epistemic injustice and secondary victimization via bystanders. I will examine theories surrounding why some victims may avoid reporting sexual harassment along with multiple theories concerning bystander victim-blaming attitudes. This background accounts for why victims of sexual harassment are often fearful of retaliation, not only by the harasser, but also from bystanders who side with the harasser rather than the victim, which is a recurring theme in my analysis of victim statements.

Chapter 4. Epistemic Injustice, Secondary Victimization, and Re-Narration

Identity is fundamental in the construction of narratives and accordingly, to the study of narratives (Connelly and Claninin 2006). As restorative justice thinker Zehr (2001:189-190) states, after victimization, "we must recover a redeeming narrative which reconstructs a sense of meaning and identity." Healing after victimization seems to depend on sharing the victimization story with trusted allies (Herman 2015). But, as Brison (2002) asserts, we need to tell our stories, but we also need "an audience able and willing to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them" (p. 51). Individuals willing to listen and understand the victim's stories are not always available (Pemberton, Mulder, and Aarten 2019). After sexual harassment in the workplace, bystanders often must decide who to believe, which this chapter will show, is not an obvious choice, even if the bystanders have witnessed the sexual harassment encounter. This chapter will examine the multiple factors that contribute to bystander complicity and secondary victimization. This chapter will also explain barriers that victims encounter, which I refer to as believability, and storytelling challenges, which impact how victims respond to sexual harassment and victim re-narration in the aftermath. I will also examine positive outlets for victims, through social movements and targeted social media platforms which allow victims to share their stories with other victims.

It is important to foreground the challenges that victims face when they have been sexually harassed and subsequently must determine *if* they should report the experience, and to *whom* they should report. This decision involves two important factors that arise from the stepwise nature of sexual harassment: epistemic injustice, which has long been a barrier for minority and oppressed groups, and secondary victimization, which has many characteristics and outcomes for victims of sexual harassment. I will expand on these two factors one at a time.

Epistemic Injustice

When we tell stories to others about our life events, most of us assume our listeners will believe what we say, however, women and many oppressed groups understand (or find out quickly) that certain stories they tell are not believed by others, simply because of who those individuals are, either by race, gender, or some sort of social status. However, stories are critical to individuals, families, and societies. Stories can establish trust, create connections, and foster belonging, but stories can also maintain and expose inequalities. As Bourdieu (1984) suggests, all societies produce stories that maintain the power of elites as they also construct certain stories that serve to rationalize the inequalities and social division of marginalized groups. The following section will examine the epistemic injustice that results from systemic oppression of women, and especially women of color, when involved in a narrative contest of he said, she said against a perpetrator who is a man.

Epistemic injustice (2007) is an important, but heretofore neglected dimension of the experience of sexual harassment. Epistemic injustice is a systematic distortion of an individual's capacity as someone who "knows" based on the individual's status, ultimately causing unjustified distrust of that individual (Spear 2019). Fricker (2007) created a typology of epistemic injustice. The first type of epistemic injustice according to Fricker (2007) is *testimonial injustice*, which occurs when the "personal credibility" of the speaker is deflated because the listener accepts certain stereotypes or beliefs (Fricker 2007:160), for example, dismissing a woman's point of view because she is a woman and is presumed to be too sensitive or over-reactionary. Indeed, when a victim claims sexual harassment has occurred, others may distrust her story, believing she misunderstood what happened, or she is too sensitive. Similarly, men who claim they have been sexually harassed are often discredited because of a *male sexual*

drive discourse which asserts that men have an irresistible need to have sex, therefore it is not possible that a man could be sexually harassed (Hollway 1989). The second type of epistemic injustice, according to Fricker (2007), is *hermeneutical injustice*, a structural discrimination that occurs when the existing discourse available to certain groups of people does not align with experiences of others, causing an absence of appropriate language that the victim needs to communicate the harmful experience effectively so that listeners understand (Fricker 2007). When hermeneutical injustice occurs, victims are "understood in terms of crude stereotypes that do not accurately portray individual group members but also assume a mask of invisibility; they are both badly misrepresented and robbed of the means by which to express their perspective" (McConkey 2004:202). Hermeneutical injustice occurs against already marginalized groups and is especially prevalent in cases of sexual harassment of women because (1) men are in a greater social position than women, and (2) sexual harassment is substantially gendered, thus the harm affects men and women much differently (Fricker 2007). Moreover, when racial minorities are targets of sexual harassment, they are at a higher risk for experiencing hermeneutical injustice if they report the harm because women of color already have reduced legitimacy in society.

Epistemic Oppression

In Bernenstain's 2021 critique of epistemic injustice, she claims that Fricker fails to acknowledge that when women of color try to speak out about sexual harassment, the epistemic injustice stems from sustained oppression of certain groups, i.e., women and especially women of color, that causes those groups to not be believed (Berenstain 2020). In other words, when others disbelieve women's stories of sexual harassment because of their gender, it is an epistemic injustice; and when victims of sexual harassment who are women of color are disbelieved, this epistemic injustice is a form of racial gaslighting (Davis and Ernst 2017), which is deeply

embedded and upheld in existing structures of oppression (Berenstain 2020). Scholars have long written about patterns of epistemic oppression of women of color, and in Spivak's 2003 essay, she argues that a central issue for the poor and marginalized is that they have no platform to express their concerns to people who will listen and understand. In fact, Dotson (2014, 2018) coined the term epistemic oppression to explain how certain, marginalized groups are silenced because of their absence of power and status.

Epistemic injustice against women of color has a long history, despite their categorical "collective consciousness of their sexual victimization" (Davis 1983:183). As Dotson asserts, individuals who are subjected to epistemic oppression are not unable to communicate their experiences [of sexual harassment], but "those articulations generally fail to gain appropriate uptake according to the biased hermeneutical resources utilized by the perceiver" (2012:32). Thus, epistemic injustice persists and is upheld by the elite, either through intentional support of oppression, or a lack of awareness, creating a disregard to intervene. In essence, the elite, or white men, create the rules and norms about harms that women, and women of color experience, causing a failure to hear women's stories of harms like sexual harassment, and thus, preserving those harms in society.

Another epistemic barrier for oppressed groups develops when the elite speak on behalf of the oppressed, rather than letting them speak for themselves, which causes gross misinterpretations of their plights and instead of helping, may cause further harm. Take, for example, the current war between Russia and Ukraine where the President of Russia, Vladimir Putin, told the international media that the war is liberating and protecting the Ukrainians from genocide. Putin stated, "We had to stop that atrocity, that genocide of the millions of people who live there and who pinned their hopes on Russia, on all of us" (Fisher 2022). Putin's status as

President allowed him to speak to the media for the oppressed group that *he* is victimizing, causing his narrative about the war to overshadow the reality of the pain he is inflicting.

Indeed, when others speak for marginalized groups, instead of creating their own identities, the oppressed have their identities created for them in the eyes of the elite and usually to benefit the elite (Spivak 2003). As Spivak asserts, "it is not a solution, the idea of the disenfranchised speaking for themselves, or the radical critics speaking for them; this question of representation, self- representation, representing others, is a problem . . . we cannot put it under the carpet with demands for authentic voices" (Spivak and Gunew 1990:63). Thus, epistemic injustice to marginalized groups is done both through not hearing them and through silencing by speaking *for* them as the silencing of marginalized groups involves "ongoing, systematic exclusion from knowledge-production, in spite of apparent gains in formal equality and the various attempts to incorporate the perspective of the oppressed" (De Schryver 2021:107).

Plummer (2019) refers to a similar idea, he calls dominant narrative power, suggesting that those who have narrative privilege are the elites, followed by a mid-range of individuals or groups who are occasionally heard, and the largest number of individuals or groups who are at the bottom and are rarely or never heard. Indeed, in the absence of a sympathetic listener, the victim is left in a vulnerable position, especially in the workplace, if she must remain near her harasser.

Epistemic Privilege versus Epistemic Oppression

An important dimension of power dynamics is epistemic privilege (Fricker 2007), which is what the offender has over the victim who suffers from epistemic oppression. Rebecca Solnit (2016) states, "Every conflict is in part a battle over the story we tell or who tells and who is heard" (p. xiv). Sexual harassment remains a widespread harm for women because gender

oppression works, in part, by making women's stories not tellable (Fricker 2007; Bernenstain 2021). Indeed, locational power (Plummer 2019), which is critical to this project, the harms of sexual harassment, and the narrative contest, recognizes oppression based on a person's gender, class and race and defines whose stories are heard and whose stories are not heard. Typically, the socially and economically powerful in each society dictates which groups are believed in different contexts, including in the case of harmdoing. The credible groups, the elites of the time, may change as cultures evolve and as there is a historical shift which allows the "new elites" in that time to be believed. This hierarchy of credibility causes elite voices to be heard while those who are in a lower position of power are rarely or never heard, which can create a narrative exclusion (Plummer 2019). Individuals throughout history have benefitted from their privilege and class when using stories as vehicles to "get their way," even when those stories have been told in bad faith (Presser 2018). Consider the late 1800s in the United States and white privilege that allowed black men to be lynched based on the word of a white woman's false claims of having been raped. Today, in the United States, credibility favors white, middle, or upper-class men first (McConkey 2004) and if an individual belongs to an ethnic minority group or is a woman, they may suffer from a lack of credibility, which is understood as an epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007).

In sum, epistemic injustice can manifest through multiple mechanisms of victim-blaming attitudes held by bystanders or institutional representatives who support offenders and blame victims. When victims of harm are not believed, the act of telling their victimization story can become challenging or unmanageable, especially when the audience is not sympathetic. Understanding secondary victimization through a narrative lens can help understand the harm done to victims of sexual harassment as it can further undermine the victim's narrative and

further rupture the victim's "ownership" of her story (Pemberton, Mulder, and Aarten 2019:404).

Below, I will review multiple explanations identified by scholars that contribute to secondary

victimization, which was frequently identified as an impediment to speaking out against

harassment in the analysis of this project.

Secondary Victimization – How Bystanders Obstruct Victims' Storytelling

Secondary victimization (Williams 1984) often develops from passed down narratives

derived from harassment myths and victim stereotypes, resulting in victim-blaming from

bystanders (Campbell et al. 2009). Herman (2015) asserts that when victimization occurs,

bystanders may prefer to support the offender as the offender does not ask for anything and

prefers that the bystander ignore the victimization event. Furthermore, Herman (2015:62) states,

"[Even] the people closest to the victim will not necessarily rally to her aid; in fact, her

community may be more supportive to the offender to the offender than to her. The survivor's

feelings of fear, distrust, and isolation may be compounded by the incomprehension or frank

hostility of those to whom she turns for help." This may cause betrayal by individuals with

whom the victim had an important relationship which can be more traumatic to the victim than

the initial victimization.

Even when bystanders are sympathetic to victims, they may become distant if the victim

does not play the stereotypic victim role, such as needing a "shoulder to cry on" after

victimization. A similar concept to secondary victimization (Williams 1984), *secondary victim*

blaming (Van Dijk 2009), describes unfavorable reactions towards victims who choose to be

proactive and take action against the harm done rather than just trying to "move on" from their

victimization. Whereas primary victim blaming involves bystanders blaming victims for the

harassment itself, secondary victim blaming occurs when bystanders do not like the victim's reaction to their own victimization (Pemberton, Aarten, and Mulder 2019). Below I discuss how bystanders in the workplace are usually aware when sexual harassment is occurring, causing them to "take sides" with either the victim or harasser. When bystanders side with the harasser, the victim is re-victimized and subjected to secondary victimization.

Sexual Harassment is Not Invisible

Before discussing secondary victimization in workplace harassment, it is important to dispel the notion that bystanders are not aware when sexual harassment happens. Bergman et al. (2002:232) state that "reporting [sexual harassment] does not occur in a vacuum," meaning that coworkers and most individuals in an organization are aware of sexual harassment accusations. Indeed, several studies find that co-workers are often aware of sexual harassment happening to their peers who either witness or hear about sexual harassment from the victim or other peers (Bond 1988). Gutek and Koss (1996) state that women know which men in their workplaces are the harassers, suggesting an environment where sexual harassment is discussed and known by others in the workplace. When bystanders are told stories of harassment incidents in the workplace, they become co-owners of the story (Petronio 2015) and often create their own narrative about the victim and harasser, which results in secondary victimization of the victim. Indeed, when we tell stories, we invite others (for better or worse) to co-create our narrative, not knowing if they will support or challenge our experiences (Plummer 2019).

Bystander Awareness of and Reactions to Workplace Sexual Harassment

Bystander Stress: While Braithwaite and Roche (2001) assert that harm is inflicted on victims, not bystanders, sexual harassment has recently been shown to cause bystander stress among those who witness or learn about colleagues being sexually harassed (Schneider 1996).

Bystander stress can result in occupational stress, performance decline and peer conflicts (Raver and Gelfand 2005). Moreover, few bystanders are willing to report sexual harassment they have witnessed (Johnson, Kirk, and Keplinger 2016) which is consequential as bystanders play an important role by either enabling or intervening when sexual harassment is observed or known. By ignoring sexual harassment when it occurs, bystanders alleviate their own concerns of becoming targets of retaliation and give themselves permission to avoid intervening, causing them to become "tolerant bystanders" (Presser 2009:190).

Just World Theory: When sexual harassment is known within an organization, bystanders may construct a narrative that reassigns blame from the offender to the victim, to overcome troubling feelings that something bad has happened to someone good. This concept is known as the justice motive or Just World Theory, and centers on the desire of people to believe that the world is just and fair, and when it is not, it is because people usually "get what they deserve" (Lerner 1980). Pemberton (2011:2) explains, "Here the notion of good things happening to good people and bad things to bad people is reversed. The fact that something bad has happened to someone, implies that he or she must be a bad (or at least irresponsible) person." Thus, when bystanders construct their own story to explain why victims are sexually harassed in order to mitigate feelings that something bad has happened to someone good, they will often construct stories that blame the victim, thereby creating a narrative challenge that the victim may not be able to overcome in the presence of unsympathetic listeners.

Social Identity Theory: Some bystanders have empathy for men who sexually harass, and mistrust women who accuse men of harassment, arising from a social psychological theory called social identity theory (Turner et al. 1987). Social identity theory suggests that a perceived threat to the integrity of the male gender, for example, in the case of a sexual harassment

accusation against a man in a specific social circle, may cause the other men in that social group

to believe the harasser and mistrust the victim (McDonald 2012). Likewise, women will often

have empathy for women who are victims of sexual harassment if they see themselves as

members of the same social circle. However, women who are peers may instead side with the

man who is harassing to avoid being perceived as weak, as a threat to their peers who are men, or

if they identify more closely with the harasser's social circle than the victims. When men (or

women) support the accused and blame the victim because of cultural and social similarities, it is

common for those peers to create their own narrative about the harassment event derived from

harassment and victim-blaming myths that absolves the harasser and blames the victim, (e.g., the

victim was flirting and wanted attention, or the victim is lying) (Bongiorno, McKimmie, Masser

2016).

  Counterstereotypic Victim Behavior and Ideal Victim: Counterstereotypic victim

behavior (McKimmie, Masser, and Bongiorno 2014) suggests that bystanders will distrust

victims of sexual harassment and support accused harassers when victims exhibit counter-

stereotypic victim behavior (dressed inappropriately, drinking alcohol, staying out too late at

night, etc.) *and* if the accused harassers are socially similar to the bystanders (by age, race, social

status, etc.). Bystanders also judge the victim's story of sexual harassment based on concepts

such as *ideal victim* (Christie 1986:18) where Christie asserts that "a [type of] person or [certain]

category of individuals who – when hit by crime – most readily are given the complete and

legitimate status of being a victim." Ideal victims may receive public support if they meet

specific conditions of someone who has been unjustly harmed, including the appearance that the

victim is powerless, respectable, and innocent, and has been victimized by a powerful,

disreputable offender. Both theories are concerned with how "real victims" of harm, such as

sexual harassment, should behave before and after a harmful action, and if the victim acts outside of this "ideal victim" stereotype, her victimization narrative will not be believed and instead, the harasser's version of events will be supported by bystanders.

Unreliable Narrator: The concept of the unreliable narrator (Booth 1991; Hansen 2007) posits that when a speaker and the audience share the same beliefs and life views, the speaker's narrative will be viewed as reliable, and his story will be credible to the audience. If the audience does not share the same views as the speaker, the speaker will be considered untrustworthy or an unreliable narrator (Hansen 2007). For instance, if a victim speaks out against sexual harassment in an institution where harassment is tolerated, the victim may be seen as an unreliable narrator by peers who support the organizational culture of harassment. Consequently, the victim's story may be discredited by peers who assume she is lying for speaking out against the accepted workplace environment. Indeed, a qualitative study examining the frequency of sexual harassment, reported that women refused to define their experience as sexual harassment in order to maintain the perception that they were team players within organizations that tolerate sexual harassment (Collinson and Collinson 1996), thus avoiding the unreliable narrator label. From a narrative perspective, if the victim is perceived as an unreliable narrator by her audience, her story of victimization may be distrusted irrespective of how effectively she is able to convey her experience of sexual harassment.

Silent Tolerator: Another phenomenon that occurs after sexual harassment victimization is a disbelief of the victim if she did not report harassment immediately after the encounter. It appears that most sexual harassment victims choose to cope individually, rather than lodging a formal complaint or responding to the harasser because both actions are seen to cause retaliation and additional stress for the victim (Hart 2019). If the victim later chooses to report the sexual

harassment, institutions will often label the victim a *silent tolerator*, asserting that her failure to

report sooner demonstrates that she welcomed the sexual harassment (Fitzgerald et al. 1995). As

Polletta (2009:123) explains, "the stories that women tell later are often heard suspiciously."

Ostracism: Victims of sexual harassment may be retaliated against, not through victim-

blaming dialogue, but from being shunned by others. Retaliation, in the form of narrative

absence, is often carried out by bystanders and involves shunning victims who report sexual

harassment to show support for the harasser (Brown and Battle 2019). Ostracism of a victim is

essentially a "silent treatment"; an inaction that utilizes silence to punish the victim for making

an accusation (Ferris et al. 2008). Tactics of ostracism include leaving the victim out of

meetings, ignoring greetings or other conversations with the victim, and socially excluding the

victim to isolate her (Roninson et al. 2013). Although the motive is not always apparent with

ostracism (Williams and Sommer 1997), the purpose is usually punishment for reporting the

sexual harassment allegation by "getting back" at the victim or by "making her fall in line" so

she will not continue to "speak out against the harasser" (Brown and Battle 2019:8). The

ambiguity of ostracism can cause it to go unchecked, and consequently, maintain this harm as a

permitted form of secondary victimization (Robinson et al. 2013).

The aforementioned theories of secondary victimization shed light on the issues that

sexual harassment victims face if they report harassment within the workplace. Many victims to

choose not to report sexual harassment, either because they are concerned about the

consequences or for other personal and professional reasons. However, there are other ways for

victims to find support. Outside of the workplace, there are platforms for victims who have been

sexually harassed where they can find support by sharing their stories with others who have also

been sexually harassed. Thus, the next section will examine the flipside of victim re-narration.

First, I will examine why some victims choose not to report sexual harassment because of personal or professional reasons. Then, I will review how mediated social movements today have changed the way the general public receive information about sexual harassment. In addition, social media outlets for victims of sexual harassment have emerged and become a safe venue for victims to share their stories with others who have experienced the same harm. Some of the victims in this project utilized various media outlets so they could share their narratives, unedited and uncontested.

