

**A LITTLE BIRD TOLD ME SO...:  
THE EMOTIONAL, ATTRIBUTIONAL, RELATIONAL AND TEAM-LEVEL  
OUTCOMES OF ENGAGING IN GOSSIP**

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**ABSTRACT****A LITTLE BIRD TOLD ME SO...:  
THE EMOTIONAL, ATTRIBUTIONAL, RELATIONAL AND TEAM-LEVEL  
OUTCOMES OF ENGAGING IN GOSSIP****Shimul Melwani****Sigal G. Barsade, Supervisor**

In this paper, I examine the consequences, both positive and negative, of initiating and participating in gossip in work-related contexts. While a commonly held perspective is that gossip is harmful in that it hurts relational interactions by encouraging coalition-building and engendering divisiveness, an alternative hypothesis is that gossip's emotional attributes, can also help to foster stronger relationships and help individuals navigate complex environments. Specifically, I explore the influence of gossip at multiple levels of analysis: individual, dyadic and group. In Study 1, a laboratory experiment that looks at the short-term benefits of engaging in gossip (versus two control conditions, self-disclosure and task discussion), I find that individuals who engage in gossip experience higher positive emotions, energy and motivation but lower levels of state self-esteem. These gossiping dyads also experience dyadic benefits of relationship



closeness and cooperation. Study 2 explored both the reputational and team-level outcomes of gossip. This study showed that team members who engaged in gossip were seen as being less trustworthy. Furthermore, gossip centrality had an inverted U-shaped curvilinear relationship with perceptions of competence. Study 2 showed that gossip about team members negatively influenced team outcomes such as psychological safety, cooperation and viability and increased team-level perceptions of politics while gossip about individuals outside the team has a positive effect on these outcomes, enhancing levels of team cooperation and decreasing perceptions of politics at the team-level. More detailed mediation analyses showed that team process variables, psychological safety and perceptions of politics measured halfway through the course of the team, mediated the negative relationship between intra-team gossip density and team cooperation and team viability measured at the end of the team's lifecycle. In terms of the relationship between extra-team gossip density and team cooperation, it was mediated by decreased team perceptions of politics. This research contributes to the emerging field of inquiry on gossip by providing a comprehensive model of the consequences of gossip at three different levels of analysis as well as a strong empirical test of the effect of gossip on organizationally-relevant outcomes.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Gossip— also referred to as the organizational grapevine, the information mill, shop-talk or water cooler conversations— is pervasive in the workplace. As organizational members, we have all been part of exchanges in which we “catch up” on recent events in our organizations (e.g. who has been promoted, who has been fired, who is an effective team member, and who is difficult to work with) and we may have frequently been the source of such information ourselves. Indeed, researchers have shown that gossip is ubiquitously practiced (Besnier, 1989; Gluckman, 1963; Levin & Arluke, 1987): people’s conversations revolve around evaluations and judgments about other people over two-thirds of the time (Dunbar, Marriott and Duncan, 1997; Emler, 1994). Because organizations contain a system of connections in which employees work, relate and engage with each other, the organizational context tends to be one in which gossip is especially widespread (Hallett, Harger & Eder, 2009; Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell & Labianca, 2010). However, even though research in organizational behavior has long recognized the significance of informal, social interactions in the workplace (e.g., Kanter, 1977; Roy, 1958), this research has mainly focused on social exchanges such as support (e.g., Lincoln and Miller, 1979; Ibarra, 1993), advice (e.g., Nebus, 2006; Sparrowe, Liden, Wayne & Kraimer, 2001) and citizenship behaviors (Bowler & Brass, 2006). Gossip, as a type of informal social interaction is universal and pervasive, and therefore

colors employees' daily experiences at work, has in comparison remained under-researched and under-examined. Given its pervasiveness in the workplace and its relevance to people's work experiences, how does engaging in this behavior influence employees' short- and long-term outcomes in the form of their emotions, relationships, reputations and team experiences? To better understand this commonly practiced phenomenon, I examine the consequences, both positive and negative, of initiating and participating in gossip for individuals, dyads and groups in work task-related contexts. While the existing empirical research on gossip has tended to focus on its antecedents, exploring the motivations behind this behavior (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011; Kniffin & Wilson, 2005) as well as the dispositional traits that predict who engages in it (Jaeger, Skleder, Rind & Rosnow, 1994; Nevo, Nevo & Derech-Zahavi, 1994; Watson, 2011), the consequences of gossiping have not been systematically and rigorously examined. Furthermore, because gossip carries both positive and negative connotations, the potential consequences of engaging in this behavior remain equivocal. Much of the past research on gossip has originated from a moral perspective. Morally, numerous social and cultural sanctions against gossip, including the fact that nearly all the world religions indicate that gossip should be avoided, highlight a view of gossip that views it as morally wrong and destructive. Proponents of this pejorative view suggest that gossip is a self-serving, instrumental behavior, driven by agentic motives that compete with workplace goals (Baker & Jones, 1996). This perspective assumes that gossip is an intentionally

instrumental means through which information can be created and disseminated to manage the gossiper's image to his or her own advantage (Handelman, 1973; Hannerz, 1967). Moreover, it has been viewed as a form of covert conflict (Bartunek, Kolb & Lewicki, 1992) and relational aggression (Richardson & Green, 1997) that encourages coalition-building and engenders divisiveness (Crampton, Hodge & Mishra, 1998; Rosnow, 2001), unjustly harms the reputations of others (Wilson, Wilczynski, Wells, & Weiser, 2000), undermines managerial power and is also considered to be a willful waste of time that may hurt productivity (Roy, 1958).

However, even in the face of these objections towards gossip, there is an alternative perspective that gossip can be beneficial and functional. First, from a functionalist perspective, gossip has been posited to be a positive interpersonal behavior that involves the efficient and productive exchange of information, emotion, values and attitudes between two actors (Rosnow, 2001). According to this perspective, researchers have found some evidence for the hypothesis that engaging in gossip can lead to positive effects for individuals and groups. They find that gossip enables individuals to obtain information and monitor others in their social networks (Kniffin & Wilson, 2005), engage in sense-making in the face of complex events (Van Vleet, 2003) and may foster stronger relationships (Baumeister, Zhang & Vohs, 2004; Dunbar, 2004). At a group level, gossip has been shown to reaffirm social values based on normative rules (Eder & Enke, 1991; Kniffin & Wilson, 2005) and enable individuals to understand and learn about their group

and organizational culture (Baumeister, et al, 2004). Overall, this functionalist view suggests that, in organizations, gossip is therefore, likely to help individuals navigate complex and competitive organizational environments, characterized by a set of strict norms and values.

Thus the research on gossip's consequences has reached contradictory conclusions. The two divergent perspectives, a morally-driven view that associates gossip with a host of penalties and problems and a functional view that proposes that that gossip is a universal and often valuable activity, are largely disconnected across fields of research. Hence, in this dissertation, I intend to reconcile and balance these two paradoxical perspectives to develop a clear, conceptual understanding of gossip and its positive and negative consequences, for individuals, dyads and teams in work contexts. By drawing upon relevant sociological and social psychological theoretical paradigms, such as belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), social comparison theory (e.g., Festinger, 1954), social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979) among others, I develop an integrated theory of the benefits and detriments of engaging in gossip by focusing on four main questions. First, what are the consequences of engaging in gossip, in terms of the gossiper's own intrapersonal emotional and cognitive outcomes? Second, how does the process of exchanging gossip influence the gossiper's (and the recipient's) combined dyadic outcomes, such as cooperation and rapport? In delving into these two questions, I explore the role of gossip valence, or the degree to which positive and

negative gossip influences individual and dyadic outcomes. My last question explores how gossip operates in a team context and influences the manner in which the gossiper is perceived by others as well as overarching team-level outcomes? In exploring this question, I look at how the choice of target at a group-level differentially influences group outcomes. Through a multi-method approach, in two studies, a laboratory experiment and a field study of naturalistic student teams, I hope to answer these questions and redress this gap.

To do so, I first try and clarify the nature of gossip in Chapter Two, by distinguishing it from related, similar constructs like rumor and self- disclosure. I then subsequently outline a working definition of gossip in work contexts. In that chapter, I also describe prior research on gossip as well its social functions. Following this, in Chapter Three, I then build a model and develop hypotheses about of the individual, dyadic and team-based consequences of engaging in gossip. Two studies designed to test my hypotheses are then presented, a laboratory experiment in Chapter Four and a field study in Chapter Five. Last, I summarize the results of the studies and discuss the implications and contributions of the research (Chapter Six).

This dissertation offers three central contributions to theory and research on gossip and informal interactions in the workplace. First, by more deeply investigating the consequences of engaging in gossip for individuals, dyads and groups, this paper highlights the critical function that gossip, an ambivalently-valenced interaction plays in

informal interactions in work contexts. By building on prior gossip research and theory and through my two naturalistic studies in laboratory and field settings, I present highlight and show the important role of engaging in gossip at three different levels of analysis, with respect to individual, dyadic and group-level outcomes. Second, specific to the study of gossip as a phenomenon, I posit and explore gossip, in terms of both its positive as well as its negative outcomes. This is in contrast to prior work in organizational behavior that has labeled workplace gossip as being a type of antisocial or deviant behavior like employee resistance (Scott, 1985), indirect workplace aggression (Robinson and Bennett, 1995) or social undermining (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002). In this dissertation, I acknowledge that perspective, while also probing the positive outcomes of engaging in gossip. As a further contribution to its study, I also explicate the construct of work-related gossip, highlighting definitional issues, distinguishing it from other constructs and extending these issues to the workplace. Last, from a methodological perspective, I explore gossip in utilizing two different methodologies, a complex laboratory setting as well as a survey-based longitudinal field study of student work teams. Overall, this form of investigation diverges from past research on gossip which has traditionally focused on ethnographic studies of gossip in village and tribal settings (Colson, 1953; Cox, 1970; Gilmore, 1978) or controlled experiments, which make use of hypothetical scenarios or retrospective experiences of gossip. Last, I also highlight how gossip influences dyadic relationship formation and positive emotions. Together, I hope

that this research extends classic and contemporary knowledge of how gossip operates in the workplace.

## CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUALIZATION OF GOSSIP

The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the consequences of engaging in gossip at three levels of analysis, by exploring its effect on *individuals'* emotions, esteem and task engagement, *dyadic* relationships and *group* processes. In this chapter, I (a) define and conceptualize the construct of gossip (b) highlight relevant past research on the antecedents and motivations of gossip behaviors, and, (c) describe the overarching social functions of gossip.

### **Conceptualizing Gossip: Building a Definition of Gossip**

Theory and research on gossip have been hindered by a lack of a uniform definition (Foster, 2004). Indeed, because gossip has been studied in a variety of disciplines, ranging from anthropology to social and evolutionary psychology, many different definitions of gossip exist. Therefore, in past research, gossip has been defined in a multitude of ways, ranging from broad descriptions such as general 'chit chat' (Foster, 2004), conversation about social topics (Dunbar, 2004) or idle talk (Rosnow, 2001; Oxford Dictionary). While more detailed definitions require that for talk to be precisely classified as gossip, three specific criteria need to be met: (1) the target is not present, but familiar to the gossipers (2) the talk is evaluative and may center on moral judgments of the target, and (3) the talk is idle (Rosnow, 2001; Yerkovich, 1977) or, more specifically,



in the case of the workplace, outside the legitimate boundaries of the task at hand (Rosnow & Georgoudi, 1985).

A necessary and sufficient aspect of gossip is that it occurs within an inherently triadic structure and it entails an explicit interaction or conversation between (at minimum) two gossipers about a third person, the target who is *absent* from the conversation (Besnier, 1989; Foster, 2004; Hannerz, 1967) but belongs to their same social network or community (Paine, 1967)<sup>1</sup>. The second characteristic of gossip is that it is evaluative in nature (Bergmann, 1993; Eder & Enke, 1991; Hannerz, 1967; Rosnow, 2001) involving a positive and/or negative judgment of the target. Indeed, conceiving of gossip as either positive or negative is hardly a novel idea: Machiavelli (1516/1995) maintained that “all

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<sup>1</sup> This definition encompasses gossip about celebrities as well (Ben Ze’ev, 1994; De Backer, Nelissen, Vyncke, Braekman & MacAndrew, 2007). Even though, celebrities are not direct members of people’s social communities and networks, people tend to feel as though they are intimately involved with them (Caughey, 1984) and these celebrities become common topics of interest to discuss with real acquaintances. Highlighting an evolutionary perspective, Barkow (1992) suggests that this phenomenon is caused by an inability for the human brain to separate audiovisual stimuli from real interpersonal interactions and that when we see a media image of a celebrity (especially those who are often in the news), we (falsely) start to believe that these people are members of our social networks.

men, when they are talked about... are remarked upon for various qualities which bring them either praise or blame" (p. 89), while Gottman and Mettetal (1986) in early research observed that while negative gossip pervaded adolescents' conversations, positive gossip was also often present. Other researchers have referred to these evaluations as critical versus uncritical (Taylor & Brown, 1994), good versus bad gossip (Bergmann, 1993), or praise versus blame gossip (Elias & Scotson, 1965). Research has found that these evaluative judgments are driven by cognitive and affective mechanisms. Cognitively, gossip may be based on an explicit or implicit comparison between the target, or person being talked about and a social reference or self-relevant reference point, such as social norms or the gossipers' own behaviors and values (Rosnow, 2001; Wert & Salovey, 2004). Most frequently, an upward comparison that shows the target in a positive light with respect to the gossiper or the other members of a social network, can be considered to be positive gossip, while a downward comparison that heightens a gossiper's positive behaviors and values at the expense of those of the target can be considered to be a form of negative gossip. However, gossip is often also driven by affective reactions that arise from targets' defiance of or adherence to group-based moral norms and standards (Baumeister, et al, 2004). For instance, a person may feel contemptuous or disgusted when confronted by an immoral act (Rozin, Imada, Lowery & Haidt, 1999) and filled with awe when he or she witnesses a moral and positive action (Wert & Salovey, 2004). When people experience these strong emotions, they are especially likely to share them

with others and through a process of social sharing of emotions (Rimé, Mesquita, Phillipot, & Boca, 1991) and may then express these emotions in the form of negative and positive gossip (Rimé, 2007). Hence it is important to note that, even though, people are more likely to describe gossip as being saturated with negative evaluations, gossip can also be positive in content, especially in the case of upward comparisons of the gossiper with the target (Rosnow, 2001; Sabini & Silver, 1982).

Last, a final identifying character of gossip is that it is idle (Yerkovich, 1977), and outside the legitimate boundary of the issue or task at hand<sup>2</sup>. This criterion of gossip that is related to the content of the message has not been as relevant to prior research in psychology and anthropology that operate primarily in non-work related domains. In the workplace, since it is often necessary to discuss and evaluate others as part of workplace interactions (such as performance appraisals or selection decisions), this aspect of the

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<sup>2</sup> In defining the construct of gossip as related to the workplaces, I narrow prior definitions of gossip (Wert & Salovey, 2004) to include “evaluative conversations *outside of the legitimate boundaries of a task*”. While, I considered other qualifiers such as “evaluative conversation unrelated to *one’s professional role*” or “evaluative conversation unrelated to *one’s job*” as an alternative definitions, I was also careful not to limit the definition too much. While, gossip is irrelevant to the task at hand, there may be situations where it is not irrelevant to one’s professional role or job.

definition becomes especially important in delineating gossip from other behaviors. Hence conversations about absent others in a formal, task-related context, such as performance appraisals or hiring decisions would not be included in the construct of gossip even though these types of interactions incorporate the evaluative and private criteria of gossip. However, evaluative comments about organizational members, outside of a legitimate task-relevant context would be considered to be gossip. Specifically, gossip in the workplace comprises information that is of no importance, or irrelevant to the functioning of the gossip participants, their work groups or the organization, as a whole. As an example, consider two managers evaluating the credentials and past performance of their subordinates in the context of a performance appraisal. Even though the nature of the performance appraisal may compel them to make evaluative comments about these absent subordinates, or targets, their conversation stays within legitimate boundaries of the task at hand, which is to assess the performance of their subordinate. Hence, this conversation would not be considered as gossip. However, if their discussion moved beyond the requisite context of the exchange to include superfluous or unrelated evaluations of the subordinates' political preferences, or personal relationships, their discussion would move beyond the legitimate, or formal boundaries of the task at hand and become idle talk, or gossip. Thus, in this dissertation, I put forth the following definition of gossip in work contexts, that encompasses these aforementioned criteria as well as taking into account the unique aspects of the work context: *Gossip is positively-*

*and/or negatively-valenced evaluative talk that occurs, outside of the legitimate boundaries of a task, about a member of the discussants' social environment who is not present.*

In addition to extending the definition of gossip to incorporate a work-related context, one of my contributions to the literature on gossip is highlighting that this definition is more complicated and intricate. Indeed, it is important to note that while this definition implies that classifying a piece of talk as either “gossip” or “not gossip” is a straightforward undertaking, rather than a dichotomy between all and nothing, there appears to be a continuum of “gossipy-ness” on which a piece of talk may lie: conversation becomes more gossipy depending on the extent to which it lies on the continuum of each these criteria. Also, while gossip can have a clear, identifiable form (Ben Ze’ev, 1994), there is no single way to describe it as it has an off the record quality and is associated with para-linguistic strategies such as sarcasm, indirectness and humor (Keltner, Van Kleef, Chen, & Kraus, 2008).

*What Gossip is Not.* The terms, gossip and rumor are often used interchangeably, however, they represent different constructs with correspondingly different antecedents, features and consequences. Rosnow (Rosnow, 2001; Rosnow & Georgoudi, 1985) argues that gossip is always about others’ personal affairs and can be based on either truth or fiction. He describes rumors, on the other hand as being more exploratory and speculative which can include other topics, not concerning people. For instance, a rumor may include

a workplace conversation about a company undergoing a merger or engaging in layoffs, but gossip occurs when coworkers extrapolate from this discussion to chat about which of their colleagues they think should be fired. Thus, when the information is unnecessary or excessive, it is characterized as gossip because it goes beyond the requisite context of the initial conversation. Furthermore, even though both these communication behaviors involve similar functions, such as the exchange of information (Rosnow and Fine, 1976), they are driven by different motivations: rumors involve an individual's attempt at sense-making, or clarifying a situation while gossip is motivated by a desire to meet one's affiliation and status needs (Rosnow & Fine, 1976). In addition, gossip is distinguished by its "inner-circleness", such that gossip participants are usually personally connected and often share, or desire to share a relationship and similar values (Gluckman, 1963) while rumor is more suited to less connected audiences. Even though, researchers have tried to differentiate between rumor and gossip, they are related constructs that serve the similar purpose of transmitting information that is of personal consequence to listeners (Rosnow, 2001). In terms of their similarity, both rumor and gossip occur spontaneously and are rarely ever planned (Bergmann, 1993), deal with novel information (Rosnow, 2001) that is often not entirely factual (Michelson & Mouly, 2000).

A few other constructs also share similarities with gossip. For instance, evaluative discussions about a target who is *present* may simply be described as ridicule (Kuttler,

Parker & La Greca, 2002) or teasing (Shapiro, Baumeister, & Kesller, 1991) while gossip about the self can simply be called self-disclosure (Kuttler, et al, 2002).

### **Conceptualizing Gossip: Levels of Analysis**

Beyond the definition of gossip, an additional detail deserves further discussion, that of levels of analysis at which the gossip occurs. Thus far, in prior literature, the definition of gossip has remained agnostic about level of analysis, and as a consequence research on gossip has not systematically explored the outcomes of gossip on individuals, dyads and groups (Noon & Delbridge, 1993). Even though the act of gossiping does not specifically clarify the level of analysis at which it occurs, its definition, based on the notion that it involves (at least) *two* actors discussing an absent third party emphasizes that this behavior can be best conceptualized as operating at the dyadic level. Indeed, from a dyadic perspective, gossip is considered to be a two-way communication process, or a shared and collaborative experience (Baumeister, et al, 2004) that involves the co-production of information (Besnier, 1989) and an exchange of socio-emotional resources (Rosnow, 2001). In turn, this dyadic process is likely to shape outcomes at the dyadic level as well as influence outcomes at lower levels of analysis, that is for each individual involved in the gossip exchange.

The question then arises as to whether gossip is isomorphic, or similar across levels of analysis, as we move from the dyadic to the group level. Organizational researchers have highlighted two types of isomorphism: functional isomorphism or the idea that a

construct will have similar outcomes irrespective of the level of analysis at which it is being studied, and structural isomorphism, or similarities about the nature of the construct at different levels (Morgeson & Hofmann, 1999). In terms of structural isomorphism, gossip at a team-level can be described as a configural team property, or one that originates or emerges from individual members' behaviors and experiences (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000). Because configural team properties capture the array or configuration of individual behaviors and experiences within the team, they do not have homogeneity as a defining attribute and are by definition not structurally isomorphic (Morgeson & Hofmann, 2000). For instance using network research as a direct comparison, a positive relationship between two individuals when aggregated to the group level can be assessed in many ways: the average number of positive ties, the density of positive ties, the ratio of positive to negative ties and so on. As I operationalize group-level gossip as gossip network density, I allow for the possibility that members of the team engage in differing levels of gossip. Furthermore, because a dyad engaging in gossip is predicted to have differing outcomes as compared to group members who are involved in a network of dyadic relationships of varying strengths, gossip as a construct is not expected to be functionally isomorphic as well moving from the dyad to the group level.

Thus, in this dissertation, I investigate gossip at three levels of analysis by focusing on the consequences of gossiping on the individual or the source of gossip, the dyadic



outcomes for the members involved in the gossip exchange as well as the group-level of outcomes of gossip.

### **Conceptualizing Gossip: Social Functions of Gossip**

The most developed stream of research on gossip underscores the functional explanations of gossip in societal or cultural contexts. This view, propagated by sociologists (e.g., Eder & Enke, 1991), anthropologists (e.g. Dunbar, 1996) and cultural psychologists (e.g., Baumeister, et al, 2004) helps to explain why individuals engage in gossip as well as how gossip plays a role in a larger cultural or group perspective. As Merton (1949) stated, functionalist explanations hinge on "interpreting data by establishing their consequences for larger structures in which they are implicated". In this view, gossip is seen as a cultural product, constructed by individuals or groups and includes information, intimacy, norm enforcement and entertainment.

In terms of **information gathering**, gossip enables people to learn about their cultural and social world and those who share it because it acts as a mechanism of information dissemination (Foster, 2004). Gossip can be an effective way to uncover information about other group members (Dunbar, 1996; Kniffin & Wilson, 2005; Wilson et al., 2000), thus allowing the gossiper to develop a "map of his social environment" (Hannerz, 1967, p. 57). By uncovering information about alliances, politics, others' reputations and control over resources, gossip may help people determine with whom they would like to cooperate. To this end, gossip proves to be an efficient means of broadening our

knowledge bases and exchanging information about the reliability and trustworthiness of others (Dunbar, 1996). By gossiping, an individual also engages in social comparison and learns the standards against which he or she is to be measured by society (Wert & Salovey, 2004). In terms of information, at the group level, gossip is a measure of the sum of opinions (Szwed, 1966). Similarly, gossip is also hypothesized to help create and **enforce social norms**. Through gossip, people express their interpretation and evaluations of others' moral actions and by passing these judgments, endorse and perpetuate social norms (Sabini & Silver, 1978). The reiteration of norms may also work to standardize and constrain group members' behaviors because it discourages individuals from violating group norms and standards through fear of becoming the targets of gossip and experiencing other such public sanctions (Gluckman, 1963). This norm enforcement function of gossip was demonstrated in studies in real-life groups, such as California cattle ranchers (Ellickson, 1991), Maine lobster fishermen (Acheson, 1988), and college rowing teams (Kniffin & Wilson, 2005) and have confirmed that gossip is used in these quite different settings to enforce group norms when individuals fail to live up to the group's expectations.

Gossip may also increase **solidarity** by facilitating social bonding and group formation. Disclosing gossip indicates that the gossiper trusts and feels safe with the recipient (Hannerz, 1967) and this type of self-disclosure helps to cement their relationship (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977). In terms of group formation, gossiping about others' feats and

faults, brings groups together through the sharing of norms. Gossip can help to cohere agreement around group norms which can establish closed group boundaries and becomes a way to distinguish trusted insiders from outsiders. Both these notions are supported by research on the evolutionary underpinnings of gossip which suggests that gossip, is a way to reinforce social bonds through the exchange of social knowledge about others (Dunbar, 2004).

Last, the amusement or **entertainment** function of gossip is associated with the notion that gossip is separated from work tasks. Researchers have referred to gossip as being “sheer fun” (Spacks, 1982, p. 31), pleasurable (Ben Ze’ev, 1994) and thoroughly enjoyable (Gilmore, 1978) both for individuals (Eder & Enke, 1991) as well as groups (Gilmore, 1978). This suggests that gossip often serves no immediate purpose but can exist simply as recreational value for the gossipers, even providing distraction and relief from monotonous and routine tasks (Roy, 1958).

## **Conceptualizing Gossip: Structural, Dispositional and Motivational Antecedents of Gossip**

Research that sheds light on the antecedents of gossip has implicitly highlighted the structural origins of gossip behaviors. As such, gossip occurs within a triadic structure

that comprises *at least* three members<sup>3</sup>, the gossip giver or source, the listener who responds and partakes in the conversation, and the target who is absent from the conversation. Structurally, because triads are inherently imbalanced, this triadic configuration of relationships may engender gossip as two of the members attempt to attain cognitive balance by forming a coalition of two against one (Caplow, 1956; Heider, 1958). The balanced dyadic structure is more secure because it allows the two actors to disclose information freely and openly (Derlega & Chaiken, 1977) and by pooling resources together, lets the actors gain power and resources over the third member (Mills, 1953). This work on the structural antecedents of gossip also highlights that the relational context of the gossiping dyad is a key component: people are likely to share gossip with their close friends and family (McAndrew, et al, 2002) over strangers and acquaintances (Rosnow & Georgoudi, 1985).

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<sup>3</sup> Three members, the gossip giver, the gossip recipient and the absent target form the simplest triadic structure. While, the gossipers (gossip giver and gossip recipient) may include more individuals, for a single gossip episode, there is usually one gossip giver (Bergmann, 1993) who relays his or her evaluations about absent target(s). Specifically, in this section, and in both my studies, I conceptualize the triad in its more pure form, with a gossiping dyad and an absent target.

Another stream of research on the antecedents of gossip has emphasized how gossipers' personality characteristics as well as target may influence an individual's decision to initiate gossip. In general, people who have a high tendency to gossip, are more anxious and have a low need for social approval (Jaeger, et al, 1994; Nevo, et al, 1994). Research has also examined sex differences in gossip with varying findings. While, some researchers find that women may be more inclined than men to gossip (Leaper & Holliday, 1995), others show that after controlling for social desirability, the only sex differences in tendency to gossip occur based on topic (Nevo, et al, 1994), such that women are more likely to gossip about the physical appearance of others, while men gossip about sports' achievements. There were no differences between the sexes on topics related to competence, achievement or social information.

In terms of the targets of gossip, the people who are likely to be gossiped about are usually envied or high-status others (Ben Ze'ev, 1994) and norm-violators (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011). A study conducted in a sorority showed that individuals who were perceived as having undeserved status and cold, aggressive personalities were gossiped about more than agreeable, admired and well-liked others (Keltner, et al, 2008). As a rule, people are also more interested in gossip about members of the same sex and of similar age (McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002) and are also more likely to pass along negative information about adversaries, strangers and powerful others, while protecting negative information about allies.

While most research on gossip has focused on the factors that enhance its incidence, less research has examined the role of gossip and how it influences those who choose to engage in this behavior. The theoretical background for how gossip influences outcomes for individuals, their relationships and their group interactions is presented in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 3: INDIVIDUAL, DYADIC AND GROUP OUTCOMES OF GOSSIP**

Several questions form the nucleus of this dissertation and will be explored in the sections and studies below. I start by discussing the intrapsychic benefits and consequences of initiating and participating in gossip for individuals. Second, I consider the receiver's perspective in the gossip exchange. Although both parties may be gossipers and receivers, each of their roles is imbued with specific expectations and interests that may influence how they view each other. . I then examine the dyadic processes of gossip. Given that social norms dictate that receivers and givers concurrently engage in the process of gossip (Eder & Enke, 1991), I explore how gossip influences the way people relate to and work together in pairs. I then look at the reputational outcomes of engaging in gossip, by examining engaging in gossip influence others' judgments of the gossip-giver, particularly with regard to attributions of trustworthiness and competence. Last, I explore the role of gossip on team-level outcomes, by looking at how the density of team level gossip networks influence processes such as team-level perceptions of politics and psychological safety as well as team outcomes such as viability and cooperation.

## **The Gossip Giver's Perspective: Intrapsychic Outcomes of Engaging in Gossip**

Even with the negative connotations and potential social penalties associated with gossip, gossip continues to be a universal behavior; this discrepancy implies that participating in gossip may allow the gossipier to reap intrapsychic benefits and override any possible negative consequences. As discussed, although some functional models claim that gossip has long-term beneficial outcomes like the formation of group norms (Baumeister, et al, 2004; Eder & Enke, 1991; Gluckman, 1963), information transmission (Hannerz, 1967) and influence (e.g., Kurland & Pelled, 2000), its direct effects on the gossipier's immediate cognitive and affective outcomes have not been empirically investigated. Hence, in the first part of my dissertation, I derive predictions about relationships between gossiping and critical individual job-related affective, cognitive and behavioral outcomes that are likely to be influenced by gossip's positive social functions and negative, moral connotations, including state self-esteem, positive affect, energy, the discrete emotions of guilt and task engagement as well as the valence of gossip and the role of existing friendship ties as moderators for some of these relationships. In the following section, I therefore establish theoretical links between gossiping and each of these outcomes.



