IF YOU DON'T HAVE SOMETHING NICE TO SAY, SAY IT ANYWAY: THE

POSITIVE EFFECTS OF GOSSIP

by

CHRISTOPHER RYAN OUTLAW

(Under the Direction of Jason Colquitt)

ABSTRACT

Gossiping, defined as informally exchanging negative information with a

colleague about an absent third person (Kurland & Pelled, 2000), is a pervasive

phenomenon. By some accounts, at least 90% of employees engage in workplace

gossiping (Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, Labianca, & Ellwardt, 2012). This may be surprising

given that gossiping is viewed as a counterproductive behavior within organizational

research, and as something to be stamped out by many practitioners. In my dissertation, I

argue that this negative viewpoint of gossip is incomplete and overly simplistic.

Specifically, the purpose of my dissertation is to investigate how changes in gossiping

relate to changes in perceptions of social exchange relationships, affective states, and

ultimately, citizenship behavior among coworkers. First, I developed and validated a

measure of gossiping extent. Next, I used an inductive approach to develop and validate a

measure of gossip quality. This allowed me to explore the moderating role of gossip

quality on the relationship between gossiping extent and proposed mediators and

outcomes. Drawing from social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the cognitive-

motivational-relational theory of emotions (Lazarus, 1991), I have integrated these

constructs in a model of gossiping's positive and negative consequences. I tested my hypotheses using a sample of full-time coworker dyads in a field study using an experience sampling methodology.

INDEX WORDS: Gossiping, Social Exchange, Affect, Helping Behavior, Experience Sampling Methodology

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"If you haven't got anything nice to say about anybody, come sit next to me."
-Alice Roosevelt Longsworth

When was the last time you shared information that shaped the image of a

coworker—a coworker who was not around to be part of the conversation? The memory

you just recalled represents a time when you have engaged in gossiping. Rest assured you

are not alone in gossiping—a behavior which is anything but new. Gossiping has been a

central part of our social fabric as evidenced by some of the earliest known legal writings

(e.g., Lyon, 1904). Even in prehistoric times, gossiping may have been instrumental in

helping ensure the survival of primitive societies (Dunbar, 2004). Today, gossiping

continues to dominate the social landscape. It represents the most common type of speech

we use to relate to one another (Goldsmith & Baxter, 1996) and accounts for over one

quarter of the conversational content between individuals (Emler, 1990; Emler, 1994).

These findings are no less true in the work environment, where gossiping has been

described as a staple of organizational life (Waddington, 2005). Even the most

conservative estimates suggest gossiping accounts for around 15 percent of break time

conversation (Slade, 1997). Other studies suggest that at least 90% of employees engage

in gossiping (Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, Labianca, & Ellwardt, 2012). What explains the

pervasiveness of gossiping? Scholars generally agree that gossiping plays a critical role in

our social interactions. These interactions include: influencing how others see us;

sanctioning deviant group behavior; developing and maintaining interpersonal

relationships; and defining which groups we belong to (Stirling, 1956; Foster, 2004; Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012). In this light, it is difficult to imagine a healthy social life devoid of gossiping.

Despite its utility, the term gossiping has taken on a negative connotation (Rysman, 1977). These pejorative overtones—which also characterize organizational gossiping—may help explain the assumed negative outcomes of gossiping as well as the large number of practitioners intent on eliminating gossiping (Noon & Delbridge, 1993). This attitude toward gossiping is not limited to practitioners. Management scholars also tend to treat gossiping as something to be avoided. For example, in a seminal study on deviant workplace behavior, Robinson and Bennett (1995) identify gossiping as a form of political deviance. To justify their classification, the authors performed an inductive study in which they asked participants to describe deviant behavior at work. Nearly seven percent of the statements provided by respondents explicitly refer to gossiping (Robinson & Bennett, 1995).

Loughry and Tosi (2008) performed a study in which they explored the relationship between gossiping and behavioral problems. Results from their study suggest a positive relationship between gossiping and behavioral problems. These findings led the authors to conclude that gossiping is not healthy for organizations and that managers should train workers to avoid gossiping (Loughry & Tosi, 2008). Based on this evidence, the general consensus among management scholars and practitioners seems to be that gossiping should be treated as inherently negative and harmful. I propose that practitioners and scholars reconsider current assumptions regarding gossiping while considering its potential positive consequences.

What positive outcomes might be overlooked by the tendency to view gossiping as solely counterproductive? Consider the following example where two graduate students are discussing a third student who is performing poorly in his graduate program. During a private conversation, the fourth-year remarks to the third-year "He struggles because he doesn't come across as a conscientious person—he is terrible at managing impressions." In this example, we might expect the fourth-year to feel happy about passing along information that will help the third-year succeed in the program. Further, we might expect the third-year to share those positive feelings, but for a different reason. Perhaps revelation of this information will result in the third-year experiencing a heightened awareness of critical success factors and an increased determination to succeed.

Here, it is easy to imagine how gossiping signals care and concern, thus strengthening interpersonal bonds. Through the process of gossiping, both students feel better, feel closer, and therefore may be willing to go out of their way to help one another in the future. Indeed, as the caliber of the gossip increases, so might the fourth-year's happiness, the third-year's awareness and determination, and ultimately, their willingness to help each other. Can gossiping lead to such positive outcomes? If so, what explains such relationships? Answering these questions will help shed light on how gossiping may actually be good for the workplace.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how changes in gossiping relate to changes in perceived relationship quality, affective states, and ultimately, helping behavior. I start with a review of the literature on gossiping. Next, I define gossiping, and develop and validate a measure of gossiping extent. Then, using an inductive approach, I define and develop a measure of gossip quality. This measure allows me to explore the

interaction of gossiping extent and gossip quality on the relationship between gossiping and helping behavior. Drawing from social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotions (Lazarus, 1991), I integrate these constructs in a model of gossiping. Finally, I test my hypotheses using a sample of full-time coworker dyads. In order to capture the day-to-day fluctuations in gossiping and the resulting outcomes, I use an experience sampling methodology. An overview of my gossiping model is shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1

Model of Hypothesized Relationships
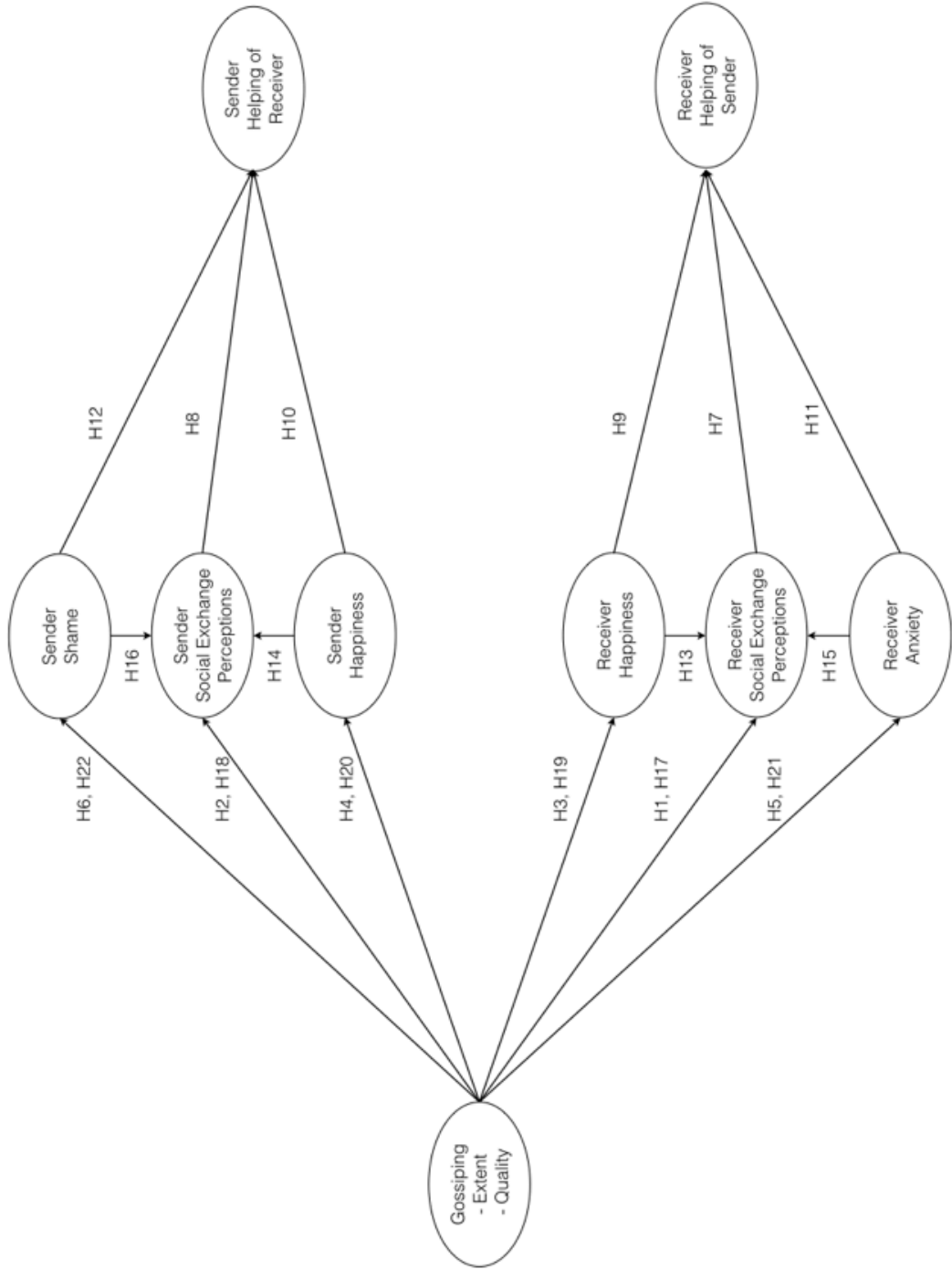
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early Works

In one of the earliest academic writings on gossiping, Lanz (1936) contemplates the moral aspects of gossiping. He portrays gossiping as a foolish weakness and social force by which immorality prevails (Lanz, 1936). In his attempt to illustrate the aimlessness of gossiping, Lanz (1936) inadvertently draws attention to social functions of gossiping such as catharsis and social comparison. These functions foreshadow the next developments in the gossip literature—a move to look beyond moral implications and take a more objective approach. Stirling's (1956) writing on the underlying psychological mechanisms at play in the gossiping process laid the groundwork for our current understanding of the social functions of gossiping. These functions can be classified according to whether gossiping is used for: harming; influencing; managing emotions; impression management; or building and maintaining relationships (Stirling, 1956).