The Flip Side: Victim Support and Choosing Silence over Reporting

Victims of sexual harassment often find support outside of the workplace, with friends and family, however, Pemberton, Mulder, and Aarten (2019) explain that even when others support victims of sexual harassment, the supportive reaction can put unexpected demands on the victim's narrative. For example, when friends express sympathy for a victim with the intention of easing the victim's suffering, this reaction may overlook other needs that victims have, including the desire to "take a stand" against their victimization or "fight back". Proactive reactions by victims may be viewed as unnecessary or confusing to others who sympathize with the victim if they have placed the victim into a role of weakness and someone who they can help heal. Pemberton, Mulder, and Aarten (2019:409) state, "In narrative terms, sympathy recasts the victim into a supporting role in the observer's tale of attempting to alleviate distress through coping with and even overcoming the victim's suffering." However, victims who have support from other victims with similar experiences can find allies in their next steps of either moving on from their experience or taking a stand and proactively working to make positive change for other, future victims. Thus, sympathy from others who have not experienced the same harm as

the victim differs from the understanding that other victims of the same harm can give to each other.

Women's Resistance Through Victim Re-Narration and Social Movements

Finding victims who have had similar experiences can be challenging, however, with recent social movements and the increased accessibility of social media sites aimed at targeting like-minded groups of people, finding others who have experienced similar life events – both positive and negative – is more accessible than ever before. Moreover, social movements across history have created awareness for many oppressed groups. Prior to those social movements, however, the stories of the oppressed were "sent away" as the dominant narrative succeeded in silencing and shaming oppressed groups (Plummer 2019:68). Today, global social media is beginning to challenge the ability for the elite to diminish stories of the oppressed.

The sexual harassment awareness movement is one of the most recent movements to gain traction, arguably because high-profile victims came forward using social media. The combination of instant and wide-spread media coverage and high-profile speakers caused the #MeToo movement to flourish. Moreover, online platforms, e.g., Hollaback and #MeToo, have been made available for victims to come together to share their experiences of harassment and resistance to harassment with the goal of bringing sexual harassment to an end through larger social movements. When social movements emerge from efforts like Hollaback or #MeToo, they create visibility into the epistemic injustice (failure of acknowledgment) that sexual harassment victims experience, through shared stories and mutual acknowledgement (Jackson 2018). The Hollaback and #MeToo platforms also give victims an opportunity to provide counternarratives that dispute some of the dominant stereotypes and myths surrounding sexual harassment victims that tend to depict women as naïve and over-reactionary.

Amenta and Polletta (2019:279) define social movements as "sustained and organized collective actions to effect change in institutions by citizens or members of institutions who are excluded from routine decision-making." While social movement have mobilized for decades as groups have sought to create awareness and affect change, as these movements have moved into the digital era, they have been given the opportunity to create even greater and more immediate change. The Hollaback online platform, which began in 2005, has several functions: collecting stories of people, usually marginalized groups such as women, non-whites, and LGBTQ, who have been sexually harassed to help them understand their victimization and to further understand that street harassment is a larger societal problem; to train people in how to listen, intervene and aid in helping victims of street harassment through bystander intervention training; and to end harassment through various social movements (Hollaback.org). The founders aim to empower individuals who are harassed in public spaces, most often through street harassment, which is frequently dismissed as a "real harm".

Street harassment is generally defined as "unwanted sexual attention from strangers in public" (Wesselmann and Kelly 2010:451) and while it is often framed as a harmless annoyance, it can take on different forms from seemingly innocent compliments to racist expletives. The effects of street harassment on victims can be innocuous, but for many victims, street harassment can be harmful, even causing women to fear for their safety in public more generally (Vera-Gray 2016). Through Hollaback, targets of sexual harassment share not only their stories of being harassed, but also their strategies of resistance, including talking back, taking a different route to avoid interaction, small physical gestures, and ignoring the harasser (Fleetwood 2019). Fleetwood's (2016) narrative habitus speculates that there are correlations between stories and action, and when victims of street harassment read the narratives of other victims on

Hollaback.org., the outcome can empower victims by offering language they can use to respond to harassers and defend themselves in future cases of sexual harassment.

Whereas Hollaback is centered around street and public harassment, #MeToo is engaged with victim advocacy concerning all forms of sexual harassment and sexual assault. #MeToo was founded in 2006 by survivor and activist Tarana Burke as a safe platform for victims of sexual harassment or assault, to engage with other victims, share stories, and develop skills to take action, and advocate for victims of sexual harassment. However, #MeToo became a mainstream movement after Alyssa Milano posted on her Twitter account on October 15, 2017:

> If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too.' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem." If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet.

Following the intense media coverage of #MeToo of Milano's tweet, women from around the world began to share their stories of sexual harassment and sexual assault. Like Hollaback, #MeToo provides victims, and importantly, marginalized victims, multiple ways to reclaim their narrative and take back control of their story after sexual harassment through various training opportunities, healing workshops and platforms for sharing stories of victimization.

However, some media outlets have asserted through interviews and newspaper articles that the #MeToo movement's intended purpose has gone too far with public accusations of sexual harassment perpetrators (Fileborn and Phillips 2019), which may be creating backlash and bias against women in the workplace, as some men will no longer mentor women employees (McGregor 2017). From a narrative perspective, social movements such as #MeToo have been cast as the villain in sexual harassment cases, by some accused harassers who counter victims' stories with narratives that blame #MeToo for creating a pathway for victims to make false

sexual harassment accusations. As the American actor Michael Douglas said in the face of an accusation of having sexual harassed a woman [….], "Look, I support the #MeToo movement with all my heart. I have always supported women, along the way. This is the kind of step [false accusations of sexual harassment] that can set that movement back" (Deadline 2018).

When certain terms like sexual harassment gain widespread media attention, as with the #MeToo movement, scholarly definitions diverge from the mainstream public use of the term (Tinkler 2012), which may cause the term, "sexual harassment" to become overused in situations that are not appropriate. The outcome of this newly muddled definition of sexual harassment has the potential of triggering criticism of victims who come forward in good faith (Uggen et al. 2021). While victims of sexual harassment may wish to pursue reporting sexual harassment to the organization or confiding in others for support, many victims choose to keep the experience to themselves. The following sections examine various personal or professional reasons why victims may choose not to report sexual harassment.

Not Reporting Harassment

Kreps (1993) asserts that individuals experience and interpret the same actions of sexual harassment differently, which may cause one victim of sexual harassment to feel harmed while another may "shrug off" the experience. Wood (1993:17) similarly states, "whatever else it maybe, sexual harassment is a range of personal experiences, each of which is situational in particular historical, and social moments." The complexity of individual backgrounds and experiences underscores why some sexual harassment victims, even if they have experienced the same harm, by the same perpetrator, may stand up to their harasser, while others may deflect or try to cope with the harassment, and some may file a formal complaint against the harasser. To be a "woman" or a "victim" is not a uniform identity for all, as women have a diverse range of

tolerance or intolerance for any experience, including harm. The ways in which women react to the harm of sexual harassment reflect hierarchies and histories of race, class, national, religious, and gender oppression. Not all victims are interested in "punishing" their harasser, and many believe that punishment causes additional harm, often because their social group routinely suffers carceral punishment for wrongdoing which may exacerbate harms and even produce new ones.

Some victims may not want to report sexual harassment if they are in a powerless position and the harasser is in a position of power. Consider sex workers who have both social and economic powerlessness combined with the illegal nature of their jobs. When sex workers are harassed by customers, they usually avoid involving the police because by doing so, they may be subjected their own incarceration, or even sexual harassment/assault by the police, as police are responsible for "committing about one third of all sexual assaults against sex workers" (Dixon and Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2020:191).

Victims' choices to speak out or remain silent range from personal preferences to fears about not being believed by others. This fear of not being believed may be derived from decades of stories or personal experiences of not being believed. Consequently, we are still in an uphill battle to make sexual harassment *not normal,* and women continue to be concerned about telling their stories of sexual harassment and being believed by others, thus choosing silence over reporting.

Chapter Summary

When an individual experiences a trauma, their narratives explain to the listener how they experienced their victimization. Believability and storytelling challenges are critical elements of

victims' stories as they respond to sexual harassment. Because sexual harassment victims are generally women, women of color, and often in a lower position of power than their harasser, their status places them in a powerless position against a powerful man, which creates an epistemic injustice, rendering their story untellable. Narrative victimology examines discourse, post-victimization of many different harms, thus, this section underscores the importance of including the examination of sexual harassment within the context of discourse. Moreover, the multiple forms of secondary victimization described above can further disrupt the victim's ability to adequately communicate her story, especially in the absence of sympathetic listeners or if bystanders create contradictory narratives about the victimization, placing the blame on the victim, rather than the offender (Pemberton, Aarten and Mulder 2019).

Victims need listeners who understand and emphasize with their story. While talking with family and friends is a common source for victims after they have been harmed, those listeners may not have gone through the same victimization. Social media platforms, such as Hollaback, provide victims with an outlet for talking with other women who have been harmed in similar ways, creating a community for victims of the same harm, who understand what each other have gone through. Victims and sympathetic bystanders in this project used various social media outlets to tell their story to others.

The following chapter will describe the research methods I used for this project and the theories used in the analysis of the statements from all parties involved in the sexual harassment experience. I will first give a general overview of the project, followed by a description of the narrative analysis tools I will be using. Next, I will explain the data collection process and finally, I will discuss the analytical procedures used to determine the key findings in this project. My objective is to understand how sexual harassment is grounded in discourse, creating a

narrative contest between the harasser, victim and all others involved in the harassing experience and to investigate how harassers give themselves permission to harm, and how victims narrate their decisions to report or cope with harassment. This chapter will underscore the potential of narrative criminology and narrative victimology, which when used together, are poised to examine a multitude of harms, not only separately but together, to deepen our understanding of how harmful action is instigated by harassers and how it is perceived and responded to by victims.

Chapter 5. Research Methods: Accessing and Analyzing Stories of Sexual Harassment

The purpose of this analysis is to examine the narrative discourse of victims and harassers, or *what* they say, and to examine the meta narrative discourse, or *how* victims speak of what perpetrators and bystanders have or would harmfully say about them if they were to pursue recourse. Specifically, I am interested in how harassers and victims engage in a narrative contest against each other, as they try to narrate their story of harmdoing and victimization to others, each with the goal of being believed. Included in this narrative contest is the contribution to the narrative from bystanders and institutional representatives. In addition, I am interested in how women of color explain their victimization and their decisions to report or cope with the harm of sexual harassment, specifically to gain insight into the similarities and differences of their experiences of fears of retaliation or believability, opposed to white women who are sexually harassed. Storytelling depends fundamentally on context, depending on who we are talking to and based on how we perceive we should be "viewed" by that person or groups of people (Polletta et al. 2011). Thus, I was interested in statements from legal investigations *and* informal interviews in the media to examine how the actors told their stories of harassment, as the audience for each are either individuals who can inform the outcome of a legal complaint or can offer public support. I was also interested in how victims storied their positions of powerlessness to the harasser or the institution, and how harassers conveyed a counternarrative against victims' stories.

This chapter will first review the qualitative research and narrative analyses that used for my narrative inquiry. I will first examine the value of using a narrative inquiry to examine the statements of victims, harassers and bystanders involved in sexual harassment actions. I will then

describe the procedure I used data collection and analysis for this project. The final sections will describe my data collection and analysis process.

Sample and Data Collection

Selecting cases for research can be challenging, especially when collecting a small sample to represent broader populations (Seawright and Gerring 2008). Because the focus for this project was workplaces in the United States, I was able to narrow down geographically, however, another challenge was to locate statements from all parties involved in the sexual harassment experience. I wanted my sample to be representative of sexual harassment experiences of both white women and women of color, and also of middle class versus working class to illuminate differences in the performance of, and reaction to sexual harassment.

It can be challenging to obtain information on men who have harmed women (Cavanagh, et al. 2001), especially when the victim has not spoken out against the abuser. If a harmful act has *not* been publicly identified as such, the offender's account may never be given, so he can maintain a positive public image. In addition, sexual harassment in most workplaces is handled confidentially ensuring that the names of the accused are not made public. These barriers made it more difficult to find cases that included both the victim and harasser statements about the same sexual harassment experiences. Thus, in order to obtain statements from multiple parties, including perpetrators, involved in sexual harassment, I selected statements that were in the public domain and had been shared in news reports and social media platforms from two widely publicized cases of sexual harassment, Andrew Cuomo (2021) and Ford Motor Company (2017).

Before choosing the cases for this project, I did multiple online searches to locate sexual harassment cases that were publicly available. My searches yielded many options that included

very high-profile cases but were more representative of sexual assault than sexual harassment. For example, victims who spoke out against Harvey Weinstein, the film producer and co-founder of Miramax, convicted of rape and sexual assault. Because I wanted the focus to be on communicated harassment, I sought out cases where rape or forceful unwanted touches were not the cause for the publicity, but rather, where unwelcome comments were the basis for the complaints.

Finding publicly available complaints from victims that also included harasser and bystander statements, was challenging. Most workplace sexual harassment does not go to litigation and is handled internally and confidentially (McCann et al. 2018). While working on this project, the Andrew Cuomo case of sexual harassment was being investigated and all transcripts were made public, and because the transcripts included victims, the harasser, and multiple bystanders, I selected this as one of the two cases for this project. The investigation transcripts were housed on the New York Attorney General's Office and included testimonies based on formal interviews from each individual involved in the sexual harassment case. The transcripts included the former Governor, all of his victims, and bystanders who worked in the office. I also selected two self-published articles by one of Andrew Cuomo's victims, Lindsey Boylan, who used the online platform medium.com to write about her experiences while working in the Governor's office. In addition, four newspaper articles from The New York Times, The Post-Journal, NBC New York and Rev.com about the harassment case involving Andrew Cuomo were selected.

Another case I was able to locate online, which had multiple statements from victims and the institution, was the sexual harassment case at the Ford plant in Chicago, which had wide-spread media attention because of the number of victims who came forward. Interviews for this

case were selected from various media outlets who reported on the case and interviewed many of the victims. These articles came from the Detroit Free Press, The New York Times, and WTTV, a local news station in Chicago. In addition, a I drew from a social media page for minority groups, called Lipstick Alley, which housed many of the statements from the victims at Ford.

A total of 22 transcripts and interviews were used for this project. The first case involved the report from the lawsuit filed against Andrew Cuomo, the former Governor of New York City who had multiple sexual harassment allegation claims made against him in 2021. An online search was conducted to locate the investigation transcripts and other major interviews by media outlets from the Cuomo case. I decided to use a total of seven investigation transcripts and nine media interviews from victims, harassers, and bystanders. The investigative and media transcripts I examined are from the harasser, Andrew Cuomo, two victims, Charlotte Bennett, and Lindsey Boylan, and two bystanders, Chris Cuomo, and Melissa DeRosa. In addition, I examined the investigative report that included statements from many other, named and unnamed victims and bystanders. Seeking racial diversity – as most parties to the Cuomo case were white and middle-class – I identified the Ford Motor Company sexual harassment case, where over 30 women, mostly women of color, came forward about long-standing sexual harassment in the Chicago manufacturing plant. An online search was conducted to locate interviews by the women who publicly came forward as well as the public responses by the CEO of Ford Motor Company. In total, I identified five news articles for the analysis that included interviews from multiple Ford victims.

Data Analysis

The narratives I engaged drew from responses that victims, harassers, and bystanders

gave to questions about specific harassment encounters. Many of these responses were in the form of tropes (Sandberg 2016) or small stories (Bamberg and Georgakopolous 2008). My first task was to examine the statements of harassers, *their* victims, and bystanders to the harassment event, to identify the narrative contest during and after the sexual harassment experience. I read through each of the harasser, victim, and bystander statements to get a sense of general patterns when talking about offending, victimization, harassment allegations or institutional barriers.

After I uploaded each transcript and interview into the software, NVivo, I began to code each document. When I initially coded the transcripts and interviews, I did not have a set of categories in mind, yet many of the similarities and differences in the ways victims spoke about their victimization, whether they worked in the Ford plant or for Andrew Cuomo, became apparent, such as being fearful of retaliation or feeling powerless against their harasser. For example, in both workplaces, newly hired woman learned about the culture of sexual harassment, however, the way they learned about harassment was very different. At Ford, the plant workers yelled at the new employees - who were women - as they walked through the plant on a tour, and in Andrew Cuomo's office, an employee said quietly to a new employee to watch out for Cuomo's behavior.

While analyzing the transcripts, I looked for instances of a narrative contest. For example, if the victim said the harasser made inappropriate comments and in response, she said she made a joke to deflect the encounter, like, "I just tried to laugh it off." Next, I extracted themes to be coded from harassers' narratives including patterns such as power, use of neutralizations or justifications, or citing harassment myths. I then extracted themes from the victims' statements including believability concerns or epistemic injustice, powerlessness, silencing, secondary victimization and barriers from institutions or bystanders. Finally, I

extracted themes from bystanders, including disbelief of the victim or not wishing to be involved. I then coded the narrative statements using the qualitative analysis software NVivo to help me organize and cross-reference the data, memos, and findings.

From the analysis, I identified seven primary themes (or nodes) that were salient across cases and actors: institutional barriers or complicity, power and powerlessness, believability, stepwise nature of sexual harassment, retaliation, bystander complicity or victim-blaming, and co-construction of the narrative. Presser and Sandberg (2015) distinguish five foci of possible narrative analysis: (1) types or features of the narrative, (2) characterizations of agency made by subject and verb selections, (3) genre of the narrative, (4) coherence of narrative, and (5) the context of the storytelling (p. 86). Utilizing Presser and Sandberg's (2015) first focus of narrative analysis, I found three thematic foci for my analysis: power and powerlessness (of harassers, institutions, and victims), epistemic injustice and believability, the stepwise nature of sexual harassment, and co-construction of the narrative contest. By examining the stories of harassers, victims, and bystanders from two different institutional milieu – a political office and a manufacturing plant, the analysis identified similarities and differences between the experiences of the different actors which has implications for sexual harassment experiences in organizations, globally.

While some harms, such as gun violence or theft may seem to be associated with specific groups of individuals based on age, race, or economic status, sexual harassment has no social, age, class, race, or income boundaries, causing it to be a unique mass harm. Indeed, each year thousands of sexual harassment reports are made by college students, college professors, factory workers, cleaning staff, airline employees, government employees, doctors, nurses, and the list goes on. We have witnessed a movement recently with #MeToo showing that high-profile

actresses have been sexually harassed and assaulted; Anita Hill, a professor at University of Oklahoma College of Law famously testified against Clarence Thomas, a federal circuit judge, after he sexually harassed her; and there are countless tales on social media from "average" women (and men) who have endured sexual harassment.

Likewise, the cases used in this study present different types of workplace locations to study how sexual harassment crosses all boundaries, yet has similar effects for all involved, regardless of social status, race, etc. This project makes a comparison between a high-profile government office and a car manufacturing plant. One case involves a Governor who was in the public eye and often in the media, and therefore, theoretically, would behave appropriately with his staff. The other case location is a manufacturing plant where employees involved in the sexual harassment were not in the public eye, creating no real concern about a "public image" if they chose to behave inappropriately with others. However dissimilar, this is also why I chose these two cases for this project. I wanted to examine the similarities and the differences between perpetrators who harass others who have different social and occupational repercussions at stake, if caught; I also wanted to examine the similarities and differences between middle-class white women and working-class Black women in their experiences of sexual harassment.