### ***Self-Esteem of the Gossiper***

Gossip may contribute to an enhanced sense of personal self-esteem through multiple cognitive routes that derive from its social functions, namely, information gathering, bond-building and group solidarity. Gossip, a source of information gathering and sharing, allows the gossip giver to engage in implicit or explicit social comparisons with their targets. These social comparisons will in turn influence the gossipers' self-esteem levels. For instance, engaging in downward comparisons, in which the gossipers compare themselves with a target who is worse off than themselves allows them to validate their abilities, build themselves up and establish more positive self-views (Wert & Salovey, 2004) and enhancing self-esteem. Upward comparisons, may also have positive effects in that they allow gossipers to publicize connections with successful others and thus enhance self-esteem by sharing in, or "basking in their reflected glory" (Cialdini, et al, 1976). These positive effects may be able to offset any negative feelings produced by social comparisons with these successful targets. Also, derogating these high-status targets (potentially on dimensions unrelated to the ones that inspired the upward comparisons) may allow the gossipers to feel better about themselves (Fein & Spencer, 1997). Gossip's bond building function may also positively influence gossipers' self-esteem levels as making connections with others is a route used to pursue self-esteem. Feelings about the self are strongly affected by others' perceived reactions to us (Leary, Haupt, Strausser & Chokel, 1998) and hence, the process of engaging in gossip which

helps forge positive relationships (Baumeister, et al, 2004; Bosson, Johnson, Niederhoffer & Swann, 2006) may in turn, also enhance social self-esteem. Last, feelings of solidarity are often developed through the discovery of a shared like or dislike for another person through gossip. Since, according to social identity theory, people derive self-esteem through their associations with personally valued in-groups, in part by drawing clear boundaries between their own groups and those of outsiders (Tajfel & Forgas, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), it is thus plausible that these momentary experiences of connectedness with a valued in-group can promote increases in self-esteem (Leary, Tambor, Terdal & Downs, 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In sum this suggests that:

**Hypothesis 1a:** People who engage in (both positive and negative) gossip will experience higher-levels of state self-esteem than those who do not

However, looking at the meta-experience of gossip can suggest that individuals who engage in gossip may also experience a decrease in their state self-esteem. This decrease may be driven by the morally questionable nature of gossip (Levin & Arluke, 1987).

Gossip often carries negative connotations; for example, individuals may associate gossip with betrayal of others' secrets (Kelley, 2002) or a self-enhancement tactic used to selfishly further the gossipers' own interests while damaging the targets' reputations (Wilson, et al, 2000). Thus, engaging in gossip, along with its' unethical or immoral undertones may cause gossipers' to feel displeased with themselves, a type of judgment that is associated with decreased levels of state self-esteem (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991).

Furthermore, because gossip is viewed as an self-serving, untrustworthy behavior that is often associated with low-status groups (Eder & Enke, 1991) and is often also described in a derogatory manner as “tittle-tattle”, “being catty” (Percival, 2000) and “women’s talk” (Eggins & Slade, 1997; Spacks, 1982), gossipers may worry that others’, especially the recipients of gossip, may look down upon them. Concern about these interpersonal appraisals will influence the gossipers’ levels of self-esteem, as according to the sociometer theory, self-esteem is a gauge of the degree to which individuals feel accepted and valued by others (Leary & Downs, 1995). Thus, because gossipers may worry that by engaging in gossip they will be seen as less trustworthy or influential by the recipients of gossip, these concerns about their level of interpersonal acceptance may cause them to experience a decreased level of state self-esteem

**Hypothesis 1b:** People who engage in (both positive and negative) gossip will experience lower-levels of state self-esteem than those who do not

### ***Positive Affect of the Gossiper***

The social functions of gossip shed light on how engaging in gossip may actually lead to higher levels of positive emotions. From an informational perspective, the social comparative facet of gossip may allow people to self-enhance by derogating both higher and lower status targets (Wert & Salovey, 2004). This may allow the gossipers to feel better and stronger, experiences that are in turn, linked to higher levels of positive affect (Crocker, Karpinski, Quinn & Chase, 2003; Crocker, Thomson, McGraw & Ingerman,

1987). Also, the processes of social interactions and the exchange of information may also have affective consequences (Collins, 2004; Lawler, 2001). When people engage in successful shared and reciprocated social interactions, such as gossip (Baumeister, et al, 2004; Eder & Enke, 1991), they tend get caught up in them and may therefore experience higher levels of emotional energy, or arousal (Collins, 2004) which may manifest itself as feelings of confidence and elation (Collins, 2004) as well as an emotional high (Lawler & Yoon, 1996), thus, enhancing the experience of positive affect.

From a relational perspective, gossip affords the gossiper an opportunity to feel connected to at least one other person for as long as the gossip episode lasts. Since humans have a pervasive need to form and maintain relationships with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), this increased social activity along with the process of seeking and making contact with others through gossip may cause people to feel happier (Lyubormisky 2001; Srivastava, Angelo & Vallereux, 2008). In light of these interpersonal connections, the act of gossiping can assuage feelings of rejection and satisfy a need to belong, which in turn enhances feeling of positive affect. Last, engaging in gossip is entertaining (Foster, 2004), fun (Spacks, 1982) and amusing (Gilmore, 1978), experiences that generally arouse positive affect. Hence, I predict that because the process of engaging in gossip may be an affectively rewarding experience:

**Hypothesis 2:** People who engage in (both positive and negative) gossip will experience higher-levels of state positive affect than those who do not

### ***Guilt of the Gossiper***

Even though gossipers may experience positive emotions by virtue of engaging in gossip, research has highlighted that people can experience multiple positive and negative emotions at the same time (Larsen, McGraw & Cacioppo, 2001; Williams & Aaker, 2002). In this case, as gossip may be viewed as an immoral activity derided by many societies and religions, participating in this behavior may generate an emotional reaction of guilt. Guilt, as a discrete emotion is elicited by negative evaluations of one's behavior or actions that violate obligatory moral standards (Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney, Wagner, Hill-Barlow, Marschall & Gramzow, 1996), especially those associated with indirect or direct harm towards other people (Wicker, Payne & Morgan, 1983). The link between engaging in gossip and feeling guilt can be seen in some of the qualitative descriptions of people engaging in gossip. Often, gossipers qualify their behavior with statements like "I don't like to talk badly about people, but-" or "I don't want to judge anyone else's business, but..." (Bergmann, 1993). Hence, I predict that:

**Hypothesis 3:** People who engage in (both positive and negative) gossip will experience higher-levels of guilt than those who do not

### ***Energy of the Gossiper***

I predict that the act of gossiping may afford individuals with the opportunity to generate energy and feel more activated and aroused. Energy, described as the "fuel" that allows people to accomplish work tasks, regulate emotions and align with group and

organizational norms and expectations (Fritz, Lam & Spreitzer, 2011, p. 28) tends to become easily depleted due to high workloads, routine work tasks, interdependent, often difficult work interactions and negative emotional experiences (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven & Tice, 1998; Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter, 2001; Pugh, 2001). I suggest that gossip, with its relational and entertaining features is a device that allows people to manage and sustain their levels of energy.

By providing entertainment, gossip encourages humor and laughter (Foster, 2004), relaxation (Dunbar, 1998, 2004), serves as a relief from monotonous work (Roy, 1958) and therefore, leads to the increase of energy. First, laughter releases tension, distress (Martin & Lefcourt, 1983) and leads the generation of positive affect (Weisfeld, 1993), which in turn overcomes negative emotions, supplies energy (Fredrickson, 2001; Fredrickson, & Levenson, 1998) and prevents depletion of psychological resources (Keltner & Bonanno, 1997). Also, because gossip is described as a natural, low-effort (Dunbar, 1998), idle (Rosnow, 2001) and informal (Hannerz, 1967) social interaction it can allow individuals to unwind (Fritz & Sonnentag, 2005) and may therefore also provide a social respite from work (Troughakos, Beal, Green & Weiss, 2008) which in turn generates energetic resources.

Relationally, gossip may lead to the production of energy through a series of pathways. During these interactions, gossipers are likely to vent to each other about their negative experiences. Through this process of socially sharing their emotions (Luminet, Bouts,

Delie, Manstead, & Rimé, 2000), gossip may serve a cathartic function and allows the gossipers to revitalize themselves. Also, from an interpersonal perspective, as suggested above, gossip's bond-building functions may replenish gossipers' energy levels. Positive relationships, both short- and long-term, are energizing (Dutton, 2003; Shraga & Shirom, 2009). In general, people thrive on sharing their thoughts and feelings with others around them and so when they lose a sense of connection with the other members of the social world, they may feel more depleted and tired. As such, because positive interactions help people connect with others, meet their fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and reaffirm a sense of inclusion in a group (Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco & Twenge, 2005), which in turn may lead people to feel reinforced, and therefore, more energetic.

**Hypothesis 4:** People who engage in (both positive and negative) gossip will experience higher-levels of energy than those who do not

#### ***Motivation of the Gossiper***

Gossip's various social functions may also explain why individuals who engage in gossip may experience higher levels of motivation. First, the information exchange involved in gossiping allows the gossipers to make implicit social comparisons with targets who are being gossiped about (Wert & Salovey, 1991). Upward social comparisons with individuals who have achieved outstanding success are likely to influence the gossipers' goals in a positive manner, enhancing their motivation to do better and achieve similar

levels of success as well. When engaging in negative gossip and making downward social comparisons with targets, people may then become motivated to avoid similarly unpleasant outcomes and avoid being gossiped about themselves. Indeed, positive role models can inspire one by illustrating an ideal, desired self, highlighting possible achievements that one can strive for, and demonstrating the route for achieving them (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997, 1999); negative role models can inspire one by illustrating a feared, to-be-avoided self, pointing to possible future disasters, and highlighting mistakes that must be avoided so as to prevent them (Lockwood, 2002). These goals and expectations of evaluation and judgment may then manifest as higher levels of attention, persistence and focus, all aspects of higher levels of task motivation and engagement (Kahn, 1992). Second, from a more relational perspective, gossip, as an entertaining (Rosnow, 2001) and low-maintenance activity that does not require individuals to engage in high levels of social coordination (Dunbar, 1998) is also likely to lead to task engagement. Indeed, as demonstrated by Finkel and colleagues (2006) participants who engaged in an easy, informal, low-maintenance interaction were more likely to be engaged in challenging task as compared to those who experienced a high-maintenance, or more difficult interaction. High-maintenance interactions, in turn, impair self-regulatory resources, which are associated with motivation and the ability to engage and focus in work.



**Hypothesis 5:** People who engage in (both positive and negative) gossip will experience higher-levels of motivation than those who do not

***The Relative Effects of Negative versus Positive Gossip on Self-Esteem and Positive Affect of the Gossiper.***

I predict that negative gossip will enhance self-esteem and positive affect more than will positive gossip. One perspective, centered in the social comparison literature suggests that negative gossip can be considered to be an implicit or explicit downward comparison, in which the gossiper criticizes the target's character and behaviors, making a claim of superiority with respect to the target (Wert & Salovey, 2004). Inherent in these downward comparisons is the assumption that the gossiper is better than the target; this allows the gossiper to feel better and builds his or her self-esteem (e.g. Wills, 1981).

Positive gossip, or the discussion of a target's strengths and positive behaviors is more threatening because it contains implicit upward comparisons, highlighting the gossiper's inferiority or lack of abilities a propos the target. This may concurrently produce lower self-evaluations and self-esteem (e.g., Morse & Gergen, 1970; Tesser, Millar, & Moore, 1988). A relational perspective also accounts for why gossipers may feel a higher sense of self-esteem when engaging in negative over positive gossip. Given the strength of negative attitudes (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989), discovering a shared dislike over as opposed to a shared like may increase gossipers' feelings of similarity to each other (Byrne, 1971). This may then allow gossipers' to connect with each other (Bosson, et al,

2006) and fortify their sense of belonging to a valued in-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and these feelings may collectively promote increases in the gossipers' self-esteem ((Leary, et al, 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

These relational and social comparative mechanisms may also provide an explanation for why engaging in negative gossip may lead to higher positive affect than positive gossip. Social comparisons with those who have acted improperly or against group norms in general make us feel happier (Crocker, et al, 1987) and may lead to positive emotions such as pride (Wert & Salovey, 2004). On the other hand, positive gossip, which may contain more upward comparisons is associated with negative emotions like resentment, envy and jealousy towards the target (Wert & Salovey, 2004). These emotions that are typically associated with feelings of inferiority, insecurity and longing (Parrott, 1991) may dampen any positive feelings. Relationally, revealing negative information or dislikes, usually considered to be confidential information, signifies that the gossiper trusts the listener. Thus, negative gossip may build intimacy and serve as a powerful bonding agent (Bosson, et al, 2006), which may cause the gossipers to feel a greater sense of positive affect. Since, positive information does not carry the same shroud of secrecy and can be shared with others even in the absence of trust it may not have the same relationship-building effect and may not satisfy the gossipers' need to belong.

**Hypothesis 6:** People who engage in negative gossip will experience higher levels of self-esteem than those who engage in positive gossip.

**Hypothesis 7:** People who engage in negative gossip will experience higher levels of positive affect than those who engage in positive gossip.

## **The Gossiping Dyad: Dyadic Outcomes of Gossip**

I have, so far, focused almost exclusively on the consequences of relaying gossip from a giver to a recipient. However, gossip, may also be described as the *exchange* of information, about an absent third party; this definition implies that more than one person could actively contribute to the interaction for it to be considered to be an episode of gossip (Baumeister, et al, 2004; Wert & Salovey, 2004). Hence, I will examine not only the effects of gossip for individuals but also for gossip dyads, or the members involved in a gossip episode. A gossip episode involves the exchange of information between two (or more) members.

### ***Gossip and Relational Outcomes***

Through its bond-building social function, gossip may influence dyadic relationships by leading to relationship closeness. From a relationship-building perspective, prior research provides various rationales for why gossip may forge social bonds (Ben Ze'ev, 1994; Dunbar, 1996, 2004). First, gossip may enhance relationships because it signals trust. In general, by sharing a confidence with a recipient, the gossiper is letting him or herself be vulnerable to the chance that the recipient may breach confidentiality and expose this information to the target (or others in the social network). Thus, gossip is a way to telegraph allegiance to a person (Gluckman, 1963; Hannerz, 1967) In return, recipients may reciprocate with gossip of their own, leading to the development of rapport and intimacy in the dyad. Second, gossip is also able to enhance closeness through increasing

mutual acceptance and understanding within the gossiping dyad. Given that gossipers seldom contradict each other and aim to reach consensus on the norms for appropriate and inappropriate behavior (Eder & Enke, 1991), gossip may serve a validating function in relationships. Since, validation and acceptance of others' beliefs are powerful means of creating intimacy (Reis & Shaver, 1988), this may be another mechanism by which gossip is may engender higher levels of closeness. Furthermore, these shared norms and beliefs may allow gossipers to strengthen group boundaries (Baumeister, et al, 2004; Colson, 1953; Hannerz, 1967) by establishing themselves as an in-group separate from the target who is then relegated to being a part of the out-group. Last, the process of disclosing and sharing beliefs may also serve a self-expanding function. As such, when a gossipier shares his or her thoughts and beliefs with a recipient, he or she then tends to incorporate both the recipient's thoughts and perspectives as well as the recipient's appreciation of his or her own thoughts and perspectives. This type of self-expanding experience is very rewarding and is linked with a desire to interact and get closer to the interacting partner.

**Hypothesis 8a:** Members of dyads who engage in gossip should experience higher levels of closeness than those who engage in other types of communication (such as self-disclosure)

**Hypothesis 8b:** Members of dyads who engage in gossip should experience higher levels of rapport than those who engage in other types of communication (such as self-disclosure)

***The Relative Effects of Negative versus Positive Gossip on Relational Outcomes***

Speaking negatively about someone is predicted to a more powerful way of bonding with others (Dunbar, 2004) than speaking positively about someone. Since, negative gossip reveals personal information about the gossiper and his or her opinions about the target, sharing these thoughts may be seen as a form of self-disclosure, recipients will be more likely to reciprocate the gossiper's trust which in turn should lead the members of the gossip exchange to feel closer (Derlega & Chaiken, 1977). In a similar way, people are also more attracted to those who reveal negative attitudes about others (Folkes & Sears, 1977) because these negative attitudes are particularly informative about the gossiper's attitude and may give the listener more insight into his or her disposition (Baumeister, et al, 2001). If the listener holds a similar negative attitude, they are likely to feel closer to the gossiper (e.g., Byrne, 1971). On the other hand, positive attitudes may not be as useful. If a person reveals a favorable attitude about a third party, a listener who agrees with this positive attitude may not be sure of whether the source really feels positively or is simply following politeness norms (Jones & Kanouse, 1987). The listener thus may feel like they are being deceived by the gossiper, or that they do not have enough information about him or her. Some initial evidence for this claim was provided by

Bosson et al (2006) who found that negative attitudes about people may have helped in friendship formation.

**Hypothesis 9:** Dyads engaging in negative gossip will have higher levels of relationship closeness and rapport than those who engage in positive gossip.

### ***The Moderating Effects of Strength of Friendship on Relational Outcomes***

The strength of the relationship between the gossipier and the receiver may moderate the extent to which gossip leads to enhanced levels of closeness and rapport. Prior research provides explanations for why sharing gossip with friends is likely to lead to higher levels of rapport. First, gossip, which includes sharing personal feelings about others' characters and behaviors, is considered to be a type of self-disclosure (Wert & Salovey, 2004). This type of disclosure-related information is usually shared slowly and incrementally while building relationships (Altman & Taylor, 1973) and is almost never shared in initial interactions. Hence while gossiping, or disclosing one's personal feelings to friends may enhance feelings of positivity and closeness, gossiping with strangers may be likely to give rise to uneasy and awkward social interactions (Derlega & Stepien, 1977), which may then decrease feelings of comfort and closeness. Another reason why gossip may lead to enhanced levels of closeness between friends but not between strangers is because of attitude and value similarity. Because friends are usually alike in terms of their beliefs and values (e.g., Bryne, 1971), they usually share judgments of others who do not abide by the group's norms. By agreeing with each other and validating each other's beliefs,

friends may then feel closer to each other. An acquaintance who has dissimilar beliefs may disagree with the gossipers' judgments of the target, which may result in conflict and lower levels of relationship closeness.

**Hypothesis 10:** The strength of friendship will moderate the relationship between engaging in gossip and relationship closeness. Specifically, the stronger the strength of friendship within a dyad, the stronger will be the positive effects of gossip on closeness.

### ***Gossip and Cooperation***

Engaging in gossip may lead people to act more cooperatively- especially in mixed-motive conflicts where narrow individual self-interest is at odds with broader group interests and mutual cooperation (Axelrod, 1984). As such, Morris and colleagues (Moore, Kurtzberg, Thompson & Morris, 1999; Drolet & Morris, 2000) propose that there may be two mechanisms that may lead to enhanced levels of cooperation in dyads: a rational, cognitive assessment of shared group membership and a socio-emotional mechanism through the development of rapport. Gossip, over and above other communicative behaviors may incorporate both these mechanisms and lead to enhanced cooperation in dyads.

Cognitively, the process of engaging in gossip may lead gossipers to demarcate clear group boundaries and establish group norms. Research has shown that people are less cooperative when dealing with out-group members than with in-group members, both in social dilemmas (Kramer & Brewer, 1984) and in ultimatum bargaining (Robert &



Carnevale, 1997) mostly because they tend to have positive expectations and trust of in-group members (Brewer, 1991). Hence, the process of gossip and its corresponding cue of shared group membership in a social category may create in-group trust and favoritism that leads to cooperation in a mixed-motive situation.

Affectively, gossip may influence the development of rapport, or mutually shared positive emotions and interest (Drolet & Morris, 2000) through the sharing of stories between the gossipers. Gossip is a shared experience that encourages participants to engage in mutual disclosure regarding themselves and other members, or targets in their social networks (Baumeister, et al, 2004). This process of disclosing interesting information, coupled with the thrill of revelation (Yerkovich, 1977) may foster positive emotions, liking and rapport (Jourard, 1959), which in turn may facilitate cooperation in mixed-motive conflicts (Drolet & Morris, 2000). For instance, positive mood has been shown to increase people's intentions to cooperate with their opponents (Forgas, 1998) and make concessions in negotiation settings (Barry & Oliver, 1996).

Overall, the main reasons by which gossiping may lead to increased cooperation over other behaviors like self-disclosure is because gossiping, with its consensus building function, is likely to foster a prosocial mindset. In general, since social motives derive from the characteristics of a situation (Chen, Chen, & Meindl, 1998), gossip which encourages agreement and consensus between gossipers and recipient (Eder & Enke, 1991) is also more likely to enhance collective success and cooperation by enhancing the

possibility of creating value (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993). Self-disclosure, on the other hand, may trigger an individually-focused pro-self mindset that is associated with competitive thinking and more distributive behaviors (Pruitt & Carnevale, 1993).

**Hypothesis 11:** Members of dyads who engage in gossip should experience higher levels of mutual cooperation than those who engage in other types of communication (such as self-disclosure)

An overview of the hypotheses at the individual and interpersonal level are represented in Figure 1.

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INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE  
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## **Group-Level Outcomes of Gossip**

I propose, in the earlier sections that the consequences of engaging in gossip for individuals and dyads are likely to be largely functional and positive by hypothesizing that engaging in gossip leads individual gossipers to feel positive, energetic, engaged and possibly even filled with higher levels of self-esteem. Gossiping dyads are also predicted to benefit from gossip and are predicted to feel closer and display more cooperative behaviors. However, even though I predict that gossip will have largely functional outcomes for individuals and dyads, I do not expect that gossip is a functionally isomorphic behavior, and that these positive benefits may not translate to the group level. Indeed, in corroboration of this, a recent survey of more than 1000 working adults indicated that office gossip was their biggest workplace annoyance (The Ranstad Group, 2010), indicating that there may be differences in the way gossip as a phenomenon operates and is interpreted at a dyadic versus group-level.

Why would gossip have different outcomes at a dyadic versus group level? One reason may be because dyads and group vary in terms of their structure. In terms of structural differences, because dyads are comprised of only two individuals, they have a simpler structure than groups. Because a dyad only involves a single relationship, it is entails easier coordination and communication and is generally a more enjoyable interactional context for its members (Moreland, Lewis, & Weingart, 1996). In contrast, in groups, members are involved in a series of relationships, of varying valences and

strengths. These relationships are embedded in an overall network in such a way that the outcomes of one interaction may influence the perceptions and interactions of individuals and dyads on the team but not directly involved in the interaction. For instance, with respect to gossip in the group, it may trigger group members to form alliances and coalitions with each other by gossiping about each other. In contrast, coalition formation simply cannot occur in a dyad because it is structurally comprised of only two members.

Behaviorally, there are also likely to be discontinuities between dyadic and group behavior. The dyad is distinguished from groups by the fact that it has only two members and a single relationship. The same phenomenon is therefore likely to operate in a different manner in a dyadic relationship in comparison with the group that has a complex set of relationships. At a dyadic level, as I hypothesize, gossip is likely to have positive effects. The dyadic boundary, allows gossip to occur freely and openly, fostering and maintaining trust, building a sense of belonging as well as enhancing feelings of closeness. At a group level, however, gossip may operate very differently. Because gossip at a group level, serves to preserve norms, gossiping about team members who are perceived as not meeting expectations and upholding group norms may instead reduce feelings of trust and closeness and foster feelings of fear, distrust and suspicion. Hence, it is likely that gossip will then influence team processes like psychological safety and team politics and will in turn, hurt key team outcomes like team cooperation and team

viability. These structural and behavioral discontinuities across the dyadic and group levels explain why gossip is not functionally isomorphic across levels.

Before describing the effects of team-level gossip on team outcomes, I first describe how gossip emerges and operates at a team-level construct.

### ***Gossip as a Team-Level Construct: Emergence and Social Networks***

I envisage gossip behaviors as a configural team property that originate or emerge from team members' experiences and interactions (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Unlike a shared team property, however, configural team properties do not coalesce and converge among members of a team. Instead this type of team property captures the pattern or variability of individual experiences within a team. Kozlowski and Klein (2000) also state that a researcher, in operationalizing, the configural properties of a unit need not evaluate consensus, similarity or agreement among team members, and that the overall group-level property is constructed through a non-linear aggregation of individual- or dyad-level data.

Evaluating the role of the individual (within a team structure), I focus on centrality in the gossip network because it captures the extent of an individual's access to and control over informational resources. At a team level, gossip can be depicted in terms of the team's social network, or the pattern of associations among the team members. This configuration of interconnections (which I refer to as "gossip ties") provides information as to the degree to which each team members shares and receives gossip from each of his

or her team members, thus taking into account the fact that each dyad engages in differing levels of gossip. The measure of extent to which the members of the team share gossip can be referred to as “team gossip network density” and is assessed as the ratio of existing gossip ties between team members relative to the maximum possible number of these gossip ties in the team. An example of a highly dense gossip network will be one in which everyone shares gossip with everyone else; this network will also likely have a high degree of shared norms, increased communication and collective resources and information.

Past research has shown that team network density related to different types of tie content such as instrumental or task-related information (e.g., Reagans, Zuckerman, & McEvily, 2004), support or affect-laden resources (Podolny & Baron, 1997; Oh, Chung & Labianca, 2004), advice (Nebus, 2006) and hindrance, or difficult relationships in which valuable information is withheld (Labianca, Brass & Gray, 1998; Sparrowe, et al, 2001) differentially influences team outcomes such as group performance, effectiveness and viability. Indeed, this suggests that density alone does not shape group outcomes, but that the content of the information that flows through the ties also plays an important role in ascertaining team outcomes. Thus, it is likely that the content of gossip flowing through the team ties may have a varying effect on group outcomes. Team members can engage in *intra-team* gossip, in which they talk about and evaluate their own team members’ actions and behaviors. On the other hand, because teams are situated within

organizations, individuals have connections outside of their teams (Ancona & Caldwell, 1992), many of which overlap usually because they are part of similar social networks. Therefore teams may also engage in *extra-team gossip*, in which team members engage in gossip about individuals outside of their teams, a behavior noted by Roy (1958), who in his study of factory workers found that team interactions were often influenced by members outside their team.

Given these two types of gossip content, my overarching research question was: Does the density of gossip social networks within teams have implications for team outcomes like team cooperation, viability and performance? Also, does the content of gossip (intra-versus extra-team gossip) influence these outcomes?

### **The Receiver's Perspective: Dispositional Attributions of the Gossiper**

Engaging in gossip may also have reputational consequences for the gossiper: when others observe it, they may make dispositional attributions of the gossiper's behavior. In general, people are likely to make dispositional attributions that one's behavior is caused by stable internal characteristics rather than situational forces (Gilbert & Malone, 1995) and use these behaviors to infer their goals, motives and traits (e.g., Reeder, Hesson-McInnis, Krohse & Scialabba, 2001; Ross, 1977). Specifically, gossip, as an interpersonal behavior may be diagnostically important because it is intentional in nature. Engaging in gossip is seen as purposive and instrumental (Paine, 1967) as gossipers *choose* to share and discuss their evaluations of others' behaviors. This deliberate,

voluntary decision to impart gossip may be seen as portraying the gossiper's traits, motives and values (Heider, 1958) and, may therefore, play a central role in perceivers' attributions and judgments (Tetlock & Lerner, 1999). Indeed, some recent network research finds that individuals' abilities to convey gossip influenced their perceived levels of influence in organizational settings: the more an employee gossiped, the more informal influence they were granted by their colleagues (Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, & Labianca, 2010). This positive benefit may have accrued because the gossiper was able to portray him- or herself as an expert on the norms of the group (Baumeister, et al, 2004), which in turn lead to perceptions of influence and status (Anderson, Spataro & Flynn, 2008). Thus, in this section I hope to explore two main dimensions of attributions, trustworthiness and competence (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002), that may result as an outcome of engaging in gossip.

### ***Gossip Centrality and Attributions of Trustworthiness***

Engaging in gossip may influence team members' perceptions of the gossiper's trustworthiness. In this positive perspective, trustworthiness, or the extent to which a person is seen as benevolent and honorable (Davis, Schoorman, Mayer, & Tan, 2000) may be signaled through the telling of gossip for a number of reasons. First, from a dyadic perspective, the process of exchanging gossip indicates that the gossiper is intentionally choosing to share a confidence or a private opinion with a recipient suggests that that the recipient is trusted by the gossiper (Yovetich & Drigotas, 1999). Because



trust is likely to develop through a spiral (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994), such that when someone trusts us, we are more likely to trust them as well, the act of receiving gossip, accompanied by the gossipers' trust may cause recipients' to view him or her as being trustworthy. Across a series of dyadic interactions, centrality in the gossip network may result in an overall attribution of trustworthiness.

Attributions of trustworthiness can also be explained through the lenses of identity theory. Since, many gossip discussions tend to revolve around an "us versus them" – or we are better than they are- theme (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986), identity theorists would also suggest that gossipers establish themselves as part of an in-group, who through their evaluative discussion of a third party, who by default then becomes part of an "out-group". Individuals who are central in a gossip network are likely to be perceived as part of the in-group and will be, in turn, viewed as more trustworthy (Brewer, 1991).

Last, trustworthiness may be inferred through a process of mutual verification. Because gossip usually requires, the two parties involved in the interaction to agree with one another (Eder & Enke, 1991; Leaper & Holliday, 1995), the cycle of corroboration and agreement triggers feelings of similarity, which in turn is likely to cause the gossip recipient to view the gossipers as trustworthy (Byrne, 1971; Byrne, Clore & Smeaton, 1986).

However, gossip can also have a negative impact on trustworthiness perceptions. Most of these negative perceptions are driven by the morally questionable nature of gossip. Many

recipients may view gossip as a strategic ploy to gain attention or power and further the gossipers' own selfish self-interests at the expense of the target's, and therefore may be less likely to trust them (Wilson, et al, 2000). Also, gossipers may be seen meddling and untrustworthy because of their betrayal of others' secrets (Kelley, 2002; Percival, 2000) and because gossip breaks the implicit rules of friendship that include not talking badly about mutual friends and not betraying confidences (Emler, 1994). Last, because gossip is often viewed as unreliable (Rysman, 1977), it is possible that the communicator of that information will also be viewed as untrustworthy. As such I offer two competing hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 12a:** Centrality in the gossip network will be positively related to attributions of trustworthiness

**Hypothesis 12b:** Centrality in the gossip network will be negatively related to attributions of trustworthiness.

### ***Gossip Centrality and Attributions of Competence***

The social functions of gossip, information and norm enforcement, suggest that gossip is likely to have a positive effect on attributions of competence. In support of this claim, the more central an individual is in the gossip network, the more information they may have access to. In turn this information about the social environment may help the gossipier navigate complex social environments and achieve interpersonal goals (Hannerz, 1967). Because gossip serves to convey information that is often unavailable through other

channels (Ayim, 1994), or through other people, it allows gossipers who are central in the network to signal that they have access to and control over information. Recipients may infer that the gossip is not only in possession of a special understanding of the organization's social norms and values (Baumeister, Zhang & Vohs, 2004) but that they have control over the spread of this information. Because information is a valued resource in organizations (Etzioni, 1961), the gossipers' information base may allow them to accrue reputations of expertise and competence (Dunbar, 1996). Furthermore, gossipers may also appear more competent and efficacious if they use gossip as an impression management strategy. Centrality in the gossip network may allow gossipers may choose to share information that allows them to socially compare themselves with the target and shows them in the best light, thus, allowing them to build positive impressions in the eyes of their recipients (Suls, 1977). To build perceptions of competence, gossipers may also engage in another impression management strategy that includes making evaluative judgments of others to look worldly-wise and intelligent (Amabile, 1983).