First, gossiping may be motivated by the desire to harm another, for example, badmouthing a supervisor. Second, gossiping may be used as a way to influence deviant group members by sanctioning behavior that violates group norms. Consider a would-be social-loafer who is motivated to stay on task in an effort to avoid becoming the object of gossip if he is caught shirking duties. Next, gossiping may be an attempt to manage emotions, for example, by venting about an incompetent coworker. Fourth, gossiping may be used for impression management such as when an employee promote his own

work ethic by criticizing a coworker's performance. Finally, gossiping can facilitate the development and maintenance of relationships between individuals as well as cohesion within groups. For example, two managers exchanging views on an ineffective employee may feel closer due to the shared experience of gossiping.

Max Gluckman, a social anthropologist, authored what many consider the first seminal paper on gossip. Gluckman's (1963) reflections on the social functions of gossiping were derived from earlier anthropological writings (e.g., West, 1945) as well as his own observations while conducting research. Whereas Stirling mostly theorized about implications of gossiping for the individual, Gluckman focused on gossiping implications for the group. For example, he notes that a community was held together by maintaining group values through gossiping. Residents avoided violating social norms for fear of being gossiped about. In another observation, Gluckman (1963) stated that while conducting observational studies, he often felt excluded from social groups because he was unaware of when gossiping occurred. This observation shows how gossiping delineates group boundaries by emphasizing who is capable of gossiping.

Robert Paine voiced sharp criticism of Gluckman's arguments while also providing his own theorizing on the social functions of gossiping. Paine (1967) argued that scholars should focus on the individual because it is the individual who benefits from gossiping. He describes a good gossiper as one who uses indiscretion to their advantage by gossiping when they stand to benefit from dissemination of that gossip. Also, a good gossiper would refraining from gossiping when discretion is unlikely and the social cost of spreading such gossip would be ruinous. Paine seemed to view gossiping as an impression management tool. By the late 1960's, gossip research had evolved from

simplistic assumptions regarding its inherently immoral qualities and had begun to take a central role in helping researchers understand social interactions. What was less clear, however, was precisely what constituted gossiping or how gossiping should be defined.

Gossiping Defined

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the verb "gossiping" is defined as "to talk idly, mostly about other people's affairs." However, this definition is unsatisfactory for scholars wishing to measure gossiping. As Schwab (2004) pointed out, clear construct definitions are vital for scale development and measurement. When the breadth of what should be included as gossiping is overly broad, measuring gossiping becomes problematic as scale items may capture variance beyond the intended meaning. Given the subjective nature of phrases like "idle talk" and ambiguous words like "mostly," what is needed is a precise definition that distinguishes gossiping from related constructs.

Rosnow and Fine (1976) made one of the first serious attempts to provide a more precise definition of gossiping. These authors defined gossiping as light conversation about others, of a personal nature which may or may not be true. This definition is helpful because it narrows the conceptual domain to exclude constructs such as self-disclosure (Jourard, 1971) which involves talking about one's own affairs. Spacks (1985) further narrowed the definition by stipulating that gossip must be about absent third parties. This narrowing of the definition distinguished gossiping from constructs like workplace bullying (Rayner & Hoel, 1997) which may include comments made about others while that person is present (Foster, 2004). However, the "idle talk" component of Rosnow and Fine's (1976) definition remained troublesome because, as was previously argued, gossiping plays a vital role in social interactions.

Eder and Enke (1991) addressed this disconnect by defining gossiping as evaluative talk about an absent third person. Based on this definition, the authors stipulated that gossiping includes a perceived assessment or judgment of an absent third person. Defining gossiping in much the same way, Kurland and Pelled (2000) were among the first to bring conceptual clarity to gossiping within the organizational domain. The authors defined gossiping as "informal and evaluative talk in an organization, usually among no more than a few individuals, about another member of that organization who is not present" (Kurland & Pelled, 2000, p. 429). This definition has gained widespread acceptance among gossip scholars and highlighted several notable aspects of gossiping.

The first aspect centers on whether positive evaluations should be included in the definition. Negative evaluations are estimated to be three (Mitra & Gilbert, 2012; Ellwardt, Wittek, & Wielers, 2012b) to seven times (Hallet Harger, & Eder, 2009) more likely to occur during gossiping. Therefore, my use of the term gossiping in this dissertation refers to perceived negative evaluations unless otherwise noted. Second, it is the informal aspect of their definition that distinguishes gossiping from evaluations made about employees during formal performance evaluations, for example. Third, only a few individuals are generally part of the gossiping process. Unless otherwise noted, gossiping is assumed to involve a triad of employees. This triad includes: the *sender*, or the person providing the negative evaluation; the *receiver*, or the person to whom the sender communicates; and the *object*, or the absent person being evaluated.

Drawing from Kurland and Pelled's (2000) definition, I define *gossiping* as informally exchanging negative information with a colleague about an absent person. However, further disambiguation is needed. Gossiping may refer to the actual act of

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gossiping or it may refer to the gossip content. I define *gossiping extent* as the degree to which gossiping occurs. Alternatively, Noon and Delbridge (1993) suggest the gossiping process likely involves making judgments about the content of gossip. The authors refer to these judgments as a "quality control check" for the caliber of the gossip (Noon & Delbridge, 1993, p. 30). In general, these checks seem to describe a certain standard of gossip—metrics used to evaluate whether the information should be passed on. Accordingly, I define *gossip quality* as the degree to which the content of the gossip is high caliber rather than low caliber. Unless otherwise noted, gossiping will refer to both gossiping extent (the verb) and gossip quality (the noun).

What Gossiping Is Not

Rumor and gossiping are often used interchangeably, however, there are key conceptual differences between these two constructs. Allport and Postman (1947) defined rumor as unverified assertions which are made with the intention of shaping beliefs. Wert and Salovey (2004) suggested rumors differ from gossiping because the content of rumors usually pertains to recent important events, whereas the content of gossip focuses on interpersonal evaluations. Similarly, Rosnow and Fine (1976) specified that rumors always deal with unsubstantiated information and generally center on key events or issues. On the contrary, the authors suggested that gossiping may or may not be unsubstantiated and that gossiping focuses on the individual.

Expanding on this individual focus, Dunbar (2004) suggested the content of gossip is necessarily personal because gossiping is defined by exchanging evaluations of others. Along these lines, Mills (2010) proposed that gossiping occurs in the interpersonal domain while rumor occurs in the public domain. Finally, rumor and gossiping can be

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differentiated based on the functions they serve. For example, rumor and uncertainty are often inextricably intertwined as in the case of mergers and acquisitions (Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991), changes in senior leadership (Isabella, 1990), market turbulence (DiFonzo & Bordia, 1997), and layoffs (Smeltzer and Ziner, 1992). The functions of gossiping, on the other hand, go beyond reducing uncertainty and may include the role gossiping plays in providing entertainment or maintaining relationships.

The organizational grapevine represents another construct which is often conflated with gossiping. Mishra (1990) defined "the grapevine" as the unsanctioned and informal workplace communication network. He further suggested that the formal network—consisting of conference calls, organizational bulletins, and memos—is often supplemented by the grapevine. Kurland and Pelled (2000) considered the grapevine to be part of the informal organization characterized by spontaneity and lack of formally sanctioned communication. Moreover, they suggested that gossiping is a specific type of informal information that flows through the grapevine. Smith suggested that the grapevine differs from gossiping in that the content of the former includes information that is relevant to most employees while the later focuses on personal information which is likely relevant to a limited number of employees (Smith, 1996).

Finally, the organizational narrative is related to gossiping. Dunford (2000) defined the organizational narrative as a series of events held together by a plot and disseminated in story-like form. Martin et al. (1983) explored narratives as a method by which employees warn their coworkers about rule-breakers and the consequences suffered by rule-breakers. Here, narratives overlap with gossiping to the degree that both constructs function as mechanisms which can discourage deviant behavior and facilitate social

learning via the exchange of evaluations of objects. Dailey and Browning (2014) suggested that exchanging narratives can also build rapport and signal inclusion in a group, much like gossiping. However, narratives may lack the interpersonal evaluative component found in gossiping. Examples include stories about organizational rebranding campaigns (Sonenshein, 2010) or an organization's overall success (Martens, Jennings, & Jennings, 2007).

Qualitative Studies and Results

Tucker (1993) was one of the first to study gossiping in the workplace. He examined temporary workers through the lens of conflict management in an effort to better understand how these workers dealt with grievances. Compared to behavior such as resignation or theft, he described gossiping as a less assertive resolution method whereby the employer is unlikely to become aware of the grievance. Tucker (1993) suggested that gossiping can be used to hold the offending party (e.g., an abusive supervisor) accountable through the process of communicating informal evaluations. Tucker's work provided tantalizing evidence of the utility of gossiping and coincided with Noon and Delbridge's (1993) call for organizational scholars to take research on gossiping seriously. Unfortunately, it would be more than a decade before the next qualitative study on gossiping was published.

Focusing on the relationship between gossiping and emotions, Waddington (2005) conducted an study using diary records, critical incidents, and follow-up interviews. Findings from the critical incident portion of the study revealed that participants tended to feel better after engaging in gossiping, suggesting positive emotions as an outcome of gossiping. Coding from the diary records revealed that participants experienced emotions

ranging from happiness and relief to anger and embarrassment. Results from the critical incident portion of the study also revealed that participants felt better about their interpersonal relationships. These findings lend support to the social function of gossiping as it relates to relationship building and maintenance. Waddington (2005) concluded by noting the particularly complex emotional landscape that accompanies gossiping in organizations.

In an open-ended survey, Waddington and Fletcher (2005) asked participants to describe when they gossip. After coding responses, several themes emerged. First, the emotions involved were similar to those found in Waddington (2005) in that they included anxiety, anger, happiness, and excitement. The content of gossip included topics such as coworker's relationships and coworker behavior that deviated from normative expectations. Motivation to gossip seemed to be driven by social learning, social identity, and relationship building. More importantly, Waddington and Fletcher (2005) realized that senders and receivers require a certain degree of trust and expect reciprocity when gossiping. The authors concluded by noting the important role gossiping plays in expressing and managing emotions, and suggested future studies explore the types of interpersonal relationships that facilitate gossiping.