Chapter Summary

Using a narrative approach is advantageous for criminological research because we all recount our experiences and forecast our futures through stories. The purpose of this project is to identify how narratives are not only constructed by directly involved social actors but are shaped by others. I examined 22 publicly available transcripts and interviews from two different cases. My examination of the transcripts and interviews uncovered six repeated themes: institutional

barriers or complicity, power and powerlessness, believability, stepwise nature of sexual harassment, retaliation, bystander complicity or victim-blaming, and co-construction of the narrative.

The following four results chapters will explore each of these in detail. Each results chapter focuses on central characteristics of the sexual harassment experience, all contributing to the co-construction of the narrative contest, culminating in the final results chapter where narrative criminology and victimology will be used together to examine statements from all parties in a single harm - which is a discursively formed harm. My results chapters take these in order of the experience of sexual harassment and culminate with a showcase of the narrative contest in action. The four chapters are laid out using the following approach: (1) what actually happened during sexual harassment, which included power and powerlessness, retaliation, and bystander complicity; (2) the start of the narrative contest, including harassers' instigation of sexual harassment followed by the victims' first responses; (3) telling others about sexual harassment, which illuminates the stepwise nature of sexual harassment (victim credibility and story credibility); and (4) co-construction of the narrative contest.

In the first results chapter, I will discuss my findings of the experience of sexual harassment – or what happened - across both cases used in this study. The three most common themes that emerged in the data included themes of power and powerlessness, retaliation, and bystander complicity. This chapter will first give a general overview of some of the statements that illustrated the theme of power by victims and harassers from both cases used for this study. Harassers used their power to harass and to motivate others to harass. I also identified two types of power held by harassers: individual and group. Victims explained their powerlessness in the sexual harassment encounters as reasons for "playing along" or not speaking out so they could

avoid retaliation. Fear of retaliation and warnings from bystanders against reporting were common themes that emerged from the data. Retaliation (or warnings thereof) were presented in two ways: straightforward, and devious (e.g., done in secret). The following chapter will tease out the three aforementioned themes of power, retaliation, and bystander complicity, which served as the beginning of the narrative experience of sexual harassment for the victims.

Chapter 6. Experiences of Victimization

This chapter is the first of four results chapters. Its particular purpose is to showcase dimensions of the sexual harassment experience based on my analysis. Plummer (2019) describes the difference between stories and narratives as, stories are *what* is told, and narratives are *how* stories are told. This chapter examines *what* was told and is organized by the three most common themes about the sexual harassment experience that I found in my examination of the transcripts: power and powerlessness, retaliation, and bystander complicity. Power and powerlessness were central to the analysis as they generated both retaliation and bystander complicity.

The two workplace locations in this project were markedly different, consisting of a high-profile government office with mostly middle-class employees, and a manufacturing plant with working-class line workers. How perpetrators harassed in each case was also markedly different. The former Governor, Andrew Cuomo's actions and comments were frequently subtle. At the Ford plant, harassing actions and comments were clearly sexual and inappropriate. However, regardless of how the sexual harassment was carried out by the perpetrators in each case, the sexual harassment experience and outcomes for the victims were similar, consistently causing concerns about retaliation. Retaliation was a deterrent for victim's initially speaking out against sexual harassment. Retaliation was either an understood outcome based on stories about known retaliation in the workplace or was perceived by victims as an outcome based on the power the harasser held over the victim. Finally, victims reported that bystanders and supervisors tacitly participated in the harassment by turning a blind eye or telling victims to stay silent about their experiences.

Katz (1988:8) states that offenders who commit harm are "playing with a line between the sense of themselves as subject and object, between being in and out of control, between directing and being directed by the dynamics of the situation." Perpetrators who straddled being in control while harassing, and then being out of control after the victim reported the harassment, was a recurring finding in this project. My analysis showed this type of play of identity by harasser in multiple ways: (1) harassers used a slow buildup of comments, presumably to "test the waters," or see how far they could go with inappropriate comments. This slow buildup ensured that any of their comments could be explained as innocent if questioned; (2) when accusations were made and bystanders became aware of the harassment complaint, harassers were no longer in control of their power over the victim because others were paying attention to the relationship between the victim and harasser. Therefore, to regain control, harassers changed their positions of powerful to powerless, making themselves the victim; and (3) harassers were surrounded by other harassers, creating a workplace culture that was accepting of harassment. The particular culture of accepted harassment allowed harassers to remain in control through strength in numbers. That is, because so many individuals were engaging in harassing behaviors, there were no trusted individuals for victims to confide in who would take their claims of harassment seriously. The following sections will introduce the three most common themes that emerged in victims' accounts: power and powerlessness, retaliation and warnings to victims, and bystander complicity.

Power and Powerlessness

Power is central to the experience of sexual harassment, whether it is sexually motivated or hostile, gendered harassment. Whereas the next chapters will examine the *power of stories*, or

how the actors narratively constructed their experience of sexual harassment, this section examines the *stories of power* and what the actors involved stated about their experiences of sexual harassment, or what actually happened. Plummer (2019:65) states that our stories "are grounded in worlds of domination and subordination: people have to live with them and find their own ways around them." Victims frequently stated that power and powerlessness were central to their experiences of sexual harassment and its aftermath, as they described harassers who were not concerned with getting criticized or caught. Of Cuomo, victims stated that he was so powerful that no one would speak out against him. In the Ford case, the culture was so engrained in harassment that victims stated most people were involved in the harassing behaviors, thus, for victims to speak out, they would have to (1) find someone who was *not* engaging in the harassment and (2) hope that they would be sympathetic to the victim and not the harasser.

How Workplace Tolerance Aids Fearless and Repeat Offending

The powerful are granted societal "permission" to perpetrate certain harms. When power derives from social and economic status, offenders have access to valuable resources to help defend against allegations, such as legal representation. In cases of sexual harassment, the accused have usually harassed before without sanctions, and even if disciplined, have often continued to harass (Lucero and Middleton 2006). I refer to these agents as fearless harassers because they do harm to others in private or public, without concern for consequences. This project uncovered two types of fearless harassers: *individual-power harassers*, who felt they were "above" sanctions because of their social, professional, or economic status, and *group-power harassers*, who felt they were "above" sanctions because multiple individuals were participating in the same harmful actions, causing the harm to be normalized in the workplace.

Powerful harassers in this study were aided by workplace tolerance of sexual harassment. If the workplace condemns sexual harassment and protects victims, harassing behaviors are not common. Conversely, if the workplace is a producer and protector of harassers, or if the workplace culture is engrained with sexual harassing behaviors, inappropriate behavior is considered normal, rather than deviant. Ahmed (2021:123) states, "when other people are going along with it, you are being told there is nothing wrong with it." Not following rules of "normal office etiquette" was normalized and caused harassers' inappropriate office behavior to seem normal in this project.

For example, Ana Liss, who worked for the former Governor, claimed that Cuomo always referred to her as sweetheart or darling and that he often touched her inappropriately, kissing her on the cheek and hands. She stated to investigators:

> [F]or whatever reason, in his office the rules were different. It was just, you should view it as a compliment if the Governor finds you aesthetically pleasing enough, if he finds you interesting enough to ask questions like that. And so even though it was strange and uncomfortable and technically not permissible in a typical workplace environment, I was in this mindset that it was the twilight zone and…the typical rules did not apply. (Liss, Investigation Report 2021:148)

The statement by Ana Liss above describes how Cuomo used power, and others' perception of it, to make verbal and physical overtures to women without fear of reprimand. In his office, Cuomo's power over his victims was two-fold: he was their supervisor *and* his office culture supported harassing behaviors.

In both cases in this study, the workplace gave perpetrators permission to harass. However, the workplace tolerance presented differently in each location, mirroring the types of

offenses that occurred in each. In Cuomo's office, workplace tolerance was a silent reaction to sexual harassment from bystanders. At Ford, workplace tolerance was as egregious as the actions of sexual harassment, with bystanders also engaging in sexual harassment along with the harasser. The combination of workplace tolerance and individual power or group power harassers was a common theme throughout the transcripts in this project.

Individual Power: In some cases, harassers may flaunt their immunity to sanctions. The Cuomo case provides an example of a harasser who acted like he was above sanctions because of his multiple positions of power over his target. For example, at one public event, the former Governor was shaking hands employees, and when he shook hands with one of his employees who was a woman, he whispered to her, "I'm going to say I see a spider on your shoulder" and then he brushed his hand in the area between her shoulder and breast below her collarbone (Investigation Report 2021:4). Taking this action in public was a signal to the victim that Cuomo felt he was so powerful that he could harass in public, and no one would question him. Cuomo used his multiple positions of power (economic, situational, professional, gender, and race) all of which led to his individual power, to give himself permission to touch someone inappropriately, in front of others.

Some victims of sexual harassment by fearlessness harassers stated that they felt powerless to speak up because their harasser had sexually harassed others before without being sanctioned. A victim referred to as Executive Assistant #1 described her response to the Governor's intimate hugs:

> I felt that he was definitely taking advantage of me. He was taking advantage. The fact that he could tell I was nervous. He could tell that I wasn't saying anything because he had gotten away with it before. (Investigation Report 2021:22)

Similarly, another unnamed executive assistant to Cuomo stated:

> I think that he definitely knew what he was doing, and it was almost as if he would do
>
> these things and know that he could get away with it because of the fear that he knew we
>
> had. (Investigation Report 2021:9)

These statements by Cuomo's victims explained that this was not uncommon behavior, and because the former Governor was able to get away with inappropriate touching, he was fearless about continuing this behavior without concern of recourse.

Group Power: The Ford plant is an example of harassers who felt they were above sanctions because multiple individuals were participating in the same harmful actions. At Ford, fearless harassers were empowered by the culture of harassment, which gave them permission to harass without consequences. Victims stated that fearless harassers at Ford were so embolden by decades workplace inappropriateness, including harassment, that supervisors participated rather than helping to intervene. In one interview with a local news outlet, Suzette Wright at Ford was asked if management was aware of an existing "underground economy" that included the sale of drugs, guns, electronics, and sex:

> They all knew this was happening. You name it, you could get it inside that plant, and it
>
> was not a secret…. They all knew. There were stripper parties on the night shift,
>
> everybody knew about it, and everybody went…. (Gunderson 2018)

The workplace culture at Ford was inundated with individuals who performed sexually harassing behaviors which had sustained for decades, creating a situation where "power in numbers" gave permission for an atmosphere of harassment. Moreover, perpetrators did not try to hide their harassing behaviors. Instead, harassers used denials or threats against their victims to counter the sexual harassment accusations.

Throughout the analysis, there was evidence that while Cuomo's victims were reluctant to report harassment initially, many of the victims from Ford *did* immediately resist their harassers and *tried* to report harassment to supervisors. However, the supervisors either dismissed the accusation as unimportant or also harassed the victims. As Christi Van at Ford said:

> I asked [supervisor] for a cord to charge my cellphone. He showed me a picture of his penis.… I walked over to *his* supervisor, and I said, 'He just showed me a picture of his penis.' [The supervisor] said, `Loosen up. Oh wow. You want to see mine, too?' He told me if I reported it, I'd be on the outside looking in and he guaranteed that happened…. (Lipstickalley.com 2018)

In this exchange, there was no attempt to try to dispute the victim's claim of harassment. Instead, the supervisor also harassed Van and then threatened to terminate her if she spoke out. Van described another colleague's remark which was ignored by a supervisor. "He said, 'The bottom on you is unreal. I would love to see you in pink, pretty panties.' A man of power was right there listening. He had nothing to say" (Lipstickalley.com 2018).

Transferring Power: Using Others to Harass

The Cuomo case of sexual harassment suggests that some harassers will use their power to motivate others to harass their targets. By recruiting others to harass, the harasser pits a team of others against the victim. Andrew Cuomo successfully used his powerful position to persuade and encourage some of his staff to engage in hostile behavior towards other members of his staff and multiple victims commented on this toxic environment in Cuomo's office by some of his executive aids. Cuomo had named a group of his inner circle "the mean girls" because they were mean to many of the other employees. Cuomo even asked other women in his office how the

"mean girls" were treating them, revealing that he knew how they behaved toward other employees in his office (Investigation Report 2021:89). Charlotte Bennett, one of Cuomo's victims, recalled, "like his test is setting up someone in a position where they're being abused by the people around him and not just directly from him" (Charlotte Bennett Transcript 2021:96). Ana Liss, another victim, said that it was not only fear of retaliation by Cuomo, but by his team were she to complain. A third victim, Kaitlin, stated that as she began to lose favor with the former Governor, "the mean girls…started to be short with" her as well (Kaitlin, Investigation Report 2021:89).

In this workplace, the governor actually mobilized toxic behavior, which created additional barriers for victims: they were afraid not only of the Governor, but also his top aides. Cuomo's acceptance of this bad behavior was also evident through his naming of the group, "mean girls" which narratively sanctioned their roles as bad actors. In this case, he effectively transferred his power to the "mean girls" as they behaved badly on his behalf, as if they were deputies to his role as Sherriff. As Charlotte Bennett described:

> …he was surrounded by people who enabled his behavior, like surrounded by yes men…if this is what he wants, this is what he gets, and that mood and that anger or that fear of him suddenly becoming angry definitely ruled the office and then trickled down…. (Charlotte Bennett Transcript 2021:82)

Bennett describes to investigators how Cuomo's power "trickled down" to his staff, bringing to bear that the powerful can transfer their power to others to use on their behalf.

Retaliation and Warnings to Victims against Speaking Out

Retaliation is a paramount shaper of the narrative contest of sexual harassment. It may cause the victim to downplay her story of harassment, as she tells herself that the harassment is not worth reporting so she can avoid making the harasser angry and avoid any potential retaliation from bystanders or the institution. Retaliation is counterattack against an individual or group who has harmed or threatened harm against another person or group. It can be accomplished by causing physical, emotional, or economic discomfort or pain. Retaliation is a close companion to bullying. Ahmed (2021) speaks of retaliation and bullying as abuses of power, causing additional harm for victims of sexual harassment. She states, "Bullying is a profoundly undoing experience, and how bullying affects a person is often the aim of the bully: you are undermined, made to feel smaller, brought down; you are frightened to go to work, to walk down that corridor, to open the door to the meeting room" (p. 56). These same negative outcomes occur with retaliation.

In addition, retaliation can occur either openly and in a straightforward manner, or underhandedly, by pretending to be on the side of the victim, but then spreading unflattering rumors about her to others. My analysis uncovered two types of retaliation: *straightforward* and *devious*. Straightforward retaliation was accomplished when supervisors or bystanders stated bluntly that sexual harassment was normal, or in extreme cases, openly threatened or intimidated victims to keep them quiet about their victimization. Devious retaliation involved insincere compassion towards victims of sexual harassment, followed by backstabbing, which caused victims to alter their narratives or remain quiet about their victimization to avoid severe retaliation, such as getting fired.

Straightforward Retaliation

Straightforward retaliation was a common theme for victims at the Ford plant in Chicago where retaliation was often done candidly and in front of others and sometimes came in the form of additional sexual harassment and humiliation. As Miyoshi Morris stated of one experience, "When I asked the Union's plant chairman for assistance, he told me if I wanted his help, I had to get down on my knees" (Gunderson 2018). Morris further stated:

> They flexed their power, threatened my career, and suggested if I wanted to continue to provide for my family, I had to engage in sexual acts or favors. I was told by a UAW leader that I needed to watch certain other female employees who were also subjected to his advances and see the good jobs she and others were provided with when they got with the program. (Lipstickalley.com 2018)

Verbal warnings against speaking out about sexual harassment were common at Ford, acting as cautionary threats that if victims spoke out, they would be the ones who got into trouble rather than the harasser. When bystanders caution victims against speaking out about sexual harassment, those warnings make them complicit bystanders, as they warn victims of consequences, but don't problematize the harassing actions. Terri Lewis-Bledsoe, from Ford, said that a union representative warned her against filing complaints, telling her, "You're going to be called a troublemaker" (Chira and Einhorn 2017). Gwajuana Gray, another victim at Ford, said that while there was a strict policy against retaliation against a victim who reports sexual harassment, "when you speak up, you're like mud in the plant" (Chira and Einhorn 2017). Another unnamed victim at Ford said victims who spoke out against sexual harassment faced retaliation from their harassers, co-workers, and bystanders. After this same unnamed victim accused a co-worker of groping her, friends of the accused physically blocked the victim, using

their bodies as barricades, so she could not return to her station at work. They also subsequently slashed her car tires (Chira and Einhorn 2017). Retaliation at the Ford plant mirrored how sexual harassment was performed, as both were also openly carried out against victims.

Devious Retaliation

Retaliation was commonly discussed by victims of Andrew Cuomo. However, the retaliation described was most often done behind the victim's back or was cloaked as empathy, making it appear as if the bystanders were trying to help, when in reality, their actions supported the harasser, not the victim. For example, bystanders told victims that they were sorry for what they were going through and then secretly discussed ways to discredit them. Retaliation did not only come from harassers, but also bystanders and the institution.

Several members of Cuomo's executive staff sought to retaliate against one of Cuomo's victims, Lindsey Boylan, by publicly discrediting her. In one instance Boylan's colleagues released her confidential personnel files to the media. When investigators asked about the retaliation efforts against Boylan, one of the staff members responded that Boylan had "cast herself as being a victim of a toxic work environment," and the confidential files "spoke to *her* [Boylan's] contribution to an unhealthy work environment for some of the people that she worked with" (Investigation Report 2021:106).

The former governor denied involvement in releasing this confidential file to the media, but one member of his staff stated that he did not think "anything went out the door without [the Governor's] knowledge" and it was "safe to say" this was "consistent with what the Governor wanted or had been discussed with him and he approved it" (Investigation Report 2021:108). Another bystander testified about the Governor and his executive team regarding conversations about discrediting Boylan and attempting to discredit her narrative, stating:

I would be in the room when they were actively trying to discredit her. They were

actively trying to portray a different story of it. Trying to make her seem like she was

crazy and wanting to get her personnel file out. That was the first time that I had seen

someone publicly come out and saying something against him and sexually harassing

them and them going behind the scenes and trying to discredit her. (Investigation Report

2021:158)

Boylan also described how supporters of Cuomo obstructed her story of sexual harassment with

public retaliation, as she stated:

And he continues to abuse us. As recently as Saturday, the Governor sent his attack dogs

on national television to accuse me of "lying." He is gaslighting and revictimizing us. He

is showing everyone what happens to women when they speak up about harassment and

abuse in the workplace. (Boylan, Medium.com 2021)

The counter accusation from the harasser and bystanders, publicly accusing the victim of lying

about her victimization, was a form of mediated retaliation. Boylan's use of the term "attack

dogs" provides an image of violence and pain, which enhances her narrative that she was the

victim, and Cuomo and his supporters were not only guilty, but were malicious offenders.

The fear of *possible* retaliation was also described by victims. When retaliation is

perceived as a possibility, that concern can cause victims to tailor or withhold narratives of

sexual harassment to avoid punishment by the harasser or others. When Charlotte Bennett

testified about Governor Cuomo's comments, she explained why she initially did not say

anything to him or others: "I was uncomfortable, but I also was acutely aware that I did not want

him to get mad" (Bennett, Investigation Report 2021:9).