On the other hand, the perception of gossipers is that they spend more time engaging in gossip than working and may be viewed as incompetent, lazy and unproductive. Because gossip is unrelated to the task at hand, people who choose to engage in it at work may be seen as shirking or focusing on irrelevant details. Lending support to the negative gossip-competence relationship, some recent findings suggest that managers penalized gossipers

with low performance ratings (Grosser, et, al 2010). As there is evidence for both sides of this question, the following competing hypotheses are posited:

**Hypothesis 13a:** Centrality in the gossip network will be positively related to attributions of competence

**Hypothesis 13b:** Centrality in the gossip network will be negatively related to attributions of competence.

### **Gossip and its Group-Level Outcomes: Theory and Hypotheses**

Based on McGrath's (1964) input-process-outcome framework for studying teams, I propose a model of the effects of gossip on team processes and outcomes. In this model, the inputs include team-level factors (such as the gender makeup of the team, and the density of team-level gossip) that coalesce to influence team processes and overall outcomes. These team processes, or mediators (Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro , 2001) comprise motivational and affective states, such as psychological safety and perceived team politics, that emerge as the team works together. Team outcomes in turn are valued activities and results that include team cooperation and performance and members' affective reactions (e.g., team viability).

#### ***Gossip Density and Perceptions of Team Politics***

Perceptions of team politics represent the degree to which team members view their work or team environment as promoting and maximizing the self-interests of others (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991). With regard to intra-team gossip, I posit that individuals in teams that

engage in intra-team gossip, or gossip about their own team members are likely to perceive their teams as being more political. As such, higher levels of intra-team gossip may enhance individuals' subjective perceptions of team politics for three main reasons. First, gossip may be viewed a deliberate and strategic ploy to gain attention and power and further the gossipers' selfish self-interests by putting others down (Paine, 1967) or passing judgments on others' behaviors (Kurland & Pelled, 2000). A relatively large number of team members exchanging gossip about each other is therefore, indicative of a focus on self-image enhancement and competition for resources, which in turn will cause the team to be perceived as being more political. Furthermore, higher amounts of intra-team gossip may also give rise to the formation of coalitions, as team members put each other down in a desire to gain resources and power. The formation of these alliances facilitates group fragmentation and is a type of influence tactic (Kipnis, Schmidt, & Wilkinson, 1980) that will also lead to higher perceptions of politics in the team. Last, since gossipers pass moral judgments on others by reviewing their actions based on their fit with the group values (Baumeister, et al, 2004), targets within a team may feel pressure to conform to group norms and roles. High density of intra-team gossip, as accompanied by a pressure to conform may restrict the freedom of team members and cause a sense of a loss of control (Katz & Kahn, 1978) and a feeling of being constantly monitored (Markus, 1978), experiences that are linked to individuals' perceptions of politics in the work environment (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989).

Although I expect a positive relationship between intra-team gossip density and perceptions of team politics, I contend that the relationship between extra-team gossip density and perceptions of team politics will be negative. This is because as team members discuss individuals or teams outside of their team boundary, they are likely to amplify their sense of group membership. By highlighting group-level norms and values and decreasing differences within the team, the team members are likely to be viewed as working toward their interests of the group, rather than the self. Ferris and colleagues have highlighted that teams that agreement around group norms as well as the existence of collective goals are two main factors that decrease perceptions of politics (Ferris, et al, 1989; Ferris, et al, 1993). Therefore, I predict that:

**Hypothesis 14a:** Intra-team gossip density is positively associated with perceptions of team politics.

**Hypothesis 14b:** Extra-team gossip density is negatively associated with perceptions of team politics.

### ***Gossip Density and Team Psychological Safety***

Working in interdependent project team settings requires team members to share information, ask questions and seek help. Although these activities are required for project team success, engaging in them carries interpersonal risks (Edmondson, 1999) such that individuals who enact them may worry that they will be viewed as incompetent or disruptive (Edmondson, 2002) and may experience retribution by receiving penalties

in the form of fewer instrumental and socio-emotional resources. Team environments that allow individuals to take these interpersonal risks without fear of being penalized are considered psychologically safe (Edmondson, 1999). When a team is psychologically safe, team members expect that their teammates will treat them with respect and acceptance; they will not be embarrassed or punished by their peers if they express their views or display weaknesses.

In teams that have high levels of intra-team gossip, in which a large proportion of group members exchange gossip about others' in their group, I propose that psychological safety is likely to be low. Gossip tends to convey and affirm information about social norms and other guidelines for behavior (Baumeister, et al, 2004) and therefore acts as a form of social control (Wilson, et al, 2000). Specifically, gossip can be viewed as a policing device that can be employed to regulate team members' behaviors, especially those that have violated the group's collective or moral norms. In this type of team environment, team members may feel like they are being persistently monitored and evaluated, either overtly or implicitly. Because people are concerned about belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), maintaining a positive self-image (Steele, 1988) and fear being evaluated (Fiske, Morling & Stevens, 1996), being the target of judgment may cause them to adhere to team norms, experience heightened levels of self-consciousness and feel less trusted (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975), experiences that reduce their perception of team-level psychological safety. Experiencing heightened levels of self-

consciousness may cause individual team members to become preoccupied with the how others' perceive and judge them (Schlenker, Forsyth, Leary & Miller, 1980) and therefore avoid engaging in interpersonally risky behavior that is at the core of psychologically safe environments. From a more norm-driven perspective, because acting appropriately as per the team's standards may cause individuals to feel more accepted and rewarded (Kahn 1990), team members may be less willing to disagree or challenge others' views, indicating a lack of interpersonal risk-taking (Edmondson, 1999) and causing lower levels of team psychological safety (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004).

Alternatively, a relatively large number of members gossiping about individuals or groups outside of the team may have a positive influence on psychological safety.

Because gossip tends to result in consensus (Eder & Enke, 1991), it may allow the team to develop and preserve strong norms and perpetuate their group's culture (Baumeister, et al, 2004). Furthermore, gossiping about members outside of the team will trigger an "us versus them" team orientation, which will contribute to the formation and maintenance of positive relationships among team members (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). In general, positive interpersonal relationships that are characterized as supportive and trusting promote psychological safety (Kahn, 1990) because are prepared to take risks without fearing they might endanger the relationship or subject it to irreversible damage.

**Hypothesis 15a:** Intra-team gossip density is negatively associated with team psychological safety.



**Hypothesis 15b:** Extra-team gossip density is positively associated with team psychological safety

### ***Gossip and Cooperation***

As work in teams is highly interdependent, it necessitates individuals to coordinate decisions and activities to achieve team outcomes. Team cooperation defined as “the willful contribution of personal efforts to the completion of interdependent jobs” (Wagner, 1995, p. 152) requires team members to engage in mutually supportive behavior and demonstrate a collective commitment to the team task (Pinto, Pinto & Prescott, 1993). Thus, team cooperation is an important element of team effectiveness (Kozlowski & Bell, 2003) and has been linked to important team outcomes like performance (Brannick, Roach & Salas, 1993), innovation (Woodman, Sawyer & Griffin, 1993) and efficiency (Seers, Petty & Cashman, 1995).

In terms, of the influence of intra-and extra-team gossip on team cooperation, I predict that intra-team gossip and extra-team gossip will have opposing influences on team cooperation, such that intra-team gossip will negatively influence team cooperation, while extra-team gossip will have a positive effect on team cooperation. Further, I propose that these relationships will be mediated by emergent team states such as psychological safety and perceptions of team politics.

The negative influence of intra-team gossip density on team cooperation is likely to occur through two mechanisms. First, as described above, when members of a team engage in

large amounts of gossip about other members of the team, team members are likely to feel monitored as well as afraid that their behavior will be gossiped about as well. These negative feelings, accompanied by an overall desire to adhere to coworker norms may lead to lower levels of psychological safety in the team (Edmondson, 1999; May, et al, 2004). This in turn will likely lead to lower levels of team cooperation because the anxiety of being judged along with a decreased desire to take risks and challenge others that accompanies lower experiences of psychological safety will cause individuals to lose focus of the group outcomes and focus instead on self-protection strategies (Dirks, 1999). This type of individual focus will hurt the group's ability to coordinate and work together, because individuals are focused less on collective goals and do not engage fully in team cooperative behaviors. Second, high levels of intra-team gossip are also likely to increase the level of perceived politics in teams. High levels of politics, associated with experiences of thwarted belonging (Thau, Aquinis & Poortviliet, 2007) may cause individuals to engage in self-serving behavior (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992) that advance their own interests but create little of value for their teams.

In contrast, extra-team gossip density, or the extent to which team members gossip about individuals outside the team, may serve to knit team members together. In general positive, high-quality relationships and more stringent group boundaries serve to enhance psychological safety (Carmeli, Brueller & Dutton, 2009). High levels of psychological safety, coupled with open, team environment with low levels of politics in turn will be

linked with positive team outcomes like cooperative communication and participation in team activities (Eisenhardt & Bourgeois, 1988; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006).

**Hypothesis 16a:** Intra-team gossip density is negatively associated with team cooperation. **Hypothesis 16b:** Extra-team gossip density is positively associated with team cooperation.

**Hypothesis 17a:** The negative relationship between intra-team gossip density and team cooperation will be mediated by increased levels of perceived politics and decreased levels of team psychological safety.

**Hypothesis 17b:** The positive relationship between extra-team gossip density and team cooperation will be mediated by decreased levels of perceived politics and increased levels of team psychological safety.

### ***Gossip and Viability***

An important dimension of team performance is team viability. Team viability is defined as a group's potential to retain its members—a condition necessary for proper group functioning over time (Goodman, Ravlin, & Schminke, 1987; Hackman, 1987). Viability is a broad construct that captures both the satisfaction of teammates with their membership and their behavioral intent to remain in their team (Barrick & Mount, 1998; Hackman, 1987).

I predict that the extent to which team members' gossip about individuals both inside as well as outside their team should predict team viability, such that intra-team gossip has a

negative effect while extra-team gossip has a positive effect on team viability. The two mechanisms I described above, perceptions of politics and psychological safety are predicted to mediate the relationships between intra- and extra-gossip density and team viability. As I described earlier, teams that have high levels of intra-team gossip, they will perceive higher levels of politics. Increased perceptions of politics usually tend to elicit negative emotional responses like frustration, stress and strain ((Rosen, Harris & Kacmar, 2009), which in turn are likely to cause decreased morale (Rosen, et al, 2009) and satisfaction (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992), which will hurt team viability. Furthermore, intra-team gossip and high levels of perceived politics will usually covary with the formation of coalitions and subgroups. The existence of coalitions is likely to amplify the salience of in-group/out-group membership and cause strain and polarization between subgroups (Hogg, Turner, & Davidson, 1990), which will decrease feelings of team viability. Lower experiences of team psychological safety associated with intra-team gossip will in turn hurt team viability. As such, psychologically unsafe team environments cause individuals to distance themselves from their work and work relationships and experience lower satisfaction (Kahn, 1990), experiences that are linked with lower levels of team viability.

Extra-team gossip, on the other hand, will have a complementary effect. Because it causes individuals to feel closer and strengthens experiences of group identity, it will lead to higher levels of psychological safety and lower levels of perceived politics in the team.

These positive experiences in turn cause individuals to internalize their work roles and relationships (Brown & Leigh, 1996; Kacmar, Bozeman, Carlson, & Anthony, 1999; Kahn, 1990) and lead to increased team viability and satisfaction.

**Hypothesis 18a:** Intra-team gossip density is negatively associated with team viability.

**Hypothesis 18b:** Extra-team gossip density is positively associated with team viability.

**Hypothesis 19a:** The negative relationship between intra-team gossip density and team viability will be mediated by increased levels of perceived politics and decreased levels of team psychological safety.

**Hypothesis 19b:** The positive relationship between extra-team gossip density and team viability will be mediated by decreased levels of perceived politics and increased levels of team psychological safety.

## **Summary**

The hypotheses described above outline how gossip is a highly complex phenomenon that has profound consequences for affect, cognition and behavior. Specifically, I explore how gossip operates at different levels of analysis, influencing important aspects of people's experiences in work-related contexts, from intrapsychic outcomes like emotions, cognitions and motivation, to their reputations, their relationships and their team-specific experiences. To test these hypotheses I explore the influence of gossip on cognitive outcomes at the individual (self-esteem, task motivation), dyadic (dyadic agreement and cooperation) and team (team perceptions of psychological safety, politics and

cooperation) levels as well as affective outcomes at the individual (energy, positive affect, guilt), dyadic (dyadic rapport) and team (in terms of perceptions of team viability) levels.

## **CHAPTER 4: INDIVIDUAL AND DYADIC OUTCOMES OF GOSSIP**

### **A Description of the Empirical Strategy**

This dissertation focuses on the consequences of engaging in gossip for individuals and dyads, especially within work-relevant contexts. In general, the empirical study of gossip has been problematic for two main reasons. First, gossip tends to be a private and secretive behavior, which people go to extreme lengths to disguise and conceal (Jaeger, et al, 1994). In addition to being a clandestine behavior, when gossip occurs within conversations, it is often very subtle, and filled with subtext and para-linguistic cues like sarcasm and humor that are too difficult for outside observers and researchers to decode and understand (Keltner, et al, 2008; Wert & Salovey, 2004a). Indeed, these methodological issues, coupled with the aforementioned definitional issues (Foster, 2004; Rosnow, 2001) have also added to the barriers around the study of gossip and may explain in part why such a ubiquitous and organizationally-relevant behavior such as gossip has gone understudied for so long. As such the little research on gossip and its outcomes has mainly been examined through participant observations or ethnographies and simplified, controlled laboratory studies that involve the use of hypothetical scenarios or prior experiences of gossip. Following I will briefly discuss how these methods have

contributed to the field of gossip and outline my strategy for building on the study of gossip in this dissertation.

Early research on gossip was conducted by anthropologists who provided in-depth, first-hand accounts of gossip in specific contexts. These researchers studied gossip behaviors in small ethnic groups using participant observation techniques. While their ethnographies offer intriguing insights into gossip in both urban (Gilmore, 1978; Roy, 1958) and tribal (Colson, 1953; Cox, 1970) social contexts, it is difficult to generalize their observations from these unique groups to all types of gossip exchanges, or to narrow in on the specific factors that influence gossip behaviors and their resulting intrapsychic and interpersonal outcomes. More essentially, these observations took place in social and familial settings and so the findings cannot directly be applied to work contexts. Given such specificity, ethnography may not be the best way to rigorously test hypotheses around gossip and other types of interpersonal communication behaviors, but instead, provide fertile ground for further theoretical development.

Another common technique for the study of gossip includes basic, simple laboratory studies. While laboratory studies offer a high level of control in testing causal relationships, for the most part, these studies either involved hypothetical gossip scenarios rather than authentic gossip exchanges. In these studies, researchers either provide participants with hypothetical “gossip” scenarios (McAndrew et al, 2007; Wilson, et al, 2000) or ask them to retrospectively remember situations that engendered



gossip (Baumeister, et al, 2004). For instance, in a study that looked at who people were likely to share gossip with, McAndrew et al (2007) developed a set of vignettes, in the form of hypothetical gossip situations and with reference to these scenarios asked respondents questions such as “how likely they were to pass along the hypothetical gossip” and “who they would like to tell this piece of gossip to”. While this research helps to shed light on a part of this phenomenon previously uninvestigated, it does not provide us with a clear understanding of how people actually act in situations where the gossip is about someone in their social network. Furthermore, it is unclear whether the scenarios were interpreted in a similar manner by the respondents. As such, while such experiments are a valuable means of isolating elements that may play a role in how and why gossip exchanges occur, they offer little insight into how people behave and react in real-world situations where multiple factors (such as relationships, concerns about social desirability and reputations, past experiences, etc.) dynamically and simultaneously vary with each other. Similarly, experiments that use retrospective accounts of gossip exchanges (Baumeister, et al, 2004) may also fall victim to some of these issues. These types of studies are not able to ensure that the situations involved in each retrospective account are comparable, and thus, it is hard to ascertain and generalize about the outcomes of individual gossip behavior. Thus, these types of studies, while helping to illuminate and build on our understanding of gossip, do not allow us to predict behavior and outcomes that occur in due to engaging in this behavior. This does not mean that

laboratory experiments are not helpful to even our contextual understanding of gossip, but they must be conducted in a way that tries to realistically bring that context in to the lab. In an attempt to capture a more authentic view of how gossip operates in real-world settings, researchers have more recently started to explore how gossip operates in social networks, such as sororities (Jaeger, et al, 1994) and work organizations, such as hospitals, schools and non-profit organizations (Ellwardt, Labianca & Wittek, 2011; Grosser, et al, 2010; Hallett, Harger & Eder, 2009; Waddington, 2005). These recent studies are a step forward in illustrating how gossip operates in work-related contexts as well as showing the value of utilizing survey and sociometric methodologies to study gossip; however, they have, so far, been limited in their cross-sectional designs and small samples.

### **Overview of Studies**

In an attempt to overcome some of these drawbacks, the two studies in this dissertation will employ a range of designs and methods: a naturalistic laboratory experiment and a longitudinal survey study of teams. The experiment, Study 1, will have people enacting real and natural gossip exchanges in face-to-face interactions while, the second, survey-based study, Study 2, will assess real, aggregate patterns of gossip behaviors in teams and their outcomes in a work-related context and will explore the effects of these aggregate gossip patterns on team outcomes in a longitudinal design. Although each of these methods carries their own set of limitations, the use of multiple methods and designs

allows me to compensate for the limitations raised by each of the methods. Taken together, the studies provide a thorough test of the hypotheses at individual, dyadic and group levels using different samples and methodologies.

The first study, presented in this chapter, focuses specifically on the individual and dyadic outcomes of gossip. This study, a laboratory experiment, that required undergraduate students to engage in real episodes of gossip allowed me to explore the role of gossip on individual (Hypotheses 1 through 7) and dyadic (Hypotheses 10 through 13) outcomes of gossip. The second study, described in Chapter 5, comprised a longitudinal study of student teams and will look at how participating in gossip networks was related to individual outcomes (Hypotheses 8 and 9) and team outcomes (Hypotheses 14 to 19).

## STUDY 1: METHOD

In this study, I investigate the individual and dyadic consequences of engaging gossip with an eye towards understanding (1) how engaging in gossip influences individuals' own short-term intrapsychic emotions and cognitions, and (2) the effects of gossip on affective dyadic outcomes such as relationship closeness and work-related, behavioral outcomes such as cooperation.

### Participants and Experimental Design

One hundred and twenty-six undergraduate students from the University of Pennsylvania were recruited through the Wharton Behavioral Lab and were asked to bring a same-sex friend to participate in this study to yield a total sample size of 252 participants (100 male and 152 female). The participants' mean age was 19.87 years ( $SD= 1.48$ ). As an incentive, each dyad was compensated with \$30. The friendship pairs were randomly assigned to one of three conditions, in which they were asked to engage in either: (1) gossip, (2) self-disclosure, or (3) a task-based discussion. In the experimental condition (the "gossip" condition), participants were instructed to spend ten minutes gossiping, or talking about people that they knew in common. In the first control condition (the "self-disclosure" condition), participants were instructed to spend ten minutes sharing personal information about themselves with their partners. This condition was included to ensure that the outcomes of gossip did indeed differ from self-disclosure, a common interpersonal communicative behavior that has been referred to as "*gossip about the self*"

(Kuttler, et al, 2002) and is also linked to enhanced relationship quality (Cozby, 1973; Jourard & Lasakow, 1958). In comparing gossip with self-disclosure, gossip may be a more efficient way to gain the same benefits as self-disclosure, which often tends to be anxiety-wrought (Frey & Tropp, 2006) and carries with it the social risk of the listener forming negative appraisals and attributions (Kelly & McKillop, 1996) and rejecting the discloser (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Indeed, some research has shown that disclosure alone may not be enough to enhance relational bonds and that self-disclosure only results in better relationships when the discloser divulges intimate information (Laurenceau, Feldman-Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998) or discloses to a members of a demographically similar group (Phillips, Northcraft & Neale, 2006), thus suggesting that that gossip may be a faster, less risky and easier way to attain the same relational benefits. In the second control condition (the “task discussion” condition), participants were instructed to spend ten minutes working on an engaging team-based task. This condition was included to compare both the gossip and self-disclosure conditions with one which did not carry any personal information and closely mimicked daily work interactions in the workplace.

## **Procedure**

The experimental procedure consisted of the following steps. On arrival to the laboratory, the same-sex friendship dyads were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions: gossip, self-disclosure or task-related discussion. Each dyad was led to a private room

equipped with cameras that both audio- and videotaped their interactions (please see Figure 2 for a pictorial representation of the room). While the participants were informed that they were being videotaped, two precautions were taken to make them feel more at ease. First, the video cameras were unobtrusively arranged in the room to capture the participants' conversation while preventing them from feeling self-conscious (please see Figure 3 for a photograph of the camera that was used). Second, all participants were repeatedly reassured by the experimenter that no one, but the experimenter and her team would be permitted view the videotapes.

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PLEASE INSERT FIGURES 2 AND 3 HERE  
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### Pre-Surveys

Once in the private room, each member of the friendship dyad, in all three conditions was first asked to individually complete a survey that assessed their baseline state (or how they felt “right now, that is at the present moment”) of self-esteem, a set of emotions, energy, and their feelings towards their partner. To ensure that the two individuals felt comfortable to be honest about their responses, they entered their answers on two separate laptop computers that were arranged on a table across from each other. Once, this survey was completed, the experimenter entered the room and provided instructions

to the friendship dyads based on their random assignment to one of the three experimental conditions.

### Experimental Manipulations

On completing the survey, the participants were asked to move to two chairs that were arranged side-by-side to allow them to feel more comfortable engaging in a conversation. The experimenter instructed the participants in the gossip condition to work together to generate a list of a total of five common friends, enemies and acquaintances. They were then instructed to spend the next 10 minutes talking about one or more of these common acquaintances<sup>4</sup>. To prevent social desirability concerns raised by the negative connotation carried by the term “gossip”, the experimenters were careful to define the term, not using the specific word and also gently reminded the participants at the beginning of the

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<sup>4</sup> The instructions for the gossip condition requested the participants to talk about the individuals on their respective lists, but did not restrict their conversations by allowing the gossiping dyads to talk about other individuals. As Emler (1994) found, the experience of gossip is that is an informal interaction with no necessary fixed agenda. Emler argues that formality works against the process gossip as it discourages disclosure and that unstructured environments are the most conducive to the transmission of gossip.

experiment that evaluating other people was a universally-practiced and essential human ability. The exact instructions were as follows:

“In this session, we are studying social interactions. One of the major types of social interactions that people engage in is talking about other people they know. Indeed this forms about 60-70% of what people do when they interact at work. Thus, to help us understand the processes of social interactions at work, we would like you to now talk to each other about any number of the people on your mutual lists. That is, you can choose to talk about one, two or all of the people on your list. You are also welcome to talk about others who are not on the list. You have about 10 minutes to engage in this interaction. I will knock on the door and enter after your time has lapsed.”

The participants in the “*self-disclosure*” condition were given a list of questions from Sedikedes, Campebell, Reeder & Elliot’s (1999) relationship induction or self-disclosure task and were requested to deliberate on these questions and discuss the answers with each other. They were reminded that none of their experiences should involve lengthy discussions of other people, and should focus instead on themselves. Other than the disclosure-specific instructions, the rest of the instructions for this condition mimicked that of those in the gossip condition. In this condition, the experimenter’s instructions were as follows:



“In this session, we are studying social interactions. One of the major types of social interactions that people engage in is talking about themselves. Indeed this forms about 60-70% of what people do when they interact at work. Thus, to help us understand the processes of social interactions at work, we would like you to now talk to each other about yourselves and have provided a set of questions that you can follow to help you get started on this interaction. You can choose to talk about any number of these questions- you can focus on one or all of them in this study. During this time, please try not to talk about anyone other than yourself. You have about 10 minutes to engage in this interaction. I will knock on the door and enter after your time has lapsed.”

The participants in the third condition, the task discussion condition, were asked to participate in a task based on Staw and Boettger (1990). This task required the dyads to work on developing a promotional brochure for prospective students applying to the Wharton school. Other than the task-specific instructions, the rest of the instructions for this condition mimicked that of those in the gossip condition. In this condition, the experimenter provided the following instructions:

“In this session, we are studying social interactions. One of the major types of social interactions that people engage in is taking part in shared work. Indeed that is 60-70% of what people do when they interact at work. Thus, to help us understand the processes of social interactions at work, we would like you to now

to read the instructions on the sheet and to work together to complete this task. You have about 10 minutes to engage in this interaction. I will knock on the door and enter after your time has lapsed.”

#### Post-Interaction Questionnaires

Immediately subsequent to these ten-minute interactions, the participants were then instructed by the experimenter to complete a second questionnaire (the “post interaction survey”). In this post-interaction survey, the participants were asked to rate how they felt during the interaction using the same state self-esteem and emotions items as those they rated prior to the interaction, or in the baseline survey. The questionnaire also asked about their experience of dyadic rapport as well as the extent to which they were engaged in the interaction.

#### Two-party Negotiation Description

Once, participants completed this second, post-interaction survey, they were then provided with a scenario regarding a two-person negotiation (Vacation Planning, Dispute Resolution Research Center). As part of this negotiation, participants were asked to play the role of two friends who have different preferences concerning how to spend a vacation. This two-party negotiation had distributive elements and integrative elements (where participants could maximize their joint gain through logrolling, identifying and mutually sharing specific information as well as distributive elements. The point-scoring scheme provided to participants illustrates these integrative and distributive components.

Participants were told that the use of points might seem somewhat artificial but that it would allow them to compare how they feel about the various alternative agreements. Specifically, participants were told that the points define their interests for the vacation. Associated with each issue were five possible options (choice of destination, mode of travel, season of travel, hotel rating and length of stay), each with an associated payoff. On one of the negotiator's schedules, the issue of mode of travel had the highest potential for payoff (420 points) and the issue of choice of destination had the lowest potential (80 points); these priorities were reversed for the other negotiator. Thus, the task had integrative (logrolling) potential for negotiators, and therefore, high joint outcomes could be achieved if the negotiators exchanged concessions on their low- and high-priority issues. The issue of hotel rating and season of travel were distributive issues and were of equal priority to each negotiator such that each negotiator had opposing preferences for them. There was one issue, length of stay, for which both negotiators had the same preferences. The maximum joint outcome score possible was 1600 (e.g., 820 points for one negotiator and 780 points for the other negotiator). Participants were not given any information about their opponent's payoff, and they were told not to share with their opponent the specific numbers on their point schedule. The overall points attained by each dyad as well as the difference between the points for each member of the dyad were used as the two behavioral measures of cooperation. The two point schedules are presented in Table 1, while details about the roles are in Appendix 2.

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PLEASE INSERT TABLE 1 HERE.

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### Post Negotiation Questionnaires

After the negotiation, the participants were asked to complete a post-negotiation questionnaire that was the same as the post-interaction questionnaire in that it assessed participants' individual outcomes like state self-esteem, affect, engagement as well as dyadic outcomes such as closeness and rapport. Once they had completed this last survey, the participants were debriefed and paid. A description of the study is presented in Figure 4 and the set of scales used in these three surveys is presented in Appendix 1. A table of the various scales assessed at the three points in time: baseline, post-interaction and post-negotiation is presented in Table 2.

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PLEASE INSERT FIGURE 4 AND TABLE 2 HERE.

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### **Dependent Variables: Self-Reported Measures**

**State self-esteem.** Participants completed a 13-item self-reported measure of explicit of state self-esteem based on the performance and social subscales from Heatherton and Polivy's (1991) state self-esteem scale at three points in time: before engaging in the

interaction, after engaging in the social interaction and after the negotiation. Sample items include “I feel confident about my abilities,” “I feel inferior to others at this moment,” and “I feel displeased with myself right now”. This scale was assessed based on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The internal consistency of this scale ranged from .87 to .90 across the three time points. I also assessed whether self-esteem was influenced as a result of dyadic interactions. As expected, given that state self-esteem is an individual measure that fluctuates based on an individuals’ baseline, or trait level, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) based on dyad membership for self-esteem after the interaction ( $F(124, 119) = .88, ns$ ) and after the negotiation ( $F(125, 115) = 1.05, ns$ ) were not significant, thus suggesting that the self-esteem outcomes did not reflect dyadic membership.

**Positive Emotions.** Participants assessed their experiences of positive emotions using 10 items from the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS; Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988) before beginning the interaction, after the social interaction and after the negotiation. Using the stem “how you feel right now, that is at this very moment”, individuals were given adjectives such as excited and enthusiastic to measure the extent to which they were experiencing positive emotions and were asked to rate these items on a scale of 1= *strongly disagree* to 7= *strongly agree*. Coefficient alphas for this scale ranged from .87 to .88 across the three time periods. On assessing whether it was important to control for dyadic level effects, the one-way analyses of variance measures

(post interaction,  $F(125, 121) = 2.78, p < .01$ ; post-negotiation,  $F(125, 125) = 2.38, p < .01$ ) and the intraclass coefficient scores (post-interaction,  $ICC(1) = .48$ ; post-negotiation,  $ICC(1) = .41$ ) suggested that positive emotional outcomes were influenced by the dyadic interaction and that multilevel analyses, controlling for the effects of the dyad were necessary.

**Energy.** To capture participants' experiences of energy, I included a 3-item measure of activation from Feldman-Barrett and Russell (1998). On a scale, with three items, ranging from 1 (*relaxed*) to 7 (*energetic*), 1 (*calm*) to 7 (*excited*) and 1 (*inactive*) to 7 (*active*), participants rated their experiences before and after the social interaction as well as after the negotiation. The internal consistency of the scale was .84 to .90 across the three time-points. The one-way analyses of variance measures (post interaction,  $F(125, 124) = 1.72, p < .01$ ; post-negotiation,  $F(125, 122) = 1.81, p < .01$ ) and the intraclass coefficient scores (post-interaction,  $ICC(1) = .27$ ; post-negotiation,  $ICC(1) = .30$ ) suggested that these energy-related outcomes were influenced by the dyadic interaction.

**Guilt.** A 3-item guilt sub-scale from Izard's (1977) Differential Emotions Scale was included to assess participants' experiences of guilt before engaging in the social interaction, after engaging in the social interaction and after the negotiation. This scale consists of the following items: guilty, remorseful and regretful and was rated on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). While, the internal consistency of the scale was .82 to .89 across the three time-points, neither the one-way analyses of variance measures (post

interaction,  $F(125, 123)=1.06, ns$ ; post-negotiation,  $F(125, 123)=.81, ns$ ) nor the intraclass coefficient scores (post-interaction,  $ICC(1)=.03$ ; post-negotiation,  $ICC(1)=.01$ ) suggested that participant experiences of guilt were influenced by the dyadic interaction.