Hallett et al. (2009) examined the power and politics involved with gossiping by using linguistic ethnography to analyze video recordings of formal school staff meetings. The authors found that gossiping is often carried out with a certain degree of discretion. Specifically, they classified tactics that gossipers use to obfuscate the degree to which statements are interpreted as "negative" evaluations. These tactics included: making evaluations about an object that only insiders would understand; masking negative

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evaluations by framing evaluations as questions; and using sarcastic positive evaluations (Hallet et al., 2009). These findings highlight the challenges researchers face when studying gossiping in the natural environment (see Gluckman, 1963). Along these lines, Hallet et al. (2009) drew attention to the perceptual nature of gossip, and in doing so, present a compelling case for relying on self-reports for measuring gossip.

Finally, Mills (2010) explored gossiping in the context of organizational change. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews over a period of two years to explore the role of gossiping in terms of exchange relationships and sensemaking during CEO succession. She found that the motivating forces behind gossiping included functions such as strengthening ties within a group, staying informed, validating personal beliefs, and being the first to share information. In addition to highlighting the social functions of gossiping, these findings also hint at characteristics that make gossiping valuable from both sender and receiver perspectives. For example, receivers may value information that contributes to their welfare (e.g., "avoid working with that new manager—he is unfair"). Senders may value information that is interesting (e.g., "our old CEO was fired for embezzling") in hopes that receivers will be impressed.

Mills (2010) adopted an exchange perspective by suggesting that there is a relationship between gossiping and interpersonal relationship quality. In support of this view, Mills (2010) noted that employees only validate or share exceptionally sensitive information with highly trusted coworkers. These are coworkers who have proven to be reliable information exchange partners. Further, she suggested that a relationship based on mutual respect and trust was necessary because of the inherent risks that come with exchanging sensitive information. The qualitative studies reviewed above suggest that

certain features of gossip contribute to its perceived value, and that there is a link between emotions, relationship quality, and gossiping. However, several points remain unclear. For example, what exactly makes gossip valuable? What emotions result from gossiping and why does gossiping foster exchange relationships?

<div align="center">**Theoretical Perspectives and Quantitative Results**</div>

Over the past twenty years, there has been a slow but steady stream of quantitative research on gossiping aimed at addressing a number of basic research questions. These quantitative studies have explored how gossiping impacts the sender and object, who becomes the object of gossiping, and how gossiping influences the relationship between the sender and receiver. To investigate these topics, researchers have drawn from a handful of theoretical perspectives. Most notably, gossip scholars have relied on exchange theory, the evolutionary psychology perspective, and a social network approach. In the following section, I will summarize each of these basic research questions by discussing relevant theories and findings.

How Senders are Perceived

Erdogan, Bauer, and Walter (2014) explored the consequences of being a sender by using network generation theory (Nebus, 2006). Network generation theory posits that advice-seeking employees will weigh the potential costs and benefits of consulting with resource-rich employees (i.e., employees who have a good relationship with their supervisor). One potential cost is that the resource-rich employee will use the advice-seeker's request for guidance as fodder for gossiping. Here, the resource-rich employee becomes the sender and the advice-seeker becomes the object. As the perceived likelihood of gossiping increases, advice-seeking employees should be less likely to

solicit guidance from resource-rich employees (Nebus, 2006). Indeed, Erdogan et al. (2014) found that when resource-rich employees were perceived to have a high tendency to engage in gossiping, advice-seeking employees were less likely to solicit advice.

Taking a social network analysis approach to examine gossiping, Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, and Labianca (2010) reasoned that managers tend to perceive senders as indiscrete troublemakers. Accordingly, managers should be more likely to form negative impressions of senders and rate them lower on work performance measures. In support of their hypothesis, the authors found a significant negative relationship between supervisor-rated sender gossiping and supervisor-rated sender work performance (Grosser et al., 2010). As both of these studies illustrate, perceived discretion appears to be crucial in building and maintaining interpersonal relationships through gossiping.

Assuming a completely different theoretical approach, Dunbar (1996; 1998) proposed the social gossip theory of language evolution to explain how senders are perceived. According to social gossip theory, grooming originally facilitated social bonds among members of small primitive clans. As these clans grew larger, grooming became inefficient as a mechanism for maintaining interpersonal relationships, and out of necessity, passing along social information (gossip) became the new exchange currency. Through this exchange process, gossiping not only serves as a source of cohesion, but it also provides a way to control free riders who might otherwise exploit the benefits of group membership (Dunbar, 1996).

Farley, Timme, and Hart (2010) tested the social gossip theory of language evolution by asking employees to rate the degree to which senders were affectionate, controlling, and inclusive with respect to their workgroups. Consistent with this theory,

Farley et al. (2010) found a significant positive relationship between coworker perceptions of a sender's gossiping and a sender's desire to control other group members. In other words, coworkers viewed gossiping as a tool to keep deviant group members in line. Contrary to social gossip theory, Farley et al. (2010) found no relationship between coworker perceptions of a sender's gossiping and a sender's desire for inclusion.

Predictors of Who Becomes an Object

A relatively large portion of quantitative studies have addressed the question of who becomes the object in gossiping. These studies rely on concepts such as trust and reputation in the context of social networks to explain who becomes the object. Ellwardt et al. (2012b) suggested that an employee's trust in his manager will predict the amount he gossips about his manager. The authors reasoned that the sender is engaging in risk-taking behavior. As the relationship quality between the sender and supervisor increases, the sender should be less likely to engage in gossiping for fear of damaging his increasingly valuable relationship. Further, as the relationship quality between sender and receiver deteriorates, the sender should also be less likely to engage in gossiping due to a greater chance that the supervisor will find out. Support was found for these hypotheses.

Ellwardt, Labianca, and Wittek (2012c) adopted a social network perspective relying on principles of social control and status to develop their arguments. They hypothesized that gossiping serves to maintain group norms by keeping members of one's own group from free riding or otherwise exploiting advantages of group membership. If gossiping does serve as a mechanism for sanctioning, then members from the sender's work group should be more likely to become objects compared to non-group members. The authors also hypothesized that senders realize the risk and potential for

retaliation increase as the object's status increases, and are therefore less likely to gossip about high-status objects. Support was found for both of these hypotheses. An employee was more likely to become an object when he belonged to the sender's workgroup and when sender perceived that employee had a lower status (Ellwardt et al., 2012c).

Rooks, Tazelaar, and Snijders (2011) explored which transaction partners in a buyer–supplier relationship are likely to become objects. Drawing from theories of social control, the authors hypothesized that when there are many third parties common to both buyer and seller, gossip is more likely. This likelihood results from the utility gossip holds as a punishment mechanism for transaction partners responsible for causing problematic transactions. The authors also hypothesized that transaction partners who have a well-established relationship are less likely to gossip about each other for fear of damaging that relationship should the other partner find out about the gossip. Support was found for each of these hypotheses. As the number of shared network ties decreased or the amount of time the partners were in business together increased, the likelihood of gossiping decreased.

Wittek and Wielers (1998) also adopted a social network approach, taking into account the relationship quality to predict which employees are more likely to become objects. The authors hypothesized that a receiver would be unlikely to value gossip about a friend because the receiver's self-concept was derived, at least in part, from their friendship with the object. Therefore, coworkers with whom both the sender and receiver share a low quality relationship should be more likely to become objects. Wittek and Wielers (1998) found support for their hypothesis. Gossiping which threatens a receiver's self-concept (e.g., gossiping about a friend) may be perceived as having little or no value.

Similarly, Decoster, Camps, Stouten, Vandevyvere, and Tripp (2013) explored which employees are likely to become objects by explicitly drawing on models of identification. One outcome of high organizational identification is that employees tend to view the organization's successes and failures as their own (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). Decoster et al. (2013) suggested that as abused employees' organizational identification increases, they are less likely to engage in supervisor-targeted gossiping. This decreased likelihood indicates that these employees recognize that gossiping about their supervisor may ultimately damage their organization (and thus their own identity). As expected, Decoster et al. (2013) found that abusive supervisors were less likely to become the objects for employees who rated higher on organizational identification.

How Gossiping Impacts Objects

Burt and Knez (1995) used a social network approach combined with insights from trust and exchange theory to explore the consequences of gossiping for objects. The authors hypothesized that when a sender provides a receiver with positive evaluations of an object, this signals that the object can be trusted. Accordingly, an alternate route in which the receiver comes to trust the object is established. Also, sharing a network of mutual friends was hypothesized to impact how much a receiver trusts an object (although not whether the receiver should initially trust the object). Both of these hypotheses were supported. Results also indicated that network density amplifies a receiver's lack of trust in an object compared to a receiver's trust in an object. This finding that suggests that receivers are more attuned to negative evaluations of objects.

Ferrin, Dirks, and Shah (2006) also investigated the degree to which network characteristics provide an alternate route by which trust can be established. The authors

hypothesized that the degree to which a sender trusts an object can be transferred to the receiver, a process they refer to as trust transferability. Further, the authors hypothesized that trust transferability can occur indirectly, such as when one employee observes two coworkers interacting. Trust transferability can also occur directly, such as when a sender provides a receiver with evaluative information about an object. Results from their study provide support for the trust transferability hypothesis. Moreover, it seems that third-party evaluations, such as gossiping conveyed from a sender to a receiver, have a greater impact on the receiver's trust in an object than does a receiver's direct observation of an object (Ferrin et al., 2006).

More recently, Wong and Boh (2010) expanded on these findings by investigating advocates (i.e., senders)—those employees who provide positive evaluations regarding a supervisor's reputation for trustworthiness. Drawing from social exchange theory, the authors reasoned that supervisors and senders exchange favors for each other over time. For example, if a supervisor were to provide support for a sender, one way that sender could repay that support is by advocating on behalf of the supervisor. In this case, spreading positive evaluations about the supervisor signals to other employees that supervisor is trustworthy. The authors also use social information processing theory to explain how a sender's positive evaluations regarding a supervisor's trustworthiness influence the receivers' perceptions of how trustworthy that supervisor is.