In the following example of perceived retaliation, one of Cuomo's assistants, named Executive Assistant #1, met with Cuomo in his office, where he suggested that they take a "selfie," or picture of the two of them. While taking the selfie, Cuomo put his hands around the assistant's waist, grabbed her butt cheek and rubbed it (Investigation Report 2021:22). The victim stated of this encounter:

> [T]he way he was so firm with [me] that I couldn't show anyone else that photo, I was just terrified that if I shared what was going on that it would somehow get around. And if Stephanie Benton or Melissa [DeRosa] heard that, I was going to lose my job. Because I knew that I certainly was going to be the one to go. (Investigation Report 2021:23)

Another employee stated that she was advised by Cuomo's staff to "leave with as little fuss as possible" and "not make waves," because "the Governor could destroy [her] career and [she] would never find a job in the state again" (Investigation Report 2021:126). Similarly, an executive assistant stated that she believed it "was almost as if he knew he could get away with it because, if we were to say anything to anyone, he wasn't the one that was going to get in trouble or go anywhere—it was going to be us" (Investigation Report 2021:126).

Power and the potential negative consequences of "not going along" with the harassing behaviors was a common theme. As Ahmed (2021) reminds, retaliation can be in the form of direct negative consequence for the victim or can be in the form of an absence of positive consequences, each described in two statements that follow. In the first, a former employee of Cuomo, Lindsey Boylan, said of his harassing behaviors that she knew of no one who had ever made a complaint against the Governor, because they "would be destroyed before they even stepped out the door" (Boylan, Investigation Report 2021:75), predicting negative retaliation as a

consequence for reporting the harassment. Alternatively, a state trooper who worked for the

governor similarly said the following of him:

> [He had] a habit of being creepy and flirtatious but no one would speak out because they
>
> would be retaliated against…and everybody, for the most part, gets promoted because
>
> they're in the good graces of the Governor. So, if they stay quiet or give him information,
>
> they'll get promoted, or something good will happen to them…. (Investigation Report
>
> 2021:162)

This statement by the state trooper predicted that the retaliation would be in the form of an

absence of positive consequences, rather than the imposition of a negative consequence, each

having the power to cause victims to stay quiet about the harassment.

Finally, in a more egregious example of retaliation, Miyoshi Morris from Ford said that

she succumbed to having sex with her harasser (a manager) after he told her that her job was in

jeopardy for being tardy. She stated, "where else are you going to go and make that kind of

money?" (Chira and Einhorn 2017). Her fear of retaliation in the form of a negative

consequence, coupled with her personal financial situation, caused her to make the decision to

"go along" with her harasser's demands so she could keep her job.

Bystander Complicity

Victims may not know who to trust or who will believe their stories of sexual harassment

when it is known that bystanders are aware of sexual harassment but do not intervene. Bystander

complicity was commonly described as a barrier to reporting harassment. As Chapter 4 revealed,

bystanders are usually aware of sexual harassment, but often turn a blind eye or may even side

with the harasser. In the case of Andrew Cuomo, bystanders testified that they were surprised

about the allegations of sexual harassment, however victims testified that they had witnessed

multiple harassing encounters between Cuomo and others. The Ford case interviews indicated

that sexual harassment was known to be a very large part of the culture, and the responses by

union representatives or other supervisors to reports of harassment were often in support of the

harasser. Thus, both cases suggest that bystanders knew about harassment and supported the

harasser which was an additional concern for victims as they decided if they should speak out

against, or cope with the harassment.

After sexual harassment occurred, most victims at Ford and in Cuomo's office had to

refrain from seeking help in case their request for help turned into trouble for them. As Executive

Assistant #1, a victim of Andrew Cuomo, stated, "Who am I going to tell? My supervisor was

Stephanie Benton…the Governor's right-hand person and if I told her I was going to be asked to

go somewhere else or transferred to [another] agency" (Investigation Report 2021:162). Lindsey

Boylan similarly stated of her victimization by Cuomo:

> No one would say or do anything ever. That's how this worked. I would be in the middle
>
> of a weird dynamic and looking around, you would feel like that's just normal because
>
> you would get no reaction from anyone else. (Boylan Transcript 2021:128)

From the Ford plant, Suzette Wright made this statement:

> The people who are elected to the union leadership are elected by their peers – the guys
>
> that they worked on the line with. So, you're going to make complaints against people
>
> that are their friends. They don't look to protect women first. It's a conflict of interest….
>
> You'd go to the union rep, and it's their buddy, their friend, the guy they used to work
>
> with…. (Gunderson 2018)

In each statement, these victims revealed how they knew they would not be believed by others in the workplace because bystanders were aware of the harassment and either supported the harassers or disregarded the victims. These statements describe how the victims, post-harassment, confronted the fact that help was illusive.

Chapter Summary

Our own experiences of victimization can be worsened with the fear of retaliation by others who have power over us, causing uncertainty about speaking out because of concerns about retaliation or other negative outcomes. Conversely, and as seen in each of the cases where the victims did eventually come forward with their accusations, making this project possible, victims may resist power arrangements and those who wield power over them by coming forward with their stories, thus, creating a new story of empowerment for themselves.

The victim statements in this chapter, however, showed the challenges faced during and after sexual harassment in terms of retaliation and bystander complicity before they came forward with their formal accusations. At Ford, actions and comments were obvious and egregious, and most employees participated in the sexual harassment. In Cuomo's office, the sexual harassment actions and narratives were concealed or could seem innocuous, and while many in his office knew that harassment had occurred, most ignored it.

This project focuses on the sexual harassment experience holistically, centering on how harassers, victims and bystanders co-create the narrative contest. The narrative contest begins at the onset of the sexual harassment experience when the harasser initiates sexual harassment through "compliments," hostile remarks, sexual requests, display of inappropriate images, and so on. However, even before the initiation of sexual harassment, the harasser has already launched

internal self-narration, using various justifications for the harm he is about inflict on the victim. This self-talk, which gives permission to harass, is conditioned by shared harassment myths and the other cultural mechanisms for harm discussed in Chapter 3. The next chapter introduces the start of the narrative contest as the perpetrator sexually harasses the victim and the victim responds. I examine how harassers used various narrative tactics that give permission to commit harm to the targets, including harassment myths and victim reduction. Next, I present how victims initially responded to the narrative contest using verbal, physical and silent responses, as they navigated their way out of the encounter. I unpack how victim responses often began with internal narratives and self-talk, before turning into actual responses to the harasser.

Chapter 7. Instigating the Narrative Contest with the Victim

This chapter examines the start of the sexual harassment experience as the harasser instigates sexual harassment with his target, utilizing various narrative tactics that give permission to commit harm to the targets. Harassment myths often serve as the basis for permission to harm and are utilized when harassers use excuses or victim blame if accused of sexual harassment. First, I will examine some of the techniques that harassers in this study evidently used to allow themselves to harm others, including the use of harassment myths, victim-reduction, and their positions of power, all of which gave these harassers permission to harm. These self-narratives by harassers served as the preface to the narrative contest. Next, I will examine the initial response by victims, after the narrative contest began. Following the instigation of harassment by the perpetrator, either with a harassing gesture or comment, the victim responded to the harasser in some way. These responses were both verbal and non-verbal. Finally, I will examine how some victims narrated their story of harassment to others by using reduction - one of the same tactics that harassers used to give themselves permission to harm.

Permission to Harass: Myths and Victim Reduction

Harassment myths were apparent in the data, seeming to have given the harassers permission to commit harm. Harassers pulled from myths and stereotypes to both create a narrative oppression for victims who tried to tell their stories of harassment, and to give themselves permission to sexually harass. For example, Suzette Wright from the Ford plant, described a conversation she had after being harassed by a co-worker and telling her union representative about the encounter. Wright's union representative said, "Suzette, you're a pretty woman — take it as a compliment" (Chira and Einhorn 2017). The victim's union representative

changed the victim's story of harassment into a story of a compliment which should have flattered her, based on old myths that when men hit on women, women should feel complimented.

Similarly, Ana Liss said of working in Cuomo's office "…You should just feel flattered" and she stated if she had complained, she would have been "laughed out of town" and terminated from her job (Liss, Investigation Report 2021:84). The use of harassment myths was subtle but revealed in these short statements where harassers responded to accusations of sexual harassment with various excuses or victim-blaming counternarratives. Myths were also utilized in the harasser's reducing the victim – constructing her as "less than" – which allowed the harasser to believe his actions were therefore not so harmful.

Non-Human Victim Reduction

My analysis uncovered two forms of victim reduction. One form of victim reduction was non-human victim reduction, which utilized narrative manipulations that reimagined the victim as an object, giving harassers mental space to commit harms against that individual. The other form of victim reduction was a similar narrative manipulation but aimed at humiliating victims. Reduction by humiliation enabled harassers to minimize the victim's social or professional status by removing any notion of equality between the harasser and victim. In the interviews and transcripts for this project, the use of victim reduction was achieved in various ways, including directly reducing the target to non-human objects or by exploiting harassment myths and denying harm was done because the victim "she should have been flattered".

Reducing women to non-humans, or food items, was a recurring theme in the interviews from the victims at Ford. For example, one victim's husband, who also worked at the Ford plant, recalled reactions when new women were hired, "When they come in, everybody's: 'Oh man,

look at her. Nah, this is going to be mine" (Chira and Einhorn 2017). The victim is reduced to "this" – an object to be possessed, rather than a human agent. Shirley Thomas-Moore, a victim in the Ford Motor Company case stated of the culture at Ford, when new hires were given a tour of the plant "a man would hit his hammer on a railing, summoning the attention of the factory floor. 'Fresh meat!' the male workers hollered" (Chira and Einhorn 2017). A union representative recalled the many men at the factories stated about women co-workers, "You're going to want to eat that porterhouse steak" (Chira and Einhorn 2017).

Racialized victim reduction was described at the Ford plant where sexual comments were framed with racial connotations. One woman from the Ford plant recalled asking a co-worker why men were calling her "peanut butter legs" He responded, "Not only is it the color of your legs, but it's the kind of legs you like to spread." (Chira and Einhorn 2017). These examples show that victims were reduced to non-human objects based on their gender, race/skin color, and physical characteristics. The reduction of victims to meat grants permission to treat them as they would a nonhuman animal or an object because harmful actions to an object – and for some individuals, to nonhuman animals – are widely deemed as not really harm (Presser 2013).

Reduction by Humiliation

Victim reduction was also a theme in the Cuomo case, however, the language used was more subtle and less hostile than that used at the Ford plant. As discussed in Chapter 2, victim reduction is done differently to white women (if at all) than women of color, who are often reduced to non-human animals or objects. The victims at Ford were mostly women of color. Cuomo's victims were white. Cuomo used language to reduce his victims to objects, but his approach was less blatantly sexual than the reduction at Ford. Instead, Cuomo reduced his

victims in ways that embarrassed them, and also helped him maintain his social and professional power over them.

Nicknames are a common way of reducing a target and are often seen when men call women "sweetheart" or other romantically defined names that are reserved for intimate partners. When a supervisor creates a nickname for a subordinate, he creates a new narrative about their relationship, altering their professional relationship into a playful or romantic relationship, without the target's participation or consent. One of Cuomo's assistants, Kaitlyn, recalled that his nickname for her was "sponge." Kaitlin said he told her to "be a sponge and to take everything in and absorb everything" and thereafter, referred to her as sponge in front of others. When asked by investigators if she asked him to stop, she said, "no, because he's the Governor and if that's what he wanted to call me, then that is what he could call me" (Kaitlyn, Investigation Report 2021:87).

Another victim, Brittany Commisso, stated that her nickname from Cuomo was "bun" after she had worn her hair in a bun, stating "[Cuomo] kind of looked at it and made a face and said, I don't like your hair like that. And I said, oh, okay. He said, I like your hair when it is down better" (Commisso, Investigation Report 2021:84). Subsequently, Cuomo continued to refer to Commisso as "bun." Cuomo's victims stated they understood these nicknames as shows of disrespect. These nicknames also changed the narrative about his relationship with his victims – or the way others perceived their relationships. What had been a professional relationship now looked to others like a playful, and therefore, unprofessional relationship. One former employee explained how this playful use of nicknames could alter the way others perceived a working relationship that seem too friendly. When the former Governor posed in a picture and placed his hand around her waist, Ana Liss described how this action diminished her professional position

by making their relationship "look less professional and more intimate" (Investigation Report 2021:83).

Engaging in the Narrative Contest: Victim Responses to Sexual Harassment

Following the initiation of sexual harassment, victims must respond to their harasser somehow. Even a non-response is a kind of response. As Gutek and Koss (1993) assert, victims respond in one of three ways when they are sexually harassed: 1) coping, or talking with a spouse, therapist, etc.; 2) direct response or confrontation; or, 3) indirect response, which may involve ignoring, avoiding, shrugging off or laughing off inappropriate comments as a coping mechanism when they are uncertain how to respond. Gutek and Koss found that the indirect response was the most common form of coping for victims. Indirect coping responses can take on several different forms including a verbal response, a non-verbal response, a physical response, or some combination. A verbal response can include changing the subject or playing along, a non-verbal response may include laughing off an inappropriate comment or dressing differently to try to avoid being a target, and a physical response may be walking or pushing away physically from the harasser.

Initial Internal Responses to Sexual Harassment

Some of the statements by victims reported on their inner dialogue as they were being sexually harassed, offering insight into their narrative response, which was performed in their minds until they took some sort of action. Each victim intentionally chose their response to the harassment, most often attempting to exit the immediate situation without confrontation. For example, victims stated they were fearful of making the harasser angry if they said something negative about the unwanted comments or actions, so they decided to utilize coping strategies to

remove themselves at that moment. Many victims stated that they were powerless against their harasser and therefore, needed to maintain a certain demeanor to escape the encounter and keep their jobs. One of Andrew Cuomo's victims, Charlotte Bennett, recalled to investigators an incident where she was going through her responses in her mind to his comments, trying to decide how to remove herself from a situation without upsetting him or potentially losing her job:

> [H]e wouldn't let it go and kept asking and talking about the size of his hands and was like kind of engaging me in this what became very uncomfortable interaction in which I was more scouring my brain for like a positive thing people had said to him about this job. . . [It] just like became him trying to get me to admit something sexually. . . I really was just trying to like thread this needle of not making him angry but also maintaining my – what I see as appropriate behavior. Like I'm not crossing this boundary with you but I'm also not looking to get into a fight with you and losing my job. (Bennett, Investigation Report 2021:47)

This self-commentary illustrates Bennett's inner dialogue as she was being sexually harassed and before she was able to determine how to respond or engage in the narrative contest with the harasser. Bennett conducted a future-oriented narrative exchange with Cuomo in her mind, which was entirely discursive, where she told him, "I'm not with you." Bennett also referred to needle threading, a metaphor that tells us how carefully she was trying to mentally process, through her self-narrative – her response to Cuomo's advances.

Verbal Responses to Sexual Harassment

Verbal responses are commonly used after unwanted sexual harassment actions as the target reacts to the experience. These verbal responses are strategies to get out of the immediate

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encounter without confrontation, sometimes by deflecting or "playing along" while trying to bring the encounter to a close. One such strategy seen in the data was changing the subject. When a victim of Cuomo, named State Entity Employee #2, was preparing to do a live, on camera nasal swab on the former Governor during a Covid-19 press conference, she did a practice run before going live. During this practice, the Governor asked her "to make sure she didn't "go so deep that [she] hit [his] brain" to which she replied, that she would be "gentle but accurate." The Governor responded, "Gentle but accurate, I've heard that before." The victim stated that she changed the subject to stop the inappropriate encounter, which she knew was sexual and made her uncomfortable (Investigation Report 2021:98).

Playing along with the harasser was another way that victims coped with the uncomfortable encounters. One of the former Governor's victims, referred to as State Trooper #1, recalled a conversation she had with Cuomo, which had made her uncomfortable. She said the Governor asked her age, which was late 20s. He responded, "You're too old for me" and then asked her what age difference between himself and another woman would be "acceptable to the public". The victim responded, "Probably older than your daughters." She stated that this encounter had made her feel so uncomfortable that next, she tried to deflect the conversation by making jokes about becoming his matchmaker. In this exchange, the victim decided that the best way to deflect the overture was to jokingly put herself in the position of helping him find someone to date (Investigation Report 2021:37). In a different encounter, Cuomo asked the same victim, Trooper #1, if he could kiss her. She stated of this encounter:

I remember just freezing, being—in the back of my head, I'm like, oh, how do I say no politely because in my head if I said no, he's going to take it out on the detail". Not

knowing how to respond in that moment, she replied, "Sure". (Investigation Report

2021:39)

Responses to harmful actions vary depending on many factors, including the type of

harm, location, and individual actors. Because sexual harassment is a harm that is done via

communication, communication is commonly used to respond to harassers by victims. However,

and as seen in this section, the verbal responses were most often communicated to deflect the

harassment as the victim tried to process simultaneously what she was experiencing.

Non-Verbal Responses to Sexual Harassment

While verbal responses are most common, victims also described non-verbal responses to

sexual harassment. For example, one of the victims at Ford participated in the narrative contest

with a non-verbal response by "dressing down" to try to avoid being the target of lewd

comments. Christie Van said she wore overalls to work in the hopes that it would discourage

sexual comments, however, she stated that the comments continued regardless

(Lipstickalley.com 2018). Indeed, not reacting to sexual harassment contributes to the narrative

contest. Executive Assistant #1 stated Cuomo once rubbed his hands on her back and asked her if

it felt good. She recalled, "freezing in place and not knowing what to say in response"

(Investigation Report 2021:21). She explained that she did not respond aggressively – pushing

him away or telling him stop - because she believed she would have been fired (Investigation

Report 2021:22). In another encounter where the former Governor cupped her breast, Assistant

#1 told the investigators:

> At that moment it was so quick, and he didn't say anything, and I just remember thinking
>
> to myself, oh my God, and I remember stopping and him not saying anything and I

remember I walked out, and he didn't say anything, and I didn't say anything.

(Investigation Report 2021:25)

Lindsey Boylan, another victim of Andrew Cuomo, claimed the former Governor said to her, after his dog scratched her, "Well, if I was the dog, I'd mount you too." Boylan discussed that remark, giving insight into her self-narrative as she was experiencing the verbal harassment:

I think I kind of would laugh awkwardly or something. I don't even know. Things were so far gone past appropriate at that point and there was no reaction to his deeply inappropriate things, and I didn't want to create problems for myself, and I didn't know what to do, so I would just try and not react. (Boylan, Investigation Report 2021:72)

In each of these incidents, the victims explained how their engagement in the narrative contest was performed by *not* responding with dialogue, which was potentially the safest way to respond. That is, their non-verbal response added to the co-construction of the narrative contest because *not* pushing Cuomo away or telling him he was inappropriate was a signal to the harasser that the victim accepted – at least in that moment – the action by the harasser.

Non-verbal responses may also be physical, as when victims physically try to get away from the harasser. The physical removal from a situation is meant to signal clearly to the harasser, "this is not okay." The following statement by one of Andrew Cuomo's victims, Executive Assistant #1, illustrates this type of unsaid narrative. After Cuomo hugged his victim very tight, she physically pulled part of her body away from his and stated in her interview that she had done so because she "didn't want any part of [her] body near his pelvic area" and "didn't want anything to do with whatever he was trying to do at that moment." Cuomo responded about this encounter to investigators and claimed that this victim was the "initiator of the hugs," and he "would go along" with tight hugs because he didn't "want to make anyone feel awkward about

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anything" (Cuomo, Investigation Report 2021:21), providing an example of how narrative contest can be altered with each co-author. In this example, Cuomo changed the narrative and placed the blame on the victim by casting himself as an innocent and reluctant participant in her hugs, only hugging back so she wouldn't feel awkward.