**Engagement.** Engagement in both the social interaction and the negotiation was measured using an adapted version of Rothbard's (2001) measure of engagement. Using a shortened 3-item measure of attention (sample item included, "I paid a lot of attention during this conversation/negotiation") and absorption (sample items, "I was completely engrossed in this conversation/negotiation" and "I lost track of time during this conversation/negotiation"), participants assessed their experiences of task engagement on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The internal consistency was .84 and .90 for the absorption scale and .82 and .85 for the attention scale across the two time-points, post-interaction and post-negotiation. The one-way analyses of variance measures for absorption (post interaction,  $F(125, 122)= 2.85, p <.01$ ; post-negotiation,  $F(125, 124)= 2.87, p <.01$ ) and the intraclass coefficient scores (post-interaction,  $ICC(1)=.48$ ; post-negotiation,  $ICC(1)= .49$ ) suggested that participants' levels of absorption were influenced by the dyadic interaction. Similarly, the one-way analyses of variance measures for attention (post interaction,  $F(125, 124)= 1.18, p <.01$ ; post-negotiation,  $F(125, 122)= 1.88, p <.01$ ) and the intraclass coefficient scores (post-interaction,  $ICC$

(1)=.10; post-negotiation, ICC (1)= .31) suggested that participants' levels of attention were influenced by the dyadic interaction.

**Dyadic Rapport.** Participants' assessments to the degree to which they experienced rapport with their partners during both the interaction and negotiation were assessed using a 5-item scale from Drolet and Morris (2000). On a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), participants' were asked to rate items such as "I felt as though I understood what my team member was trying to express" and "I felt a great deal of rapport during this interaction". Along with the one-way analyses of variance measures for dyadic rapport (post interaction,  $F(125, 125) = 1.84, p < .01$ ; post-negotiation,  $F(125, 124) = 1.61, p < .01$ ), the intraclass coefficient scores (post-interaction, ICC (1)=.29; post-negotiation, ICC (1)= .24) suggested that participants' levels of dyadic rapport were influenced by the dyadic interaction.

**Relationship Closeness.** To assess the level of relationship closeness, I used two self-reported measures. First, participants assessed how close they felt to their partners using a warmth thermometer. This single-item scale asked participants to rate how close they felt to their friends on a scale of 1= *Not at all close* to 100=*extremely close* (Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998). This measure was an especially relevant measure because it allowed me to assess small changes in the degree of relationship closeness reported by each member of the friendship dyad and was also less susceptible to ceiling effects, a problem that may likely arise when assessing positive relationships using Likert-type



items. Both the one-way analyses of variance measures (baseline,  $F(125, 126) = 2.05, p < .01$ ; post interaction,  $F(125, 126) = 2.37, p < .01$ ; post-negotiation,  $F(125, 126) = 2.18, p < .01$ ) and the intraclass coefficient scores (ICC (1) values were .34, .41 and .37, respectively) highlighted that closeness was influenced by the dyadic interaction and prior friendship between the participating members of the dyad. Second, participants were also asked to complete the Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (Aron, Aron & Smollen, 1992). This scale also comprised a single question and asked participants to choose one of seven pairs of circles overlapping to various degrees, depicting how they felt toward their team member; the relevant values range from 1 (*no overlap*) to 7 (*almost complete overlap*). Again, in addition to the one-way analyses of variance (post interaction,  $F(125, 126) = 1.43, p < .05$ ; post-negotiation,  $F(125, 125) = 1.48, p < .05$ ), the intraclass coefficient scores (ICC (1) values were .17 and .19, respectively), both indicating that that closeness was an outcome of dyadic membership.

**Cooperation.** I examined the total number of points that dyads earned from their negotiation. This measure of joint gains and logrolling, served as the overall cooperation measure. The maximum number of points that could be earned by any dyad was 1600 points. Higher scores represented more communication and cooperation, while lower scores represented lower levels of cooperation.

### **Coded Measures: Dependent and Independent Variables**

**Conversation coding.** Three coders analyzed the conversations in all three conditions for evidence of negative and positive gossip as well as negative and positive self-disclosure. To align with the non-verbal emotions and body language coding, the coders listened to discrete two-minute segments of the conversations and sequentially coded each of these segments. For each segment of conversation, the coders looked for evidence of gossip and self-disclosure. The degree of positive (and negative gossip) was assessed using the definition of gossip set forth in this dissertation, the extent to which each dyad engaged in making positive (or negative) evaluations about an absent third-party, while self-disclosure was defined as the extent to which the members of each dyad shared positive (or negative) information about themselves. A given two-minute segment could receive multiple scores, participants could share both positive and negative information about other members or themselves. Positive and negative gossip was evaluated on a continuum from 1 (*no positive (or negative) gossip*) to 7 (*High degree of positive (or negative) gossip*) while positive and negative self-disclosure was assessed on a continuum from 1 (*no positive (or negative) self-self-disclosure*) to 7 (*High degree of positive (or negative) self-disclosure*). The three coders showed a high level of inter-rater reliability in assessing these four items (ICC for positive gossip= .89; ICC for negative gossip= .88; ICC for positive self-disclosure= .84; ICC for negative self-disclosure= .87). The coders also coded two-minute segments of the task discussions for sharing of

positive and negative information (ICC for positive information= .80; ICC for negative information= .78)

**Coded Dependent Variables.** Participants' positive emotions, levels of energy and dyadic rapport were also assessed through trained observers' ratings via video-tape ratings of the participants' social interactions. I chose these two different types of measures for these constructs for two reasons. First, from a methodological perspective, the video-coder data allow the benefit of better access to the emotions and energy being expressed by participants on a moment-by-moment basis, while the self-reported emotions provide access to participants' internal states and experiences immediately after the interaction. It is important to assess whether these two measures match, give that even though most research finds that coded ratings of respondents' expressed emotions correspond with their self-reported internal feelings (Barsade, 2002; Filipowicz, Barsade & Melwani, 2011). Furthermore, given the socially undesirable connotation of gossip, I also wanted to ensure that participants who engaged in gossip did not temper the self-reports of their emotions in the retrospective self-report surveys. Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations for all study variables at the individual level of analysis across each of the three conditions.

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PLEASE INSERT TABLE 3 APPROXIMATELY HERE  
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The correlations between the self-reported responses and the coded measures are described in Table 4.

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Three video-coders were extensively trained in coding both the content of conversations as well as emotions (through facial expression and body language) and non-verbal behavior. Much support has been found for video-coders' abilities to reliably judge facial expressions (e.g., Ekman and Friesen, 1975; Gump and Kulik, 1997), body language (Bernieri, Reznik, & Rosenthal, 1988), and group and dyadic dynamics (Bartel & Saavedra, 2000; Bernieri, 1988; Carrère & Gottman, 1999). The interactions were coded on a dyadic level; that is, the coders watched the interactions and rated the dyadic pairs on the extent to which each dyad displayed positive emotions, energy and rapport as well as what the friendship dyads talked about during the course of their conversations. These interactions were coded at a dyadic level because the participants in these same-sex friendship pairs were considered to be indistinguishable from each from one another<sup>5</sup>, the

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<sup>5</sup> Same-sex friendship pairs, homosexual romantic partners and identical twins are all examples of dyads that in which members are typically indistinguishable. If dyad members are indistinguishable, then there is no systematic way to separately analyze their behavior. Dyad

interactions were coded on a dyadic level. To ensure that the coders remained blind to the experimental condition, they first watched the videotapes without sound, thus allowing them to rate non-verbal emotional expressions and body language. They then watched the tapes with sound to be able to code for the content of the conversations, at which point, given the differences across the three conditions, the three conditions could easily be distinguished from one another. For both the dependent variables (positive emotions, energy, dyadic rapport) as well as the independent variables (content of conversation), the coders rated the interactions every two minutes (at the sound of a beep from a timer). These two-minute segments were then aggregated across coders to create overall measures.

**Positive Emotions.** The coders measured the level of displayed positive emotions in each dyad by watching both participants' facial expressions and body language throughout the course of the experiment and rating the level of a dyad's pleasant mood every two minutes (at the sound of a beep) on a scale of 1 (*very slightly or not at all*) to 7 (*very*

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members are only considered distinguishable if there is a meaningful factor (such as gender, or age) that can be used to separate the two individuals. Given the fact that the dyads comprised same-sex pairs as well as the exchange-oriented nature of gossip (i.e., both gossiper and recipient are involved in co-producing gossip-related information, I viewed the dyad members as indistinguishable and chose to code the videotapes at a dyadic level.

*much so*). This assessment of positive emotions consisted of two measures from Gross and Levenson's (1997) Emotional Behavior Coding System: happiness (based on mouth, cheek, and eye-wrinkle movements) and smiles (by counting the number of Duchenne smiles). The ICC interrater reliability among the three video-coders for participants' positive emotion was .77. Furthermore, the coded ratings of participants' positive emotions significantly correlated with the participants' self-reported positive emotions at  $r = .38, p < .001$ .

**Energy.** The coders assessed the level of displayed energy in each dyad by watching and rating participants' facial expressions and body language throughout the course of the experiment. Energy was described to the raters as the degree to which the measured in terms of the degree to which the dyads exhibited energy, activation and arousal every two minutes (at the sound of a beep) on a scale of 1 (*very slightly or not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*). Using each two-minute segment as an item, this measure has an intra-class interrater reliability of .82. Furthermore, the coded ratings of participants' energy levels significantly correlated with the participants' self-reported energy levels at  $r = .35, p < .001$ .

**Dyadic Rapport.** Based on Drolet & Morris' (2000) measure of dyadic rapport, the three video coders were instructed to rate three nonverbal behaviors: postural convergence, facial expression compatibility, and facial expressions of mutual interest. Postural convergence defined as the extent to which the dyadic partners positioned their bodies in

relation to each other such as by simultaneously sitting upright or leaning forward had an ICC inter-rater reliability of .74. Facial expression compatibility defined as the compatibility of the simultaneous expressions of the dyadic partners had an ICC inter-rater reliability of .76, while facial expressions of mutual interest defined as the degree of interest and attentiveness in the interaction had an ICC inter-rater reliability of .79. Together these three measures were averaged (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .80$ ) to create an overall measure of dyadic rapport that significantly correlated ( $r = .26, p < .01$ ) with participants' self-reported measures of dyadic rapport for the interaction.

**Cooperation.** A proxy measure of cooperation, the extent to which the dyadic partners' reinforced or validated each other was assessed through both non-verbal as well as verbal measures. This measure allowed me to explore the dynamics of cooperation in the negotiating dyad in addition to the overall objective measure of cooperation described above. To do so, the coders assessed the degree to which members of each dyad nodded when listening to their partners speak (Givens, 2002; Hadar, Steiner & Rose, 1985) as well as showed verbal signals of agreeing, by using expressions such as "I agree", "yes" or "mmm-hmmm". This measure had an inter-rater reliability of .83 and correlated with the objective measure of cooperation, joint negotiation outcomes at .36,  $p < .01$ .

### **Control variables.**

I included demographic variables, participants' sex and age in order to control for demographic factors that have been associated with gossip behaviors in prior research

(Eder & Enke, 1991; Levin & Arluke, 1987) and might influence the degree to which participants engaged in gossip.

### **Data Analysis**

To examine the differences across the conditions, I conducted two types of analyses: multilevel analyses for the individual-level measures as well as analyses of variance for the measures assessed at a dyadic level. Because the study design included individuals nested within dyads, there was a lack of independence in the data for each individual. To take this lack of independence into account, I formally tested the hypotheses using multilevel modeling (Hofmann, 1997; Hofmann, Griffin, & Gavin, 2000; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). In this case, multilevel modeling is an appropriate choice because the individual-level measures such as positive emotions, energy and individual ratings of rapport are nested within and impacted by dyad-level factors. As per these analyses, the first level of analysis (Level 1) is the individual participant and includes measures of their emotions, energy and assessments of rapport and closeness. The second level of analysis (Level 2) is the dyad and includes the experimental manipulation (of gossip, self-disclosure or task discussion). I employed SAS PROC MIXED to generate a multi-level model controlling for non-independence of observations and random dyad-level variance that might influence the results beyond variance at the individual level (Singer, 1998). To control for random variance related to dyad membership I treated dyad as a random factor in the analysis (Nezlek & Zyzanski, 1998). Furthermore, in these analyses, the



experimental conditions were represented by two dummy-coded variables. The first variable had self-disclosure coded as a 0 while the gossip and task discussion conditions were coded as a 1. The second dummy variable coded the experimental task discussion condition as a 0 while the gossip and self-disclosure conditions were coded as 1. By adding these two variables into the analyses, I was able to explore the main effect of gossip, as compared to the other two types of conversational experimental conditions. For the coded measures, coded at a dyadic level, I used one-way analyses of variance to assess differences across the three experimental conditions for the variables assessed at the dyadic level.

## **STUDY 1: RESULTS**

### **Manipulation Check**

To test whether dyads in the gossip condition did indeed engage in gossip, I relied on the coders' ratings of the conversations, instead of asking individual participants to self-report the extent to which they believed that they had engaged in gossip. Relying on coders' ratings of the conversation were likely to be a more accurate manipulation check than a self-reported measure because research has shown that people may often engage in gossip, without being consciously aware of the fact that they are talking about other people in an evaluative way (Yerkovich, 1977). A comparison of the degree of gossip across the three conditions using planned contrasts and a one-way ANOVA indicated that the manipulation was successful. As can be seen in Figure 5, friendship dyads in the

gossip condition engaged in more negative gossip ( $M = 4.12$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ) than did those in the self-disclosure condition ( $M = 1.61$ ,  $SD = .71$ ),  $t(121) = 12.71$ ,  $p < .001$  and task discussion condition ( $M = 1.00$ ,  $SD = .00$ ),  $t(121) = 15.66$ ,  $p < .001$ . The dyads in the gossip condition also demonstrated higher levels of positive gossip ( $M = 2.59$ ) than did those in the self-disclosure ( $M = 1.18$ ),  $t(121) = 10.27$ ,  $p < .001$  and task discussion ( $M = 1.00$ ) conditions,  $t(121) = 11.54$ ,  $p < .001$ . The dyads in the self-disclosure condition and those in the task discussion condition engaged in the same levels of positive gossip,  $t(121) = 1.28$ ,  $ns$ ; however, those in the self-disclosure condition engaged in more negative gossip than those in the task discussion condition,  $t(121) = 2.91$ ,  $p < .05$ . Additionally, planned contrasts within the gossip condition showed that, friendship dyads in the gossip condition engaged in higher levels of negative gossip than positive gossip,  $t(46) = 6.59$ ,  $p < .001$ .

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 INSERT FIGURE 5 APPROXIMATELY HERE  
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I also corroborated that dyads in the self-disclosure condition indeed engaged in higher levels of self-disclosure than those in the gossip and task discussion conditions. As expected, based on the experimental manipulation, dyads in the self-disclosure condition engaged in higher levels of self-disclosure ( $M = 3.44$ ) than did those in the gossip condition ( $M = 2.85$ ),  $t(121) = 2.74$ ,  $p < .001$  and task discussion conditions ( $M = 1.15$ ),  $t$

(121) = 10.06,  $p < .001$ . Interestingly, there was also a significant difference in the extent to which those in the gossip condition engaged in self-disclosure as compared to those in the task discussion,  $t(121) = 7.70, p < .001$ .

### **Hypothesis Tests: Individual Level Outcomes**

**State-Self-Esteem.** To test Hypothesis 1a and 1b, I ran a multilevel model controlling for random dyad variance as well as gender and baseline levels of self-esteem. In support of Hypothesis 1b, and as can be seen in Table 5, Model 1, gossiping participants did indeed experience lower levels of state self-esteem than those in the self-disclosure ( $b = -.31, p < .01$ ) and task discussion ( $b = -.43, p < .01$ ) conditions, even when controlling for gender and baseline levels of state self-esteem.

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PLEASE INSERT TABLE 5 APPROXIMATELY HERE  
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**Positive Emotion.** Hypothesis 2 predicted that participants in the gossip condition would experience higher levels of positive emotion than those in the self-disclosure or task discussion condition. I first tested this hypothesis using a hierarchical linear model which included Level-1 individual-level control variables (gender and baseline levels of positive emotion and relationship closeness) and Level-2 dyad-level predictors of the dummy-coded experimental condition. As seen in Table 5 (Model 2), the results demonstrated that in support of Hypothesis 2 that participants in the gossip condition experienced

higher levels of positive emotions than did those in the self-disclosure ( $b = .27, p < .05$ ) and task-discussion ( $b = .52, p < .01$ ) conditions. These results were further corroborated by the video-coder ratings of the level of displayed positive emotions in the interaction. As predicted by Hypothesis 2 and mirroring the results from the multilevel analyses that utilized the participants' self-reported outcomes, these coded measures highlighted that dyads who engaged in gossip displayed higher levels of positive emotion ( $M = 5.32, SD = 1.11$ ) than did those who engaged in self-disclosure ( $M = 4.44, SD = .66$ ),  $t(116) = 4.34, p < .001$  or task discussion ( $M = 4.31, SD = .85$ ),  $t(116) = 5.05, p < .001$ . There were no significant differences between those in the self-disclosure and task discussion conditions,  $t(116) = .61, ns$ . Please refer to Figure 6.

**Energy.** Hypothesis 3 predicted that gossiping individuals would experience higher levels of energy than would those who engaged in self-disclosure and a task discussion. Table 5, Model 4 presents results of a multilevel model showing that, even controlling for participants' baseline levels of energy, the individuals who engaged in gossip reported experiencing higher levels of energy than those in the self-disclosure ( $b = .96, p < .01$ ) and task discussion ( $b = .89, p < .01$ ) conditions. Furthermore, the video-coder ratings also reinforced this finding. As can be seen in Figure 7, video-coders rated the dyads in the gossip condition as exhibiting higher levels of energy ( $M = 5.15, SD = 1.05$ ) as compared to those in the self-disclosure ( $M = 4.03, SD = .74$ ),  $t(108) = 5.20, p < .001$  or a task discussion ( $M = 4.20, SD = .84$ ) conditions,  $t(108) = 4.20, p < .001$ . There were no

significant differences between those in the self-disclosure and task discussion conditions,  $t(108) = -.77, ns$ .

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 PLEASE INSERT FIGURES 6 AND 7 HERE  
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**Guilt.** The means in Table 5, Model 3 shows that Hypothesis 3 that predicted that those individuals who engaged in gossip would experience higher levels of guilt than those who engaged in other types of conversations such as self-disclosure and task discussion was not supported. Controlling for gender and participants' initial or baseline levels of guilt, gossiping participants did not report experiencing higher levels of guilt than those in the other two conditions, self-disclosure ( $b = .06, ns$ ) and task discussion ( $b = .18, ns$ ).

**Task motivation: Absorption.** Hypothesis 5 predicted that gossiping individuals would experience higher levels of motivation in the interaction than would those who engaged in self-disclosure and a task discussion. While there were no difference in attention across the three conditions, Table 6, Model 1 presents results of a multilevel model showing that even when controlling for participants' level of attention or concentration during the interaction, the individuals who engaged in gossip reported feeling more absorbed than those in the self-disclosure ( $b = .45, p < .01$ ) and task discussion ( $b = .58, p < .01$ ) conditions. This experience of engagement also had carry over effects: the gossiping participants continued to be more absorbed in the negotiation task that followed the

conversational interaction than those in the self-disclosure ( $b = .12, p < .01$ ) and task discussion ( $b = .21, p < .01$ ) conditions, even when controlling for their levels of attention and absorption in the initial interaction (please refer to Table 6, Model 2).

I also checked whether positive emotions and energy would act as mediators between the experimental condition and the outcome of absorption. Both positive emotion and energy did not significantly relate to absorption, thus preventing me from conducting more detailed mediation analyses.

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PLEASE INSERT TABLE 6 APPROXIMATELY HERE  
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**Valence of Gossip as a Moderator.** Hypotheses 6 and 7 propose that the valence of gossip will attenuate the effects of gossip on gossiper's self-esteem and positive affect, such that those who engage in negative gossip will experience higher levels of self-esteem and positive emotions than those who engage in positively-valenced gossip. Interacting with experimental condition (gossip versus self-disclosure) were two constructed variables, positive valenced conversation (positive gossip and positive self-disclosure) and negative valenced conversation (negative gossip and negative self-disclosure). The task discussion condition was eliminated from these analyses as the task in this condition involved writing a promotional brochure for the Wharton school and thus constrained participants to focus on mostly positive information. Self-disclosure as

the more relevant and stringent control condition was therefore used in these analyses. The analyses consisted of a three-way interaction between experimental condition (gossip versus self-disclosure), positive information and negative information. Table 7 shows the test for the moderating effects of information valence on self-esteem (Model 2) and positive emotion (Model 4) and shows the results of these two three-way interactions. Using self-esteem as the dependent variable, Model 2, indicates that the 3-way interaction is positive and significant ( $\beta = .37, p < .05$ ) suggesting that the valence of information moderates the relationship between engaging in gossip (versus self-disclosure) and state self-esteem. The findings are contrary to what I proposed in Hypothesis 6, that individuals who engaged in negative gossip would experience higher levels of self-esteem than those who engaged in positive gossip. To help illustrate the nature of the three-way interaction, I conducted simple slope analyses of the two-way interaction between positive-valenced and negatively-valenced conversations for each of the conditions, gossip and self-disclosure. Among those who engaged in gossip, the interaction between positive and negative information was significantly related to state self-esteem, and, contrary to my expectations, the sign of the simple slope was positive ( $.17, t(46) = 2.03, p < .05$ ). Thus, as can be seen in Figure 8a, among those who engaged in higher level of positive and lower levels of negative gossip had higher levels of self-esteem as compared to those who engaged in low levels of positive gossip. In contrast,

and as shown in Figure 8b, for dyads in the self-disclosure condition, the interaction between positive and negative information was not significant ( $t(38) = 1.8, ns$ ).

Hypothesis 7 was not supported. As can be seen in Table 7, Model 4, the valence of information did not moderate the direct relationship between experimental condition and positive affect ( $\beta = -.16, ns$ )

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PLEASE INSERT TABLE 7 & FIGURE 8 APPROXIMATELY HERE

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### **Hypothesis Tests: Dyadic-Level Outcomes**

**Relationship Closeness.** I predicted that dyads engaging in gossip would report higher levels of relationship closeness than would those who were assigned to the other two types of interaction conditions, self-disclosure and task discussion. In support of Hypothesis 8a and as can be seen in Table 8, Model 1, gossiping participants did indeed report higher levels of relationship closeness than those in the self-disclosure ( $b = 6.11, p <.01$ ) and task discussion ( $b = 6.34, p <.01$ ) conditions, even when controlling for gender, age and baseline levels of relationship closeness.

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PLEASE INSERT TABLE 8 APPROXIMATELY HERE

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**Dyadic Rapport.** Hypothesis 8b predicted that gossiping individuals would experience higher levels of dyadic rapport than would those who engaged in self-disclosure and a task discussion. Table 8, Model 2 presents results of a multilevel model showing that, even controlling for participants' baseline levels of relationship closeness, the individuals who engaged in gossip reported experiencing higher levels of rapport than those in the self-disclosure ( $b = .25, p < .05$ ) and task discussion ( $b = .22, p < .10$ ) conditions. Furthermore, the video-coder ratings also reinforced this finding. As can be seen in Figure 9, video-coders rated the dyads in the gossip condition as exhibiting higher levels of rapport ( $M = 5.47, SD = .97$ ) as compared to those in the self-disclosure ( $M = 4.14, SD = .73$ ),  $t(108) = 6.63, p < .001$  or a task discussion conditions ( $M = 4.09, SD = .77$ ),  $t(108) = 7.27, p < .001$ . There were no significant differences in the level of dyadic rapport displayed between those in the self-disclosure and task discussion conditions,  $t(108) = .26, ns$ .

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PLEASE INSERT FIGURE 9 APPROXIMATELY HERE  
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**Valence of Gossip as Moderator.** Hypothesis 9 predicted that the valence of the conversation would moderate the relationship between engaging in gossip and relational closeness such that engaging in negative gossip will lead to increased relationship closeness as compared to engaging in positive gossip. Once again for the reasons

described above, I only compared gossip and self-disclosure. As seen in Table 7, Model 6, controlling for baseline relationship closeness, the interaction term is not significant, while the experimental condition continues to predict closeness post-interaction. Hence, Hypothesis 9 was not supported.

**Strength of Friendship as a Moderator.** Hypothesis 10 posited that the initial strength of friendship in a dyad will moderate the relationship between engaging in gossip and relationship closeness, such that the stronger the strength of friendship within a dyad, the stronger will be the positive effects of gossip on closeness. As can be seen in Table 9, this hypothesis was not supported in the proposed direction. In testing for a moderating effect of initial levels of friendship on the relationship between engaging in gossip and relational closeness (post-interaction), the interaction term *experimental condition X baseline closeness* is significant and positive ( $b = 4.05, p < .01$ ), indicating that initial levels of closeness temper the effect of gossip on closeness such that at high levels of initial closeness, the type of interaction does not influence the relationship. However, at lower levels of baseline closeness, gossip serves to enhance feelings of relationship closeness than self-disclosure. Figure 10 shows this significant interaction is plotted for high and low levels of closeness (defined as +1 and -1 standard deviation from the mean, respectively; Aiken & West, 1991). In addition to plotting the interaction, simple slope analyses showed that when closeness was low,  $B = -7.23, t = -32.33, p < .001$ , there were significant differences in the level of closeness experienced by dyads who participated in

gossip versus self-disclosure. When closeness was high, the type of social interaction did not matter,  $B = .89$ ,  $t = .69$ , *ns*.

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 PLEASE INSERT TABLE 9 AND FIGURE 10 APPROXIMATELY HERE  
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**Cooperation.** Hypothesis 11 predicted that participants in the gossip condition would exhibit higher levels of cooperation than would those in self-disclosure and task discussion conditions. This hypothesis was supported both in terms of their behavior in the negotiation task as well as their negotiation outcomes. In terms of the video-coder ratings of cooperative behavior, Figure 11 demonstrates that participants in the gossip condition displayed higher levels of cooperation and agreement with their partners ( $M = 5.35$ ,  $SD = .93$ ) than did those in the self-disclosure ( $M = 4.11$ ,  $SD = .74$ ),  $t(119) = 5.32$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and task discussion ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ),  $t(119) = 6.28$ ,  $p < .001$ ) conditions. The two control conditions did not differ from one another  $t(119) = .99$ , *ns*. Furthermore, in terms of negotiation outcomes, and as seen in Figure 12, dyads in the gossip condition ( $M = 1460.83$ ,  $SD = 159.44$ ) reached higher levels of joint gains than did those in the self-disclosure ( $M = 1391.41$ ,  $SD = 136.27$ ),  $t(122) = 2.15$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and task discussion ( $M = 1390.41$ ,  $SD = 154.73$ ),  $t(122) = 2.13$ ,  $p < .05$ ) conditions. The two conditions did not differ from one another,  $t(122) = .03$ , *ns*.

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PLEASE INSERT FIGURES 11 AND 12 HERE

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### **STUDY 1: DISCUSSION**

Study 1 sheds light on consequences of engaging in gossip for individuals and dyads. Using a laboratory methodology, the results from this study indicate that people who engaged in gossip reaped positive benefits: individual gossipers experienced better affective outcomes in terms of their positive emotions and energy while gossiping dyads experienced higher levels of closeness and cooperation. The only negative outcome of engaging in gossip was that individuals reported experiencing decreased levels of self-esteem in the short-term. However, even this negative outcome remedied over time, as gossipers recovered and restored their levels of self-esteem by the end of the negotiation phase that followed the social interaction component of the experiment, as compared to those who engaged in self-disclosure. Furthermore, supporting the positive outcomes of engaging in gossip, individual gossipers did not experience higher levels of guilt as compared to individuals who engaged in self-disclosure and task discussions.

This study also highlighted the importance of exploring the role of the valence of gossip on individual and dyadic outcomes. Indeed, initial evidence from Study 1 suggested that the degree to which the gossip was positive versus negative mattered for individuals' outcomes, especially self-esteem. The findings indicate that, within the gossip condition,

high levels of positive *and* negative gossip were associated with higher levels of experienced state self-esteem as compared to gossip that had a higher degree of negative versus positive conversational elements. It is interesting that even though both these conditions had similarly high levels of negative gossip, the degree to which they varied on positive gossip predicted state self-esteem. One explanation could be that the individuals who engaged in both positive and negative gossip were able to experience the socio-comparative gains afforded by negative gossip, but also offset any adverse self-evaluations, deriving from the immoral connotations of the negative gossip by also making positive evaluations of others. While gossip valence influenced individuals' self-esteem experiences, it did not however, appear to influence more affective outcomes such as levels of individual positive affect and dyadic relational closeness. This may be because, gossip bestows social benefits by meeting people's overall need to belong. Self-esteem, on the other hand, involves a cognitive assessment of one's failures and successes, especially in the interpersonal domain (Leary, et al, 1995). Negative gossip, with its immoral connotations could therefore have had more of an effect on individual's esteem-based outcomes.

The finding that gossip did not influence gossipers' experiences of guilt bears further discussion given that prior research has theorized as to the link between gossip and guilt (Spacks, 1982). While no empirical link has been investigated thus far, researchers who study gossip in ethnographic settings highlight that individuals who engage in gossip

appear to display guilt, and also engage in behaviors that assuage their feelings of guilt (Eder & Enke, 1991; Haviland, 1977). It is possible that I did not capture individual's true experiences of guilt in this study. One possible explanation is that while participants did indeed experience guilt, they were loath to admit to experiencing it, as it is a painful and negatively-perceived emotion (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Also, given that feelings of guilt require a large amount of attention and effort, individuals feeling guilt are likely to want to avoid thinking about the situation (Smith & Ellsworth, 1985) in order to maintain their cognitive resources and feel less depleted. Last, because participants in the experiment were given latitude to gossip, they may have experienced fewer negative outcomes like guilt.

The results of Study 1 are made more compelling by the fact that they are replicated both in terms of self-reported measures as well as coded outcomes as assessed by a set of trained coders. This study explains why people continue to gossip, even when faced with negative connotations. However, this methodology, while allowing me to explore the causal links between gossip and individual and dyadic outcomes, did not allow me to test the effects of gossip in a more naturalistic setting. Furthermore, this first study looked at a time-bound episode of gossip, and explored how gossip compared to other types of social interactions such as self-disclosure and task interactions. This limits our understanding about how levels of gossip influence constructs that vary across time. To

address these concerns, I sought to study how gossip operates in a more naturalistic, field setting, and thus, conducted Study 2 in a longitudinal student group context.