Wong and Boh's (2010) major contribution, however, was demonstrating how network characteristics (e.g,. number of non-overlapping contacts) predict how effectively advocates are able to shape receivers' perceptions. Non-overlapping contacts are important because advocates aren't simply corroborating information about the

manager's trustworthiness—they are planting the seed from which initial judgments will grow. While the previous three studies are important for understanding how gossiping can impact receiver perceptions of objects, there are two points worth noting. First, in all three studies, gossiping was assumed to occur within networks, but actual gossiping behavior was never operationalized or measured. Second, with the exception of Burt and Knez (1995), evaluations exchanged between sender and receiver were positive evaluations—not the negative evaluations required for gossiping as I have defined it.

How Gossiping Impacts the Sender–Receiver Relationship

The final question centers on the degree to which gossiping impacts the relationship between the sender and receiver. Given that gossiping may play a large role in building and maintaining high quality interpersonal relationships, it is surprising that only one study has attempted to address this question. Ellwardt et al. (2012a) explored the causality between gossiping and friendship formation by testing two competing hypotheses. According to social gossip theory (Dunbar, 1996), gossiping should lead to friendship because gossiping represents a show of faith. Gossiping is risk taking behavior by the sender that signals a desire to build and maintain a relationship with the receiver (Ellwardt, Steglich, & Wittek, 2012a). The social capital perspective (Coleman, 1988) suggests that the deepening of coworker friendships should be followed by an increased willingness by each coworker to engage in risk taking behavior.

Based on the results from a longitudinal social network analysis, Ellwardt et al. (2012a) found support for the evolutionary perspective. This perspective suggests that gossiping is more appropriately modeled as an antecedent to friendship formation. The idea that gossiping results in high quality interpersonal relationships is interesting. From

a practical point of view, understanding of how interpersonal relationships are enhanced through gossiping could fundamentally alter the generally held practitioner belief that gossiping is undesirable (Danziger, 1988; Gregg, 2003; Greengard, 2001; Lachnit, 2001; Baker & Jones; 1996). In terms of theoretical contribution, studying gossiping as an antecedent to exchange relationships and understanding what makes gossiping both risky and rewarding is also important.

CHAPTER 3

MAIN EFFECT HYPOTHESES

Gossiping and Social Exchange Relationships

Having reviewed both qualitative and quantitative work on gossiping, I turn now to the specific relationships summarized in Figure 1. The conceptual lens for many of those relationships is social exchange theory, which suggests that—as long as benefits are perceived to be of similar value and reliably reciprocated—exchange relationships will tend to remain healthy (Blau, 1964). Because the benefit provider cannot know for sure whether the benefit will be reciprocated, the value of the exchange is expected to be relatively low early on and grow as the social exchange relationship matures and trust increases (Blau, 1964). Colquitt, Baer, Long, and Halvorsen-Ganepola (2014) define a social exchange relationship as "a more invested relationship between an employee and his/her [colleague] that is based on—and motivated by—obligatory exchanges of unspecified favors and benefits, over an open-ended and long-term time frame" (p. 6) which they operationalized as a relationship embodied by mutual "investment," "obligation," "trust," and "significance" (p. 19).

Gossiping has been described as "a valued commodity in the marketplace of social exchange" (Rosnow & Fine, 1976, p. 131), suggesting that it could be labeled an exchange benefit. At its core, gossiping is the exchange of information. According to Foa and Foa (1974, 1980), information is one of six types of resources that can be exchanged in a social exchange relationship and includes concepts like advice, opinions, and

enlightenment (Foa & Foa, 1980). In describing gossiping as a benefit, I adopt Colquitt et al.'s (2014) conceptualization where benefits are defined as discretionary and valued behavior perceived to create a desire to return a favor (see also Blau, 1964). Of course, such benefits can be explored from the perspective of both the receiver and the sender.

Why might gossiping foster receiver perceptions of a social exchange relationship? One reason is that gossiping can make the receiver feel trusted. Trust is defined as a willingness to engage in risk taking behavior (Mayer & Davis, 1999). When someone gossips, they have opened themselves up to criticism and also shared information that may be passed along indiscreetly. Given those risks, the receiver will likely infer that she is trusted. Further, the receiver likely sees gossiping as a signal that the sender desires to build and maintain a meaningful relationship (Dunbar, 1996; Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993).

When the receiver feels trusted, that feeling may deepen receiver perceptions of social exchange relationships. Feeling trusted likely makes the receiver feel valued, particularly when personalistic attributions are made. Personalistic attributions occur when the receiver infers that she possesses some special quality (e.g., "I am a good confidant") as the reason for being the recipient of gossip (Collins & Miller, 1994). Moreover, these attributions, which may be rewarding in and of themselves, can create a desire on the part of the receiver to return the favor. One way the receiver can return the favor is to help deepen the relationship by doing his/her part to imbue the linkage with mutual trust, investment, and significance.

Hypothesis 1: Gossiping extent and gossip quality will be positively related to receiver perceptions of social exchange relationships.

Gossiping may also shape sender perceptions of social exchange relationships. Gossiping may lead the sender to feel that he trusts the receiver. In gossiping the sender has also taken a risk, as the receiver may be indiscreet or the information may later be shown to be inaccurate. These risks have been studied at length in the disclosure literature and are reflected in measures of risk in intimacy (Pilkington & Richardson, 1988). Why would the sender be willing to take these risk? The likely inference is that he trusts the receiver. Festinger (1957) suggested that people match their beliefs and behaviors in order to reduce the discomfort experienced when the two do not align. For example, if a sender confides in the receiver about a supervisor's negative attributes, but does not trust the receiver, the sender will likely feel tension. To avoid that tension, the sender may reason that he trusts the receiver. Empirical studies have supported these cognitive dissonance arguments (Elliot & Devine, 1994; Schopler & Compere, 1971).

That trust inference could go on to deepen sender perceptions of social exchange relationships. The sender's trust represents time and energy invested in a relationship with the receiver. It is an investment that suggests their relationship has value. The sender may feel more committed to maintaining a valued relationship and be more willing to do his part when obligations arise. Of course, nobody likes to feel that they are in a one-sided relationship. Therefore, the sender may assume the receiver also feels a sense of significance and obligation. Those sorts of assumptions may create a self-fulfilling prophecy where the sender acts as if the relationship is deepened, and in the process, actually deepens the linkage.

Hypothesis 2: Gossiping extent and gossip quality will be positively related to sender perceptions of social exchange relationships.

Gossiping and Affect

Emotions are feelings that are generally short-lived and targeted at someone or something (Brief & Weiss, 2002). Lazarus's (1991) cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion suggests the arousal of positive or negative emotions depends on two appraisals. Primary appraisals include decisions about whether some change will help or harm our ability to achieve our goals (Lazarus, 1991). Changes that help are goal-congruent and engender positive affect in general. Similarly, changes that harm are goal-incongruent and evoke negative affect in general (Lazarus, 1991). Secondary appraisals include decisions about questions like how credit or blame for the change is assigned (Lazarus, 1991). In a decision-tree fashion, these appraisals determine which emotions are likely to arise. Positive emotions include happiness, pride, and affection; negative emotions include shame, anxiety, and disgust.

Although scholars acknowledge that gossip can trigger emotions (Baumeister, Zhang, & Vohs, 2004), few serious attempts have been made to explain why this might be so. Lazarus's cognitive-motivational-relational theory is one approach to understanding why gossiping may give rise to specific emotions. The key to applying this lens is to understand that gossip can be helpful or harmful to a number of basic goals. Although different employees may have different goal hierarchies, Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, and Rupp (2001) suggested that four are especially basic: goals regarding control, self-esteem, belonging, and meaning. In a recent study of affect, Scott, Colquitt, Paddock, and Judge (2010) used those four concepts to operationalize goal progress. I will follow suit, discussing goal congruence and incongruence in relation to the same four concepts mentioned above.

Gossiping and Positive Affect

Beginning first with the receiver, gossiping may result in the receiver feeling happy. It is possible that gossiping results in receiver perceptions of goal congruence, for multiple reasons. One possible reason is that gossiping helps fulfill the need to belong. In gossiping, the sender and receiver create shared experiences. The receiver may view these experiences as a token of her connection to the sender—a reminder that she is not alone. When the receiver feels that important connections with others are established, she is fulfilling her instinctual need to be part of something greater than herself, at least to some extent (Cropanzano et al., 2001). This relationship between gossiping and a sense of belonging has received empirical support (Bosson et al., 2006; Gluckman, 1963; Weaver & Bosson, 2011).

Gossiping may also impact the need to belong on the part of the sender. Like receivers, senders are also motivated to establish and maintain interpersonal connections in an effort to satisfy their needs. It is possible that the sender views the intimate information he shares in gossiping as an invitation to the receiver to become a more active part of his life (Brunell, Pilkington, & Webster, 2007). The more the sender signals a desire for a meaningful relationship via gossiping, the more inclined he may be to believe a meaningful relationship will result. Indirect support for this argument comes from evidence that disclosing intimate information increases senders' liking of the receiver (Collins & Miller, 1994).

For both the sender and receiver, this perceived goal congruence may result in happiness. When gossiping is seen as instrumental in achieving goals, the likely result is that the sender and receiver both feel one step closer to actual goal achievement. For

example, if the sender observes the receiver listening intently or laughing at something he

has said, he is observing a manifestation of his relational ties to the receiver. In further

solidifying his ties, goal progress has been made and the sender has experienced success.

Lazarus (1991) suggested that the result of this success is happiness, and past research

has indeed linked goal progress to measures of affective well-being (Sheldon and Houser-

Marko, 2001).

Hypothesis 3: Gossiping extent and gossip quality will be positively related to receiver
happiness.

Hypothesis 4: Gossiping extent and gossip quality will be positively related to sender
happiness.

Gossiping and Negative Affect

Although the previous hypotheses focused on positive emotions, gossiping could

trigger negative emotions as well. Specifically, gossiping may lead the receiver to

experience a feeling of anxiety. Gossiping may be interpreted as goal incongruent if it

results in the receiver feeling uncertain about her ability to control events in her life.