Victims' Experiences of Reduction

As previously discussed, harassers give themselves permission to harm though victim reduction. My analysis also found that victims in this project used self-reduction, as they explained their stories of harassment. Self-reduction was utilized by victims as a narrative method for explaining their powerlessness during the experience of sexual harassment, by painting a picture to the listener that they felt weak, small, or like they were objects, after their victimization. Christie Van stated of the sexual harassment at Ford:

> I just don't understand, why do women have to endure where we are just like a statistic, or just an art piece, just a magnet for a man to have his way and be able to do whatever he wants to do with us. (Lipstickalley.com 2018)

Van used self-reduction as she referred to herself and other victims as objects, mirroring how their harassers referred to them when they used victim-reduction in their permission to harass.

Victims also described themselves as being physically smaller or the space around them being physically reduced as a result of the sexual harassment experiences. A victim named in the Cuomo investigation, State Entity Employee #1, testified that she "was really shocked" by the Governor grabbing her butt. As she explained:

> I felt deflated, and I felt disrespected, and I felt much like smaller and almost younger than I actually am because kind of the funny part of it all is I was making this project happen. (Investigation Report 2021:94)

From the Ford sexual harassment case, Miyoshi Morris, stated, "You have to force yourself into a place of not feeling anything, of not having any emotion, to exist" (Chira and Einhorn 2017). Also from Ford, Suzette Wright stated:

> It just was way, way, way, way too much. Each time that I was taking it, again and again, it just felt like more of me diminishing, just getting smaller until it was just like a shell of a person. (Chira and Einhorn 2017)

The use of self-reduction in these statements was significant to the narrative contest. Victims conceived of themselves and the space around them as becoming smaller, creating in their minds a literal self-reduction. Thus, while victim reduction is usually done by harassers to avoid seeing the target as fully human, making it easier to harm the target, when victims reduced themselves in this project, they presented themselves as non-human, small, or feeling "closed in" in physical space, almost like a child would feel if they were afraid of something powerful or scary to them.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the onset of sexual harassment and the initial response by victims, which also introduces the start of the narrative contest of sexual harassment. Plummer (2019:30) states, "narratives live on hierarchical relations of domination and subordination." Each experience – the sexual harassment and the start of the narrative contest – was grounded in the hierarchical relations between the victim and the harasser, as evidenced by the victim's initial attempts to cope with the harassment out of fear of losing their jobs. In the two cases I used for this project, involving former Governor of New York Andrew Cuomo and Ford Motor Company, it was evident that the victims had concerns about trying to stop the harassment with firm vocal responses like "stop" or warnings that they would report the harasser. Many victims

stated they were worried about losing their jobs because their harasser had power over their jobs or because harassment was normalized in the workplace. As a result, the victims employed various coping strategies in their engagement in the narrative contest by either playing along, laughing it off, changing the subject, or physically getting away from the harasser without utilizing a verbal response.

In the next chapter, I present results concerning *how* narratives are storied. I report on how victims, harassers, and bystanders tailor their narratives of sexual harassment to emphasize particular elements of the harassment story based on what outcome each is trying to achieve. Specifically, I focus on epistemic injustice and victim believability, and storytelling challenges that hinder victims' stories of harassment. This chapter examines the victims' statements as they performed self-talk in their minds during harassment encounters. Victims' expectations that they would not be believed was a common explanation for not reporting harassment. In these statements, the victims themselves were not viewed as credible.

The storytelling challenges that victims encountered when reporting sexual harassment also revealed how explaining sexual harassment was thwarted in two different ways depending on the location: the comments were not obviously harassment, so victims' stories were not believed; and sexual harassment was so engrained in the workplace norms that even obvious violations were not taken seriously. These differences emerged based on the physical location of the harassment. Subtly was used in the harassing actions and comments by Andrew Cuomo, and brazen, inappropriate actions and comments were done by harassers at Ford. In the following chapter, I unpack each of these types of harassment performances.

Chapter 8. The Stepwise Nature of Sexual Harassment and Narrative Inequalities

This chapter focuses on *how* stories of sexual harassment are told by victims of sexual harassment as they try to tell a believable story to others while navigating the storytelling obstacles that stem from the stepwise nature of sexual harassment. Specifically, I examine two main obstacles for victims when they report: *victim credibility* and storytelling challenges that hinder *story credibility*. Victims face difficulties when attempting to report sexual harassment to authorities and these difficulties stem from power, epistemic injustice, and problems of believability because of the way sexual harassment is done or who sexual harassment is done by. When sexual harassment is done by someone powerful, victim credibility may be at stake if she tries to report the harassment, especially in the absence of witnesses.

Epistemic injustice is at play when victims are not believed because of their gender and race, and when the accused is in a more powerful position than the victim. In addition, sexual harassment is frequently perpetrated gradually, starting with small compliments before becoming more direct. I refer to this as the stepwise nature of sexual harassment because the harasser has unrolled the assault in such a way as to challenge, preemptively, reading the various encounters as anything less than normal. This approach to sexual harassment performance prevents victims from always recognizing the harm initially, and while they can explain each encounter, the challenge is for them to arrive at a story of harassment that the listener will recognize as harassment and believe.

This chapter first observes occurrences of unbelievability, which centers around how some *people* are regarded as not credible and therefore, are not believed. I examine the victim's narratives as they discussed their concerns about being believed by others in the workplace about their stories of sexual harassment. The second section examines storytelling challenges that can

cause certain *stories* to be regarded as not credible. I found that the storytelling challenges contribute to three major barriers for victims, especially in the absence of witnesses, which is commonly the case with sexual harassment: (1) uncertainty if it was sexual harassment and if it should be reported because of the slow progression of comments; (2) uncertainty as to whether it was sexual harassment and should be reported, due to the normalization of workplace sexual harassment, and (3) the harasser's ready ability to provide a counternarrative to the victim's complaint of sexual harassment. Thus, this chapter documents the challenges victims encounter when explaining the sexual harassment experiences to others, either because they are personally not believed or because their story is not believed.

Victim Credibility

The power dynamic between the harasser and the victim, which is shaped by gender, social class, economic power, age, or race, creates a "narrative inequality" (Plummer, 2019:16) during the narrative contest, where the higher status speaker is likely to be believed over the lower status speaker. This section examines the challenges of credibility and who is believed when sexual harassment is reported, which is grounded in the concepts of epistemic injustice and intersectionality. As discussed in Chapter 4, victims who report sexual harassment are often not believed by bystanders and even supervisors. In addition, when certain organizations make known that they accept certain harassing behaviors, victims may assume they will not be believed if they make an accusation of sexual harassment. The victims in my analysis were no different as they described their concerns about reporting sexual harassment, stating that they perceived they would not be believed by their supervisors or bystanders. As Whitley and Page

(2015:43) claim, "When a woman files an objection to sexual harassment, she becomes in the language of the institution, a woman who complains, and by extension, a complainer."

After the sexual harassment experience and before filing a formal or informal complaint, victims usually engage in self-dialogue as they grapple with the decision to report or keep the harassment quiet because of many fears, including being persecuted for complaining. For example, the former Governor, Andrew Cuomo took one of his victims, Lindsey Boylan, into a room where he closed the door behind him and showed her a cigar box that former President Bill Clinton had given to him. This incident was significant to the victim because she took it as a reference to Clinton's publicly outed affair with Monica Lewinsky while he was in office. Boylan explained her thoughts during that encounter:

> The Governor must have sensed my fear because he finally let me out of the office. I tried to rationalize this incident in my head. At least he didn't touch me…. (Boylan, Medium.com 2021)

As this encounter could have easily been explained by Cuomo as innocent, Boylan explains how she talked herself out of reporting this incident by telling herself that it could have been worse.

Self-talk often involves victims asking themselves if their story seems believable and taking stock of the workplace culture to determine if sexual harassment is normalized by others. In the following statements, the victims described their self-talk to the interviewers, explaining that they instinctively knew they would not be believed by others in their workplace. Recalling the example in Chapter 6 which described how the former Governor brushed his hand between one of his employee's breasts in public, after this occurred, this employee described her concerns about being believed by others as she "talked to herself" about what to do. She stated:

… [she felt] Trepidation and fear . . . how do you explain to someone what the Governor did in public, such an egregious act, heinous act. I was very fearful . . . how does someone believe that this happened to me? (Investigation Report 2021:100)

Suzette Wright from Ford likewise described her concerns about being believed and the consequences for speaking out:

I knew there was a tone already set for women who brought allegations. You almost knew you weren't going to be believed…. Some people absolutely knew it was true because they had experienced the same thing…. (Gunderson 2018)

Wright explains her concerns about being believed with past evidence that others who reported harassment before her were not believed and instead, were further victimized. As chapter 4 revealed, bystanders are usually aware of sexual harassment, but often turn a blind eye or may even side with the harasser.

Some bystanders confirmed victims' concerns about not being believed when they testified that they were surprised about the allegations of sexual harassment. After Charlotte Bennett came forward with accusations of inappropriate comments from Cuomo, where she claimed he asked about her sexual partners and told her that he wanted to "be touched," she told investigators:

I didn't think any person I had talked to at any point, as nice as they were, were going to protect me from anything at all at any point . . .. Well, I certainly expected to lose my job, and that was a real possibility is what I told my parents. (Bennett, Investigation Report 2021:61)

Bennett's concerns were validated as her supervisor, Melissa DeRosiers, testified during the investigation that she was "shocked" by the allegations. DesRosiers stated that she "had doubts"

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about Bennett's story because it "seemed crazy". In one of her statements to the investigators, DesRosiers stated that she "wondered what else had gotten lost in transition," conveying that Bennett had simply misunderstood the former Governor's comments. In addition, when asked if she thought the former Governor would have ever "hit on" Bennett, DesRosiers stated, "not for a second" (Bennett Transcript 2021:372-377). Ultimately, Bennett was transferred to a different unit, as she had predicted in her statement above. Indeed, these statements from the victim's supervisor describe exactly why the stepwise nature of sexual harassment may harm victim believability, as bystanders and officials may interpret each incident in isolation and as innocuous or a misunderstanding.

Stepwise Nature of Sexual Harassment and Storytelling Challenges

Even if the victim of sexual harassment is credible to others in the workplace, her story may not seem credible. Storytelling challenges may obstruct the ability to tell a coherent story of victimization, causing the victim's story to fall apart. Stories of harassment can break down and come across as too fragmented when victims try to piece together a single story of harassment based on multiple incidents. In my analysis, I found two distinct causes for storytelling challenges that stemmed from the stepwise nature of sexual harassment: defendable comments and normalization of harassment.

The first challenge stemmed from the slow progression of defendable comments. Defendable comments were most often described in the Cuomo case, where his victims were white and middle-class, suggesting that harassers may perceive that a more subtle approach is necessary to avoid resistance in particular workplace settings. Andrew Cuomo's victims reported that his harassment was measured, and most of his comments or gestures were made in isolation,

meaning Cuomo's stepwise approach to sexual harassment could have been explained by him as innocent banter.

The second storytelling challenge stemmed from the normalization of workplace sexual harassment, causing stories of harassment to be disregarded. This most often occurred in the Ford case, where the victim's uncertainty of how to tell the story of sexual harassment came from the workplace tolerance of sexual harassment, which was so common that it had become normalized, causing complaints to go unheard. Moreover, the harassment at Ford was not only overlooked by supervisors, but some supervisors participated in the harassing behaviors.

To illustrate an example of each type of stepwise performance, one of the victims at Ford was told by her supervisor, "I want to screw you so bad" (Chira and Einhorn 2017). In contrast, a victim of Andrew Cuomo, named State Trooper #1, testified that Cuomo said, "Why don't you wear a dress?" (Investigation Report 2021:31). In both cases, the victims stated that the harassers made inappropriate comments, but at Ford, the harasser's comment was clearly sexual, however ignored by supervisors, whereas, while Cuomo's comment *was* sexual, it something he could explain as an innocent question. The statements in this section show how the victims were constructing their stories internally as they tried to figure out 1) how to tell a coherent story that would "count" as sexual harassment or 2) talked themselves out of reporting because they could not figure out how to construct a convincing story.

Slow Progression of Defendable Comments: Challenging Victims' Stories

When sexual harassment begins as a simple compliment before turning into more aggressive advances, it can "sneak up" on the victim who suddenly realizes she is being harassed. Ahmed (2021) refers to this process of a slow buildup of sexually harassing comments or behaviors as "grooming," which is when a person doesn't make "the end clear until it is too

late" (p. 112). One of Cuomo's victims, Charlotte Bennett described this slow buildup with her experience of harassment, claiming that the questions and comments started out inappropriately, but not egregious at first, but then escalated (Bennett, Investigation Report 2021:11). This statement from victim Charlotte Bennett responds to a question from investigators concerning Cuomo's comments about her appearance:

> He asked like why I was like all dressed up. It would be like sunny outside…and he would ask me why I was wearing cold weather shoes. He went out of his way to comment on my hair…all of these isolated incidents, I felt like you could brush them under the rug…[but] this was a moment in which I was like that's sexual harassment, and I like very well understood what was happening at the moment. (Bennett Transcript 2021:135-136)

This statement explains exactly how problematic sexual harassment can be for victims when trying to explain their experiences to others. While the victim *knew* Cuomo's comments were inappropriate, she also stated that she understood that telling a supervisor that he had commented on her cold-weather shoe choice on certain warm days would be brushed off as normal banter. Even when explaining this to the investigator, her explanation of how hard it is to describe was part of the narrative she was constructing. In effect, she stated that telling a believable story was challenging.

Another victim, Alyssa McGrath, of Andrew Cuomo explained that the workplace "culture" tolerated sexual harassment, stating:

> [W]hat makes it so hard to describe every single inappropriate incident is the culture of the place. On the one hand, he makes all this inappropriate and creepy behavior normal and like you should not complain. On the other hand, you see people get punished and

screamed at if you do anything where you disagree with him or his top aides. (McGrath,

Investigation Report 2021:9-10)

This statement by McGrath reveals that they (the victims) all understood that each incident was

defendable by Cuomo if taken in isolation. In this example, both types of storytelling challenges

were described. Here, the slow progression of defendable comments *and* the normalization of

workplace sexual harassment were impediments to storytelling. As Bennett described the

workplace culture, she stated that the Governor was "creepy" and that he had created an entirely

inappropriate office culture that each employee understood they must "go along with" or be

punished by getting yelled at, which paints the picture of a schoolyard with toddlers who lose

their tempers, rather than a high-profile, professional, government office.

Normalization of Workplace Sexual Harassment: Challenging Victims' Stories

At the Ford plant, the culture of harassment was conspicuous and known to everyone

employed, so the uncertainty surrounding the "if it counts" bar was very low for victims. That is,

what would easily be considered sexual harassment in another workplace was normalized and

ignored at Ford. In addition, victims made statements about being lucky to have the opportunity

to work at Ford, so they willingly tolerated many injustices. There, the harmful experiences

would need to be *very* egregious to "count" enough for victims to report the harassment. Suzette

Wright, a 23-year-old single mother, who, when offered the job in 1993, described her

willingness to tolerate bad behavior as she stated that she was "crazy insane elated." Her salary

tripled and she could potentially earn $70,000 annually – "an incentive to put up with a lot"

(Chira and Einhorn 2017). Suzette Wright also initially minimized harassment, rather than

risking her job, by stating that the older men were born in a "different time" which caused them

to be unaware that what they were doing was sexual harassment and contributed to the

uncertainty for some victims about whether they should report some experiences or "give a pass". She stated:

> Honestly, it's because I don't think some people don't realize what sexual harassment is. It might be the older guys who were born in a time where – especially when I was there – there were people who grew up in the '50s and had a different understanding of what the workplace was. They felt like it was us barging in on their territory, and they had a certain view of women anyway. (Gunderson 2018)

In addition to giving the harasser a "pass" for bad behavior, this statement by Wright also illuminates the continuation of sex-role spillover in certain organizations. Sex-role spillover suggests that when women work in an organization that was formerly dominated by men, such as manufacturing plants, they may risk sexual harassment victimization because they are deviating from the traditional gender-based expectations for feminine behavior (Gutek 1985). From a narrative perspective, Wright stated that the harms she and other victims at Ford endured were real, while also offering an excuse for the harassers which provides insight into why she did not initially report the harm. Her explanation reveals that these offenses, while sexual harassment, were not any worse than other bad behaviors in that workplace, so reporting the harassment was not worth the potential consequences she would face, not the harasser.

The above statements illustrate how the victims understood that the sexual harassment encounters were difficult to coherently explain, either because of the defendable comments or the inappropriate workplace culture. Because of this, the victims constructed their stories as explanations of why it was hard to explain the sexual harassment experiences. Because of the real or perceived difficulties explaining a coherent story of harassment, victims "gave a pass" to their harassers. While the threshold for harassment was different between the two workplaces,

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both accepted some level of harassing behaviors. In Governor Cuomo's office, the harassment was more discrete, and at Ford, the behaviors that most individuals in any other workplace would consider as harassment, were tolerated by victims out of fear of losing their jobs.

Stepwise Approach to Sexual Harassment Supports Harassers' Counternarratives

Once sexual harassment allegations have been made, counternarratives are frequently aimed at obstructing the victim's story. My analysis revealed multiple ways that harassers defended themselves against allegations of sexual harassment: making themselves the victim, denying the accusation, and accusing the victim of wrongdoing. When sexual harassment is performed in a stepwise manner, harassers can more easily counter the victims' accusations, as opposed to incidents of quid pro quo harassment.

Paradoxically, harassers will use their positions of power to harass others, but if accused of harassment, will convey a position of powerlessness by changing the narrative to places *themselves* in the victim role, as someone who is being unfairly targeted. This maneuver of changing positions from powerful to being a victim bears a resemblance to neutralizations and drift, discussed in Chapter 3, which observes that offenders may try to neutralize their guilt to others by crafting a narrative about the harmful event that reduces or eliminates their culpability, allowing them to move back and forth between moral and deviant behavior (Matza 1964). This narrative maneuver to change the offenders' status from powerful to powerless demonstrates how consequential discourse is to sexual harassment and follows Presser's (2013:117) claim that power and powerlessness are "discursively formed, regardless of the speaker's *real* social position. The former Governor counters claims of harassment by speaking of his powerlessness in a taped statement that was aired on August 3rd, 2021, after accusations of sexual harassment emerged from his former employees, stating:

It has been a hard and a painful period for me and my family. Especially as others feed

ugly stories to the press, but I cooperated with the review, and I can now finally share the

truth. (nbcnewyork.com 2021)

In this example, Cuomo is creating a narrative about narratives. His narrative is about stories that

others have told about his power; however, he reconstructs the story to portray himself as the

victim. He also tells his audience that his narrative *is* the truth which, by default, informs the

audience that the victims' statements are false.

Counternarratives by harassers, either stated by the harasser or recalled by the victim,

were similarly constructed in both cases for this project. At Ford, harassers' responses were often

aggressive and served as warnings to the victims to keep quiet. In the Cuomo case, the

counternarratives were often accounts of innocent compliments or denials. As Blagden et al.,

(2014) states, individuals who are accused of sexual offenses often use denials to maintain a

moral persona with others and to avoid ostracism. Unfortunately, when sexual harassment has

stopped because victims have made a complaint, the same victims are often thrust into another

traumatic experience from the harasser and bystanders who create counternarratives to her story

of harassment. These counternarratives serve to systematically damage her reputation via rumors

that she is lying, stating that she is oversensitive and misunderstood the encounter(s), or by

asserting that she was the one who instigated the questionable interactions with the harasser.