## **CHAPTER 5: A FIELD STUDY TO ASSESS ATTRIBUTIONAL AND TEAM-LEVEL OUTCOMES OF GOSSIP**

In this study of longitudinal student teams, I explore the team-level effects of engaging in gossip on team outcomes as well the individual-level effects of gossip on attributions of the gossiper's trustworthiness and competence. I start at the individual level, by exploring how an individual's degree of gossip relates to his or her team members' dispositional attributions of trustworthiness and competence over time. I then examine the role of team-level gossip interactions on team processes, such as psychological safety and perceptions of politics to predict team outcomes.

### **STUDY 2: METHOD**

#### **Overview of Participants, Procedure and Data Collection**

To explore the influence of gossip on team outcomes, I collected survey data from 549 undergraduate students (61.4% male and 32.1% female (6.6% unreported)) enrolled in a four-month long introductory management course at the University of Pennsylvania. All students who were asked to participate in the study did so, yielding a 100 percent response rate. The mean age was 20.06 years ( $SD= 1.09$  years). Sixty-five percent of the students were from the United States and 68% spoke English as their first language. The mean grade point average was 3.44 ( $SD= .39$ ). The data was collected across two semesters and combined into a single dataset, as the students did not vary on any



important individual dimensions such as gender ( $F(1, 533) = .27, ns$ ), ability to communicate in English ( $F(1, 525) = 1.26, ns$ ), GPA ( $F(1, 511) = .77, ns$ ) or team-level factors like, team size ( $F(1, 111) = .12, ns$ ). Given that the students across the two semesters did not vary on any important attributes, a subset of this sample (students from one of the semesters) was also used to assess the influence of engaging in gossip on attributional, or reputational outcomes. This subset of the overall sample included 280 business undergraduate students. Sixty-five percent of the sample was male. The respondents' mean age was 20.24 years ( $SD = 1.12$  years) and they had a mean grade point average (GPA) of 3.46 ( $SD = .39$ ). 75 percent of the respondents spoke English as first language. As described earlier, the students did not significantly vary on any attributes across the two semesters.

As part of their required management course, students were required to complete a semester-long consulting project in four- or five-person groups, which, with an associated presentation, a series of three surveys and a paper accounted for 38% percent of their final course grades. Students, were told that they had to form five-person teams but were allowed to choose their group members, during the first two weeks of classes, forming a total of 113 groups. The average group size was 4.85 ( $SD = .41$ ). For the remainder of the semester, each group identified and addressed a critical strategic problem confronting a real organization of their choosing. At the end of the semester, each team was required to

submit a written report of its analysis and recommendations and present an oral report of findings to the other students in the class and the instructor.

During the semester, the participants were asked to complete three surveys about their team experiences and dyadic relationships during the course of the semester. Following the protocol of the University of Pennsylvania's review board, the students were informed that the study investigated the characteristics of teams, that course grades would in no way be affected by these data, that participation was voluntary and that only members of a research team would see their responses. Participation in the surveys accounted for a small portion of students' individual course grades; hence, I was confident that participants would take seriously their involvement in the study groups. Students were informed that they would have the option to preclude their data from being used on the analyses at the end of the semester. First, at Time 1, within the first week following team formation, but before the team had a chance to work together, I collected data on the participants' demographic characteristics (sex, age, grade point average) and personality traits. At Time 1, I also collected data on pre-existing friendship relationships between the team members since the participants were allowed to select into their own teams and may have known and worked with some of their team members before entering the course. The timing of the survey at Time 2 was coordinated such that it occurred approximately halfway through the group assignment, about eight weeks into the semester, after students had had time to interact and work together on a few team

tasks (such as a preliminary project plan and a group project progress report). In this survey, I collected round-robin data within each team asking each participant to rate the frequency with which their team members shared evaluative information about their team members as well as individuals outside of their team with them (to yield measures of intra-team and extra-team gossip). I also collected data on team process variables that may have been influenced by the degree of gossip exchange within the team such as perceptions of team politics and psychological safety. Last, at the end of the semester during Time 3, I collected measures of group functioning such as team cooperation and team viability. These two measures were meant to operationalize the constructs of cooperation and closeness used assessed in Study 1, but at the group rather than the dyadic level. In one of the semesters, I also collected each student's attributions of the members in his or her team to study the influence of engaging in gossip on attributions of trustworthiness and competence. After the semester concluded, I was also able to assess team performance by assessing the group projects. Thus, the survey periods were timed to coincide with the critical episodes of project team development: team formation and early development (Time 1), the midpoint transition (Time 2), and late development (Time 3) (Gersick, 1988).

## **Part 1: Individual-Level Attributional Outcomes of Engaging in Gossip:**

### **Variables**

In this part of the study, I examine how the degree to which an individual engages in gossip, as assessed by his or her centrality in the team gossip network, relates to his or her team members' dispositional attributions of trustworthiness and competence over time.

### **Independent Variables**

**Gossip Centrality.** As people are less likely to admit to enjoying and engaging in gossip because of its morally questionable status, gossip behaviors were assessed through peer ratings. At Time 2, gossip relations were assessed by asking respondents two questions about each of their team members: “How often does this team member share evaluative information about other team members with you?<sup>6</sup>” and “How often does this team member share evaluative information about people outside your team with you?”. Since I

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<sup>6</sup> While I was unable to measure gossip using its exact definition (“How often does this team member share evaluative information unrelated to the task about other team members with you?”), at one of the time points (Time 3), I did measure gossip using the exact definition. This measure was correlated at .97 with the measure (“How often does this team member share evaluative information about other team members with you?”) that I use in this study

was interested in the extent to which individuals engaged in gossip, I elicited responses using a 7-point scale anchored by 1=*Never or very infrequently* to 7= *Very frequently*. Also, I did not specifically use the word “gossip” in the wording of these items because I did not want participants to temper their responses to the questions because of social desirability concerns. These values were then organized in the form of a matrix of *incoming gossip*, that provides a snapshot of who in the team receives gossip and from whom they receive gossip; each cell of this matrix contained a value (from 1 to 7) indicating the extent to which the participant received gossip from other team members (please see Appendix 4 for a visual explanation of this method). Using the values in this team-level matrix I then calculated in-degree centrality scores for each individual, normed within each team to allow for comparisons across groups of different sizes. In-degree centrality is a form of degree centrality that counts only those relations with the focal individual reported by other group members, which avoids the limitations of self-reports (out-degree centrality). The intra-team and extra-team gossip centrality scores for each participant, or the degree to which each respondent engages in this behavior. To fully calculate the individual’s centrality in the overall team gossip network, I averaged<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> I averaged these two measures of centrality ( $r = .86$ ) because they appeared to exhibit multicollinearity. When they were entered in the model together as predictors, neither predicted

the extent to which each individual engaged in intra-team as well as extra-team gossip ( $\alpha = .86$ ). Individual-level gossip centrality scores ranged from 1.00 to 6.13 ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ). Intra- gossip ( $M = 3.04$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) and extra-team gossip ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ) was averaged to create an overall individual gossip centrality score ( $M = 3.07$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ )

### **Dependent Variables**

**Attributional Judgments.** To capture attributions of others in the network, for half the sample (in data collection during one semester), all respondents were asked to rate each of their team members on two main work-relevant characteristics. These attributions included: *competence*, or a rating of each other's level of competence and efficacy on a scale ranging from 1 (*extremely incompetent*) to 7 (*extremely competent*) and *trustworthiness* or a rating of each other's level of trustworthiness on a scale ranging from 1 (*extremely untrustworthy*) to 7 (*extremely trustworthy*). These attributions were then averaged to create a perceived trustworthiness and perceived competence and influence score for each individual. Perceived trustworthiness has a mean of 5.65 ( $SD = .95$ ) while perceived competence had a mean of 5.79 ( $SD = .96$ ).

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trustworthiness or competence, even though individually they negatively predicted both sets of attributions.

## **Control Variables**

In testing my hypotheses, I included the following theoretically relevant control variables:

**Demographic Characteristics.** Since, certain demographic characteristics, such as sex and age may be perceived by others to be associated with competence and trustworthiness, I controlled for them in the analyses (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992). I also controlled for self-reported grade-point average as it is a competence signaling cue that may be perceived by others to be associated with competence and will likely also engender perceptions of trust. I also controlled for whether the participants spoke English as a second language, as an individual's ability to assert him- or herself and express themselves confidently will also influence others' attributions (Ames & Flynn, 2007).

**Closeness centrality (Time 1).** The strength of the friendship relationship between two team members was measured by asking each respondent to indicate the degree which they agreed with the statement "I feel close to this teammate" on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). By averaging the values in the columns, I was able to

calculate the friendship score for each person in the teams ( $M= 1.78, SD= .75$ )<sup>8</sup>. Including this variable in the analyses allowed me to understand the role of gossip on others' attributions and demonstrate that engaging in gossip has an effect beyond interpersonal closeness in the prediction of dispositional attributions and reputation formation.

**Personality Variables.** I assessed a series of personality traits that have been shown to correlate with perceptions of competence and trustworthiness. These included:

*Big Five.* I assessed the Big Five personality dimensions, the most widely used personality taxonomy (McCrae & Costa, 1999) using the Ten-Item Personality measure (TIPI) to measure personality in the time 1 survey (Gosling, Rentfrow & Swann, 2003). The TIPI is a 10-item instrument with two items for each factor of the five-factor model (that is, extraversion ( $M= 4.77, SD= 1.31$ ), agreeableness ( $M= 4.79, SD= 1.16$ ), conscientiousness ( $M= 5.43, SD= 1.15$ ), neuroticism ( $M= 2.97, SD= 1.30$ ), and openness to experience ( $M= 5.18, SD= 1.08$ )). Participants rated how much they agreed with each item on a seven-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). It was important to control for these traits as they have been clearly linked to attributions of competence and trust (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Barry & Stewart, 1997; Watson & Clark,

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<sup>8</sup> Even though the participants were allowed to create their own teams, many of the students did not have prior relationships amongst those in the class. Because many of the students were assigned to teams, the mean level of relational closeness is quite low.



1997). In terms of competence perceptions, the dimensions of Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience have been found to be most relevant. *Conscientiousness* refers to “socially prescribed impulse control that facilitates task and goal-directed behavior” (John & Srivastava, 1999, p. 121) and relates to a stronger work ethic and higher performance on most tasks (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Judge & Ilies, 2002). *Openness to Experience* describes “the breadth, depth, originality, and complexity of an individual’s mental and experiential life” (John & Srivastava, 1999, p. 121) and relates to creativity and originality (George & Zhou, 2001; McCrae, 1987; Zhao & Seibert, 2006), behaviors that would be linked to perceptions of task competence and efficacy. In terms of social perceptions related to trustworthiness, Extraversion, Emotional Stability and Agreeableness are relevant Big Five dimensions. Extraversion, associated with traits like assertiveness and sociability and agreeableness associated with traits such as trust and altruism (John & Srivastava, 1999) would be linked to perceptions of trust and perhaps even competence (Bono & Judge, 2004).

*Positive and Negative Affect.* Participants also rated their trait positive and negative affectivity with the PANAS (Watson, Tellegen & Clark, 1988). Using the stem “how you feel in general”, individuals were given twenty adjectives and asked to rate to what degree they feel that way on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Alpha reliabilities were .87 for positive affect ( $M= 3.57, SD= .63$ ) and .89 for negative affect ( $M= 2.18, SD= .73$ ).

*Self-Efficacy and Self-esteem.* As I was assessing the degree to which participants' were viewed as being competent and trustworthy in a task-relevant context, I controlled for each participant's own core self-evaluations (Judge, Erez, Bono & Thoreson, 2002) and self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965). As such, these self-concept measures, self-esteem and core self-evaluations represent overall evaluations of the degree to which one's self-construal is positive. Individuals with high levels of self-esteem have favorable evaluations of themselves which those with high core self-evaluations are described as "well adjusted, positive, self-confident," and "efficacious" (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoreson, 2003, p. 304). In the context of the current framework, self-esteem and core self-evaluations should have implications for perceptions of competence and trustworthiness of a given individual. The self-esteem five-item scale included statements such as "I feel that I have a number of good qualities" and "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself" ( $\alpha = .79$ ) ( $M = 5.84$ ,  $SD = .97$ ), while the core self-evaluation scale, that also comprised five items included items such as "New jobs are usually well within the scope of my abilities" and "I make an effort to tackle tasks even if they look complicated" ( $\alpha = .88$ ) ( $M = 5.50$ ,  $SD = .86$ ).

### **Part 1 Results: Attributional Outcomes of Gossip**

Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations for these individual-level analyses are presented in Table 10.

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INSERT TABLE 10 APPROXIMATELY HERE  
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OLS regressions were used to test my hypotheses and the results of the regression analyses that test the hypothesized relationships between gossip network centrality and attributions of trustworthiness and attributions of competence are in Tables 11 and 12, respectively. In both these analyses, I controlled for demographic characteristics by entering these variables in Step 1 followed by personality variables in Step 3, relationship, or closeness measures in Step 3 and the centrality measures in Step 4. In support of competing hypothesis 12b (which proposed that gossip centrality would be negatively related to attributions of trustworthiness) as compared to hypothesis 12a (which proposed that gossip centrality would be positively related to attributions of trustworthiness), an individual's centrality in the gossip network was negatively related to attributions of trustworthiness,  $\beta = -.15, p < .05$ . This negative relationship, in the face of trustworthiness' positive correlation with gossip centrality ( $r = .25, p < .01$ ), occurred when controlling for levels of closeness, which indicates that individuals who are at the center of the gossip network are usually the ones who are also at the center of the friendship network, further providing support for the hypothesis that gossip and friendship tend to covary with each other. The same analyses (without controlling for levels of closeness) indicated that increases in gossip were associated with attributions of trustworthiness.

Similarly, centrality in the gossip network was also negatively related to attributions of competence, supporting Hypothesis 13b,  $\beta = -.25$ ,  $p < .01$  (which proposed that gossip centrality would be negatively related to attributions of competence) and not competing Hypothesis 9a (which proposed that gossip centrality would be positively related to attributions of competence).

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INSERT TABLES 11 AND 12 APPROXIMATELY HERE  
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**Exploratory analyses:** Given the ambivalent nature of gossip, the question arises whether engaging in gossip has a linear, negative influence on attributions of trustworthiness and competence. Is there a sweet spot of gossip, such that gossipers will reap benefits up to a certain point, after which they will be viewed as “too” gossipy and therefore untrustworthy and incompetent? Thus, I explored the proposition that gossip and attributions of trustworthiness and competence are curvilinearly related such that the relationship is initially positive but becomes weaker as participation in gossip increases. I conducted two OLS regressions to check for this possibility. In step 1, I entered the full model described above. In Step 2, I entered the quadratic term of the gossip score to represent the hypothesized curvilinear effect. A statistically significant effect of these quadratic terms in this step would suggest the presence of a curvilinear relationship. As can be seen in Table 13, Model 1, the quadratic term of gossip centrality predicting

attributions of trustworthiness was not significant, suggesting that the relationship is as found above, negative and linear in nature. However, as can be seen in Table 13, Model 2, the quadratic effect of gossip centrality for the regression model predicting attributions of competence was statistically significant and negative. This negative quadratic effect suggests that the relationships resemble an inverted U-shape. This means that an increase in gossip centrality will initially lead to increased attributions of competence, but the relationship will become weaker and eventually disappear when gossip centrality increases past a certain point (also see Figure 13).

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 INSERT TABLE 13 AND FIGURE 13 APPROXIMATELY HERE  
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## **Part 2: Group Outcomes of Gossip**

In this section, I examine the relationship between team-level gossip measures, assessed in terms of gossip density on team-level outcomes, such as team politics, team psychological safety, team cooperation and team viability.

### **Independent Variables: Team-Level Gossip**

*Intra-Team Gossip and Extra-Team Gossip Density.* To calculate intra- and extra-team gossip density, I started by assessing the extent to which each individual received gossip about individuals inside as well as outside their team from each of their team members with two single-item measures at Times 2 and 3. Participants used a 7-point Likert-type

scale ranging from 1 (*Not at All*) to 7 (*Very Frequently*) to assess the degree to which they received both intra-team gossip (or gossip about their own team members) as well as extra-team gossip (or gossip about people outside of their teams) from each of their teammates in a round-robin fashion. Specifically, each participant rated the degree of incoming intra-team gossip using a behavioral item: “From time to time, people tend to talk about other people in their social networks. How often does [this team member] share evaluative information about other team members with you?” Similarly, to rate the degree of extra-team gossip, each participant answered the question, “From time to time, people tend to talk about other people in their social networks. How often does this team member share evaluative information about people outside your team with you?” The results of these two measures were then used to create two team-level matrices of *incoming intra-team gossip* and *incoming extra-team gossip*, providing a snapshot of who in the team receives gossip and from whom they receive gossip. Using these two sets of matrices for each team, I then computed intra- and extra-team gossip network density. When network ties are assessed in binary terms (i.e., one rates whether or not one receives gossip), network density refers to the proportion of ties among the total number of possible ties (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Because I assessed the ties along a continuum, asking participants to rate the frequency with which they received gossip on a 7-point scale, I computed intra-team and extra-team gossip density during Times 2 and 3,

as the sum of actual responses divided by the total possible sum of responses across the team. This can be represented as:

$$\text{Density} = \frac{\sum \text{gossip ties}}{7n(n-1)}$$

where  $n$  = number of team members

$7$  = maximum value of gossip tie (range of 1 to 7)

Density can vary from 0 to 1. Scores closer to 1 indicate that the team has more ties.

Intra-team gossip density had a mean of .37 ( $SD=.13$ ) at Time 2 and a mean of .42 ( $SD=.13$ ) at Time 3. Extra-team gossip density averaged .38 ( $SD=.12$ ) at Time 2 and .41 ( $SD=.12$ ) at Time 3.

### **Dependent Variables: Team Processes and Team Outcomes**

In these analyses, team process variables (psychological safety and perceptions of politics) were assessed at Time 2, while team outcomes were assessed at Time 3, at the end of the team life cycle. Details of each of the scales is in Appendix 3.

**Perceptions of Team Psychological Safety.** Participants used a seven-point Likert scale ( $1$  = strongly disagree,  $7$  = strongly agree) to indicate their agreement with Edmondson's (1999) measure of team psychological safety at time 2. Sample items include "It is safe to take a risk on this team" and "Working with members of this team, my unique skills and

talents are valued and utilized.” Internal consistency reliability, based on the five items that yielded the highest scale reliability was .71 at Time 2.

**Perceptions of Team Politics.** This four-item scale that included items such as “There are cliques within our team” and “There is an influential group within my team that no one crosses” (Kacmar, & Ferris, 1991) was assessed on a 7-point scale (where 1= strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) at Times 2 and 3. Higher values reflected higher team politics’ perceptions. The values for this scale ranged from 1.38 to 3.42 ( $M= 2.17$ ,  $SD = .57$ ) at Time 2. Coefficient alpha for this scale was .76 at Time 2.

**Team Cooperation.** I assessed team cooperation using a 3-item cooperation originally developed by O’Reilly, Caldwell and Barnett (1989). The scale was “We maintain harmony within the team” and “There are high levels of cooperation among team members” and “There is little collaboration between team members” (reverse coded). Higher scores represent more cooperation. Team cooperation values ranged from 3.33 and 6.67 ( $M= 5.49$ ,  $SD = .71$ ) at Time 3. Coefficient alpha for this scale was .84 at Time 3.

**Team Viability.** Team viability or team members’ willingness to continue functioning as a team was assessed using a two-item measure (DeStephen & Hirokawa, 1988; Evans & Jarvis, 1986). The two items included “This team should not continue to function as a team” and “This team is not capable of working together as a unit”. The items were assessed on a 7-point Likert-type scale (where 1= *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*)



and were then reverse scored such that high scores were associated with high levels of team viability. Team viability ranged from 3.00 to 6.80 ( $M= 5.57$ ,  $SD = .77$ ) at Time 3. Coefficient alpha for this scale was .83.

### **Control Variables**

**Closeness Density at Time 1.** Because the participants were allowed to choose their own teams, their comfort and closeness with each other may also play a role in the extent which they have positive team experiences in terms of team viability, cooperation and psychological safety. Furthermore, close friends may also share the same network and may therefore be more likely to engage in gossip. Hence I wanted to be able to control for the extent to which the team members knew each other prior to working in their teams. Information about the level of closeness, or the closeness network was collected using the same round-robin roster method. Each participant was asked to rate their level of closeness with each of their teammates on a scale of 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Extremely*) at Time 1 through 3. Similar to the gossip density measures, this then resulted in a valued adjacency matrix, the closeness matrix, in which relationships were indicated by a number ranging from one to seven. Once again, I computed density as the sum of the actual responses divided by the total possible sum of responses. The means and standard deviations were  $M= .08$  ( $SD =.59$ ) for Time 1,  $M=.18$  ( $SD =.56$ ) for Time 2 and  $M=.17$  ( $SD =.55$ ) for Time 3.

**Team Characteristics.** I controlled for the gender ratio of males to females in the team ( $M= .62, SD=.25$ ), average age of the team members ( $M= 20.04, SD=.70$ ), average grade point average ( $M= 3.44, SD=.24$ ) and team size ( $M= 4.84, SD=.41$ ). I also added a dummy variable that represented from which of the two data collections the data was collected.

### **Analyses: Aggregation of Constructs from Individual-Level Measures to the Team-Level**

The level of analysis was conducted at the team-level. I conducted analyses at the team-level because the constructs measured were team-based phenomena that all the members of a team should hold in common. To assess these constructs, I employed referent–shift composition models (using the team as a referent) in the team member survey (Chan, 1998). I examined the statistical adequacy of aggregating individual members' responses to the team level by calculating reliability amongst the team members (ICC(1) and ICC(2)) and by testing whether average scores differed significantly across teams, as indicated by one-way analyses of variance. Together, this set of three indices gives us insight into how much the members of a team agree with one another and how different teams are from one another, both of which are important for understanding the impact of combining individual team member perceptions into team-level metrics.

In the context of this study, I investigated and confirmed that the various team outcome measures could be aggregated to the group level. With respect to aggregation, there was

evidence that psychological safety varied significantly across groups,  $F(113, 412) = 2.13$ ,  $p < .01$ . Intraclass correlation (ICC)(1) and ICC(2) values were .18 and .52. Perceptions of politics also varied significantly across groups,  $F(113, 422) = 2.03$ ,  $p < .01$ . ICC(1) and ICC(2) values were .18 and .51. Team cooperation significantly varied across groups as well,  $F(113, 411) = 2.42$ ,  $p < .01$  with ICC(1) and ICC(2) values of .08 and .30. Last, team viability had ICC(1) and ICC(2) values of .12 and .40,  $F(113, 412) = 1.76$ ,  $p < .01$ . Although the analysis of variance (ANOVA) and ICC(1) values are in keeping with past research involving aggregation (Hofmann & Jones, 2005; Hofmann & Stetzer, 1996; Kozlowski & Hulst, 1987), the ICC(2) values are somewhat low. This can be explained as a function of small group size. As ICC(2) values depend on group size (Bliese, 1998), small group sizes (4-5 members per group) will result in smaller ICC (2) values<sup>9</sup>. However, also in keeping with prior research that found low ICC(2) values due to small group sizes (Hofmann & Jones, 2005) and in light of all the evidence regarding the ANOVA and ICC(1) values, I proceeded to create aggregate measures of psychological safety, perceptions of politics, team cooperation and team viability.

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<sup>9</sup> As such, the unreliability introduced by the low ICC(2) values should attenuate my results. Thus, results presented using these measures should be interpreted as conservative in light of the possible attenuation.

## Part 2 Results: Group-Level Outcomes of Gossip

Table 14 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations among all major variables in the study.

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INSERT TABLE 14 APPROXIMATELY HERE  
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Table 15 presents the results of regression analyses testing the hypothesized relationships between team-level gossip and group outcomes. To test for the hypotheses, I ran a series of OLS regressions controlling for team gender ratio, team size, mean team age, mean team grade point average and closeness density at the start of the team lifecycle (please see Table 15, Model 1 for the effects of these variables on the set of four dependent variables).

Hypothesis 14a and 14b posited that intra-team gossip density would positively influence perceptions of politics in the team while extra-team gossip density would have a negative influence on perceptions of team politics. As can be seen in Table 15, Model 2, both these hypotheses were supported. Indeed, intra-team gossip density had a positive and significant effect ( $\beta = .91, p < .01$ ) on perceptions of team politics, while extra-team gossip density reduced the perception that the team was political ( $\beta = -.60, p < .01$ ).

Furthermore, only intra-team gossip density influenced psychological safety in the team as well. As per Hypothesis 15a (and seen in Table 15, Model 4), intra-team gossip density negatively influenced perceived psychological safety in the team ( $\beta = -.46, p < .05$ ), while extra-team gossip density had a positive and marginally significant effect on team experiences of psychological safety ( $\beta = .39, p < .10$ ) when controlling for team gender and age makeup, team size and team GPA. Thus, Hypothesis 15b was only partially supported.

The extent to which team members engaged in gossip about intra-team members as well as extra-team members also influenced overall team outcomes. Table 15, Model 6 and Model 8 shows that intra-team gossip density hurt team cooperation ( $\beta = -.67, p < .01$ ) and team viability ( $\beta = -.45, p < .01$ ), thus supporting Hypotheses 16a and 18a. Similarly, this table also shows that extra-team gossip density had a more positive influence as it enhanced perceptions of team cooperation ( $\beta = .53, p < .01$ ) but did not influence team viability ( $\beta = .13, ns$ ) at the end of the team life-cycle.

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 INSERT TABLE 15 APPROXIMATELY HERE  
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***Mediation Analyses.***

Having found support for my main hypotheses on the direct effects of intra- and extra-team gossip density on overall team outcomes, team viability and team cooperation at

Time 3, I examined whether interim team processes, psychological safety and perceptions of team politics (measured at Time 2) that are also influenced by team-level gossip mediated these relationships between gossip density and team outcomes.

To do so, I conducted mediation analyses using Preacher and Hayes's (2008) bootstrapping methods for estimating direct and indirect effects with multiple mediators. This method enabled me to assess the existence of an overall mediation effect and then simultaneously to test and contrast multiple mediating variables. I therefore, constructed a model in which the two gossip density measures, intra- and extra gossip density were entered as the two predictor variables; team viability (or team cooperation) was entered as the dependent variable; and team-level perceptions of politics and psychological safety were entered together as proposed mediators. I also statistically controlled for the effects of the following demographic variables; team age, team GPA, gender ratio, team size, survey period and levels of initial closeness in the team in each of the models. To determine how each mediator uniquely accounted for the effects of receiving contempt on task performance and interpersonal aggression, I conducted analyses using 5,000 bootstrap samples with bias-corrected confidence estimates. Specifically, I found evidence for mediation: The total direct effect of intra-team gossip density ( $B = -3.97$ ),  $t(102) = -3.03$ ,  $p < .01$  and extra-team gossip density ( $3.17$ ),  $t(102) = 2.36$ ,  $p < .05$  on team cooperation, became non-significant when the two mediators of team-level psychological safety and team-level perceptions of politics were included in the model,

( $B = -1.55$ ),  $t(100) = 1.35$ , *ns* and ( $B = 1.29$ ),  $t(100) = 1.15$ , *ns*, respectively. The results, as seen in Figure 14 showed that the relationship between intra-team gossip density and team cooperation was mediated by both psychological safety ( $B = -1.06$ , and 95% BCa CI of [-2.89, -.14]) and perceptions of team politics ( $B = -1.35$ , 95% BCa CI of [1.47, 5.42]). The positive relationship between extra-team gossip density and team cooperation was mediated by perceptions of team politics (95% BCa CI of [-4.13, -.64]) as these values did not include zero in their 95% CIs and therefore showed evidence of mediation. Psychological safety with a 95% CI of [-.10, 2.69] did not mediate the effect of extra-team gossip density on team cooperation.

On testing the extent to which these same two interim team processes mediated the relationship between intra- and extra-team gossip density and team viability, the results indicated that the total effect of intra-team gossip density ( $B = -4.53$ ),  $t(102) = -4.40$ ,  $p < .01$ , and extra-team gossip density ( $B = 3.03$ ),  $t(102) = 2.87$ ,  $p < .01$ , on team viability became insignificant when the mediators were included in the model, ( $B = -.23$ ),  $t(102) = -.19$ , *ns* and ( $B = 1.10$ ),  $t(102) = .95$ , *ns*, respectively. As can be seen in Figure 15, the results showed that the relationship between intra-team gossip density and team viability was mediated by both psychological safety (95% BCa CI of [-2.74, -.11]) and perceptions of team politics (95% BCa CI of [1.36, 5.26]) as these values did not include zero in their 95% CIs and therefore showed evidence of mediation. As there was no direct relationship

between extra-team gossip and team viability, I did not test for mediation between extra-team gossip density and team viability.

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PLEASE INSERT FIGURES 14 AND 15 APPROXIMATELY HERE  
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**Exploratory Analyses.** The analyses and hypotheses described above explore the specific roles of intra- and extra-team gossip densities on team processes and outcomes. However, because in reality, most teams will engage in both intra-team and extra-gossip concurrently, I explored the interacting role of both types of gossip density on team cooperation and team viability. As seen in Figure 16, intra-team gossip density interacted with extra-team gossip density to influence team viability such that teams who engaged in low levels of intra-team gossip and high levels of extra-team gossip perceived themselves to be very viable, while teams who had high levels of gossip overall (high intra-team gossip and high extra-team gossip) as well as those who had high levels of intra-team gossip, but low levels of extra team gossip saw themselves as being less viable. To facilitate the interpretation of these results, I plotted the simple slopes at one standard deviation above and below the mean of extra-team and intra-team gossip density (Aiken & West, 1991). As seen in Figure 16, simple slope analyses showed that when extra-team gossip was high,  $B = -.56$ ,  $t = -3.04$ ,  $p < .01$ , there were significant differences in the level of team viability experienced by groups that had low versus high levels of intra-



team gossip. When extra-team gossip density was high, the levels of intra-team gossip did not matter for viability perceptions,  $B = -.08$ ,  $t = -.43$ , *ns*. The interaction between intra-team and extra-team gossip density did not predict team cooperation.