Collins and Miller (1994) suggested that hearing intimate information (e.g., gossiping)

may cause the receiver to feel embarrassed and uncertain about how to respond to the

sender. Gossiping may also increase the chances that the receiver will hear conflicting

opinions about an object or that her involvement in gossiping will be politically

damaging in some way. Research supports the idea that gossiping is incongruent with

self-control goals (Sommerfeld, Krambeck, Semmann, & Milinski, 2007).

That goal incongruence should result in the receiver feeling anxious. Self-control

goal incongruence may represent a threat to the receiver's perceived ability to reach her

goals and will likely result in a negative emotion (Lazarus, 1991). Specifically, when lack

of goal progress leads the receiver to develop concerns about imminent threats to her self-esteem, she will likely feel anxiety (Lazarus, 1991). To illustrate, consider that the receiver may wonder whether word will get out that she was somehow involved in gossiping. Perhaps her involvement has drawn unwanted attention from HR, her supervisor, or even the object. Regardless of the consequences she faces (e.g., damaged reputation), one thing that may be clear is that she has little control over how events unfold regarding her gossiping involvement. Empirical support has been found for the idea that perceived lack of control leads to anxiety (Doby & Caplan, 1995; Hamama, Ronen, & Feigin, 2000; Strassberg, 1973).

Hypothesis 5: Gossiping extent and gossip quality will be positively related to receiver anxiety.

Gossiping may also lead the sender to experience a feeling of shame. It may be that gossiping leads the sender to perceive goal incongruence if gossiping is seen as something that harms his ability to develop meaningful relationships. The sender may wonder things like "Does the receiver worry about becoming the object herself? Does she feel bad about participating in gossiping? If so, will she start avoiding me?" The sender may also view gossiping as an unintended trigger for conflict. It is likely that the more the sender gossips, the more likely he is to say something that offends the receiver. Finally, the sender may worry that if the object finds out about the gossip, the relationship or potential relationship between the sender and object will be damaged. Research supports the idea that senders believe gossiping will result in others disliking them (Cole & Scrivener, 2013), supporting the idea that it could be goal incongruent.

Why might goal incongruence leave the sender feeling shame? The sender now believes his goals are harder to reach and may take this as an indication that he has failed

to live up to his expectations for himself. This failure may lead him to experience some

negative emotion, especially if he has jeopardized his self-worth by not living up to some

ideal (Lazarus, 1991). Moreover, if the sender holds himself accountable for the failure,

he will likely feel shame (Lazarus, 1991). Scholars have argued that the inherent negative

connotations attached to gossip can be quite salient (Foster, 2004). That salience could

make shame responses likely, even when the intentions behind the gossip are innocent or

even productive.

Hypothesis 6: Gossiping extent and gossip quality will be positively related to sender
shame.

Social Exchange Relationships and Helping Behavior

If gossiping does indeed shape perceptions of social exchange relationships, and

specific emotions, how might those findings alter behaviors within the sender-receiver

dyad. To explore those questions, I turn now to the back half of the model in Figure 1.

Beginning with social exchange, I argue that perceptions of social exchange relationships

may be related to interpersonal helping behavior. One reason is that social exchange

relationships may lead to a desire to maintain that exchange bond. The exchange bond

can be thought of as the magnetic force that holds the exchange partners together and

keeps the relationship stable (Blau, 1964). It entitles both parties to mutual obligation,

which can result in greater outcomes than either party could attain alone. The potential

for such benefits should keep both the sender and the receiver committed to maintaining

the exchange bond.

The desire to maintain the exchange bond should, in turn, predict interpersonal

helping behavior. Interpersonal helping behavior is defined as discretionary behavior

targeted towards helping a coworker (Coleman & Borman, 2000; Van Dyne & LePine,

1998). A desire to maintain the relationship likely results in repaying favors in full and even giving a little more than what is "owed." Such gestures might be achieved by accepting a coworker's request for help or by taking the initiative to lend a hand when the opportunity arises. Empirical evidence supports the idea that social exchange sentiments reflecting a commitment to the relationship impact interpersonal helping behavior (Lavelle et al., 2009; Tse & Dasborough, 2008).

Hypothesis 7: Receiver perceptions of social exchange relationships will be positively related to sender-targeted helping behavior.

Hypothesis 8: Sender perceptions of social exchange relationships will be positively related to receiver-targeted helping behavior.

Affect and Helping behavior

Affect may also lead to interpersonal helping behavior. In the case of the receiver and sender, happiness may result in helping behavior targeted toward the other member of the dyad. This is because happiness, as with other emotions, carries with it an action tendency (Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991). An action tendency is defined as a readiness or impulse to do something. The action tendency associated with happiness is outgoingness (Lazarus, 1991). By outgoing, I mean a desire to be more talkative and interact with others. Because of that tendency, happy employees wind up engaging in more conversations and interactions with other employees, potentially including the other member of the sender-receiver dyad.

That outgoingness may lead the receiver or sender to engage in helping behavior targeted towards one another. Aside from creating more opportunities to help, their outgoingness may allow the sender and receiver to more easily see the good in others (George, 1991). They may therefore be more likely to view helping as a rewarding

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experience instead of a hassle. The receiver or sender may also feel more exuberant and creative in their outgoingness (Fredrickson, 2001). Research supports the idea that state positive affect leads to interpersonal helping behavior (Ilies, Scott, & Judge, 2006; George, 1991).

Hypothesis 9: Receiver happiness will be positively related to sender-targeted helping behavior.

Hypothesis 10: Sender happiness will be positively related to receiver-targeted helping behavior.

While the previous hypotheses focused on the positive relationship between affect and helping behavior, a negative relationship between affect and helping behavior is also possible. For example, receiver anxiety may have a negative impact. When the receiver feels anxious, she is likely left with an avoidance action tendency, engendering an urge to run from harm. As Lazarus (1991) notes, anxiety necessarily involves an inability to determine the source of danger. More recently, scholars have suggested that even in situations where there is no potential for a negative outcome, anxiety can still be debilitating (Hirsh, Mar, & Peterson, 2012). It is likely that in gossiping, the receiver focuses her attention on some perceived threat, like future gossip experiences with the sender that are unwanted or somehow damaging. Even if that perceived threat fails to pose any real harm, she may feel more prepared to avoid the possible negative consequences.

The receiver's readiness to avoid the unidentifiable threat may mean the receiver is less likely to engage in sender-targeted helping behavior. Attempting to identify an unknown source of harm may result in a flood of thoughts for the receiver. It is likely that the receiver's ability to focus is diminished (Fredrickson, 1998). Instead of working on

tasks as she normally would, the receiver might be distracted. She may work slower than she normally would; the quality of her work may go down. If the receiver cannot complete tasks that are expected of her, it may be unlikely that she will attempt to engage in helping behavior targeted toward the sender. After all, why would the receiver help the sender if she cannot even help herself? Empirical support has linked anxiety to a decrease in helping behavior (Geller & Bamberger, 2009).

Hypothesis 11: Receiver anxiety will be negatively related to sender-targeted helping behavior.

Sender shame may also have a negative relationship with receiver-targeted helping behavior. When the sender feels shame, his likely response is a tendency to hide (Lazarus, 1991). Hiding engenders a desire to prevent others, particularly people that the sender reveres, from discovering his failure to live up to some idealistic standard. The sender's desire to isolate himself is further reinforced by his likely unwillingness to talk to others about his state of decline because that might bring further shame (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schette, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986). The sender may reason that the more adept he becomes at closing himself off to the outside world, the better chance he has at protecting his already damaged ego (Lazarus, 1991).

The sender's desire to withdraw may result in decreased receiver-targeted helping behavior. When the sender indulges his urge to hide, he may make an effort to stay out of the receiver's way. The sender's sentiments may manifest themselves in a lowered head, drooping shoulders, and reduced eye contact (Keltner & Harker, 1998). One likely outcome of putting on these blinders is that the sender is less likely to help the receiver. Even if the sender sees an opportunity to help, he may reason that the receiver already views him as a failure (Bagozzi, Verbeke, & Gavino, 2003). In support of such

arguments, one study found that in Western cultures, shame leads to a desire to hide and restricted levels of helping behavior (Bagozzi et al., 2003).

Hypothesis 12: Sender shame will be negatively related to receiver-targeted helping behavior.

Affect and Social Exchange Relationships

In addition to directly predicting helping behavior, affect may also influence perceptions of social exchange relationships. When individuals try to decide how they feel about things such as relationships, affect likely colors their thought process. That thought process usually involves recalling at least two types of information about the thing being judged: qualities and affective experiences (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Making judgments about a relationship may involve recalling qualities such as how trusting that relationship seems. Recalling affective experiences may include information such as the sadness experienced after an unsuccessful team effort to win a new client's business. Mental shortcuts are relied upon during this thought process such that only a small sample of qualities and affective experiences are recalled. The composition of that sample depends, in part, on an individual's affective state at the time of recall (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

Positive emotions may increase perceptions of social exchange relationships. As judgments about a relationship are formed, positive emotions may result in the recall of information consistent with that positive emotion (Bower, 1981). For example, when happiness is felt, the information recalled may include things like sharing a laugh or the belief that a relationship is built on trust. Accordingly, the sample selection of information may engender more pleasant relationship qualities and affective experiences. As a result, that relationship may be viewed in a more positive light. Empirical evidence

supports the idea that positive emotions lead to perceptions of social exchange relationships. For example, Forgas, Levinger, and Moylan (1994) found that participants primed to feel happy judged their relationship significantly more positively compared to participants in a control group.

It is also possible that negative emotions decrease perceptions of social exchange relationships. During a judgmental process, negative emotions are likely to result in the recall of negative information about a relationship (Bower, 1981). For example, when anxiety is felt, information recalled may include a raging shouting match or how claustrophobic a particular relationship seems. The sample selection of information may tend to engender unpleasant relationship qualities and affective experiences. One likely outcome is that the relationship is seen in a more negative light. Empirical results support the idea that negative emotions lead to decreased perceptions of social exchange relationships. For example, Forgas et al. (1994) also found that participants primed to feel sad judged their relationships significantly less favorably compared to participants in a control group.

Hypothesis 13: Receiver happiness will be positively related to receiver perceptions of social exchange relationships.

Hypothesis 14: Sender happiness will be positively related to sender perceptions of social exchange relationships.