The following is an example that highlights how the harasser can easily provide a

counternarrative to a complaint. Andrew Cuomo made comments to his aid, Charlotte Bennett,

about her shorts when she came into work on a weekend, telling her she looked like Daisy Duke

(a reference to a 70's television show where the lead actress wore very short shorts). During the

sexual harassment investigation, the interviewer asked Cuomo about those comments, saying, "do you remember telling her she looks like Daisy Duke?" and Cuomo replied:

> Yeah, I remember her wearing jean shorts which, frankly, I thought were a little inappropriate in the office. And I said something like, 'Oh, so what are you wearing Daisy Duke shorts today?' Not that she would know who Daisy Duke was, because I think Daisy Duke must be like, 110 now. But just to register a little bit about the shorts because I thought they were a little inappropriate. (Cuomo Transcript 2021:278)

In this exchange, the former governor admitted to the comment, but changed the narrative from the victim's accusation of having been harassed by him, to instead portray that *he* was troubled by her outfit because she was dressed inappropriately. Cuomo's counternarrative put himself in a victim position by stating that the victim had made him uncomfortable, which completely changed her narrative of being sexually harassed. This response demonstrates the ease for some harassers to turn a complaint against them into a narrative that portrays themselves as innocent, and the victim as misunderstanding, lying or in this case, even being the wrongdoer.

Blaming the victim and impeding her story of harassment can be even more detrimental when done publicly, and especially when the public platform is a national news outlet for all public consumers to witness. This public "outing" of sexual harassment broadcasts the harasser's version of the story, not the victim's version, and results in both actors foregoing any privacy surrounding the accusation and resolution of the sexual harassment allegation. During his press conference addressing the sexual harassment claims, Cuomo offered a blanket counter-narrative to render all of his victims' stories untellable by asserting they were lying. Cuomo cued listeners to not only disbelieve the victims, but to be angry with them for lying:

I understand these dynamics. My father used to say, God rest his soul, that politics is an

ugly business. As usual he was right…. And for those who are using this moment to score

political points or seek publicity or personal gain, I say they actually discredit the

legitimate sexual harassment victims that the law was designed to protect.

(nbcnewyork.com 2021)

Cuomo executed multiple narrative maneuvers in the statement above. He not only countered the

victims' narratives, but shamed them publicly, attempting to render their stories as not credible

by sharing his altered narrative on a national media stage. He also attempted to turn other victims

of sexual harassment against his victims, claiming that his victims were lying for personal gain,

which in the end, hurts "legitimate victims" of sexual harassment. He changed the narrative of

sexual harassment to one that positioned all of his victims as the villains of the story, casting

himself as both victim and hero.

Institutional Impacts: Neglect and Performative Empathy

As discussed in Chapter 2, "organizational conditions are the most powerful predictors of

sexual harassment" (Fitzgerald and Cortina 2018:12). In my analysis, institutions shaped

victims' storytelling in two discernible ways: (1) they ignored sexual harassment; or (2) they

created insincere pathways for victims to be heard. Creating insincere pathways for sexual

harassment victims is a type of performative empathy (Ahmed 2021), which gives the

appearance that sexual harassment is prohibited, but in reality, the institution is not engaging in

the process to help victims or sanction harassers. Institutional harm through inaction of sanctions

for harassers was stated by victims in this project as they recounted their experiences with

institutional representatives and their lack of support to their sexual harassment claims. This

section unpacks how some institutions publicly condemn sexual harassment while also – in practice – work to silence women who endeavor to report harassment.

Institutions may informally support sexual harassment in multiple ways, including confusing procedures of reporting, or unclear policies; the *appearance* of listening to victims; or through silencing, when the institution tells the victim they cannot speak about the harm during an investigation either informally, with a verbal warning, or formally with non-disclosure agreements (Ahmed 2021). In addition, supervisors or may ignore or brush off claims of harassment. While most organizations have policies about sexual harassment, the reality is that the decades-old harassment myths endure, and the lack of procedures or sanctions continue to "give permission" to do harm, or to turn a blind eye when harassment is known in an organization. When victims encounter any of these barriers, their ability to tell their story of harassment can be obstructed. This informal support of the harasser was seen by an attorney who was special counsel to the former Governor, Andrew Cuomo, who thwarted one of Cuomo's victims, Lindsey Bennett, regarding her accusation of sexual harassment, by telling her that her claims did not "rise to the level of sexual harassment" (Investigation Report 2021:61).

Institutional culture in both workplace locations under analysis, Ford, and the former Governor's office, permitted and sustained sexual harassment experiences by obstructing the victims' ability to file reports or refusing to help when victims try to report. Moreover, union representatives at Ford, the individuals who were supposed to aid victims who reported harm, created confusion for victims about "what counted" as sexual harassment. In fact, one employee, whose role was to investigate complaints at Ford said, "Our policy at Ford, told to us by our bosses — that I didn't agree with — was if there are no witnesses, there is nothing you can do" (Chira and Einhorn 2017). Another union official at Ford filed a legal suit against the company

alleging that Ford management not only opposed him helping victims but retaliated against him when he tried. He claimed that a senior manager said, "Your people better stop complaining" (Chira and Einhorn 2017). Another victim from Ford, Tonya Exum, recalled after being groped by a co-worker, that her union representative said, "It's not sexual harassment. He only did it one time" (Lipstickalley.com 2018).

When the institution creates a difficult or confusing path for reporting, the victim may choose not to speak out of fear of telling the wrong person. As Ahmed (2021:31) states, "if you can't locate the procedure, you do not know how to proceed. You can stop something by making it hard to use." Virginia Limmiatis referred to confusion about how to report Cuomo's inappropriate touching:

He is lying again. He touched me inappropriately. I am compelled to come forward to tell the truth. I do not know how to report what he did to me—I didn't know how to report what he did to me at the time and was burdened by shame, but not coming forward now would make me complicit in his lie, and I won't do it. (Limmiatis, Investigation Report 2021:101)

Institutions can also fail to act against harassment incidents with the illusion of listening to the victim. Sara Ahmed (2021) refers to this process of pretend listening as "nodding," where the victim tells her story to someone in a position to help (human recourses, supervisors, etc.), and the listener nods their head literally or figuratively to indicate they hear and understand the victim, but the gesture is performed simply to placate the victim so the complaint will not go forward and the victim will feel like the institution heard her. For example, after one of Cuomo's victims, Charlotte Bennett, came forward about sexual harassment, she had a call with two senior staffers in her office, where it seemed that they "heard and sympathized" with her experience,

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but at the end of the conversation, they talked her out of filing a formal complaint. During this

call, she was scared about reporting the harassment and was trying to be agreeable so no one

would consider her a threat (Investigation Report 2021:61-62):

> **Supervisor**: Ok I want to get your mind at ease. I am very familiar with the handbook. I
>
> have read through my notes and reviewed the law, and it sounds like based on what you
>
> shared that while there were conversations that became too personal and uncomfortable
>
> that most of your interactions were appropriate and that once the conversations became
>
> uncomfortable you took control of the situation…The conduct you described does not
>
> rise to the level of harassment and no further inquiry appears to be necessary at this time.
>
> Do you agree with what I just said?
>
> **Bennett:** Yes. And it's a relief. I was worried that he [Andrew Cuomo] would be mad he
>
> is a powerful person. But yes, agree with what you described.
>
> **Supervisor:** And from what you described would you say that most of your interactions
>
> were positive and support and that you considered [Andrew Cuomo] a friend.
>
> **Bennett:** Yes, and I still consider him my friend.
>
> **Supervisor:** You are very courageous.

This interaction displays how the victim's supervisors appeared to understand and sympathize

with her, as they praised her for her courage. The supervisors also asked questions in a way that

highlighted the victim's positive interactions, rather than the negative interactions between her

and the harasser, and thus concluded that no action needed to be taken. Put differently, instead of

asking if some interactions were inappropriate, they asked if most interactions were positive.

While supervisors chose not to disclose Cuomo's victim's allegations, as the

investigation reported, the rules in the New York State Employee Handbook states, "Any

supervisory or managerial employee who observes or otherwise becomes aware of conduct of a

sexually harassing nature must report such conduct so that it can be investigated" (Goer.ny.gov,

2021). This decision not to disclose the allegations of sexual harassment follows Ahmed's (2021)

assertion that "power can be understood as the right to suspend what is binding for others…the

ease with which procedures can be suspended teaches us how institutions are reproduced" (p.

48). An unidentified staff member substantiated this notion when she stated the following

regarding the case with Cuomo and Bennett, "What's crazy is if you or I did what is alleged

we'd be fired on the spot no questions asked . . . and it would be the right thing too"

(Investigation Report 2021:12).

At the Ford plant, victims also reported experiences of "nodding." As Gwajuana Gray

stated of some of the supervisors who harassed women:

> Sometimes when these supervisors get caught, they just send them to another plant. You
>
> have to understand, hourly and salaried employees get treated differently. If something
>
> happens with an hourly person, it hits the floor right away. Salaried, you don't hear about
>
> it…. (Gunderson 2018)

Here, the "nodding" was the physical relocation of the harasser to another plant, without losing

any pay or status, but was meant to signal to the victim that the company had heard her

complaint and had taken steps to rectify the problem. Another victim at Ford, LaWanda Jordan

said that Ford hid behind privacy protections and would not let victims know the end results to

investigations of harassment. Instead, she stated "[they] were told it's been handled. The case has

been closed; we can't discuss it" (Chira and Einhorn 2017). In this case, Ford representatives

appeared to resolve the harassment complaint, however, how it was resolved was unknown. At

the same time, the Ford representatives silenced the victims by refusing to discuss the

allegations. Again, in the Cuomo case versus the Ford case, interactions by harassers, bystanders and the institution showed stark differences. Likewise, professional outcomes for many of the victims - real or projected - were categorically similar (e.g., termination), however, specific outcomes may have been different because of the greater resources of the middle-class women.

Chapter Summary

Ahmed (2021:34) explains that "the harder the experience, the harder it is to express a complaint." This difficulty is compounded when the harm committed is also difficult to explain because the harm is not always obvious but is sometimes stepwise. Victim credibility and story credibility have very real impacts on individuals who are involved in conflict. Whether not able to adequately tell their side of the story because each incident seemed mundane in isolation, not being sure themselves if the encounters should "count" as harassment because of the workplace culture, or because the victim's side of the story is obstructed by harassers and bystanders, victims of sexual harassment often have an uphill battle to face if they choose to report, after already having been subjected to the harassment itself. This battle after reporting is often because the victim must create a compelling story that others will believe. As this chapter illustrated and as Ahmed (2021) claims, reporting harassment can make victims feel like they are "being harassed all over again, becoming subjected to another's will" (pp. 44-45). An additional finding in this chapter revealed that Cuomo used subtle maneuvers of sexual harassment, rather than the blatant, direct harassment that was done at Ford, suggesting that subtlety may be necessary to "get away with" harassment of relatively privileged women.

The next and final results chapter will bring the narratives of victims, harassers, bystanders, and institutions together to illustrate how the narrative contest is never only between

the victim and harasser, but also includes other actors. This chapter focuses on transcripts from

multiple actors regarding the same complaints of harassment, but also illustrates that the

narrative contest can include what goes unsaid. I will first examine some examples of common

narrative co-constructions, including an example of how others literally helped co-construct a

harasser's counter narrative as he went on the offensive publicly against his harassers, to

illustrate the power influence that others can have on a narrative contest. The next sections of

this chapter are laid out by incident or victim/harasser statements that "go together," including

any bystander statements that were made public about the same incidents, to illuminate the

variety narratives by different actors about the same harassment event. Finally, I will examine

how unsaid things are a vital part of the narrative contest. This analysis unpacks how a multitude

of voices can alter the narrative of sexual harassment depending on the speaker, the audience,

and the platform available, and how these factors can have implications on whose story is

ultimately believed.

Chapter 9. Narrative Contest

This final results chapter examines the narratives of harassers, victims, and bystanders, each who are commenting on the same sexual harassment experience, to understand how the narrative changes depending on the speaker through continuous embellishments as more actors become involved in its construction. Here, narrative criminology and narrative victimology come together as the experiences of harassers and victims are presented together, as narratives and counternarratives. As examined in Chapter 3, when victims share stories of sexual harassment, harassers often challenge the accusations by returning blame to the victim. That is, harassers change the narrative that says they inflicted intentional harm and invite others "buy into" their story of innocence. While narratives during and after sexual harassment are commonly considered to be one person's story against another's, the reality is that many different actors play a role in the narrative, even if some actors were not directly involved in the interactions between the harasser and victim.

As the story of sexual harassment unfolds in a workplace, bystanders may hear one version and retell that story to others based on their own opinions of the victim or harasser, and this retelling will continue within the workplace creating altered versions of the original narrative. In addition, the institution may intervene in the narrative contest if an investigation is needed. Eventually, the original story of sexual harassment becomes a "living story" (Plummer 2019:138), with a life of its own, and may no longer resemble the actual experience by the victim or harasser. For example, Suzette Wright, from Ford, claimed that a mentor at Ford joked about giving her $5 for oral sex. When Wright reported this to her union representative, the representative started a "don't-file-a-claim-against-Bill" campaign, outing the victim's accusation to others in the plant in order to thwart her story of harassment. The representative did

this as a form of preemptive retaliation to help the accused who could have potentially been fired and lost his benefits. Subsequently, Wright's narrative of sexual harassment was taken over by friends of the harasser who spread rumors about her relationship with the harasser, suggesting that they were consensually intimate (Chira and Einhorn 2017). This example illustrates how the victim's narrative of harassment was not only altered by others, but completely transformed. While often, and throughout this project, sexual harassment narratives shift to cast the victim as confused about what she thinks she experienced, this counternarrative cast the victim as a willing participant in a sexual relationship with the harasser who was lying about the harassment.

The following sections will examine the narrative contest. I will begin with some common narrative co-constructions that were revealed in my analysis and move to the back and forth between the harasser and the victim as the narrative contest unfolds. I will then introduce the "others" who participate, including bystanders, intuitional representatives, and the media. Finally, I will examine an important aspect of the narrative contest that occurs when parts of that narrative go unsaid, as bystanders or institutions look the other way. When silence is the response to an accusation, that silence becomes a very specific counternarrative to the victim's narrative.

Active Participation in the Harasser's Narrative

Counternarratives by harassers in response to sexual harassment accusations can alter the victim's story by suggesting that the victim is mistaken or lying and simultaneously serve to reestablish the harasser's innocence and moral self to others. When played out publicly in the media, these counternarratives can be expressed as feigned sympathy for the victim (e.g., "I am sorry for her pain, but she misunderstood"), so the harasser can gain the public's support through

polite or veiled victim-blaming to maintain his public persona and likability. Indeed, the narratives of men who have been accused of harms like sexual harassment are significantly motivated by the outcome they want to achieve. As McAdams (2006:111) explains, "a teller narrates or performs a story in a social context, to or for an audience."

In addition, the narrative contest in high-profile cases, such as the case with the former Governor, Andrew Cuomo, may also involve legal teams who co-author the sexual harassment narrative as they work to exonerate the person implicated by the claims. The following statement from one of Cuomo's top advisors illustrates how others on his team helped him craft his story of innocence and contest the victim's story of harassment, while trying to maintain his public persona and likability. One of Cuomo's advisors stated that his team felt the Governor had "screwed up" after the sexual harassment allegations and "[he] needed to project contrition" because "this was really about him needing to go out there and really express that he knew he had screwed up" (Investigation Report 2021:113). This led the Governor to make the remarks below at a subsequent press conference that was originally about the Covid-19 efforts in New York, but Cuomo used the opportunity of being on national television to add remarks about the sexual harassment allegations at the end of the press conference:

> I now understand that I acted in a way that made people feel uncomfortable. It was unintentional, and I truly and deeply apologize for it. I feel awful about it, and frankly, I am embarrassed by it…. But this is what I want you to know…I never touched anyone inappropriately. I never touched anyone inappropriately. I never knew at the time that I was making anyone feel uncomfortable. I never knew at the time I was making anyone feel uncomfortable. And I certainly never ever meant to offend anyone, or hurt anyone, or cause anyone any pain. (Rev.com 2021)

Unsurprisingly, Cuomo used denial to respond to the allegations of sexual harassment, and to maintain his public persona as a well-respected Governor of New York. In this statement, he constructed his counternarrative of sexual harassment, based on advice from his advisors, to portray himself as someone who simply misunderstood and may have said something inappropriate, but his behavior was innocent. The cadence and repetition were interesting as Cuomo repeated two phrases twice during that speech, using his mediated power to drive the point that he was innocent.

During that press conference, Cuomo's advisors took notes about his story, texting to one another, "and now he is not sounding contrite so let's get back to that…tone is not contrite" and also discussed the "spin" that his narrative needed to take, texting, "I think he needs to say he is going to counseling for his tendency to be aggressive and to reacclimate how he interacts with people. AG report may find no offense but will find inappropriate behavior so why not get out ahead of this now. So, the pattern of all these allegations is addressed with this effort for counseling and training" (Investigation Report 2021:114).

These text exchanges illustrate how multiple individuals were actively involved in the construction of the former Governor's narrative, including members of the press and attorneys who could guide him specifically, based knowledge they had with the law and press coverage, giving him an advantage over his victims who were not in a position to necessarily afford co-constructors, or media airtime, to present their narratives to the public. Throughout the Cuomo investigation into sexual harassment, he maintained this team of experts to help him with his public addresses, which most perpetrators of sexual harassment do not have access to, making this a truly unique narrative contest, heavily weighted on the side of the harasser.

When narratives are mediated, they create instant dissemination of stories, which can be accomplished through social media and other similar platforms. However, access to the national media and news networks, provides a platform that is not available to most individuals. Cuomo's public address was made possible because of his political power, which he used to counter the victim's story of harassment to all viewers who watched. As this chapter unfolds, I will demonstrate how additional "others" become involved, beginning with bystanders who may participate in the narrative contest through their silence and inaction.

Public Retaliation: Cuomo vs. Boylan

As previously examined, harassers in positions of power may use others to help harass their victims. In an exchange which included bystanders in Cuomo's office, one of Cuomo's top aids, Stephanie Benton emailed Lindsey Boylan, telling her that Cuomo said to pass a message along to Boylan, "he said look up Lisa Shields. You could be sisters. Except you're the better-looking sister" and subsequently, Boylan stated that Cuomo continued to refer to her as "Lisa" (Boylan, Investigation Report 2021:67). Boylan stated to investigators about this exchange:

> I thought it was really brazen that that was in an email, and I think more than anything what was unsettling to me was that this was communicated…by a woman on his staff . . .. I've been sexually harassed throughout my career, but not in a way where the whole environment was set up to feed the predator and this and every interaction I had with the Governor and the culture felt like it was all to feed the predator. (Boylan, Investigation Report 2021:67)

When Benton was asked about this email, she had sent that passed along Cuomo's comments, she recalled the exchange, but did not recall the comment about Boylan being the

"better looking sister". Cuomo also denied having made the comment about being the "better looking sister" stating that he "was not comfortable comparing the attractiveness of two women" (Cuomo, Investigation Report 2021:68).