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PLEASE INSERT FIGURE 16 APPROXIMATELY HERE  
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## STUDY 2: DISCUSSION

Results from Study 2, conducted in a longitudinal student team context, demonstrate that gossip occurring in naturalistic interactions plays a critical role at individual and group levels of analysis. At the individual level of analysis, the extent to which individual gossipers engaged in gossip, influenced attributions of competence and trustworthiness made about them by other individuals in their teams. At the team, or group level, levels of gossip influenced team-level outcomes such as perceptions of politics, psychological safety, cooperation and viability. With regard to team outcomes, I delved deeper into the construct of gossip, by examining how it varied based on the targets of gossip, by exploring the role of intra-team gossip, or gossip about team members as well as extra-team gossip, or gossip about individuals outside of the team on team-level outcomes. The findings indicated that intra-team gossip, or gossip about team members, had negative effects, hurting perceptions of team cooperation, team viability and psychological safety while enhancing team-level perceptions of politics, while extra-team gossip had a more

positive influence as it led to increased team-level perceptions of cooperation, team viability and psychological safety and lower perceptions of politics at the team level. These findings highlight that while engaging in gossip carries positive and functional intrapersonal benefits, such as increased energy, positive emotion and motivation, as well as enhance dyadic interaction (as seen in Study 1), its immoral overtones may cost the gossipers reputational benefits. Indeed, gossip activity (measured as the level of centrality in the team gossip network) decreased the degree to which a gossipers was seen as being trustworthy. As such, this may occur for two main reasons. First, if an individual engages in gossip about others, gossip receivers may perceive him or her as someone who will not treat personal information confidentially and make attributions of untrustworthiness. Also, gossip perceivers may become concerned that the gossipers talks about them with others on their team. The negative relationship between gossip and trustworthiness is hinted at in past sociometric research which found that frequent gossipers experienced increased levels of isolation (Jaeger, et al 1994). Interestingly, in terms of attributions of competence, gossip did not have the same unilaterally damaging effect. My exploratory analyses suggested that the relationship between gossip and attributions of competence was curvilinear, such that gossip positively influenced competence up to a point, after which it had a negative effect. This may be because, individuals who engage in low levels of gossip focus on seeking information that is personally relevant to their jobs and are therefore able to apply and utilize it successfully to navigate the social workplace.

Knowing about other individuals in their network may allow them to detect selfish group members, potential interpersonal conflicts and locate other individuals who may be able to help them succeed (Baumeister, et al, 2004) and may increase their levels of expert power (Kurland & Pelled, 2000). It may also provide social comparison information (Wert & Salovey, 2004) that will enable the gossip to enhance their behaviors to compete more effectively with others in their environment. However, when gossip frequency increases (along with the centrality of gossip in a network), those who actively and frequently engage in it may be seen as acting subversively and wasting their time (Grosser, et al, 2010; Roy, 1958). Indeed this type of curvilinear relationship

Using mediational analyses in this study, I also found that groups who engaged in high levels of intra-team gossip experienced decreased levels of team viability and cooperation for two specific reasons. First, higher levels of intra-gossip density also caused group members to perceive the team as more political, a perception that was negatively associated with team viability and cooperation. Second, these teams also experienced a breakdown in their levels of psychological safety, a team-level perception that has been linked to positive team outcomes in prior research (e.g., Edmonson, 1999). This decrease in psychological safety caused teams to experience lower levels of viability and cooperation. Contrary to these findings, extra-team gossip density was positively linked to team cooperation through a single mediator, a low level of team-level perceptions of politics. Psychological safety and team viability were not influenced by the level of extra-

team gossip density. These results highlight two important ideas about the key role played by targets in the way gossip operates in teams. As such, the findings demonstrate that gossip about other team members is more salient and powerful, thus carries the potency to cause damage to the team, while extra-team gossip allows gossipers to define group boundaries, categorize themselves in terms of their group identities, reaffirm the social norms and values of these groups and create stronger group identification (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Hannerz, 1967). Since, gossip may prime social identities by providing information about who is and is not in a person's in-group, it can trigger both implicit and explicit in-group biases (Banaji, Hardin & Rothman, 1993) that may result in outcomes such as favorable evaluations of in-group member (Rabbie & Horowitz, 1969; Tajfel, 1982), the use of biased language against out-groups (Maass, Salvi, Arcuri & Semin, 1989) and the unequal (and additional) distribution of rewards to member of their in-group (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). Future research should explore these outcomes.

## General Discussion

Gossip, a key component of the informal organization (Kurland & Pelled, 2000) has been highlighted as being “among the most important societal and cultural phenomena we, as researchers, are called upon to analyze” (Gluckman, 1963, p. 307); however, little research in the field of organizational behavior has investigated the consequences of engaging in workplace gossip (Noon & Delbridge, 1993). As a result, little empirical research on the topic of gossip in organizations exists. This dissertation is meant to serve as a preliminary step toward establishing research on gossip by theorizing and empirically investigating organizationally-relevant outcomes of gossip at three levels of analysis: individuals, dyads and groups.

The first study focused specifically on the individual and dyadic outcomes of gossip. This study, a laboratory experiment, that required undergraduate students to engage in real episodes of gossip allowed me to explore the role of gossip on individual and dyadic outcomes of gossip. As such, individuals experienced higher levels of positive affect, energy and motivation as a result of engaging in gossip, while experiencing lower levels of state self-esteem. They did not however, experience higher levels of guilt. Indeed, speaking more directly to the functionality of gossip, the degree to which individuals’ state self-esteem was hurt was influenced by the valence of gossip such that individuals who engaged in higher level of positive gossip had higher self-esteem than those who

engaged in high levels of negative gossip (along with low levels of positive gossip).

Furthermore explorations at the dyadic level indicated that gossiping dyads felt closer to one another and were also more likely to cooperate with each other. These findings were moderated by the levels of initial or baseline closeness in the dyads, such that gossip enhanced closeness more for dyads that started the experiment at lower levels of closeness.

In general, this study points to the potency and functional value of gossip as an informal interaction in workplace contexts. At first blush, it may seem surprising that gossip, a behavior that carries negative societal and cultural connotations could have such positive effects on individual and dyadic outcomes. However, these positive effects were tempered by the findings from Study 2, which established that the positive pattern of results, at least at a team level, was unique to gossip that was about individuals outside the team. This second study, comprising a longitudinal study of student teams explored how participating in gossip networks was related to reputational and team-level outcomes. Corresponding to the negative effects of gossiping, in this study, I found that individuals with high levels of gossip centrality were more likely to be viewed as less trustworthy. Furthermore, gossip centrality had a curvilinear relationship with perceptions or reputations of competence such that the relationship was positive at lower levels of gossip centrality but became negative as an individual's gossip centrality in the team increased. Given that reputations are an important currency that individuals can use

to gain trust and get ahead in their organizations (Ferris, Blass, Douglas, Kolodinsky & Treadway, 2003), the significant (and negative) effect between gossip centrality on individual reputations is an important practical ramification for individuals in organizations.

At a team-level, I found further support for the negative outcomes of engaging in gossip. In Study 2, I demonstrated that gossiping about internal team members had negative implications for the team, as it led to negative team perceptions of psychological safety, increased team-level politics and worse team outcomes such as lower levels of team cooperation and viability, while gossiping about individuals outside of the team led to higher levels of cooperation and decreased perceptions of politics. Furthermore, deeper explorations of the interaction between intra- and extra-team gossip densities showed that teams that had high levels of extra-team gossip density and low levels of intra-team gossip density were the most likely to report experiencing a feeling of viability. The longitudinal design also allowed me to explore the mediating role of team processes on team-level outcomes. Overall, the negative relationship between intra-team gossip density and team cooperation and team viability was mediated by increased levels of perceived politics and decreased levels of team psychological safety. Also, the positive relationship between extra-team gossip and team cooperation was only mediated by team-level perceptions' of politics.

In examining these results, while Study 1 offers support for the functionality of gossip for individuals and dyads, this does not mean that gossip will always operate in a constructive manner at these two levels. At the individual level, individual differences, such as the gossipers' personality or attitudes towards gossip may influence the individual gossipers' emotions and cognitions. Personality traits like self-monitoring, self-esteem and extraversion and narcissism may influence both the gossipers' tendency to engage in gossip and responses to it. For instance, individuals who are pursuing self-esteem may tend to gossip more (Wert & Salovey, 2004), while introverted individuals may not be interested in others and therefore, tend to gossip less. High self-monitors may also tend to engage in more gossip as they have a more external orientation and are thus more likely to engage in impression management (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000; Watson, 2011) and are more skilled at reading and decoding others (Mill, 1984). Data from Study 2 (as seen in Table 10) highlights the critical role of these personality characteristics. Indeed, extraverted, positive individuals were more likely to engage in, and be at the center of gossip networks. Moreover, as gossip is a collaborative, mutual interaction (Eder & Enke, 1991), the individual gossipers' outcomes may also be altered by the recipient's attitude toward gossip. If the recipient is morally opposed to gossiping, the gossipers' decision to engage in gossip may emphasize any perceived differences and this dissimilarity may trigger feelings of dislike in the dyad (Rosenbaum, 1986). The effects



of such individual differences should be considered in future elaborations of this research.

Across both studies, I characterized and delved into the construct of gossip in two focal ways. In Study 1, I investigated the valence of gossip, exploring the varying roles of positive versus negative gossip, while in Study 2, I endeavored to bring in the role of the target of gossip, by looking at the degree to which individuals in teams engaged in gossip about the fellow team members (intra-team gossip) or about others outside of the team (extra-team gossip). The fact that these different characterizations of gossip led to contrasting outcomes speaks to the importance of understanding the various modes in which gossip can be depicted and classified. In the initial next step in my future work on gossip, I hope to explore how the valence of gossip interacts with the degree to which teams engage in intra- and extra-team gossip on various individual and team outcomes. In addition, I hope to explore the construct of gossip further. For instance, gossip can vary in terms of its “juiciness”, or the degree to which it is interesting, and illicit, such that gossip that is considered to be more attention-grabbing or extreme may cause individuals to experience more positive affect and energy. Other ways in which gossip can be described is with regard to whether it is self-serving as opposed to group-serving (Kniffin & Wilson, 2005) or prosocial (Feinberg, Willer, Stellar & Keltner, 2012). A case study of a rowing team (Kniffin & Wilson, 2005) indicated that group-serving gossip is viewed as

socially redeeming and useful, whereas self-serving gossip is highly disapproved of (Kniffin & Wilson, 2005).

This research also sheds light on an ongoing debate in the current work on gossip. Do men and women engage in different levels of gossip? Research in psychology would predict that because women value communality (Bakan, 1966), the dimension of interpersonal behavior that involves being other-oriented, sensitive and warm (Bem, 1974) and tend to define themselves in terms of dyadic relationships (Gabriel & Gardner, 1999; Cross & Madson, 1997), they may tend to engage in more gossip, a behavior that entails the sharing of intimate information. Men, on the other hand, tend to organize into large social groups and are believed to focus less on developing close dyadic relationships and may choose to engage in lower levels of gossip. The data from Study 2 (which captured more natural patterns of gossip exchange) showed that there were no differences in the degree to which men and women engaged in gossip with each other: males ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ) and females ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $SD = 2.01$ ) engaged in equivalent levels of gossip. I also explored whether women were more likely to engage in more negative gossip with other women as compared to men. Past research has suggested that this might be the case as females tend to engage in more forms of subtle aggression as it is away for them to fit the gender stereotype of warmth and geniality by being overtly nice, while still conveying anger and annoyance to other women (Underwood, 2004). Indeed, in support of this proposition, analyses within the gossip condition from Study 1,

indicated that female dyads were more likely to engage in negative gossip ( $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ) than males ( $M = 3.64$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ),  $F(1, 45) = 3.23$ ,  $p < .01$  and also reaped the benefits of this negative gossip, as they were likely to feel closer to their counterparts ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ) when they engaged in negatively-valenced gossip than male participants ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ),  $\beta = .59$ ,  $p < .01$ .

### **Limitations**

As this dissertation is a first step into delving deeper into a novel research domain, each of the studies presented here are not without their limitations. As such in Study 1, the dyads that participated in the study were given license to gossip, an aspect of the study that may have influenced their attitudes towards gossiping as well as decreased the degree to which they experienced negative outcomes that may have resulted from engaging in gossip outside of the laboratory. In addition, the fact that the individuals in the experiment were asked to engage in specific types of interactions may have caused them to feel discomfort. While, it was important to provide the participants with instructions based on the three experimental conditions, the instructions may have caused the interactions to feel stilted and unnatural. Furthermore, in this study, the gossip episode was separate from the task (negotiation). While this allowed me to explore the effect of engaging in gossip on dyadic outcomes that were separate from the gossip episodes, it does not mimic the workplace context in which gossip and work occur simultaneously, or when work may precede the episode of gossip. Overall, even given

these limitations, this laboratory study afforded me the ability to not only examine the role of gossip (versus other types of work-relevant social interactions) on affective and work-related outcomes but also allowed me to understand the process of gossip (and not rely on self-reported measures), through coding of the videotaped interactions.

Study 2, a naturalistic longitudinal study of student teams enabled me to develop a deeper understanding how the effects of gossip in team interactions unfold over the course of a semester. However, this study also carried a set of limitations. First, the topics of gossip and the degree to which individuals engaged in positive versus negative gossip, remain underexplored in this study. Had it been possible for me to collect data about the what the topics of gossip were or who the targets of gossip were in each team, it may have added more depth to the findings. Furthermore, I was not able to explore the effect of gossip on performance. It is possible that intra- and extra-team gossip may operate differently with regard to objective performance. It is possible that while those teams that engaged in intra-team gossip may have experienced worse subjective outcomes, they may actually perform better on task outcomes as they may have strong norms and high expectations related to acceptable, task-related behavior in a team context. Conversely, teams with high levels of extra-team gossip may experience better team outcomes, but worse performance. This negative performance can occur because as they tend to form more rigid group boundaries, focus inward and engage in fewer external activities such as vertical and horizontal communication (Ancona, 1990).

Another overall limitation arises from the sample of undergraduate students used in both of my studies. On one hand, because my studies examined laboratory dyads and student project groups they allowed for relatively greater methodological control and precision in measures than field studies typically afford. However, they also limit the ecological validity of the findings. Although the student project groups mimicked real project groups in that they were not recruited simply for the purposes of the study and involved real stakes in the form of grades, it is possible that the same findings might not emerge in other real world teams where the team relationships last longer. For example, in organizational teams, that are supposed to work in tandem with other teams, extra-team gossip may have far-reaching, negative consequences. Furthermore, in organizations, team boundaries are often quite vague, or members belong to different, overlapping teams, which may cause issues in determining whether an individual is engaging in intra-team or extra-team gossip. Future research should follow up by examining other naturally occurring teams in organizational settings.

### **Future Directions**

In addition to establishing the effects of gossip on work-related outcomes at multiple levels of analysis, my studies raise some additional interesting questions for future research. First, while I explore the effects of gossip, finding mostly positive outcomes, the important role played by the content of gossip bears further exploration. While Study 1 results highlight that valence of gossip influenced individuals' levels of state self-

esteem, I was unable to explore the influence of the valence of gossip in Study 2. As such, in terms of reputational outcomes, based on the principle that bad events elicit stronger responses than good ones (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001), gossipers, who are the source of negative information about others may thus be seen as more competent and trustworthy than gossipers who are the source of positive information. In general, negative information may be seen as more informative and interesting, mostly because stories about norm violations may carry more information than stories that are about people who conform to norms (Baumeister, et al, 2004), demonstrating one's access to noteworthy and interesting information may enhance others' perceptions of gossip competence (Anderson, et al, 2008). Furthermore, gossipers may be seen as being more capable because they are able to use gossip as a self-presentation strategy; saying negative things about others makes one appear astute while more positive opinions of others may make one look innocent (Amabile, 1983). Also because social desirability pressures compel people to express primarily positive thoughts and feelings (Blumberg, 1972), public expressions of dislike for another person occur relatively infrequently. As a consequence, when they do occur, expressions of dislike are likely to stand out by contrast and attract more attention than comparable expressions of positivity (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989). Not only are people more likely to pay attention to others who reveal negative as opposed to positive attitudes, but research has also shown that high status members are also more prone to expressing

negative views of others (Keltner, Gruenfeld & Anderson, 2003). This would lead people to see the gossipers as having high status. Last, this may also influence trustworthiness judgments. Since people are less likely to express their negative opinions about others, receivers of negative gossip may lead to listener to feel like the gossipers are acting authentically and may give the listener more insight into his or her disposition (Baumeister, et al, 2001). On the other hand, positive attitudes may not be as useful. If a person reveals a favorable attitude about a third party, a listener who agrees with this positive attitude may not be sure of whether the source really feels positively or is simply following politeness norms (Jones & Kanouse, 1987). The listener thus may feel like they are being deceived by the gossipers, or that they do not have enough information about him or her.

One of the missing components of the model of gossip that I develop in this dissertation, is the role of the target. The target, an essential component of the gossip triad, is not considered or studied in either of the two studies but is important for at least two reasons. First, it is likely that the target of gossip, his or her hierarchical status and personality, may moderate some of my findings. Indeed, recent research suggests that the role of the target is critical the way that gossip is interpreted. Ellwardt and colleagues (2011) found that gossip tends to be about in-groups, and that status influences gossip such that high-status individuals are less likely to be the targets of negative gossip but are also rarely positively gossiped about, while McAndrew and colleagues (2007) found that high-status

targets are more likely to be gossiped about. Second, the recipient's feelings towards the target may also have important consequences for the way the gossiper is viewed. For instance, when there is a fit between the recipient and the gossiper, such that the recipient shares the gossiper's (positive or negative) opinion of the target he or she may be more prone to like and trust the gossiper (e.g., Bryne, 1971). This is because the gossiper's opinion of the target is likely to confirm the recipient's internal beliefs and make him or her feel validated (Burke & Stets, 1999). On the other hand, when the recipient disagrees with the gossiper's opinions of the target, he or she may be apt to view the gossiper in a negative light. Recipients may also view gossip as a deliberate and strategic ploy to gain attention and power and thus further the gossipers' selfish self-interests at the expense of the targets' (Paine, 1967) and may be less likely to trust them (Wilson, et al, 2000). In addition, gossip that disconfirms the recipients perceptions of the targets may be viewed as an unreliable and even outlandish, source of information. When information is seen as untrustworthy, it is likely that the communicator of information will also be viewed through the same suspicious lens (Turner, Mazur, Wendel & Winslow, 2003).

Another important future avenue for research is understanding the long-term consequences of gossip. Essentially, gossip may positively or negatively influence important organizationally-relevant individual outcomes like emotional exhaustion and organizational identification. Emotional exhaustion, which includes depletion of emotional resources (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) and feelings of physiological and



psychological strain (Lee & Ashforth, 1996) may occur due to increased work demands and multiple, often difficult interactions with people (Cropanzano, Rupp & Byrne, 2003). As gossipers vent to others, this process may serve a cathartic function, allowing them to process and acknowledge their emotions, thus, reducing stress and enhancing emotional recovery (Pennebaker, 1997). Also, because gossip increases feelings of positive affect, individuals may be more able to cope with negative work experiences because, positive emotions undo the harmful effects of negative emotions and also supply energy to the person experiencing them (Fredrickson, & Levenson, 1998). Also, because people thrive on sharing their thoughts and feelings with others around them gossip, with its bond-building role (Dunbar, 1996, 2004) may lead people to feel reinforced, and therefore, less exhausted. Also, with respect to long-term outcomes, gossip may galvanize individuals' internal experiences of team, or organizational identification. While gossiping, employees judge and voice their opinions about others' actions and transgressions based on the social milieu of their group or organization. This process of sensegiving or the reaffirming of employees' subjective perceptions of their group's norms and values (Gioia & Chittipedi, 1991) allows them to create a shared understanding of their culture's implicit rules and regulations (Ben Ze'ev, 1994) and may in turn, cause them to believe they have played a strategic role in developing and furthering the culture (Huff, Sproull & Kiesler, 1989). Shared meaning provides organizational members with a clear sense of the organization's identity and may thus, strengthen member identification.

## **Implications**

### **Theoretical Implications**

My findings offer several important theoretical contributions to existing understandings of gossip, team interactions, emotions and relationships. The primary contribution lies in developing a clearer understanding of how gossip operates in work-related contexts.

First, by investigating the consequences of gossip for individuals, dyads and teams in work-related contexts, I hope to have established a strong theoretical and empirical base for conducting future work on gossip. Whereas, past efforts to explore the consequences of gossip in work contexts have mainly focused on understanding the motives behind engaging in gossip (Feinberg, et al, 2011), its social functions with regard to norm enforcement and cooperation (e.g., Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011; Kniffin & Wilson, 2005) and its antecedents, in terms of social ties (Grosser, et al, 2010) and status (Ellwardt, et al, 2011), less work has explored its consequences. I show that engaging in gossip has far-reaching consequences in that it influences individuals' affective, motivational and reputational outcomes, dyadic relational and work outcomes as well as positive and negative outcomes at a team level. In addition, although researchers in management have classified workplace gossip as being a deviant, indirectly aggressive behavior (Bennett & Robinson, 1995) that is destructive for workplace relationships (Baker and Jones, 1996), I highlight and find that it also has a positive dimension and is associated with functional outcomes, especially at the individual level. Last, from a

methodological perspective, the two studies had a number of strengths that I hope can be incorporated into future gossip work. Gossip research has traditionally been studied using observational field studies (Baumeister et al., 2004) and community samples (e.g., Gilmore, 1978) through the use of mainly qualitative tools such as in-depth interviews, participant observation, and diaries (Mills, 2010; Waddington, 2005). Conclusions from qualitative field studies depend on the researcher's access to the field, observational skills and subjective interpretation (Kniffin and Wilson, 2010). The ability of gaining a complete overview is further challenged by the people's tendency to hide gossip activities. In the two studies, I used an experimental and survey design and obtained extensive data. In the experimental study, gossip (positive and negative) was coded by external raters, while emotional and dyadic measures were assessed through both self-report and coded measures. In the survey study, Study 2, longitudinal data collected through round-robin assessments, in addition to the fact that the extent to which each individual engaged in gossip was assessed not through self-reports but through peer evaluations eliminated issues with shared method variance and enhanced the credibility of the measures.

The studies in the dissertation also highlight the importance of understanding how gossip as a type of social interaction influences emotional, relational and team outcomes.

Although it is widely recognized that social interactions influence many important outcomes, limited research has explored the various types of social interactions, other

than self-disclosure (for a review, see, Collins & Miller,1994). Thus, one of the contributions of this dissertation is to highlight the role of gossip, as a type of common, work-relevant social interaction on relationship enhancement and maintenance, emotions and team outcomes and by doing so contribute to each of these bodies of work.

### **Practical Implications and Conclusion**

From a practical standpoint, most managers would vote to eradicate gossip; it is viewed detrimental to productivity (Michelson & Mouly, 2004; Roy, 1958), damaging (Baker and Jones, 1996) to the organizational climate and is also been considered to be deviant, or antisocial in nature (Bennett & Robinson,1995). However, the results of my dissertation diverge from this negative viewpoint on gossip, highlighting instead its unique ability to communicate our emotions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes about the experience of work and organizational life. In addition, gossip also allows people to establish closer relationship, as informal talk about mutual colleagues can make the workplace more tolerable (Roy, 1958) and enjoyable. This highlights that gossip is a type of behavior that exists in the “gray zone”, a behavior that is forbidden but tolerated in organizations (Anteby, 2008) because stamping it out may do more harm than good for the workplace. However, while my findings point to the benefits that individuals, dyads and even, under some circumstances, groups may accrue from engaging in gossip, it cannot be considered to be an unmitigated good in work contexts. Indeed, for every dyad that grows closer by sharing negative gossip about somebody, there is the target of gossip

who could potentially suffer by learning about the exchange, or contending with a damaged reputation. When taken to an extreme, negative gossip can create a hostile work environment for both the targets of gossip and those who must listen to the gossip. Therefore, instead of considering gossip to be a behavior that is to be encouraged or discouraged, managers can use gossip as a diagnostic tool. When managing or leading teams, too much gossip, especially about team members, can serve as an early warning device that alerts the manager to potential team-based problems such as conflict, distrust or social loafing. By being better connected to this informal network, managers will be in a better position to let the positive outcomes of gossip flourish, while also being able to control its dark side.

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**Table 1.***Participants' Pay-Off Matrix (Study 1).*

<b>Alternative</b>	<b>Role 1: Points</b>	<b>Role 2: Points</b>
<b><i>DESTINATION</i></b>		
Northeast	80	0
Southeast	60	105
Midwest	40	210
Southwest	20	315
Northwest	0	420
<b><i>HOTEL RATING</i></b>		
5-star	220	0
4-star	165	55
3-star	110	110
2-star	55	165
1-star	0	220
<b><i>MODE OF TRAVEL</i></b>		
Air	420	0
Car	345	20
Motorhome	210	40
Greyhound	105	60
Train	0	80
<b><i>LENGTH OF STAY</i></b>		
1 week	0	0
1.5 weeks	35	35
2 weeks	70	70
2.5 weeks	105	105
3 weeks	140	140
<b><i>SEASON</i></b>		
Spring	260	0
Early summer	195	65
Late summer	130	130
Fall	65	195
Winter	0	260

**Table 2.***A list of self-reported measures.*

Self-Report Variable	Time of Measurement		
State Self-Esteem	Baseline	Post-Interaction	Post-Negotiation
Positive Emotions	Baseline	Post-Interaction	Post-Negotiation
Guilt	Baseline	Post-Interaction	Post-Negotiation
Energy	Baseline	Post-Interaction	Post-Negotiation
Absorption		Post-Interaction	Post-Negotiation
Attention		Post-Interaction	Post-Negotiation
Dyadic Closeness	Baseline	Post-Interaction	Post-Negotiation
Dyadic Rapport		Post-Interaction	Post-Negotiation

**Table 3.**

*Means and standard deviations for self-reported and coded variables assessed at Time 1 (Baseline), Time 2 (Post-Interaction) and Time 3 (Post-Negotiation) as a function of Experimental Condition (Study 1).*

Variable	Time	Measure	Condition					
			Gossip		Self-Disclosure		Task Discussion	
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Self Esteem	T 1	Self-Report	4.62	0.57	4.61	0.69	4.70	0.76
Self Esteem	T 2	Self-Report	4.78	0.59	4.81	0.63	5.09	0.69
Self Esteem	T 3	Self-Report	4.93	0.69	5.01	0.79	5.28	0.70
Positive Emotion	T 1	Self-Report	4.68	0.69	4.58	0.69	4.64	0.66
Positive Emotion	T 2	Self-Report	5.07	0.78	4.67	0.79	4.52	0.68
Positive Emotion	T 2	Coded	5.32	1.11	4.44	0.66	4.31	0.85
Positive Emotion	T 3	Self-Report	5.16	0.80	4.82	0.70	4.60	0.87
Guilt	T 1	Self-Report	2.15	0.72	2.03	0.89	2.25	0.84
Guilt	T 2	Self-Report	2.09	0.85	1.89	0.79	1.95	0.71
Guilt	T 3	Self-Report	2.06	0.88	1.96	0.81	1.96	0.67
Energy	T 1	Self-Report	4.50	1.35	4.78	1.36	4.50	1.20
Energy	T 2	Self-Report	5.58	1.31	4.70	1.18	4.71	1.23
Energy	T 2	Coded	5.15	1.05	4.03	0.74	4.20	0.84
Energy	T 3	Self-Report	5.85	1.27	5.26	1.33	5.17	1.31
Absorption	T 2	Self-Report	5.24	1.06	4.86	1.32	4.62	1.11
Absorption	T 3	Self-Report	5.42	0.90	4.58	1.12	4.56	1.19
Attention	T 2	Self-Report	5.42	0.89	5.59	0.79	5.29	0.67
Attention	T 3	Self-Report	5.44	0.91	4.99	1.08	5.45	0.81
Closeness	T 1	Self-Report	70.06	15.15	72.23	15.55	73.05	11.28
Closeness	T 2	Self-Report	81.84	10.39	77.10	15.87	77.62	10.73
Closeness	T 3	Self-Report	84.19	8.73	77.59	15.85	80.04	10.18
Rapport	T 2	Self-Report	5.96	0.50	5.50	0.75	5.68	0.71
Rapport	T 2	Coded	5.47	0.97	4.14	0.73	4.09	0.77

Rapport	T 3	Self-Report	5.70	0.70	5.72	0.76	5.75	0.52
			1460.8	159.4	1391.5	136.2	1390.4	154.7
Cooperation	T 3	Calculated	3	3	0	7	1	2
Cooperation	T 3	Coded	5.35	0.93	4.11	0.74	3.87	1.46

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Table 4

*Correlations between Coded Variables and Self-Reported Outcomes Measured at Time 2*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Coded Mean</b>	<b>Self-Report Mean</b>	<b>Correlation between Coded and Self-Report Measures</b>
Positive Affect	4.72 (1.01)	4.79 (.79)	.38***
Energy	4.52 (1.03)	5.04 (1.30)	.35***
Rapport	4.65 (1.07)	5.83(.60)	.26***
Cooperation <sup>1</sup>	4.50 (1.25)	1417.80 (153.59)	.36***

<sup>1</sup>The self-report measure of cooperation is the total score achieved by the negotiating dyad.

**Table 5**

*Multi-Level model exploring the effects of gossip (versus self-disclosure and task discussion) on individual-level outcomes at Time 2 (post-interaction) (Study 1).*

	State Self-Esteem	Positive Affect	Guilt	Energy
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	<i>Estimate (SE)</i>	<i>Estimate</i>	<i>Estimate (SE)</i>	<i>Estimate (SE)</i>
<b>Control Variables</b>				
Gender	.08 (.08)	.21* (.10)	-.17 (.10)+	.07(.20)
Age	.02 (.03)	-.02 (.03)	.02 (.03)	.04 (.07)
Baseline Level <sup>a</sup>	.86** (.04)	.61**	.74** (.05)	.47** (.05)
Closeness- Time 1	-.002 (.002)	.001**	-.01 (.002)	.01 (.01)
<b>Predictor Variables</b>				
Gossip versus Self-Disclosure	-.31** (.09)	.27* (.12)	.06 (.11)	.96** (.24)
Gossip versus Task Discussion	-.43** (.10)	.52** (.12)	.18(.11)	.89** (.24)

*Note.* Unstandardized coefficients are reported; standard errors are in parentheses.

Two-tailed tests (n = 252 at individual level; n = 126 at dyad level)

<sup>a</sup> In each model, I included a baseline levels of the dependent variable: baseline levels of self-esteem (Model 1), baseline levels of positive affect (in Model 2), baseline levels of guilt (in Model 3), baseline levels of energy (in Model 4).

+  $p < .10$  \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$

**Table 6.**

*Multi-Level model exploring the effects of gossip on task engagement post-interaction (Time 2) and post-negotiation (Time 3)*

	Absorption-Time 2	Absorption-Time 3
	Model 1	Model 2
	Estimate (SE)	Estimate (SE)
<b>Control Variables</b>		
Gender	.51** (.17)	-.17 (.19)
Age	-.03 (.05)	-.04 (.06)
Closeness- Time 1	.01*(.003)	.01 (.004)
Attention- Time 1	.58** (.06)	.12 (.08)
Absorption- Time 2		.21** (.07)
<b>Predictor Variables</b>		
Gossip versus Self-Disclosure	.45** (.20)	.12** (.08)
Gossip versus Task Discussion	.58** (.20)	.21** (.07)

*Note.* Unstandardized coefficients are reported; standard errors are in parentheses.