Hypothesis 15: Receiver anxiety will be negatively related to sender perceptions of social exchange relationships.

Hypothesis 16: Sender shame will be negatively related to sender perceptions of social exchange relationships.

CHAPTER 4

INTERACTIONS BETWEEN GOSSIPING EXTENT AND GOSSIP QUALITY

In discussing gossiping to this point, I have suggested several possible outcomes of gossiping without taking into consideration any interactions at play between gossiping extent and gossip quality. Before discussing these potential interactions, further detail regarding the exact nature of gossip quality is warranted. As mentioned before, the variation of the information provided in gossip gives rise to certain facets of gossip quality (Noon and Delbridge, 1993). The question then becomes, what are these facets, and might they change the way the sender and receiver experience gossiping? To identify the facets, I performed an inductive study and compared those results to relevant insights from the literature. In terms of the latter, the most relevant piece is Noon and Delbridge (1993), who argued that gossip information could be evaluated according to three "quality control checks": interestingness, relevance, and credibility.

My inductive study on the facets of gossip quality used Amazon Mechanical Turk as the sample. A total of 100 responses were collected. The average age of the participants was 34.09 years (SD = 10.06), and participants were 60 percent male. Using open ended questions, I asked participants to describe both a "good" and "bad" gossiping experience and a "good" and "bad" gossiper. These responses were then content analyzed using NVivo software. The result from this analysis resulted in the emergence of the three dimensions of gossip quality: utility; truthfulness; and interestingness.

Gossip utility is defined here as the degree to which gossip is perceived to contribute to well-being. Perceptions of gossip utility may be influenced a number of different ways. For example, the sender may pass along information he feels will keep the receiver safe. Likewise, the receiver may reason that had she not known a certain piece of information, she may be much worse off. A sample response indicating utility is the observation that gossip was a chance to provide an "informative warning about the actions of another." Another response indicating utility is the observation that "sometimes [gossip] stops you from getting close to a bad person." These arguments reflect views expressed by scholars who have suggested that gossip utility shapes the gossiping experience (Ellwardt et al., 2012a; Noon & Delbridge, 1993)

Gossip truthfulness is defined here as the degree to which gossip is perceived to be accurate. Perceptions of gossip truthfulness may arise several ways. For example, the sender may be particularly discerning with regard to the veracity of the content he choses to gossip about. His discernment likely influences his perceptions of gossip truthfulness. Likewise, the receiver may come to believe gossip is truthful when she receives information that seems plausible or is corroborated by information gathered elsewhere. A sample response indicating truthfulness is the observation that "a good gossiper is one who has the facts." Another response indicating truthfulness is a receiver's observation that he "can usually trust that what [the sender] says is true." Researchers have suggested that gossip truthfulness impacts the gossiping experience (Burt & Knez, 1995; Kuttler, Parker, & Greca, 2002; Wittek & Wielers, 1998).

Gossip interestingness is defined as the degree to which gossip is perceived to absorb attention. What might shape perceptions of gossip interestingness? One example is that the sender may take notice of how much the receiver appears to be actively engaged. If the receiver appears engaged, the likely inference is that the gossip is interesting. Alternatively, receiver perceptions of gossip interestingness may arise from the realization that she is particularly engrossed in what the sender is saying. A sample response indicating interestingness is the observation that "In a good gossip experience, the information is 'juicy'. For example, if a girl is cheating on her boyfriend. That would be really interesting info." Another response indicating interestingness is the observation that the respondent "found the information intriguing." Scholars have noted that gossip interestingness may be a factor that influences how gossiping is experienced (Baumeister et al., 2004; Shibutani, 1966).

How might the interaction between gossiping extent and gossip quality (as indicated by those three facets) shape the gossiping experience? One possibility is that gossip quality amplifies the relationship between gossiping and receiver as well as sender social exchange perceptions. Recall that both receiver and sender are likely to perceive gossiping as a behavior that signals interpersonal trust. When either the receiver or sender believes gossip quality is high, it may serve to enhance the saliency of the trust displayed, making it a more potent mechanism for triggering social exchange perceptions. Indirect support for these arguments is found in previous theorizing that has taken a social exchange view of self-disclosure. When self-disclosure is cast as a social exchange "currency," the intimacy of that disclosure increases the currency's value. In return, this increased value creates a stronger relationship between the amount of information

disclosed and the receiver's felt obligation towards the sender (Collins & Miller, 1994; Omarzu, 2000; Worthy, Gary, & Kahn, 1969).

Gossip quality may also amplify the relationship between gossiping extent and positive emotions. As discussed, gossiping may be goal congruent with both sender and receiver need to belong, leading to happiness. However, high quality gossip may deepen belonging goal congruence for the sender and receiver, making it a more potent mechanism for triggering positive affect. For example, if the sender passes along information that he feels is particularly interesting, he may interpret this as a stronger signal of his desire to form a meaningful social connection. This belongingness deepening argument has received indirect support. Vittengl and Holt (2000) found the relationship between the extent of sharing personal information and positive affect was stronger when the information shared was more interesting.

Hypothesis 17: Gossip quality will amplify the positive relationship between gossiping extent and receiver perceptions of social exchange relationships.

Hypothesis 18: Gossip quality will amplify the positive relationship between gossiping extent and sender perceptions of social exchange relationships.

Hypothesis 19: Gossip quality will amplify the positive relationship between gossiping extent and receiver happiness.

Hypothesis 20: Gossip quality will amplify the positive relationship between gossiping extent and sender happiness.

Whereas the previous hypotheses focused on the amplifying effect gossip quality may have on positive emotions, gossip quality may also neutralize the relationship between gossiping and negative emotions. Earlier I suggested that gossiping may be perceived by the receiver as control goal incongruent, thereby resulting in anxiety. High quality gossip may distract the receiver from control goal incongruence, making it a less

potent mechanism for triggering negative affect. For example, when gossip quality is high, it is possible that the receiver will be especially engrossed by the content of the gossip which now compete for the receiver's attention. As a result, the receiver may be less focused on things like separating truth from reality or political disadvantages that may result from gossip.

It is also likely that gossip quality may neutralize the relationship between gossiping extent and sender shame. Recall that gossiping may lead the sender to perceive belonging goal incongruence thus resulting in shame. High quality gossip may distract the sender from belonging goal incongruence, making it a less potent mechanism for triggering negative affect. To illustrate, consider that when gossip quality is high, the sender may get more carried away with sharing the details of the gossip. That attention to detail may mean that the sender is less focused on things like whether or not he is jeopardizing his relationship with the receiver. By way of analogy, consider the literature on the seductive detail effect which argues that interesting but irrelevant information distracts from the important core content of a message. Meta-analytic results have illustrated that seductive details distract from learning goals (Rey, 2012). This suggest that gossip quality might also distract from perceptions of goal incongruence.

Hypothesis 21: Gossip quality will neutralize the positive relationship between gossiping extent and receiver anxiety.

Hypothesis 22: Gossip quality will neutralize the positive relationship between gossiping extent and sender shame.

CHAPTER 5

METHODS

Sample and Procedure

I recruited participants by posting advertisements on an online classified advertisement website. These advertisements appeared in message boards across major metropolitan areas located throughout the United States. Eligibility requirements for participation included verification that participants were 18 years or older and worked at least 35 hours per week. Individuals who met these eligibility requirements were asked to provide contact information for a coworker who was also willing to complete the study. Coworkers were then contacted in order to verify that they were willing to participate and that they met the previously mentioned eligibility requirements. Participants who completed the study were paid $50 for participation.

An experience sampling method research design was used. The survey was administered twice per day to each participant for fifteen consecutive workdays. An interval-contingent design, where a survey is administered at specific points in time, is appropriate when time-frames are relevant (Dimotakis, Ilies, & Judge, 2013). Therefore, I used an interval-contingent design such that the first survey was administered at approximately 1:00 p.m. and the second survey was administered at approximately 4:00 p.m. Administering the surveys in the early afternoon allowed participants to respond at a time when gossip was likely to have occurred. Additionally, the three hour separation allowed enough time for events and associated fluctuations in measured variables to

occur. Similar intervals have been used in previous interval design studies (Daniels, Boocock, Glover, Hartley, & Holland, 2009). Surveys were administered electronically.

In total, 200 coworker dyads were recruited for the study. At the dyadic-level, eligibility for inclusion in the final analysis required that the dyad have a minimum of eight days (i.e., over half of the consecutive 15-day study period) where day-level requirements were satisfied. At the day-level, three requirements had to be met. First, both sender and receiver had to complete both the early and late afternoon surveys. Applying this requirement resulted in 97 dyads remaining in the study. Second, scores from either the sender or receiver had to reflect that some degree of gossiping had occurred that day. This requirement resulted in 66 dyads remaining in the study. Third, both sender and receiver had to spend time together before taking the early afternoon survey in order to allow for the opportunity for gossiping. The final sample size included 59 dyads who provided a total of 2,520 complete survey responses over 630 days (an average of 10.68 days per dyad).

The average age for senders was 35.0 years (SD = 9.90). On average, senders' tenure with their organizations was 5.2 years (SD = 5.52) and their average tenure with their coworker (receiver) was 3.3 years (SD = 2.67). Senders were 32.2 percent male. Senders identified their race as 56 percent Caucasian, 15 percent African American, 9 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 19 percent Hispanic, 2 percent Native American, and 2 percent "other." The average age of receivers was 36.4 years (SD = 9.51). On average, receivers' tenure with their organizations was 5.1 years (SD = 4.59). Receivers were 42.4 percent male and identified their race as 56 percent Caucasian, 22 percent African American, 12 percent Hispanic, 9 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2 percent "other."

<div align="center">**Measures**</div>

Participants responded to measures that, in some instances, specifically referenced the name of the opposite member of the dyad. Those instances were marked with "[coworker]" in the measures below.

Early Afternoon Survey

Gossiping Extent. The gossiping extent measure was developed in accordance with a content validation method proposed by Hinkin and Tracey (1999). First, I generated a definition of gossiping. Then, using this definition, I created six survey items that reflect the definition of gossiping. Next, I recruited participants from Amazon Mechanical Turk to participate in an online survey, with each participant earning $1.00 for participation. The final sample size included 92 participants. Each participant received the definition of gossiping along with the six gossiping extent items. Participants were then asked to rate the degree to which each item matched the definition provided using a 7-point scale (1 = *Item is an extremely bad match to the definition above* to 7 = *Item is an extremely good match to the definition above*). The mean for gossiping extent was 6.05 which suggest adequate content validity based on previous studies (Gardner, 2005; Rodell, 2013).