Boylan claimed there were other sexual harassment experiences between herself and Cuomo, including an incident on a flight in the Governor's plane where he said to her, "let's play strip poker" (Investigation Report 2021:4). After Boylan made an accusation about this encounter, the "Executive Chamber" released a statement from the other staffers who were on that flight who stated, "we were on each of these October flights and this conversation did not happen" (Investigation Report 2021:70). However, one of the individuals on the same flight, who denied that Cuomo had asked to play strip poker, later testified that he did recall the governor making that statement to Boylan, illustrating that Cuomo had convinced others to aid him by contributing to *his version* of the narrative contest.

The narrative contest escalated after Lindsey Boylan's claims of sexual harassment against the former Governor, Cuomo were made public. Some of Cuomo's top advisors, with his input, wrote an op-ed against Boylan and circulated it among many of the staff in the office to get input as it went through multiple drafts. The letter contained complaints about Boylan that were in her confidential file and countered her allegations against Cuomo, asserting her accusation against him was politically motivated. While it was ultimately not made public, this letter circulated among many individuals on Cuomo's staff, spreading the narrative among her colleagues that Boylan was lying, not a victim. The unpublished op-ed contained victim-blaming content with the goal of obstructing Boylan's narrative of harassment.

Although the aforementioned op-ed was not published in the media, Boylan's confidential personnel file was "leaked" to the New York Times by Cuomo's staff which was

done to discredit her as a victim. The file contained confidential complaints against Boylan by other staffers. An unnamed author of one of the documents that was leaked to the press explained how far and wide this altered narrative was spread:

> I knew that senior staff had the documents and my files from that time, but I was not told it was going to the press until after it was out. Also, I thought it was attorney client privilege and I assumed I would have been told if the Governor decided to waive that privilege. I also was kind of surprised because I didn't think it was a great rebuttal to what she was saying. . .. I was dismayed when my memo was picked up in papers literally around the world and domestically…. (Boylan, Investigation Report 2021:108)

Leaking Boylan's confidential file to the press was a clear escalation of the narrative contest, aimed at discrediting Boylan beyond her workplace, and into the public domain while also putting her future employment opportunities in jeopardy. This action essentially "gave" the story of sexual harassment to the public with the version of the narrative that Cuomo and his supporters wanted to tell.

Lindsey Boylan's narrative of her encounters with Cuomo was not believed by bystanders in her workplace, who instead, supported Cuomo and his version of the sexual harassment narrative. Boylan's supervisor spoke to investigators of her disbelief about Boylan's claims of sexual harassment, saying that because she did not believe the victim, she did not feel the need to help the victim. DeRosa's statements below gives insights into two types of secondary victimization through the narrative contest: (1) these statements bring to bear how institutions create barriers for victims through disbelief of the victim, leading to non-reporting, even when that reporting is mandatory; and (2) DeRosa's statements directly link to the phenomenon examined in Chapter 2, the *silent tolerator*, which assets that if victims don't report

sexual harassment right away, they establish that they welcomed the sexual harassment (Fitzgerald et al. 1995). Thus, if the victim reports sexual harassment later, as Lindsey Boylan did in the Cuomo case, she may not be believed by others. This exchange demonstrates both phenomena in action (DeRosa Transcript 2021:560-561):

> **Investigator**: Did you consider having anyone in the executive chamber reach out to Ms. Boylan?
>
> **DeRosa**: No.
>
> **Investigator**: Why not?
>
> **DeRosa**: I didn't believe what she was saying was true. She had made clear from the whole week of her tweets that she hated all of us and didn't want anything to do with any of us. Alfonso had talked to her while, when she was leaving, and she didn't raise anything in the context of those conversations in addition to the September – December conversation and I believed that she was somebody running for office, and she was seeking out public office and that she was saying things that were not true in order to get attention for a political campaign.

After more questions to clarify DeRosa's response, she added this:

> **Investigator**: So, to be clear, the reasons you didn't believe her is, one, she hadn't raised it before, is that right?
>
> **DeRosa**: Right.
>
> **Investigator**: Two, she was running for public office, is that right?
>
> **DeRosa**: These aren't reasons why I did not believe her. I didn't believe her because I didn't believe her. I thought she was making it up.

Investigator: Why didn't you believe her?

DeRosa: Because I didn't view Lindsey as credible.

This exchange from the victim's supervisor resembles the aforementioned concept of the unreliable narrator (Booth 1991; Hansen 2007) as her supervisor did not share the same views as the victim and considered the victim to be untrustworthy.

The powerful harm-doer has access to support, such as attorneys. In very high-profile cases, the elite may have even access to the media, which can assist with the narrative attack on victims though either countering the victim's narrative, portraying themselves as innocent, or leaving out certain content in favor of the offender's narrative. Regarding Lindsey Boylan's allegations of sexual harassment against Cuomo, one of Cuomo's top aids, Melissa DeRosa, contacted the *New York Times* ahead of a story about the allegations. In this conversation, DeRosa states how she was able to get certain remarks removed from the article that would have been damaging to Cuomo (DeRosa Transcript 2021:751):

Investigator: Do you remember conveying any information about Ms. Boylan to her?

DeRosa: Yes…And I said to her, "This is somebody who came out and made specious allegations on Twitter two months ago, and it was crazy that you guys reported it the first time and it's even crazier that The Times would allow her to say something like this now."

Investigator: And then it didn't end up in the story, you said?

DeRosa: She said she heard me and she would take a look at it. And then I believe Jesse came back to her and Rick and said it is not included. And so, once that happened, it was - we didn't - there was nothing to do any further.

This example illustrates how a narrative of harassment is countered by the harasser, and then altered by bystanders and even the media, who may publish *or refrain* from publishing various content, often in favor of the powerful. Interestingly, Boylan discussed the narrative contest in a Medium.com interview on August 9th, 2021, and explained how her narrative was obstructed by others after negative stories about her were leaked in the media:

> I often think about how close I came to being viewed as the villain of this story. The Attorney General's report documented how the Governor, his inner circle, and people at the highest levels of corporate and non-profit power went to great lengths to discredit me. They are still trying. The Governor's office continues to use official government channels (funded by taxpayers) to release statements and stage press conferences to spread lies about me and attempt to taint me and other survivors. (Boylan, Medium.com 2021)

This example of the narrative contest examines multiple actors who involved themselves in this victim's sexual harassment experience. In this case, bystanders stated openly that they judged the victim and did not believe her story, and as a result, openly and publicly retaliated against the victim. In addition, because of the high-profile nature, the media also participated in the narrative by choosing what would and would not be said about the harasser in the press. The final statement by the victim illustrates her awareness that this experience was a story that was narrated by many individuals and as she stated, she almost became the villain of her own story of victimization.

Placing Silent Blame on the Victim: Cuomo vs. Bennett

In some cases of sexual harassment, the victim is removed from the workplace to protect the harasser. The action of relocating the victim to another workplace not only protects the

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harasser, but also places "silent blame" on the victim. That is, her removal suggests that she did something wrong. The following exchanges illustrate another example an evolving narrative contest which included multiple actors, and ultimately led to the removal of the victim.

Charlotte Bennett, one of Cuomo's assistants, confided in him about being sexually assaulted while she was in college. In a subsequent encounter, according to the investigative report, Cuomo asked her "who she [was] hitting on" and "who [was] hitting on her" and in that same exchange, Cuomo brought up her story of assault while she was preparing to give a speech at her alma mater. He repeated multiple times, "You were raped, you were raped, you were raped and abused and assaulted." In this exchange, Cuomo reduced Bennett's story of rape, and simultaneously sent a message to her that her story was trite and performative. Bennett said this made her uncomfortable, so she changed the subject, and once she did, she says he became defensive. He then told her, "He wanted to find a lady and drive off on his motorcycle to the mountains with her" (Bennett, Investigation Report 2021:51).

Bennett sent a text to her colleague alerting him to this conversation texting "[Cuomo] asked if you were hitting on me…[He] said [to me], 'you were raped. You were raped and abused. You were raped and abused and assaulted' maybe three times in a row and wouldn't stop…The way he was repeating 'you were raped and abused and attacked and assaulted and betrayed' over and over again while looking me directly in the eyes was something out of a horror movie. It was like he was testing me". In a subsequent text, Bennett told the same colleague she had texted previously, "We talked about what celebrities he wanted. For his dream scenario. Which is to hop on the back of his bike with a lady and head for the mountains. And some other things…" (Bennett, Investigation Report 2021:51).

When asked about this conversation during the investigation, Cuomo responded with this explanation (Cuomo Transcript 2021:300):

Investigator: And when you said, "I believe that's what she thinks she heard," you think she heard something else and then thinks in her head that you repeated "You were raped" three times. You think that's - a figment of her imagination because she's damaged?

Cuomo: No. I am not saying she's delusional.

Investigator: So, I don't understand the comment.

Cuomo: Yeah, you can leave here and have a different interpretation and say, "I think he said this." It doesn't mean you're damaged. Certain statements resonate with people. I think the -- "I was raped." Not "You were raped." I never said, "You were raped." "I was raped." She says I said that three times. I didn't say it three times.

Investigator: And you're sure of that?

Cuomo: I'm virtually positive because it had -- it makes no sense in the -- in the idea of the speech that I was relaying.

In this exchange with investigators, Cuomo denied that he made certain comments to Bennett. However, Cuomo talked extensively about this same conversation with Bennett, publicly to present his side of the interaction during his taped apology that was broadcast on national news platforms, which exposed private details of her past to anyone who was watching:

Charlotte worked in my office last year as an assistant…. She identified herself to me as a survivor of sexual assault…. I did ask her questions I don't normally ask people. I did ask her how she was doing and how she was feeling. And I did ask questions to try to see if she had positive supportive dating relationships…. I have heard Charlotte and her lawyer, and I understand what they are saying, but they read into comments that I made and draw

inferences that I never meant. They ascribe motives I never had. And simply put, they

heard things that I just didn't say. Charlotte, I want you to know that I am truly and

deeply sorry…. (nbcnewyork.com 2021)

Cuomo used his position of power to respond on national television with his interpretation of the

victim's narrative. Speaking directly to the victim, in front of the public demonstrated Cuomo's

fearless power, once again, as he chose to publicly expose her former experience with sexual

assault. Cuomo's narrative cast himself as a hero who was trying to help this victim recover from

a traumatic experience, and without directly saying so, he informed the public that the victim

turned his efforts to help her against him, causing him to now be *her* victim of false accusations.

Cuomo's narrative also asserted that others were creating a false narrative about him and

"ascribing false motives" that he never had. That is, he was creating a narrative *about* his

victim's false narrative.

Bystanders also participated in this narrative contest between Cuomo and Bennett.

Bennett had confided Melissa DeRosa, her supervisor, who said during this the investigation

(DeRosa Transcript 2021:357-358):

> **DeRosa**: Charlotte had started to cry and said something about being inappropriate and
>
> maybe that -- I can't remember if she used the word "hit" on her, but that's how I heard
>
> it…
>
> **Investigator**: What was your reaction to being told that Charlotte Bennet had said the
>
> governor had been inappropriate with her and that the governor had hit on her?
>
> **DeRosa**: I was shocked.
>
> **Investigator**: Did you express that shock to anyone?
>
> **DeRosa**: To Jill, Judy, and Stephanie.

Investigator: What did you say to Jill?

DeRosa: What's going on? I can't believe this.

Investigator: What did you say to Stephanie?

DeRosa: Similar.

Investigator: Did you tell either of them that it was ridiculous?

DeRosa: I don't think in that conversation.

Investigator: Was there another conversation in which you described it as ridiculous?

DeRosa: I don't know if I used that word, but I had doubts.

DeRosa explained that the sexual harassment narrative given by Bennett was not believable and instead, supported, and recirculated Cuomo's version of the narrative amongst office staff. Bennett also spoke with Jill DesRosier, Cuomo's chief of staff, about her conversations with Cuomo. Rather than providing assistance and explaining the policies of retaliation for claims of sexual harassment, DesRosiers not only shared her conversation to other colleagues in the office, but had Bennett transferred to another unit (DesRosiers, Investigation Report 2021:51).

Removing Bennett from the workplace contributed to the narrative contest by placing silent blame on her which signaled that *she* needed to leave – not Cuomo. This move communicated to others that the institution prioritized protecting Cuomo from allegations over formally reporting the victim's claim of harassment. Bennett spoke about her transfer, stating:

The verbal abuse, intimidation and living in constant fear were all horribly toxic - dehumanizing and traumatizing. And then he came onto me. I was scared to imagine what would happen if I rejected him, so I disappeared instead. (Bennett, Investigation Report 2021:64)

Bennett described her experience as "dehumanizing," again, using self-reduction because the actions taken against her made her feel like she was not worthy of being treated with respect. In addition, Bennett's use of the word "disappeared" signaled an undesirable change that was necessary for her perceived safety.

Media Contradictions: Cuomo vs. Commission

This next example provides another illustration of the narrative contest, which involved multiple actors in Andrew Cuomo's office. An executive assistant to Cuomo, Brittany Commisso, claimed that Cuomo groped her breast during one interaction, saying in her testimony to investigators:

> …it wasn't just going to be a casual hug, he really pulled me, and I remember his hand just sliding right up my blouse. And I remember looking down and I remember seeing his hand which is, I would say a large hand and over my bra…I just remember, you're going to get us in trouble. That probably wasn't the best thing to say, because it could be misconstrued that we are going to get in trouble…I remember thinking there is employees downstairs and they are going to hear it being so loud that they are going to, I think, wonder what is going on up there…people say after the fact now that has been said in the paper, people that know that, why didn't you slap him. I'm going to assault the governor. I would be taken away by the state police officers and I would be the one that would get in trouble, and I would be the one to lose my job, not him…I feel like I was being taken advantage of and at that moment that's when I thought to myself okay, I can't tell anyone. Who am I going to tell? (Commisso Transcript 2021:144)

This excerpt from Commisso's transcript reveals multiple stages of the victim's thought process during her experience of sexual harassment as well as her internal narrative contest about how others would perceive and potentially take over her story if she spoke out against Cuomo. Commisso revealed that she knew she would not be believed and conducted a hypothetical story in her mind about what would happen to her if she did physically push back on Cuomo's advances, which concluded with her being taken away by the police. Commisso also describes talking herself out of reporting because she knew her narrative would be manipulated and altered by others, including friends. After this encounter was made public, Cuomo responded on national television about the incident. His narrative of the encounter was constructed to present himself as innocent and ironically, he blamed the media for unfair public opinion, while using the media to defend himself publicly:

> There is another complaint that I want to address from a woman in my office who said that I groped her in my home office. Let me be clear. That never happened. She wants anonymity and I respect that. So, I am limited of what I can say, but her lawyer has suggested that she will file a legal claim for damages. That will be decided in a court of law. Trial by newspaper or biased reviews are not the way to find the facts in this matter. I welcome the opportunity for a full and fair review before a judge and a jury, because this just did not happen. (nbcnewyork.com 2021)

Cuomo used the media to change the victim's narrative, addressed her publicly while stating he understood that she wanted privacy, and, while using the media to expose his narrative of events, he blamed the media for sharing the victim's narrative. The use of mediated narrative power (Plummer 2019) allowed Cuomo to tell his version of the narrative through the media while

attacking the media and giving the public a new version of the narrative that they could buy into

and recirculate based on their opinions of the story.

"This is not news": Cuomo vs. Ruch

Harassers may use their consistent bad behavior as an example of why their inappropriate

behavior should actually be viewed by others as normal and not newsworthy. This final example

of narrative co-construction involving former Governor Andrew Cuomo concerns a victim who

was not an employee of Cuomo's. The encounter was brief, but the narrative contest was still

acted out publicly. This example illustrates the importance of the narrative contest in the

scholarly examination of sexual harassment in public, street harassment and other locations for

harassment outside of the workplace. Anna Ruch said in an interview with the New York Times,

on March 1, 2021, that the first time she met Cuomo, at a wedding, he approached her and placed

his hand on her bare, lower back. She said she moved his hand from her back, at which point he

remarked that she was "aggressive." He proceeded to put his hands on her cheeks and asked her

if he could kiss her. Pictures were published of this encounter in *The New York Times*. Ruch said

talking about this encounter during an interview with the New York Times, stating, "I was so

confused and shocked and embarrassed. I turned my head away and didn't have words in that

moment" (Flegenheimer and McKinley 2021).

Cuomo responded to this accusation during a press conference about COVID on March 3,

2021:

> You can find hundreds of pictures of me making the same gesture with hundreds of
>
> people, women, men, children, et cetera. You can go find hundreds of pictures of me
>
> kissing people, men, women. It is my usual and customary way of greeting. You know

that because you've watched me for let's just say more years than we care to remember. By the way, it was my father's way of greeting people. You're the governor of the state, you want people to feel comfortable, you want to reach out to them. I do it. I kiss and hug legislators. I was at an event in Queens the other day, hugged the pastors and the assembly members who were there. So that is my way to do that…. (Rev.com 2021)

Cuomo continued to say if his actions were taken offensively, he was remorseful. However, he used position of power to respond to accusations publicly, changing the narrative contest by placing himself in the role of an innocently affectionate person while using his father, another well-known public figure, as his benchmark for appropriate behavior. Cuomo also constructed his narrative to show the public that he was religious – and thus, a good person – by including a comment about hugging pastors. Cuomo used the media to deny the accusations of sexual harassment, while seizing on the ambiguity of definitions of sexual harassment by asserting that his actions "that made people feel uncomfortable" were not sexual harassment and suggested instead that his actions were culturally passed down by his father. Again, responding to his victim through the media reminded the victim and others of his power. Cuomo changed the victim's narrative from feeling uncomfortable with his touches to the narrative that these gestures were parental, not sexual, implying that he was a warm, caring person, who touched victims to make them feel comfortable. Subsequently, during the pre-taped statement where Cuomo responded to the sexual harassment allegations on August 3, 2021, he addressed this encounter again, saying:

Other complainants raised against me questions that have sought to unfairly characterize and weaponize everyday interactions that I've had with any number of New Yorkers. *The New York Times* published a front-page picture of me touching a woman's face at a

wedding, and then kissing her on the cheek. That is not front-page news. I've been

making the same gesture in public all my life. I actually learned it from my mother and

from my father. It is meant to convey warmth, nothing more. Indeed, there are hundreds,

if not thousands of photos of me using the exact same gesture. I do it with everyone....

(nbcnewyork.com 2021)

A powerful Cuomo was able to speak to the public *again* through the media, and his second

statement escalated the narrative contest by asserting that *"this is not a story."* Cuomo proceeded

to tell the public why by telling a counter-story. He addressed all of the accusations against him,

stating:

I do kiss people on the forehead. I do kiss people on the cheek. I do kiss people on the

hand. I do embrace people. I do hug people, men, and women. I do on occasion say,

"ciao, Bella." On occasion, I do slip and say "sweetheart," or "darling," or "honey." I do

banter with people. I do tell jokes, some better than others. I am the same person in public

as I am in private. You have seen me do it on TV, through all my briefings, and for 40

years before that. (nbcnewyork.com 2021)

In this statement, Cuomo told the audience that his behavior reflected who he was and had

always been – a friendly, affectionate person. His statement suggested that everyone should have

known and understood that he always touched both men and women, therefore, the accusations

of misconduct were the fault of those who would misunderstand his intentions. With this

counter-narrative to the accusations, he positioned himself as innocent and unaware of any

offense. He also used the opportunity to remind the public of his position of power by stressing

that he was a venerated public figure ("for 40 years"), distinguishing himself from his victims

who were unknown to the public.