Two-tailed tests (n = 252 at individual level; n = 126 at dyad level)

+  $p < .10$

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$



**Table 7.**

*Multi-Level model of main and interaction effects of experimental condition and conversation valence on individual self-esteem, positive affect and dyadic closeness (Study 1).*

	Self-Esteem		Positive Affect		Closeness	
	Model 1 ( $\beta$ )	Model 2 ( $\beta$ )	Model 3 ( $\beta$ )	Model 4 ( $\beta$ )	Model 5 ( $\beta$ )	Model 6 ( $\beta$ )
Experimental Condition (1= gossip; 2= disclosure)	.01	-.12	-.21+	-.19	-.19*	-.22*
Positive Communication	.20+	.42**	.04	-.003	-.01	-.01
Negative Communication	.04	-.12	.07	.12	.09	.05
Baseline Closeness					.81**	.80**
Condition X Positive		.15		.14		.06
Condition X Negative		-.09		.01		-.11
Positive X Negative		.09		-.11		.06
3-way Interaction		.37*		-.16		-.04
Condition X Positive X Negative						
$R^2$	.04	.11	.07	.12	.69	.70

*Note.* +  $p < .10$  ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

**Table 8.**

*Multi-Level model exploring the effects of gossip (versus self-disclosure and task discussion) on dyadic outcomes at Time 2 (post-interaction)(Study 1).*

	<b>Closeness-Time 2</b>	<b>Rapport-Time 3</b>
	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>
	<i>Estimate (SE)</i>	<i>Estimate (SE)</i>
<b>Control Variables</b>		
Gender	1.00 (1.30)	.19 (.10)+
Age	.42 (.42)	-.01 (.03)
Closeness- Time 1	.68**(.03)	.01** (.0043)
<b>Predictor Variables</b>		
Gossip versus Self-Disclosure	6.11** (1.53)	.25** (.12)
Gossip versus Task Discussion	6.34** (1.55)	.22+ (.12)

*Note.* Unstandardized coefficients are reported; standard errors are in parentheses.  
Two-tailed tests (n = 252 at individual level; n = 126 at dyad level)

+  $p < .10$

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

**Table 9.**

*Multi-Level model exploring the main and interaction effects of experimental condition (gossip and self-disclosure) and strength of friendship on dyadic outcomes at Time 2 (post-interaction)(Study 1).*

<b>Closeness-Time 2</b>		
	<b>Model 1</b>	<b>Model 2</b>
	<i>Estimate (SE)</i>	<i>Estimate (SE)</i>
Experimental Condition (Gossip=1, Self-disclosure=2)	-3.13** (.81)	-3.17** (.70)
Baseline Closeness -Time 1	12.21**(.67)	12.20** (.60)
Experimental Condition X Baseline Closeness		4.05** (.60)

*Note.* Unstandardized coefficients are reported; standard errors are in parentheses.  
Two-tailed tests (n = 252 at individual level; n = 126 at dyad level)

+  $p < .10$

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

**Table 10***Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations amongst Study 2 Variables assessed at the Individual Level (N= 280).*

	Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1	Gossip Centrality	3.07	1.05	1																
2	Sex	.33	.47	.09	1															
3	Age	20.24	1.12	-.14*	-.09	1														
4	English Proficiency	.76	.43	.07	-.17**	-.11	1													
5	GPA	3.46	.39	.25**	-.01	.13*	-.03	1												
6	Conscientiousness	5.43	1.15	.11	.05	-.05	-.06	.15*	1											
7	Extraversion	4.77	1.31	.15*	.11	-.08	.05	-.07	.17**	1										
8	Agreeableness	4.79	1.16	-.04	.19**	.00	-.12	-.08	.08	.20**	1									
9	Openness	5.18	1.08	-.05	.01	.02	.02	-.15*	.09	.37**	.25**	1								
10	Emotional Stability	2.97	1.30	.08	.11	.02	-.08	.03	-.21**	-.01	-.30**	-.16**	1							
11	Positive Affect	3.57	.63	.12*	.01	.07	-.07	.11	.34**	.45**	.24**	.42**	-.18**	1						
12	Negative Affect	2.18	.73	.05	.03	.01	-.13*	.07	-.20**	-.20**	-.25**	-.22**	.61**	-.06	1					
13	Self-Esteem	5.84	.97	-.06	-.04	.10	.15*	.12*	.32**	.28**	.16**	.34**	-.39**	.44**	-.45**	1				
14	Self-Efficacy	5.50	.86	.04	.051	-.02	.15*	.12*	.51**	.32**	.22**	.36**	-.27**	.56**	-.30**	.66**	1			
15	Closeness Centrality	1.78	.75	.46**	.09	.01	-.05	.13*	.19**	.16**	.03	-.04	.02	.06	-.01	-.07	.02	1		
16	Attributions of Trustworthiness	5.65	.95	.25**	.08	-.01	-.05	.30**	.17**	.03	.07	-.07	.09	.06	-.02	-.01	.14*	.23**	1	
17	Attributions of Competence	5.79	.95	.12	.11	.00	-.05	.35**	.12*	.01	.06	-.09	.10	.04	.01	-.02	.09	.14*	.83**	1

*Note.* +  $p < .10$  \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$

**Table 11**

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression of Individual Gossip Centrality on Attributions of Trustworthiness (Study 2).*

Variable	Attributions of Trustworthiness			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	( $\beta$ )	( $\beta$ )	( $\beta$ )	( $\beta$ )
<b><i>Control Variables</i></b>				
Sex	.05	.02	.01	.01
Age	-.03	-.03	.02	.01
English Proficiency	-.06	-.02	-.03	-.02
GPA	.34**	.33**	.20**	.22**
<b><i>Personality Variables</i></b>				
Conscientious		.04	-.01	.002
Extraverted		-.04	-.13+	-.12+
Agreeable		.06	.06	.05
Emotionally Stable		.23**	.24**	.25**
Open		-.04	.01	.01
Positive Affect		.05	.10	.12
Negative Affect		-.19*	-.19*	-.19*
Self-Esteem		-.27**	-.19*	-.19*
Self-Efficacy		.15	.11	.09
<b><i>Relationship factors</i></b>				
Closeness			.46**	.53**
Centrality				
<b><i>Dependent Variables</i></b>				
Gossip Centrality				-.15*
$R^2$	.12	.20	.37	.39
$\Delta R^2$		.08*	.18**	.02*

Note. +  $p < .10$  \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$

**Table 12**

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression of Individual Gossip Centrality on Attributions of Competence (Study 2).*

Variable	Attributions of Competence			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	( $\beta$ )	( $\beta$ )	( $\beta$ )	( $\beta$ )
<b><i>Control Variables</i></b>				
Sex	.08	.06	.05	.07
Age	-.03	-.02	.02	-.01
English Proficiency	-.04	-.01	-.02	.01
GPA	.40**	.40**	.31**	.34**
<b><i>Personality Variables</i></b>				
Conscientious		.02	-.01	.01
Extraverted		-.07	-.13+	-.12
Agreeable		.06	.06	.04
Emotionally Stable		.23**	.19*	.20**
Open		-.01	.03	.04
Positive Affect		.11	.08	.10
Negative Affect		-.15+	-.15+	-.15+
Self-Esteem		-.20*	-.13	-.16+
Self-Efficacy		.11	.07	.05
<b><i>Relationship factors</i></b>				
Closeness			.32**	.43**
Centrality				
<b><i>Dependent Variables</i></b>				
Gossip Centrality				-.25**
$R^2$	.17	.21	.30	.34
$\Delta R^2$		.04	.08**	.04**

**Table 13.**

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression of the role of the Quadratic Effects of Individual Gossip Centrality on Attributions of Competence and Trustworthiness (Study 2).*

Variable	Attributions of Trustworthiness		Attributions of Competence	
	Model 1 ( $\beta$ )	Model 2 ( $\beta$ )	Model 3 ( $\beta$ )	Model 4 ( $\beta$ )
<i>Control Variables</i>				
Sex	.01	.01	.07	.06
Age	.01	.01	-.01	-.01
English Proficiency	-.02	-.02	.01	.01
GPA	.22**	.20**	.34**	.31**
<i>Personality Variables</i>				
Conscientious	.002	.01	.01	.01
Extraverted	-.12+	-.12+	-.12	-.11
Agreeable	.05	.05	.04	.04
Emotionally Stable	.25**	.25**	.20**	.22**
Open	.01	-.01	.04	.05
Positive Affect	.12	.11	.10	.10
Negative Affect	-.19*	-.21*	-.15+	-.19*
Self-Esteem	-.19*	-.20*	-.16+	-.16*
Self-Efficacy	.09	.08	.05	.03
<i>Relationship factors</i>				
Closeness Centrality	.53**	.54**	.43**	.45**
<i>Independent Variables</i>				
Gossip Centrality	-.15*	.30	-.25**	.76**
Gossip Centrality-Squared		-.46		-1.02**
$R^2$	.39	.40	.34	.37
$\Delta R^2$		.01		.04**

**Table 14***Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations between Study 2 variables measured at the Group-Level (N= 113)*

	Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	Gender Ratio	.66	.25	1											
2	Average Team Age	20.04	.70	.18	1										
3	Average Team GPA	3.44	.24	.03	.19	1									
4	Team Size	4.84	.41	-.09	.11	.18	1								
5	Semester	1.51	.50	.07	.25**	.07	-.03	1							
6	Baseline Closeness Density	.24	.09	-.03	-.05	.35**	.08	-.07	1						
7	Intra-Team Gossip Density	.39	.13	-.08	-.01	.29**	.05	.16	.48**	1					
8	Extra-Team Gossip Density	.40	.13	-.08	-.05	.28**	.05	.16	.51**	.81**	1				
9	Psychological Safety- T2	5.31	.54	.04	.04	.12	-.09	.35**	.26**	.11	.19*	1			
10	Perceptions of Politics- T 2	2.11	.64	-.03	-.04	.09	.17	-.12	.26**	.39**	.27**	-.52**	1		
11	Team Cooperation- Time 3	5.49	.76	-.01	-.06	.15	-.15	.08	.15	-.05	.061	.61**	-.48**	1	
12	Team Viability- Time 3	5.57	.77	-.12	-.01	.12	-.13	.12	.01	-.20*	-.140	.55**	-.52**	.71**	1

*Note.* +  $p < .10$  \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$



**Table 15.**

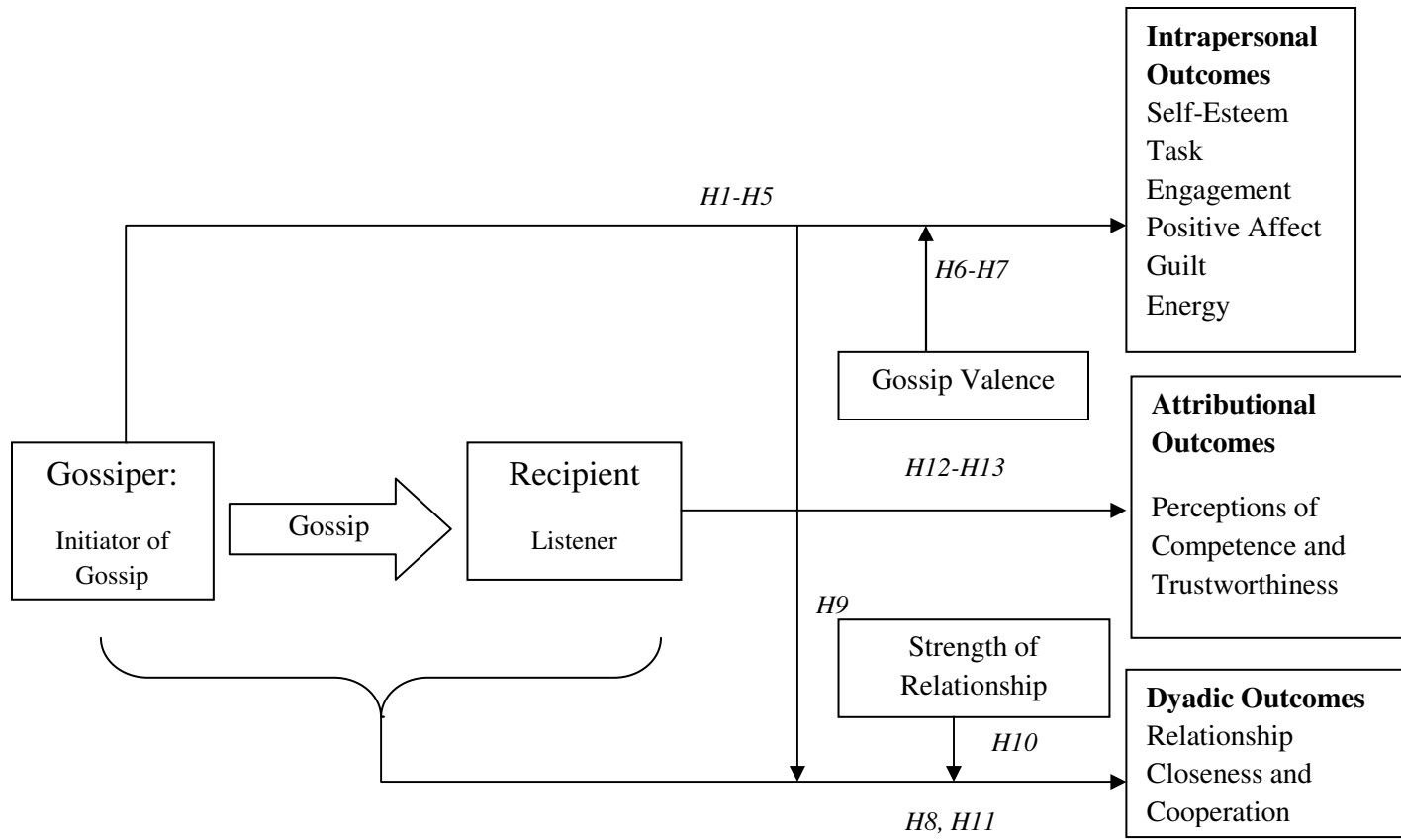
*Hierarchical Regression Analyses of Intra-Team Gossip Density and Extra-Team Gossip Density on Group processes (Psychological Safety and Perceptions of Politics) and Group Outcomes (Team Cooperation and Team Viability)*

Variable	Perceptions of Politics		Psychological Safety		Team Cooperation		Team Viability	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
	( $\beta$ )	( $\beta$ )	( $\beta$ )	( $\beta$ )	( $\beta$ )	( $\beta$ )	( $\beta$ )	( $\beta$ )
<i>Control Variables</i>								
Gender Ratio	.01	.03	.02	.01	-.03	-.05	.13	.16+
Team Age	-.02	-.03	-.04	-.02	-.09	-.07	.03	.04
Team GPA	-.03	-.07	.02	.03	.15	.17+	-.18+	-.22*
Team size	.16+	.16+	-.10	-.10	-.16+	-.16+	.17+	.17+
Semester	-.08	-.13	.37**	.38**	.08	.11	-.11	-.17
Baseline Closeness Density	.27**	.15	.27**	.29**	.11	.16	.06	-.08
<i>Independent Variables</i>								
Intra-Team Gossip Density		.91**		-.46*		-.67**		-.45**
Extra-Team Gossip Density		-.60**		.39+		.53**		.13
$R^2$	.10	.27	.21	.24	.08	.16	.07	.16
$\Delta R^2$		.17**		.03+		.08**		.08**

Note. +  $p < .10$  \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$

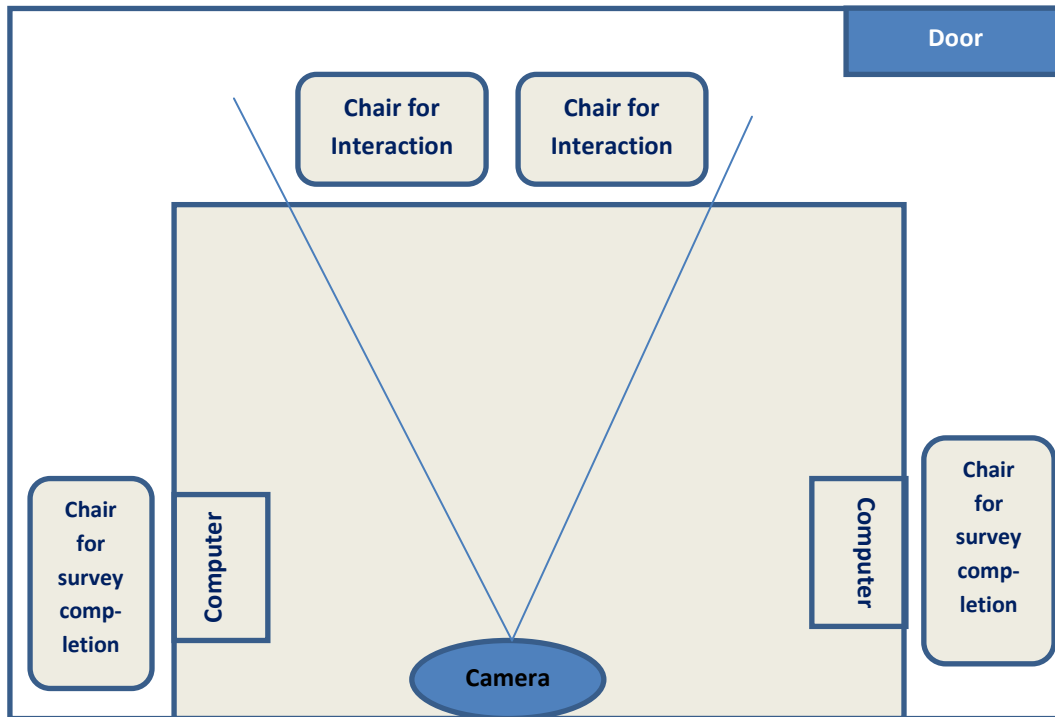
**Figure 1.**

*A Model of the Emotional, Cognitive, Attributional and Dyadic Consequences of Gossiping.*



**Figure 2**

*A visual representation of the set-up of the room for dyadic interactions (Study 1).*



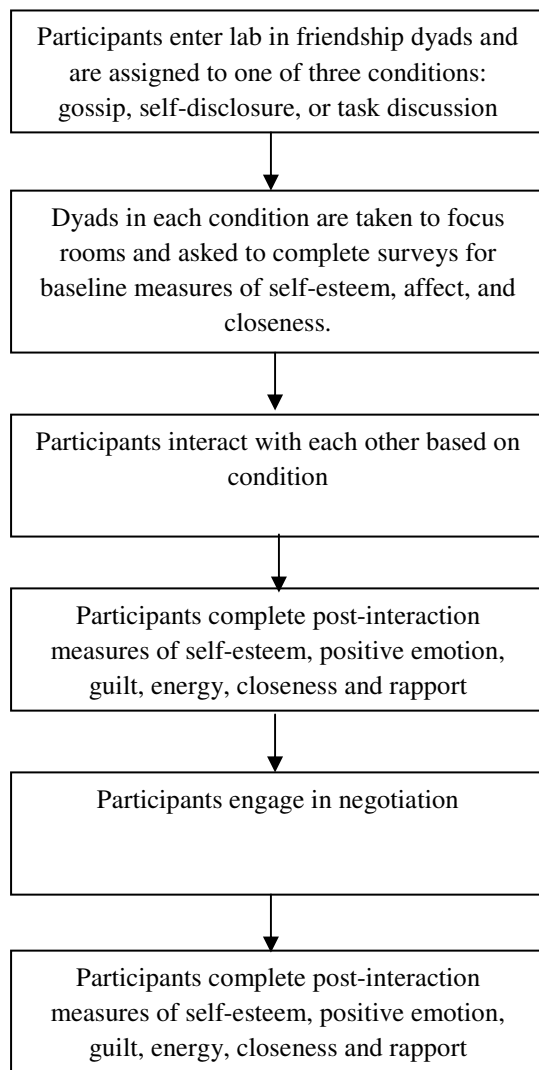
**Figure 3.**

*Example of the camera used to videotape interactions (Study 1).*



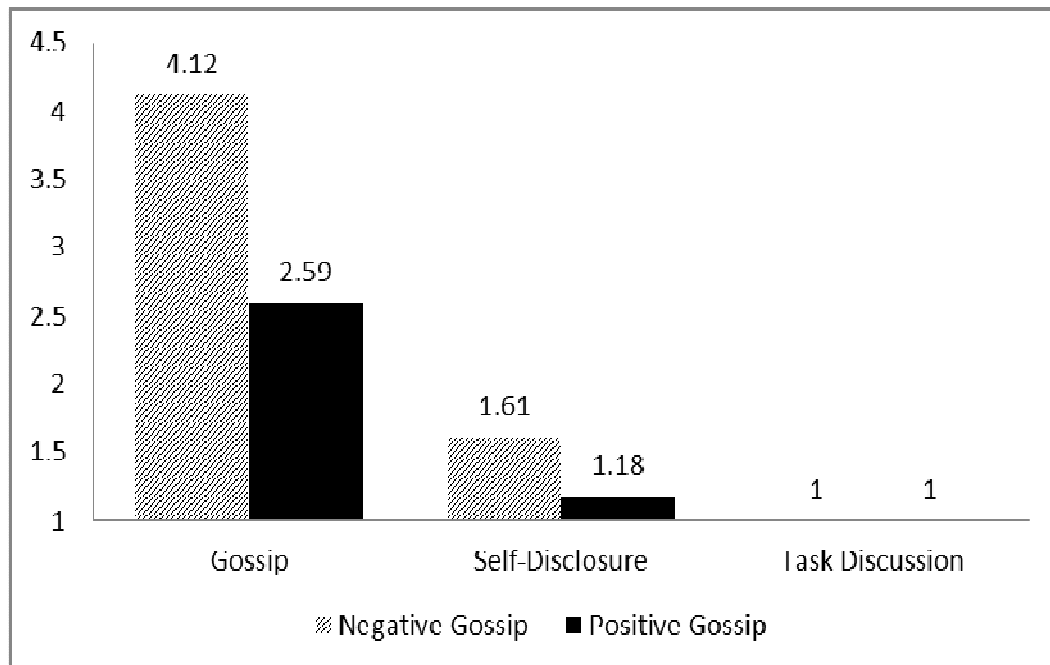
**Figure 4.**

*A Pictorial representation of the experimental procedure for Study 1.*



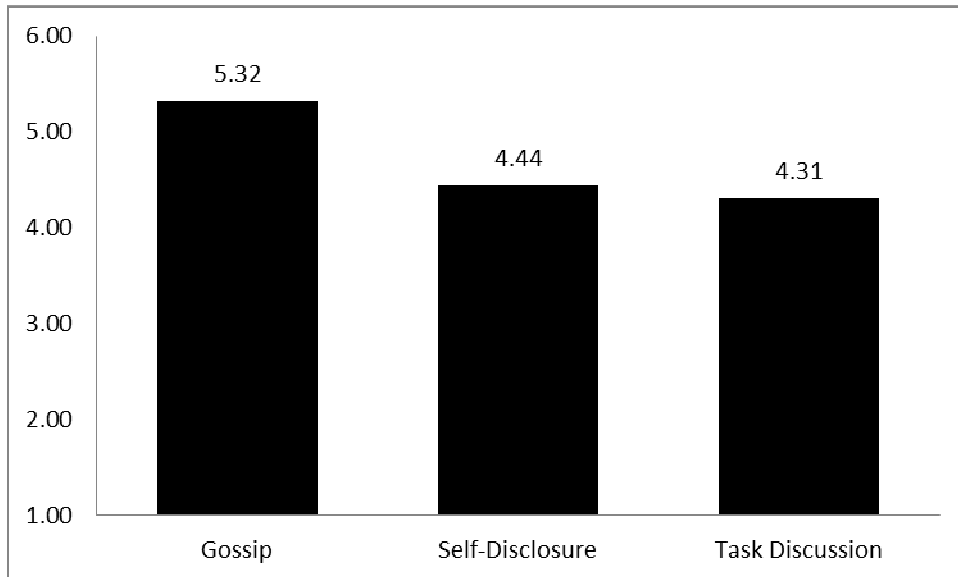
**Figure 5.**

*Manipulation Check – Amount of Negative and Positive Gossip Across Experimental Conditions (Study 1)*



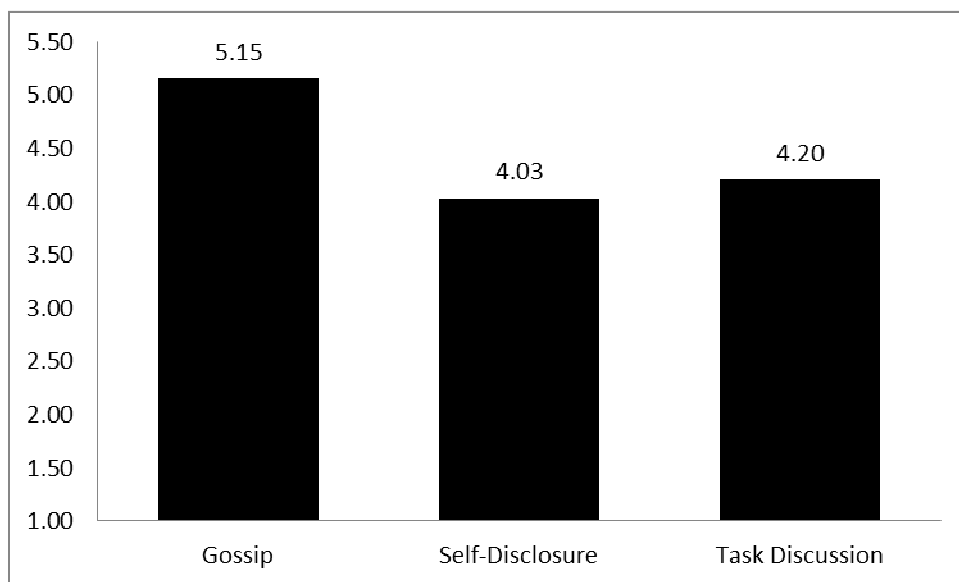
**Figure 6.**

*Difference in the levels of positive affect (as rated by video coders) for participants by experimental condition (Study 1)*



**Figure 7.**

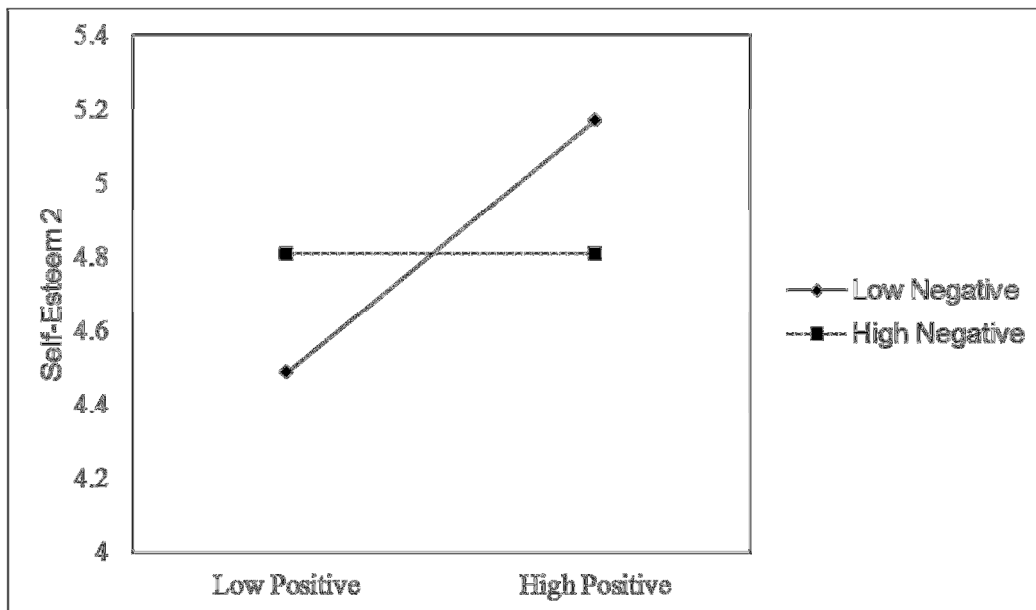
*Difference in the levels of energy (as rated by video coders) for participants by experimental condition (Study 1)*



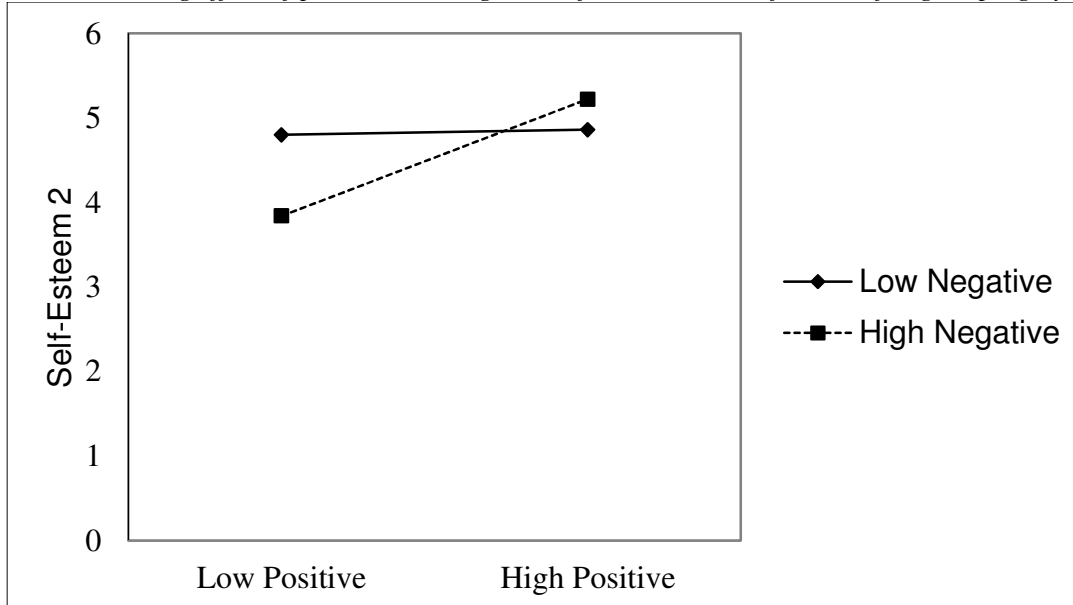


**Figure 8a.**

*The moderating effect of positive and negative information on self-esteem for gossiping dyads.*