The validated items are: "Today, I talked to [coworker] about someone's work mistakes when that person wasn't around," "Today, I conversed with [coworker] about someone's poor job performance when that person wasn't there," "Today, I spoke to [coworker] about something bad about someone when that person wasn't around," "Today, I chatted with [coworker] about someone's failures when that person wasn't there," "Today, I commented to [coworker] about drama in someone's personal life when

that person wasn't around," "Today, I communicated with [coworker] about someone's troubles on the home front when that person wasn't there." Note that the first four items were adapted from (Erdogan et al., 2014). Note also that the six items were adapted so that two were clearly about work, two were clearly about non-work, and two were more general. I felt that this sort of coverage would be representative of the full content domain of gossip.

These validated items were presented to both the sender and receiver using a 5-point scale (1 = *to a very small extent or not at all* to 5 = *to a very large extent*) with the following instructions: "Below you will find a series of statements about your conversations today with [coworker]. In particular, the statements will ask about conversations about some other person. For the purposes of those statements, that 'someone' should be a current or former organizational member (i.e., a current or former coworker or colleague). Please read each statement and decide the extent to which the following has occurred today." In testing the hypotheses, I used an aggregate of the sender and receiver reports of gossiping extent. The $ICC_{(1)}$ was .21 and the $ICC_{(2)}$ was .74, both of which suggests adequate inter-rater reliability for aggregation (Bliese, 2000). This approach prevented me from having different versions of my independent variable in different hypothesis tests. Note that, given that experience sampling method studies focus on within-person variance, between-person differences in response set tendencies that can give rise to common method bias are not a concern (Dimotakis et al., 2013).

Gossip quality. The gossip quality facets used the same content validation method proposed by Hinkin and Tracey (1999) as described above. Using definitions provided here, I generated four items for gossip utility, gossip interestingness, and gossip

truthfulness. Gossip utility is represented by the following four items: "beneficial,"

"helpful," "useful," and "valuable." Gossip interestingness is represented by the

following four items: "engaging," "intriguing," "interesting," and "fascinating." Gossip

truthfulness is represented by the four items: "factual," "accurate," "true," and "credible."

To validate these items, I again recruited participants from Amazon Mechanical

Turk. Participants were given the respective definitions along with the items generated

and asked to rate the degree to which the items matched the definition using a 7-point

scale (1 = *Item is an extremely bad match to the definition above* to 7 = *Item is an*

extremely good match to the definition above). The mean definitional correspondence for

the gossip quality facets were as follows: utility was 6.00, interestingness was 6.47, and

truthfulness was 6.52. All items above had acceptable mean definitional correspondence

and were therefore retained. Validated items were presented to both the sender and

receiver using a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) with the

following instructions: "The things that [coworker] and I talked about today, during the

conversations referenced above, were:" As before, I used an aggregate of the sender and

receiver reports of gossip quality to test my hypotheses. Gossip quality had an $ICC_{(1)}$ of

.21 and an $ICC_{(2)} = .73$, both of which suggested adequate inter-rater reliability for

aggregation. Also, the average intercorrelation among utility, interestingness, and

truthfulness was .57. Therefore, I used the higher-order gossip quality construct to test

my hypotheses.

Late Afternoon Survey

Emotions. All emotions were measured with items from Watson and Clark (1994)

and Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, and Larkin (2003). Participants were given instructions

that read: "Please rate what you felt during your conversations today with [coworker]." Then, using a 5-point scale (1 = *very slightly or not at all* to 5 = *extremely*) participants rated the extent to which they felt the adjectives provided. Receiver state happiness and sender state happiness were measured using two adjectives, "cheerful," and "happy," adapted from the Watson and Clark (1998) joviality scale. One additional adjective, "glad," was adapted from the Fredrickson et al. (2003) joy scale. Receiver state anxiety was measured using three adjectives, "nervous," "jittery," and "distressed," adapted from the Watson and Clark (1998) negative affect scale. Sender state shame was measured using three adjectives, "ashamed," "humiliated," and "disgraced," from the Fredrickson et al. (2003) shame scale.

Social exchange relationship. Both receiver- and sender-perceived social exchange relationships were measured using the four-item Colquitt et al. (2014) social exchange relationship scale. Participants were given the following instructions: "My relationship with [coworker] is characterized by:" and asked to rate their agreement using a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). Items include "Mutual obligation," "Mutual trust," "Mutual commitment," and "Mutual significance."

Helping. Both receiver- and sender- perceptions of interpersonal helping behavior were measured using 5 items adapted from Lee and Allen (2002). Participants were given the following instructions: "The statements below refer to [coworkers]'s behavior since the conversation you had with [coworker] that was referenced in the early afternoon survey. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements." Participants were then asked to rate each item using a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*). The five items used are as follows: "[Coworker] volunteered to do

things for me today," "[Coworker] assisted me with work for my benefit today,"

"[Coworker] got involved with things for my benefit today," "[Coworker] helped me

learn something new today," and finally "[Coworker] helped me with my work

responsibilities today."

CHAPTER 6

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

The means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations are presented in Table 1 with coefficient alphas shown along the diagonal. Previous research has suggested that gossip is a large component of life in the workplace. Those claims are supported by the mean of gossiping extent ($\bar{x} = 2.30$). Additionally, the standard deviation of gossiping extent was the third highest (s.d. = .94), suggesting a relatively wide variation in gossiping extent. The mean of gossip quality ($\bar{x} = 3.58$) reflects the relatively high caliber of the gossip content. The zero-order correlation between gossiping extent and gossip quality (r = .30) supports the notion that gossip extent and gossip quality are related but distinct constructs. Finally, the pattern of zero-order correlations for gossiping extent with mediators and outcome variables was as expected. However, the pattern of zero-order correlations for gossip quality was lower than expected.

Tests of Hypotheses

The hypotheses were tested with Mplus 7.2 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012) using fully latent structural equation modeling. Mplus was chosen to analyze the data because it allows users to specify models at the within-person and between-person levels, thereby taking into account non-independence arising from cluster sampling (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). All variables were modeled at the within-person level. Gossip quality was modeled as a higher-order construct, with utility, truthfulness, and interestingness

allowed to load onto the gossip quality factor. All other constructs used items as

indicators. The model demonstrated acceptable fit to the data: χ2 (1046) = 3416.72,

TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations [a]

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gossiping Extent	2.30	0.94	(.90)						
2. Gossip Quality	3.58	0.74	.27*	(.95)					
3. Sender Shame	1.27	0.56	.30*	.01	(.79)				
4. Sender Social Exchange	4.18	0.64	-.03	.30*	-.23*	(.93)			
5. Sender Happiness	2.87	1.22	.14*	.35*	-.01	.24*	(.95)		
6. Receiver Happiness	3.03	1.20	.19*	.42*	.11*	.13*	.59*	(.95)	
7. Receiver Social Exchange	4.20	0.70	.08*	.38*	-.05	.52*	.24*	.30*	(.95)
8. Receiver Anxiety	1.35	0.73	.23*	-.04	.38*	-.13*	.03	.00	-.10*
9. Sender Helping Receiver	3.85	0.90	.11*	.18*	.04	.37*	.22*	.33*	.60*
10. Receiver Helping Sender	3.79	0.90	-.01	.12*	-.05	.52*	.23*	.10*	.45*

[a] Variables assessed daily ($n = 630$). Coefficient alphas are listed on the diagonal.   *(continued)*
* $p < .05$, two-tailed.

TABLE 1 (CONTINUED)

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations [a]

Variable	8	9	10
8. Receiver Anxiety	(.90)		
9. Sender Helping Receiver	.00	(.95)	
10. Receiver Helping Sender	-.03	.51*	(.94)

[a] Variables assessed daily ($n = 630$). Coefficient alphas are listed on the diagonal.
* $p < .05$, two-tailed.

p<.01; comparative fit index (CFI) = .89; standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .09; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .06. The unstandardized path coefficients from the Mplus output are presented in Figure 2.

Hypothesis 1 predicted that gossiping extent and gossip quality would be positively related to receiver perceptions of social exchange relationships. The relationship between gossiping extent and receiver perceptions was not significant ($b = -.02$). The relationship between gossip quality and sender perceptions of social exchange relationships was significant ($b = .38$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was partially supported. Hypothesis 2 predicted that gossiping extent and gossip quality would be positively related to sender perceptions of social exchange relationships. As before, the relationship between gossiping extent and sender perceptions of social exchange relationships was not significant ($b = -.06$). However, the relationship between gossiping quality and sender perceptions of social exchange relationships was significant ($b = .31$). Hypothesis 2 was therefore partially supported.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that gossiping extent and gossip quality would be positively related to receiver happiness. The relationship between gossiping extent and receiver happiness ($b = .02$) was not significant. There was, however, a significant relationship between gossip quality and receiver happiness ($b = .56$) providing partial support for Hypothesis 3. Hypothesis 4 predicted that gossiping extent and gossip quality would have a positive relationship with sender happiness. Following the same general pattern, there was no significant relationship between gossiping extent and sender happiness ($b = -.05$). However, the relationship between gossip quality and sender happiness was positive and significant ($b = .49$). Accordingly, Hypothesis 4 was partially supported.