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Narrative Contests of the Said and Unsaid

There is a common expression, "silence speaks volumes" which is never more accurate than when harm is committed, and bystanders do nothing to intervene. Bystanders may choose to look the other way because they are not sure how to intervene or are concerned that they will be punished from their involvement. Others may believe their involvement would make no difference in resolving the situation (Fenster 2006). Presser (2019) contends that what goes unsaid is highly consequential, and I found unsaid to be critical in the cases of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment, typical of many harms, is characterized by silent bystanders.

Lindsey Boylan, a victim of Andrew Cuomo, said of bystanders, "…We are accustomed to powerful men behaving badly when no one is watching. But what does it say about us when everyone is watching, and no one says a thing?" (Boylan 2021). This section examines how the unsaid contributed to the narrative contest of sexual harassment and was seen in a couple of ways: (1) when victims confided in bystanders or supervisors about being sexually harassed and were ignored or warned against speaking out (2), when victims stated that they knew, based on the workplace culture, that no one would intervene because sexual harassment was simply a part of the job.

At the Ford plant, victims and bystanders spoke publicly about the well-publicized culture of harassment. While victims shared their stories of sexual harassment, the co-construction of their narratives included the unsaid from bystanders and supervisors who turned a blind eye, rather than supporting the victims. Subsequent public apologies from executives at Ford gave insight into the complete picture of the normalized, ongoing bad behavior that resulted in an unfair narrative contest for the victims, who until the accusations were made public, had no

support from bystanders or the institution. This statement was released by the CEO of the Ford plant in Chicago, Jim Hackett, after the sexual harassment allegations were made public:

> This week, the New York Times detailed a number of allegations of sexual harassment at our plants in Chicago over many years… I promise that we will learn from this, and we will do better…Ford has been grappling with these allegations in Chicago for some time…During the past two years, Ford and the UAW have invested in 20,000 hours of employee training at the Chicago plants to reinforce a standard of mutual respect that is non-negotiable… This has been a learning experience about how difficult it can be to root out bad behavior…. (Detroit Free Press 2017)

This statement illustrates how the unsaid narrative contest at the Ford plant had been long engrained in the culture and had been known from the top down. As previously mentioned, institutional culture may be the strongest indication that sexual harassment exists and thrives in the workplace (Fitzgerald and Cortina 2018).

Loseke (2007:670) says, "organizational narratives are created by the organizers and workers in ongoing organizations, programs and groups designed for people who evaluate themselves or who have been evaluated by others, as having troubled identities in need of repair." Indeed, the statement from Ford came out *after* allegations were reported in the news, alerted the public to the troubling workplace culture, forcing the company to respond to restore their public image. The statement from Ford provides insight into the known sexual harassment as the CEO tells the public they have known about these allegations, have been attempting to train employees and have struggled with how to stop inappropriate behavior in their workplace. Hackett enters the narrative contest of sexual harassment to tell his version of the story of Ford, which he portrays as a "grappler" – a hero trying to do the right thing, by learning and teaching.

He states that they are training people to follow a standard of respect. The language "non-negotiable" signals toughness, but they are not changing their own actions. What is *not said* in his narrative is anything about implementing new sanctions or response systems for victims who file sexual harassment complaints.

Bystander tolerance also contributes to the unsaid narrative contest because it requires *not intervening* when sexual harassment is known by others. Inaction and silence from bystanders signals to victims that they may not be supported if they speak out or report sexual harassment. This inaction from bystanders has the potential to change the narrative contest by causing victims to remain silent or diminish their story of harassment when they might have otherwise reported the harassment to workplace authorities.

At the Ford plant, victims and bystanders spoke publicly about the well-publicized culture of harassment, which contributed to the response of bystanders who "looked the other way" regarding harassment. One victim from Ford described a conversation with a union representative who downplayed a co-worker's offensive comments, saying, "That's just him — the man has no filter" (Chira and Einhorn 2017). With this comment, the supervisor cast the perpetrator as simply outspoken to dissuade the victim from reporting by what he did not say. That is, he did not say the behavior was inappropriate or that the victim *should* report the harassment.

Victims' stories of sexual harassment in this project also included what went unsaid by other victims who became tolerant to others' victimization. Christie Van described a culture at Ford in which other *victims* allowed sexual harassment to go unchallenged by not saying anything: to speak out would mean potentially losing their jobs:

They don't have a problem with being groped on. They don't have a problem with

watching the men jack off on the line. They just close their eyes. They're there to get a

paycheck. (Lipstickalley.com 2018)

As discussed in Chapter 4, tolerant bystanders ignore harm, to reduce their own risk of becoming

targets of retaliation. According to Suzette Wright from Ford, other women colleagues at the

plant told her that reporting harassment would get *her* in trouble, not the harassers, and speaking

out against the harassment would give their bosses power to humiliate the victims further, by

denying certain human rights, such as not allowing them to take a bathroom break (Chira and

Einhorn 2017). Similarly, Gwajuana Gray from Ford stated:

When someone makes a complaint, the supervisors refuse to pay them or don't pay

them…The problem is you have people in labor relations that are friends with the

supervisors, so there's no accountability. (Gunderson 2018)

These statements by victims revealed how the narrative contests were shaped by what went

unsaid, or through warnings from supervisors, which served as reminders to victims that if they

spoke out, they would lose their jobs, have their pay cut, or be publicly humiliated. The real or

perceived threats of retaliation caused co-workers to become willing or tolerant bystanders,

which allowed sexual harassment to persist, unsanctioned. The workplace culture created unique

obstacles for victims who had no one to turn to about being sexually harassed because most co-

workers were aware and unconcerned, causing hardships for victims, not harassers, if the victims

wanted to speak out. Silence, inaction, and warnings to victims from bystanders became

significant contributions to the narrative contest by causing the narrative to become even more

imbalanced against the victim.

Chapter Summary

This chapter considered how multiple individuals participate in the narrative contest of sexual harassment. That is, the victim, harassers, bystanders, and institutional representatives may each retell the narrative of sexual harassment from their point of view. Before harassment is reported, the narrative contest is between the victim and harasser only, and often, the victim employs coping strategies which prolongs the harassment experience. When victims respond to the sexual harassment encounter, the narrative contest progresses, and finally, once an accusation is made, the narrative contest escalates and others within the workplace may also become involved in telling the story of sexual harassment. When others become involved in the narrative contest, they choose sides based on whose story they believe. When bystanders take sides, they will repeat and support that individual's narrative, drowning out the other individual's narrative in the narrative contest.

Further, when sexual harassment narratives are broadcast in public forums, perhaps because the victim and/or harasser are public figures, the narrative co-construction becomes open to anyone, which can damage the victim and/or harasser as the most publicized narrative becomes dominant. Publicized narratives outside of the original workplace can pass the dominant narrative far and wide causing outsiders to form their own opinions, as was seen in the case with Lindsey Boylan after her confidential personnel file was published in the media. The impact this can have for the victim may include future employment obstacles if the dominant narrative is that the victim was wrong or falsely accused the harasser. Thus, the narrative contest, and how the story is told by the victim, harasser, and all bystanders, is crucial to the outcome of the sexual harassment experience as the loudest narrative – the narrative perspective that overshadows the other narratives - may often be the one that is believed.

Chapter 10. Discussion and Conclusions

Sexual harassment remains one of the most widespread forms of harm against women (Fitzgerald 2017). It is a harm that does not discriminate on the basis of social status, income, racial, and other boundaries, but is conditioned by these all the same. The #MeToo movement has brought into focus the pervasiveness of the harm which includes allegations against undistinguished individuals as well as politicians and celebrities. The work of the recent #MeToo movement furthermore highlights the role of narrative in social movements. My dissertation similarly highlights the role of narrative in both harm and redress.

The first three chapters of this project generated multiple insights for my analysis including the fact that sexual harassment is rooted in power dynamics and that sexual harassment is discursive and specifically narrative in nature. Because sexual harassment is narratively accomplished, narrative criminology and narrative victimology were valuable frameworks for this project. For this project, I innovated with a new concept, the narrative contest, inspired by literature on master and counter-narratives but tailored to the fact of sexual harassment as a protracted harm.

My analysis yielded three key findings: (1) Power is critical to sexual harassment and is equally critical to the narrative contest. In each experience – the supposed harassment event and the narrative elaborations that follow – it is usually the harasser who has power over the victim; (2) sexual harassment is performed via a stepwise approach, which creates obstacles for the victim as she tries to produce a coherent story of the harassment for others; and (3) many individuals participate in the narrative contest of sexual harassment in the workplace, causing the already unfair contest to become even more swayed against the victim if bystanders side with the harasser.

Power to Do and to Speak

Throughout this project, power was identified as a critical element of both sexual harassment and narratives. Power differentials in the sexual harassment experience are conditioned by relations of gender, race, and position. This study examined power differentials in workplace sexual harassment, but as discussed in Chapter 2, power is present in all locations of sexual harassment. Likewise, power is central to whose narrative gets believed in cases of sexual harassment, particularly at the start of the narrative contest when a victim goes up against her harasser. Victims made multiple comments about feeling powerless, fearing losing their jobs, and fearing speaking out. As a result of their perceptions of powerlessness, the victims said that they either "played along" or changed the subject during the harassment experience to avoid real or perceived retaliation.

Power, as an overwhelming contributor to the experience of sexual harassment and the narrative contest, was discussed by victims, harassers, and bystanders throughout my analysis. First, harassers either used their individual or positional power, or they used group or situational power over their victims. Substantial individual or positional power was seen in the case of Andrew Cuomo who, as the Governor of New York, had significant power over his victims as he could easily have them dismissed or transferred if they spoke out against him. In addition, the stepwise approach that utilized subtle maneuvers of sexual harassment, was only undertaken by Cuomo, who was harassing middle-class women. This finding suggests that subtlety may be perceived by harassers as necessary with relatively resourced women to circumvent their resistance to the harasser. Cuomo also had the ability, because of his power, to use the media to try to sway public opinion with nationally televised statements. At the Ford plant, harassers used their group or situational power, which was created by the majority of employees participating in

harassment, which contributed to an accepted workplace culture of harassment. At Ford, everyone knew that harassment was prevalent and most employees there either participated or willingly looked the other way. In both cases, power created and maintained the culture of sexual harassment and simultaneously, created obstacles to counter it when it did happen.

Second, retaliation or the fear of retaliation was salient in both cases. I found two types of retaliation: straightforward and devious. Straightforward or open retaliation, such as a supervisor telling a victim to be quiet about sexual harassment, was most commonly described at the Ford plant. This type of retaliation was done openly and in front of others and sometimes came in the form of additional sexual harassment and humiliation. Devious retaliation, for example, bystanders pretending to listen followed by spreading rumors about the victim, was most often described in the former Governor's office. This type of retaliation was frequently cloaked as empathy, causing victims to confide in bystanders who later retaliated against the victims.

Third, bystander complicity was described in both the Ford and the Cuomo cases. Bystanders tended to support harassers, either willingly or through acquiescence to avoid also becoming targets of aggression. Where sexual harassment was perpetrated in front of others, at Ford, bystanders were candid about not helping victims because they feared losing their jobs or being penalized. In the former Governor's office, bystanders were silent, feigned empathy, or encouraged victims to find other positions. In addition, Cuomo successfully used his powerful position to encourage some of his staff to engage in hostile behavior towards his victims. This transference of power caused those bystanders to either distrust the victims or look the other way so they could maintain their positions and perks from working in a political office. Thus, this analysis showed that power is central to all aspects of sexual harassment, including whose narrative is believed and how bystanders are directed to respond.

Victims' Experiences with Believability and Storytelling Challenges

One assumption going into this project was that the stepwise nature of sexual harassment would impact the narratives of victims. That is, because sexual harassment is often performed with a slow buildup, victims may not immediately recognize harassing comments, the nature of the harassment may be difficult to explain to others, and harassers can easily construct accusations of harassment as groundless – either misunderstandings or baseless attacks. The analysis confirmed these assumptions with two distinguishable findings about questions of credibility attached to victims and to stories: (1) victim credibility or epistemic injustice; and (2) story credibility.

Regarding victim believability, victims spoke about their fears of being believed specifically because their harassers had a higher status and thus greater narrative authority, or because the culture of harassment was normalized preventing sexual harassment to be seen as harm. In these instances, epistemic injustice – or the fear of epistemic injustice - was evident. Victims in Cuomo's office were young women who were accusing an individual, who had a great deal of situational power, of a harm, causing their credibility to be questioned. Victims at the Ford plant were minority women, and their accusations of sexual harassment were heard by supervisors who were also involved in harassing activities. The normalization of sexual harassment at Ford caused the victims to be viewed as not credible because they should have taken the harassment as compliments. However, because they tried to report the harassment, they were seen as complainers.

Regarding story credibility, victims stated their concerns about being able to explain the harassment, also because of the slow buildup leading them to make comments like, "these things could be brushed under the rug". In addition, victims reflected on how they were "shut down" by

harassers and bystanders who attempted to diminish the accusations with claims that they were innocent comments, or the victims misunderstood. One unexpected finding was another type of storytelling challenge, which occurred when sexual harassment was normalized in the workplace, causing an absence of sympathetic listeners who would consider inappropriate behavior to be egregious enough to report.

In addition, the storytelling challenges that victims encountered *after* being sexually harassed resulted from the same power dynamics that motivated sexual harassment in the first place. That is, the responses from victims to their harassers often mirrored how the harassment was performed. Where sexual harassment was done with a in a stepwise manner, with slow progression of defendable comments, victims initially responded in a stepwise manner, to avoid drawing attention to their discomfort or inviting an escalation of words or retaliation. In addition, those victims struggled to tell coherent stories of sexual harassment and were countered with feigned apologies or support. Where sexual harassment was done out in the open because harassment was normalized in the workplace, victims candidly told their stories of sexual harassment, but their requests for help were mostly minimized or the victims were harassed again by their supervisors which stopped the victims from trying to further report the harassment. Importantly, this chapter demonstrated that *how* the story gets told is critical to who gets believed by others and served as a reminder of how important power is to the narrative contest.

The Narrative Contest in Action

The study conceived of sexual harassment as encompassing not only action and reaction on the part of the harasser and victim, but other, surrounding responses as well – including subsequent interactions with bystanders and institutional representatives. Accordingly, central to

this study highlighted the ongoing narrative contest of sexual harassment with inputs by the victim and the harasser, as well as co-workers, supervisors, human resources employees and in some cases, the media, and attorneys.

The unsaid was consequential to the narrative contest, as it told victims that they needed to remain quiet about sexual harassment or risk additional consequences, including retaliation. Unsaid came from both institutional representatives and bystanders. At Ford, the CEO joined the narrative contest to improve the public image of the company and cast an image of apologetic and how the company was stiving to cultivate a better workplace culture. However, what he did not say was whether any tangible changes were being made, including sanctions for harassers. Bystanders contributed to the unsaid narrative contest through their silence and inaction. These unsaid contributions potentially changed the narrative contest by causing victims to keep the harassment to themselves or diminish their experiences when they may have instead confided in those bystanders or sought help from workplace officials.

Multiple individuals involved themselves in the narrative contest of each sexual harassment experience, underscoring the term "contest" as each individual told their stories with their own interpretations of events causing the stories to be heard differently from person to person. As Presser (2016) also asserts, stories are impactful regardless of their truthfulness.

Narrative Transformation: The Other Side of the Story

This project was made possible because multiple women from each case did come forward with allegations against their harassers, and thus, by the time this project was conceived, the "loudest narratives" in the narrative contest – or the narrative that overshadowed the other versions of the sexual harassment narrative - were those of victims who succeeded in their claims

against their harassers. Thus, power dynamics were amenable to change as victims came together to accuse their harassers as a group, instead of alone in both cases. Victims who have come together as a group and taken back power has also been seen with the #MeToo movement where celebrity actors claimed they had been subjected to harassment for years and even with their celebrity status, still felt powerless against their harassers to come forward. When these victims began to speak out as a group, their narrative was finally heard, and power tilted in their favor and away from their harassers. Future research should explore these pivotal changes from victims who state they are powerless and choose not to report harassment, but then come together as a group, or otherwise take their power back and do report and challenge their harassers.

Another side of the story not examined in this project are the victims who do speak out against their harassers immediately rather than "playing along" or ignoring the harassment, leading to whatever consequences defensive institutions might mete out. While it appears that such a response is less common as a first reaction to sexual harassment, some women do immediately confront their harassers (Herrera and Expósito 2014), claiming power on their own, even if institutional authorities or bystanders are hostile. Indeed, a few victims at Ford did try to report being harassed but were "shut down" by supervisors who either ignored their accusations or also harassed the victims. A future study could include the narratives of women who spoke out immediately, to glean insight into how they felt about their position of power in the harassment event and the subsequent narrative contest.

Research Obstacles and Looking Forward

As discussed in Chapter 4, finding perpetrators of sexual harassment who are willing to

be interviewed about their harmful actions is challenging. When harassment is dealt with internally in the workplace, identities are kept "confidential," however, as previously discussed, most individuals within the workplace do know who harassers are and who is being harassed. As a result, this project used publicly available data, which was possible because both cases of sexual harassment were reported on in the media. The Ford case led to a class action lawsuit. In the Cuomo case, because he was an elected official, the allegations were publicized. However, to study the narratives of perpetrators of sexual harassment remains a challenging task, as most cases are not public, and harassers are mostly unwilling to speak out.

The ability to interview men who have been accused of sexual harassment could add richness to this research. As victims speak of multiple aspects of their victimization, harassers also have something important to add to the story of the sexual harassment experience. Understanding perpetrators "reasons" for harassing could provide valuable insights into how important harassment myths still are to beliefs about the dynamics between men and women. We could also benefit from understanding if some harassers are simply unaware of the harm they are doing or if some consider the workplace as a location where they can meet potential partners?

Beyond the scope for this project, I also question if a resolution is actually achieved by victims. That is, after victimization, even with a clear resolution, do victims have "closure"? Herman (2015) asserts that closure is not really achieved in the way people speak of closure. The harassment has changed the victim's future story and actions for the rest of her life. Longitudinal studies could shed light on how victims speak of the harassment experience months, and then years later, and provide insight into how the victims self-narrative changes over time when talking about the same event.

As Chapter 2 observed, power is rooted in sexual harassment, everywhere, and especially where individuals hold dramatically different power positions. Future narrative research may want to be focused on specific contexts of the sexual harassment experience where the power differential between the victim and harasser varies (e.g., the military versus street harassment) for a better understanding of how sexual harassment is performed in the different contexts, and how the different ranges of power dynamics change the experience of sexual harassment and narratives. In addition, the experiences of women in non-mutually exclusive groups such as Black, Latino, migrant, non-cisgender, along with other oppressed groups who are sexually harassed should be featured in future research. Finally, more attention needs to be paid to how structural difficulties stemming from racism impact victims' decisions to report or cope with sexual harassment.

In conclusion, my aim for this project was to understand the entire experience of sexual harassment, from the point of view the actors who become involved either directly or indirectly. The result of the analysis yielded confirmation of some ideas I was considering (e.g., the nature of sexual harassment creates reporting barriers for victims) and some unexpected findings (e.g., stepwise barriers can also result from normalized workplace harassment). In addition, using narrative criminology and narrative victimology together contributed to a holistic understanding of harm of sexual harassment, which unlike many other harms, is fundamentally constituted narratively rather than physically. Continuing the study of sexual harassment with more data from harassers can have the potential to clarify why this harm is still so prevalent. Ongoing sexual harassment research is needed to understand the harm of sexual harassment and share that understanding with others in the hopes that it will no longer be normalized in the workplace and public spaces.

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Vita

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