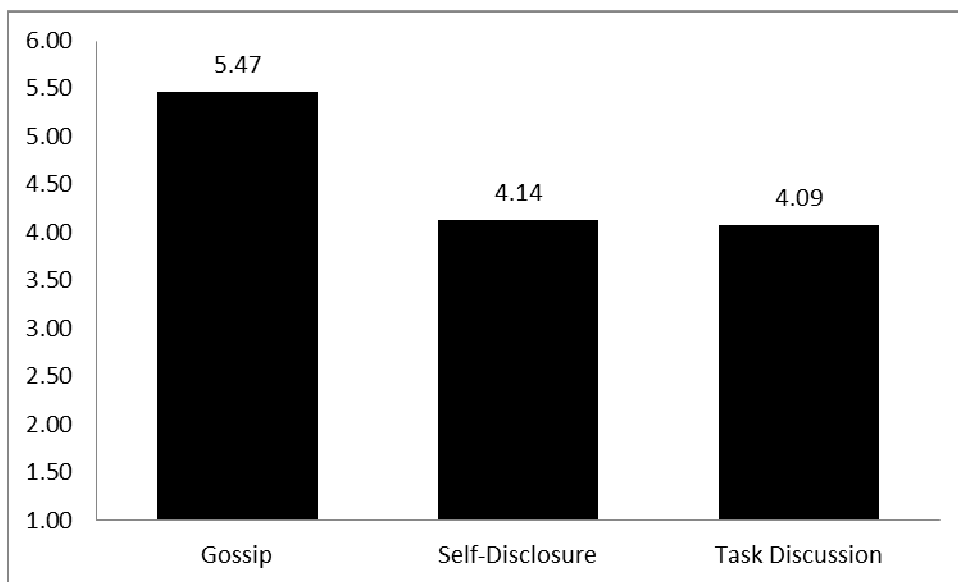
**Figure 8b.**

*The moderating effect of positive and negative information on self-esteem for gossiping dyads.*



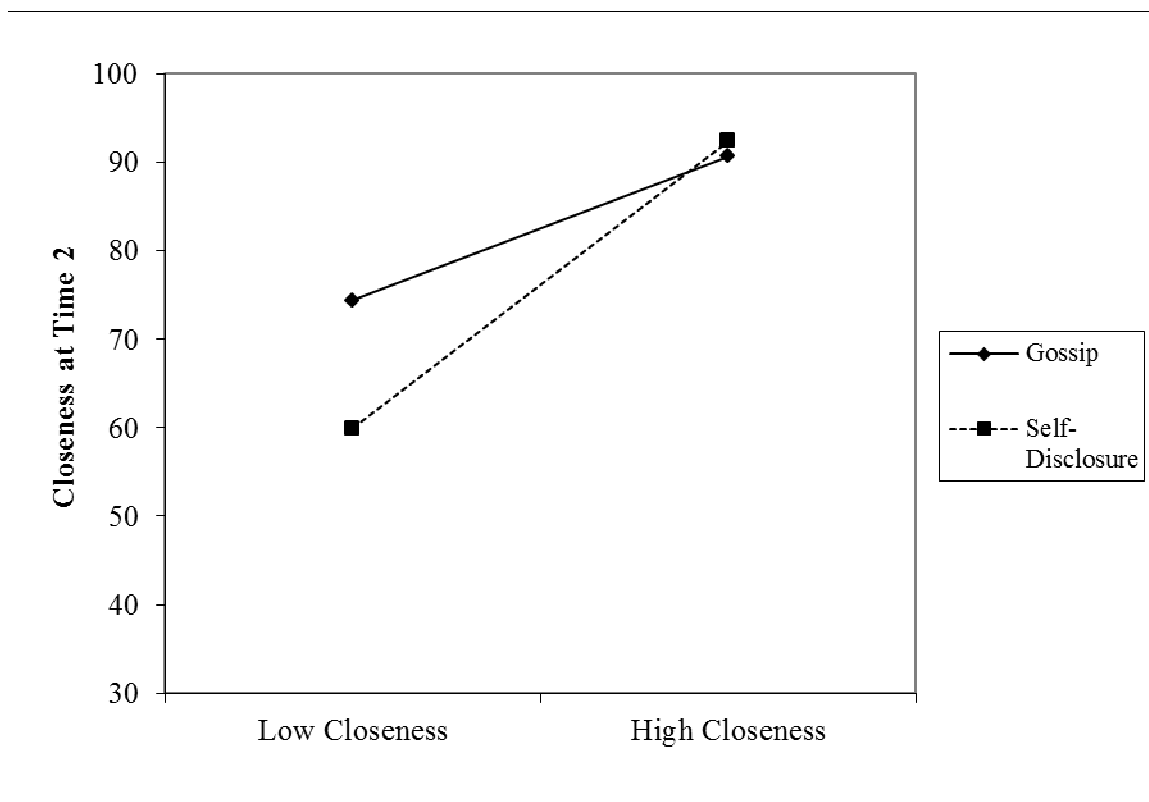
**Figure 9.**

*Difference in the levels of dyadic rapport (as rated by video coders) for participants by experimental condition (Study 1)*



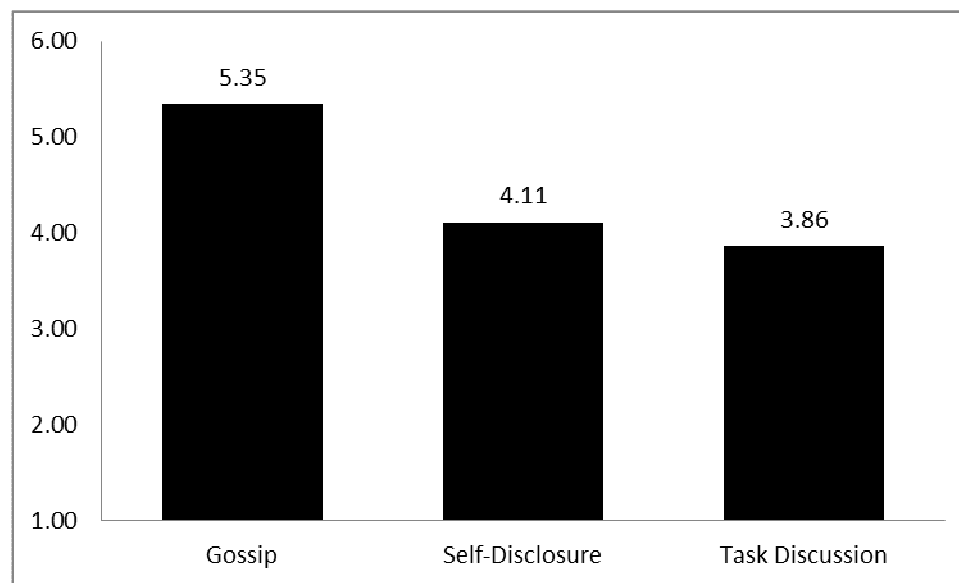
**Figure 10.**

*Moderating Effect of strength of friendship on levels of closeness for participants in the gossip and self-disclosure condition (Study 1).*



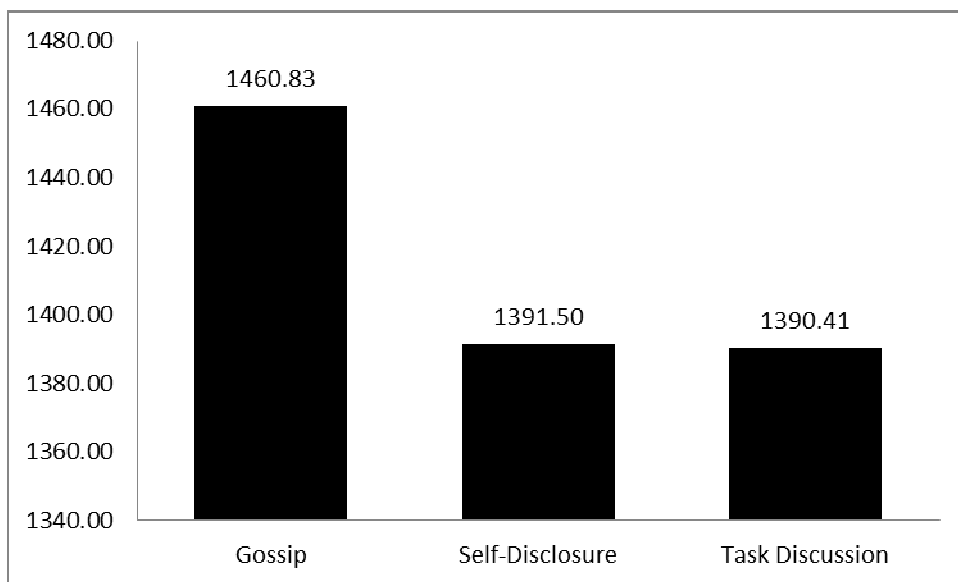
**Figure 11.**

*Difference in the levels of displayed cooperation (as rated by video coders) for participants by experimental condition (Study 1)*



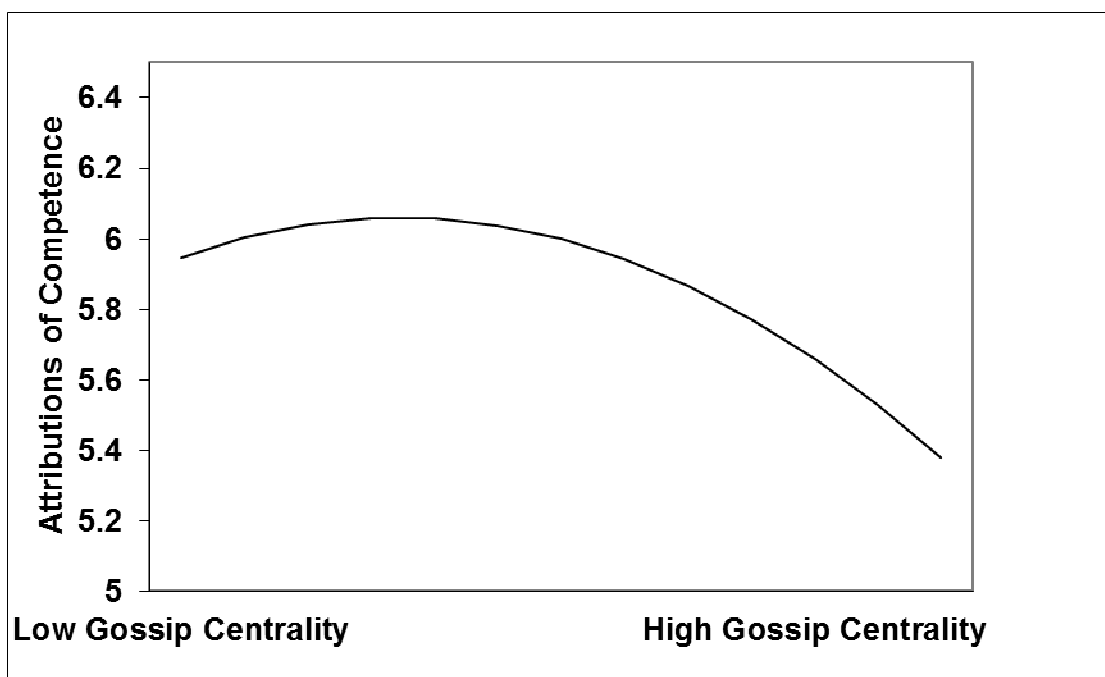
**Figure 12.**

*Difference in the levels of joint gains by experimental condition (Study 1)*



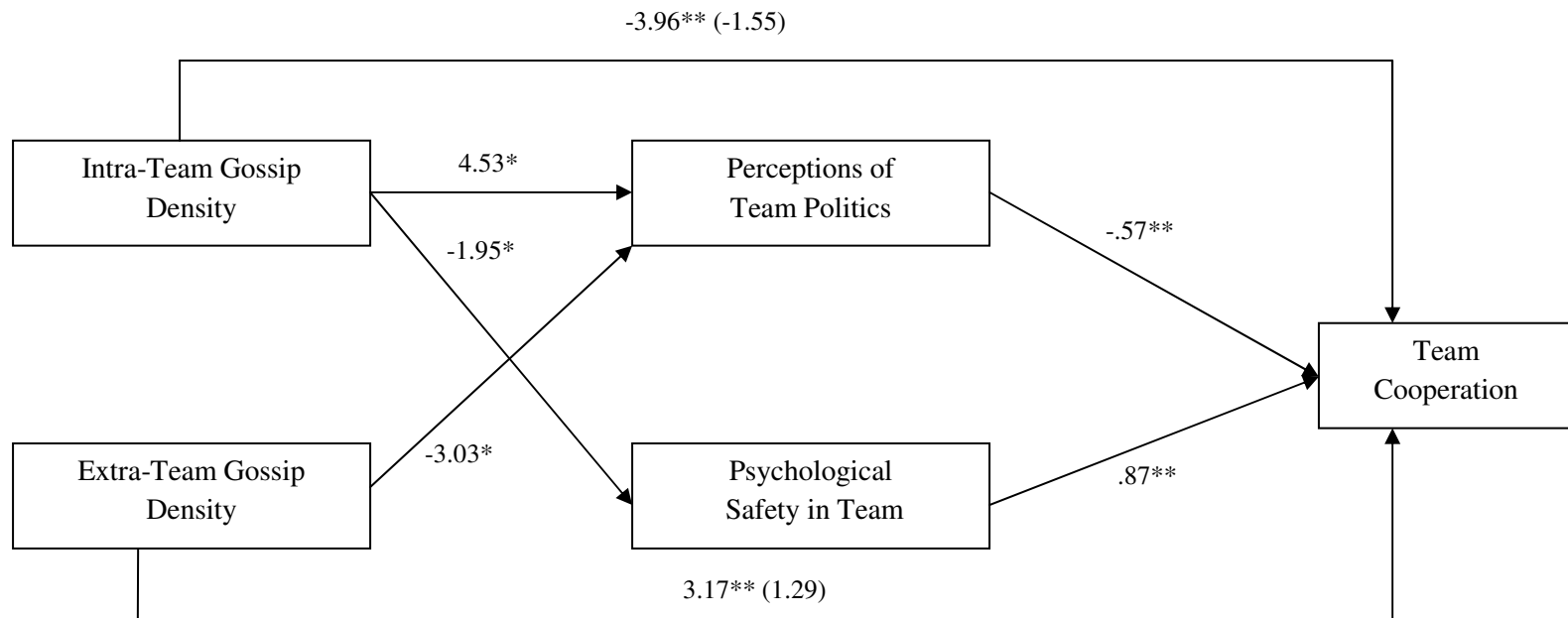
**Figure 13.**

*Relationship between individual gossip centrality and attributions of competence.*



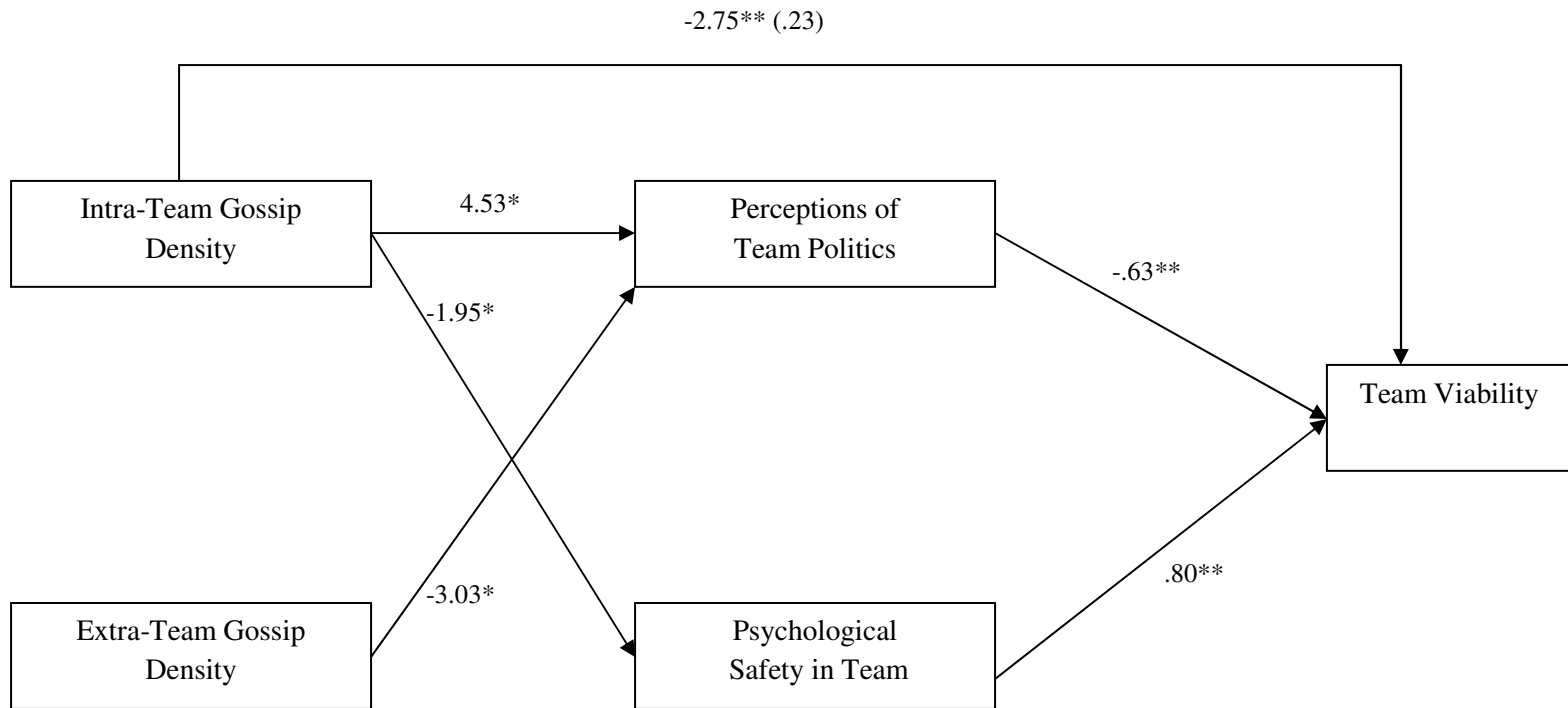
**Figure 14.**

*Mediators of the link between intra- and extra-team gossip density and team cooperation. Path values are unstandardized regression coefficients. The values outside parentheses represent the total effect of intra- and extra gossip density on team cooperation prior to the inclusion of the mediating variables. The values inside parentheses represent the direct effect, from bootstrapping mediation analyses of intra- and extra gossip density on team cooperation after the mediators are included. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .*



**Figure 15.**

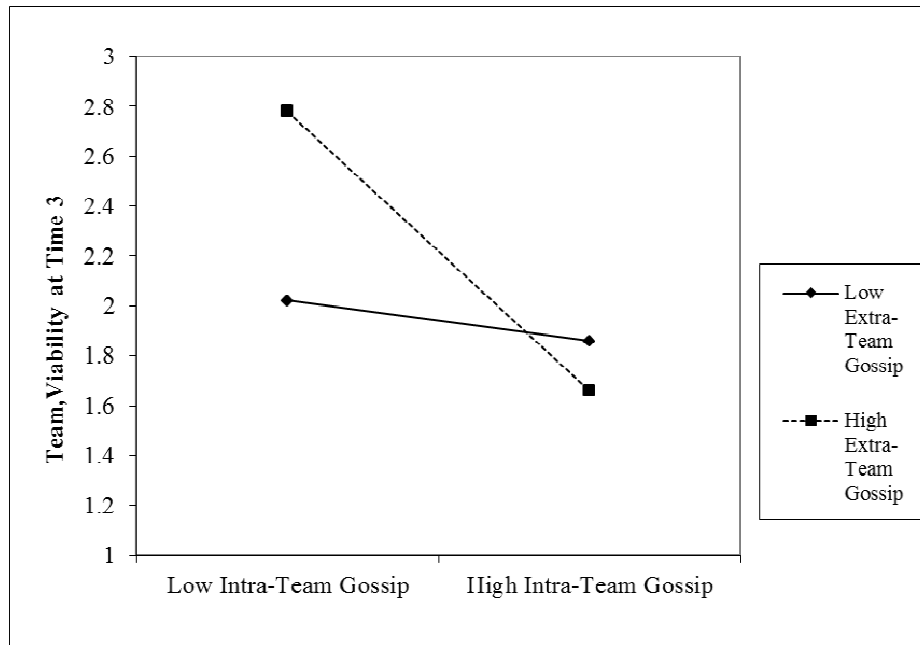
*Mediators of the link between intra- and extra-team gossip density and team viability. Path values are unstandardized regression coefficients. The values outside parentheses represent the total effect of intra- and extra gossip density on team viability prior to the inclusion of the mediating variables. The values inside parentheses represent the direct effect, from bootstrapping mediation analyses of intra- and extra gossip density on team viability after the mediators are included. \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .*





**Figure 16.**

*Interaction of Intra-team gossip and Extra-Team gossip on team viability (Study 2).*



## Appendix 1

### List of scales used in Study 1

*Instructions:* This set of questions is designed to measure what you are thinking at this moment. There is no right answer for any of these statements. The best answer is what you feel is true of yourself at this moment. Be sure to answer all of the items, even if you are not certain of the best answer.

Again, remember, answer these questions as they are true for you RIGHT now.

#### **1. State Self-esteem (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991):**

- I feel confident about my abilities.
- I am worried about whether I am regarded as a success or failure.
- I feel frustrated or rattled about my performance.
- I feel that I am having trouble understanding things that I read.
- I feel self-conscious.
- I feel as smart as others.
- I feel displeased with myself.
- I am worried about what other people think of me.
- I feel confident that I understand things.
- I feel inferior to others at this moment.
- I feel concerned about the impression I am making.
- I feel like I'm not doing well.
- I am worried about looking foolish.

#### **2. State Mood (PANAS, Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988):**

- To what degree you feel the following way at this moment, that is, how you feel right now.
- I feel happy.
  - I feel gloomy.
  - I feel ecstatic.
  - I feel pleasant.
  - I feel inspired.
  - I feel warm.
  - I feel enthusiastic.
  - I feel unhappy.
  - I feel interested.

- I feel sad.  
 I feel optimistic.  
 I feel excited.  
 I feel proud.
3. **Guilt (Izard, 1977)**  
 To what degree you feel the following way at this moment, that is, how you feel right now.  
 I feel guilty  
 I feel remorseful  
 I feel regretful
4. **Energy (Feldman-Barrett & Russell, 1998)**  
 I feel active  
 I feel calm  
 I feel energetic
5. **Engagement in task (Rothbard, 2001)**  
*Attention*  
 I focused a great deal on this task  
 I concentrated a lot on this task  
 I paid a lot of attention to this task  
*Absorption*  
 I lost track of time as I was working on this task  
 I was completely engrossed in this task  
 I was totally absorbed by this task
6. **Relationship Closeness (Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998)**  
 How close do you feel to your team member? (scale of 1 to 100)
7. **Rapport (adapted from Drolet and Morris, 2000)**  
 I felt a great deal of rapport during this interaction.  
 I felt as though I could understand what my team member was trying to express  
 I felt that my team member understood what I was trying to express.  
 I felt 'in synch' or 'on the same wavelength' with my team member  
 It was effortful to establish a harmonious feeling in the conversation
8. **Self-Disclosure Task (Sedikedes, Campebell, Reeder & Elliot, 1999)**  
 a. If you could have one wish granted, what would that be?

- b. Is it difficult or easy for you to meet people? Why?
- c. If you could travel anywhere, where would it be and why?
- d. What is one of your biggest fears?
- e. What is your most frightening early memory?
- f. What is your happiest early childhood memory?
- g. What is one thing about yourself that most people would consider surprising?
- h. What is one recent accomplishment that you are proud of?
- i. Tell your partner one thing about yourself that most other people who already know you don't know.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Negotiation: Vacation Plans**

**Role 1:**

You are planning a vacation with your friend. There are five major issues to negotiate: destination, hotel quality, mode of travel, length of stay and season.

Your goal in this negotiation is to *maximize* the number of points for yourself. You may determine your agreement by referring to the easy-to-read chart that presents all the issues and the value to you of each alternative. Although it may seem somewhat artificial to assign points to vacation plans, it is a convenient way to compare how you feel about various alternatives. This chart lists the five issues with five different levels of agreements for each issue.

Each issue has a different level of importance to you, as indicated by the magnitude of points that you could gain or lose. Obviously you prefer the alternatives that give you more points.

It is important that you do not show or tell the other person the specific numbers on your point schedule and do not, under any circumstances exchange point schedules with each other. This information is for your eyes only.

This models a real-life situation. In real-life we often have to negotiate with our friends.

Please note that you must reach an agreement on all five issues, or else you will both receive zero points. Please be aware of the time constraints.

There is a final contract sheet on the table. Please make sure that you fill this sheet out at the end of your negotiation.

You have approximately 10 minutes to complete this negotiation.

Point Schedule

<u>Alternatives to be discussed</u>	<u>Points</u>
<b>DESTINATION</b>	
Northeast	80
Southeast	60
Midwest	40
Southwest	20
Northwest	0
<b>HOTEL RATING</b>	
5-star	220
4-star	165
3-star	110
2-star	55
1-star	0
<b>MODE OF TRAVEL</b>	
Air	420
Car	345
Motorhome	210
Greyhound	105
Train	0
<b>LENGTH OF STAY</b>	
1 week	0
1.5 weeks	35
2 weeks	70
2.5 weeks	105
3 weeks	140
<b>SEASON</b>	
Spring	260
Early summer	195
Late summer	130
Fall	65
Winter	0

**Role 2:**

You are planning a vacation with your friend. There are five major issues to negotiate: destination, hotel quality, mode of travel, length of stay and season.

Your goal in this negotiation is to *maximize* the number of points for yourself. You may determine your agreement by referring to the easy-to-read chart that presents all the issues and the value to you of each alternative. Although it may seem somewhat artificial to assign points to vacation plans, it is a convenient way to compare how you feel about various alternatives. This chart lists the five issues with five different levels of agreements for each issue.

Each issue has a different level of importance to you, as indicated by the magnitude of points that you could gain or lose. Obviously you prefer the alternatives that give you more points.

It is important that you do not show or tell the other person the specific numbers on your point schedule and do not, under any circumstances exchange point schedules with each other. This information is for your eyes only.

This models a real-life situation. In real-life we often have to negotiate with our friends.

Please note that you must reach an agreement on all five issues, or else you will both receive zero points. Please be aware of the time constraints.

There is a final contract sheet on the table. Please make sure that you fill this sheet out at the end of your negotiation.

You have approximately 10 minutes to complete this negotiation.

**Point Schedule**Alternatives to be discussedPoints

<b>DESTINATION</b>	
Northeast	0
Southeast	105
Midwest	210
Southwest	315
Northwest	420
<b>HOTEL RATING</b>	
5-star	0
4-star	55
3-star	110
2-star	165
1-star	220
<b>MODE OF TRAVEL</b>	
Air	0
Car	20
Motorhome	40
Greyhound	60
Train	80
<b>LENGTH OF STAY</b>	
1 week	0
1.5 weeks	35
2 weeks	70
2.5 weeks	105
3 weeks	140
<b>SEASON</b>	
Spring	0
Early summer	65
Late summer	130
Fall	195
Winter	260



### Appendix 3 List of Scales used in Study 2

#### Individual Difference Measures

##### Big Five (Gosling, Rentfrow & Swann, 2003)

Here are a number of personality traits that may or may not apply to you. Please write a number next to each statement to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement. You should rate the extent to which the pair of traits applies to you, even if one characteristic applies more strongly than the other.

I see myself as:

1. Extraverted, enthusiastic.
2. Critical, quarrelsome.
3. Dependable, self-disciplined.
4. Anxious, easily upset.
5. Open to new experiences, complex.
6. Reserved, quiet.
7. Sympathetic, warm.
8. Disorganized, careless.
9. Calm, emotionally stable.
10. Conventional, uncreative.

##### Positive and Negative Affect (PANAS, Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988)

*Indicate to what extent you generally feel this way, that is, how you feel on the average.*

1. I feel interested.
2. I feel afraid.
3. I feel alert.
4. I feel guilty.
5. I feel determined.
6. I feel irritable.
7. I feel upset.
8. I feel nervous.
9. I feel enthusiastic.
10. I feel active.
11. I feel distressed.
12. I feel excited.

13. I feel strong.
14. I feel scared.
15. I feel hostile.
16. I feel proud.
17. I feel ashamed.
18. I feel inspired.
19. I feel attentive.
20. I feel jittery.

Self-Efficacy (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2002)

1. I am strong enough to overcome life's struggles
2. When I make plans, I am certain I can make them work
3. When I decide to do something, I go right to work on it
4. New jobs are usually well within the scope of my abilities.
5. I make an effort to tackle tasks even if they look complicated.

Self-Esteem (Rosenberg, 1965)

1. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
3. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
4. I take a positive attitude toward myself.
5. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

Round Robin Questions

From time to time, people tend to talk about other people in their social networks. How often does this team member share information about other team members with you?  
(from 1= very infrequently to 7= very frequently)

From time to time, people tend to talk about other people in their social networks. How often does this team member share information about people outside your team with you?  
(from 1= very infrequently to 7= very frequently)

How close are you to this team member? (from 1= not at all close to 7= very close)

Team-Level Measures

Team Psychological Safety (Edmondson, 1999)

1. If you make a mistake on this team, it is often held against you
2. Members of this team are able to bring up problems and tough issues
3. It is safe to take a risk on this team
4. Members of my team have a lot in common
5. No one on this team would act in a way that undermines my efforts
6. Working with members of this team, my unique skills and talents are valued and utilized

Team perceptions of Politics (Kacmar, & Ferris, 1991)

1. There is an influential group within my team that no one crosses
2. The members of this team attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down
3. There are cliques within our team
4. Team members gossip about each other

Team Cooperation (O'Reilly, Caldwell and Barnett, 1989)

1. There are high levels of cooperation between team members
2. We maintain harmony within the team
3. There is little collaboration between team members

Team viability (DeStephen & Hirokawa, 1988; Evans & Jarvis, 1986)

This team should not continue to function as a team

This team is not capable of working together as a unit.

Demographic Controls

1. Gender
2. Age
3. English as a first language
4. Grade Point Average (GPA)

#### Appendix 4.

##### **An Example of Network Matrix Creation and Manipulation for Study 2variables.**

Network data are organized in a valued adjacency matrix in which the respondent's value of the relationship toward the person in the column is indicated by the number in the cell. For example, this matrix of a four-person team shows the degree to which gossip is received by the individual (in the row) from the individual (in the column). For example, Person A (row 1) indicates that he or she received a value of 4 (high level of gossip) from Person B (column 2).

An individual's outgoing gossiping score equals average of each column. An individual's gossip receipt is an average of each row.

<b>Gossip Receipt Matrix</b>				
	<i>Person A</i>	<i>Person B</i>	<i>Person C</i>	<i>Person D</i>
<i>Person A</i>		4	1	2
<i>Person B</i>	3		3	3
<i>Person C</i>	1	2		5
<i>Person D</i>	3	3	2	