FIGURE 2

Structural Equation Modeling Results

$n = 630$. *p<.05, one-tailed.
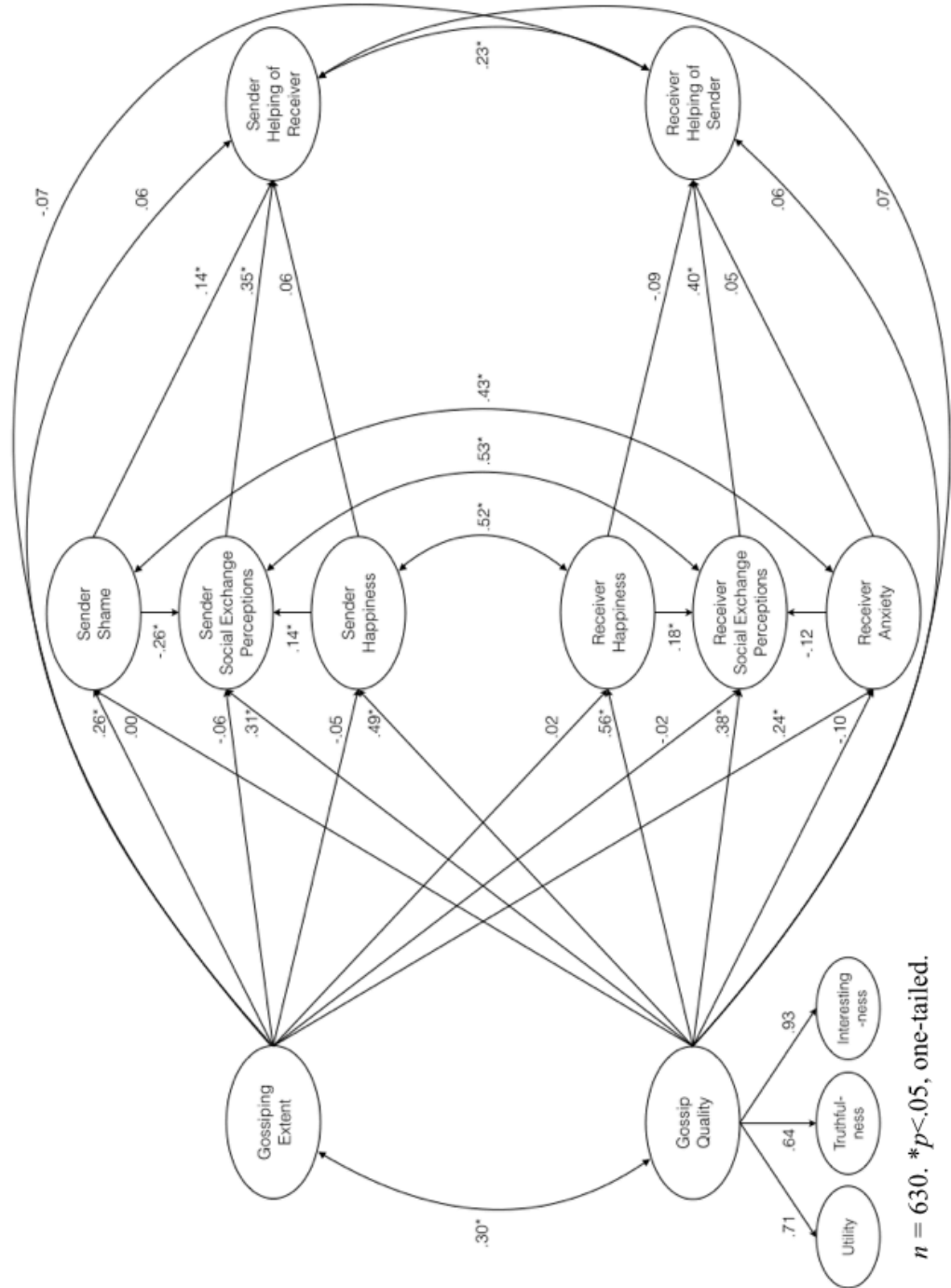
Hypothesis 5 predicted that gossiping extent and gossip quality would be positively related to receiver anxiety. The relationship between gossiping extent and receiver anxiety was significant and positive ($b = .24$). On the contrary, the relationship between gossip quality and receiver anxiety was not significant ($b = -.10$). Therefore Hypothesis 5

was only partially supported. Hypothesis 6 predicted that gossiping extent and gossip quality would be positively related to sender shame. Gossiping extent and sender shame had a significant positive relationship ($b = .26$). There was no significant relationship between gossip quality and sender shame ($b = .00$). As such, Hypothesis 6 was also partially supported.

Hypothesis 7 and 8 predicted that perceptions of social exchange relationships would be positively related to helping behavior. More specifically, Hypothesis 7 predicted that receiver perceptions of social exchange relationships would be positively related to sender-targeted helping behavior. There was a significant relationship between receiver perceptions of social exchange relationships and sender-targeted helping behavior ($b = .40$), thus supporting Hypothesis 7. Hypothesis 8 predicted a positive relationship between sender perceptions of social exchange relationships and receiver-targeted helping behavior. The relationship between sender perceptions of social exchange relationships and receiver-targeted helping behavior was also significant ($b = .35$), thereby supporting Hypothesis 8.

Hypotheses 9 through 12 predicted that positive and negative emotions would be related to helping behavior. More specifically, Hypothesis 9 predicted that receiver happiness would be positively related to sender-targeted helping behavior. This relationship was neither positive nor significant ($b = -.09$) failing to support Hypothesis 9. Hypothesis 10 predicted a positive relationship between sender happiness and receiver-targeted helping behavior. However, this relationship was also not significant ($b = .06$), failing to support Hypothesis 10. Hypothesis 11 predicted that receiver anxiety would be negatively related to sender-targeted helping behavior. Following the same general

pattern, this relationship was not significant (b = .05). Hypothesis 12 predicted that sender shame would be negatively related to receiver-targeted helping behavior. Although significant (b = .14), this relationship was in the opposite direction. Accordingly, Hypothesis 12 was not supported.

Hypotheses 13 through 16 predicted positive and negative emotions would predict social exchange relationships. More specifically, Hypothesis 13 predicted that receiver happiness would be positively related to receiver perceptions of social exchange relationships.This relationship was significant (b = .18) supporting Hypothesis 13. Hypothesis 14 similarly predicted sender happiness would have a positive relationship with sender perceptions of social exchange relationships, which was the case (b = .14). Therefore, Hypothesis 14 was supported. Hypothesis 15 predicted a negative relationship between receiver anxiety and sender perceptions of social exchange relationships. This relationship was in the expected direction, but not statistically significant (b = -.12), failing to support Hypothesis 15. Hypothesis 16 predicted that there would be a negative relationship between sender shame and sender perceptions of social exchange relationships. This relationship was significant (b = -.26) thus supporting Hypothesis 16.

To summarize the effects reflected in these hypotheses, I examined the indirect effects of gossiping extent and gossip quality on both sender-targeted and receiver-targeted helping behavior. I used Mplus to generate indirect effects and the associated standard errors. Mplus incorporates the delta method when calculating standard errors for the indirect effects (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). This method is used to improve the accuracy of confidence intervals by taking into account the non-normal distribution of the indirect effect (MacKinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004). In order to test for partial

versus full-mediation, I added four paths that were not hypothesized. The first two paths were between gossiping extent and receiver-targeted as well as sender-targeted helping behavior. I also added paths between gossip quality and receiver-targeted as well as sender-targeted helping behavior. The results from the indirect effects analysis are presented in Table 2.

The relationship between gossiping extent and sender-targeted helping behavior resulted in a cumulative indirect effect that was not significant (b = -.01). Similarly, the relationship between gossiping extent and receiver-targeted helping produced a cumulative indirect effect that was not significant (b = -.01). However, the cumulative indirect effect for the relationship between gossip quality and sender-targeted helping behavior was significant (b = .14). Likewise, the cumulative indirect effect between gossip quality and receiver-targeted helping behavior was also significant (b = .16). It should be noted that there were no significant direct effects from gossip quality to sender-targeted helping behavior (b = .06) or receiver-targeted helping behavior (b = .07). These findings suggest that the proposed mediators fully mediate the relationship between gossip quality and sender-targeted as well as receiver-targeted helping behavior.

Interaction Effects

Hypotheses 17 and 18 predicted that gossip quality would amplify the positive relationship between gossiping extent and receiver as well as sender perceptions of social exchange relationships. Hypotheses 19 and 20 predicted that gossip quality would also amplify the positive relationship between gossiping extent and receiver happiness and sender happiness, respectively. Hypothesis 21 and 22 predicted that gossip quality would neutralize the negative relationship between gossiping extent and receiver anxiety as well

TABLE 2

Indirect Effects of Gossiping Extent and Gossip Quality on Sender Helping Receiver and Receiver Helping Sender [a]

	Effect		
Path Sequence	**Indirect**	**Direct**	**Total**
Gossiping Extent→Receiver Helping of Sender	-.01	-.07	-.07
Gossiping Extent→Sender Helping of Receiver	-.01	.06	.05
Gossip Quality→Receiver Helping of Sender	.14*	.06	.20*
Gossip Quality→Sender Helping of Receiver	.16*	.07	.23*

[a] Variables assessed daily (n = 630).
* $p < .05$, one-tailed.

as sender shame. To test these predictions, I introduced latent interactions between gossiping extent and gossip quality to the model shown in Figure 2. These latent interactions were generated and tested in Mplus, which uses a Latent Moderated Structural Equations approach (Klein & Moosbrugger, 2000) to estimate interactions. Receiver-focused and sender-focused interaction results are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

The gossiping extent x gossip quality interaction term was significant ($b = .14$) when used to predict receiver perceptions of social exchange relationships. A plot of the latent moderated structural interaction for Hypothesis 17 was generated using procedures similar to those recommended by Jaccard and Wan (1995) and is presented in Figure 3. Given the absence of a positive main effect of gossiping extent on receiver perceptions of social exchange relationships, the pattern of the interaction is not completely consistent with the plot stipulated in Hypothesis 17. Instead, Figure 3 reveals that gossip quality

TABLE 3

Interaction Effects of Gossiping Extent and Gossip Quality on Receiver Reactions [a]

Independent Variables	Receiver Social Exchange	Receiver Happiness	Receiver Anxiety
Gossiping Extent	-.08	-.01	.29*
Gossip Quality	.44*	.60*	-.14
Gossiping Extent x Gossip Quality	.14*	.09	-.12

[a] Variables assessed daily (n = 630).
* $p < .05$, one-tailed.

TABLE 4

Interaction Effects of Gossiping Extent and Gossip Quality on Sender Reactions [a]

Independent Variables	Sender Social Exchange	Sender Happiness	Sender Shame
Gossiping Extent	-.06	-.05	.24*
Gossip Quality	.32*	.49*	.03
Gossiping Extent x Gossip Quality	.02	-.01	.07

[a] Variables assessed daily (n = 630).
* $p < .05$, one-tailed.

FIGURE 3

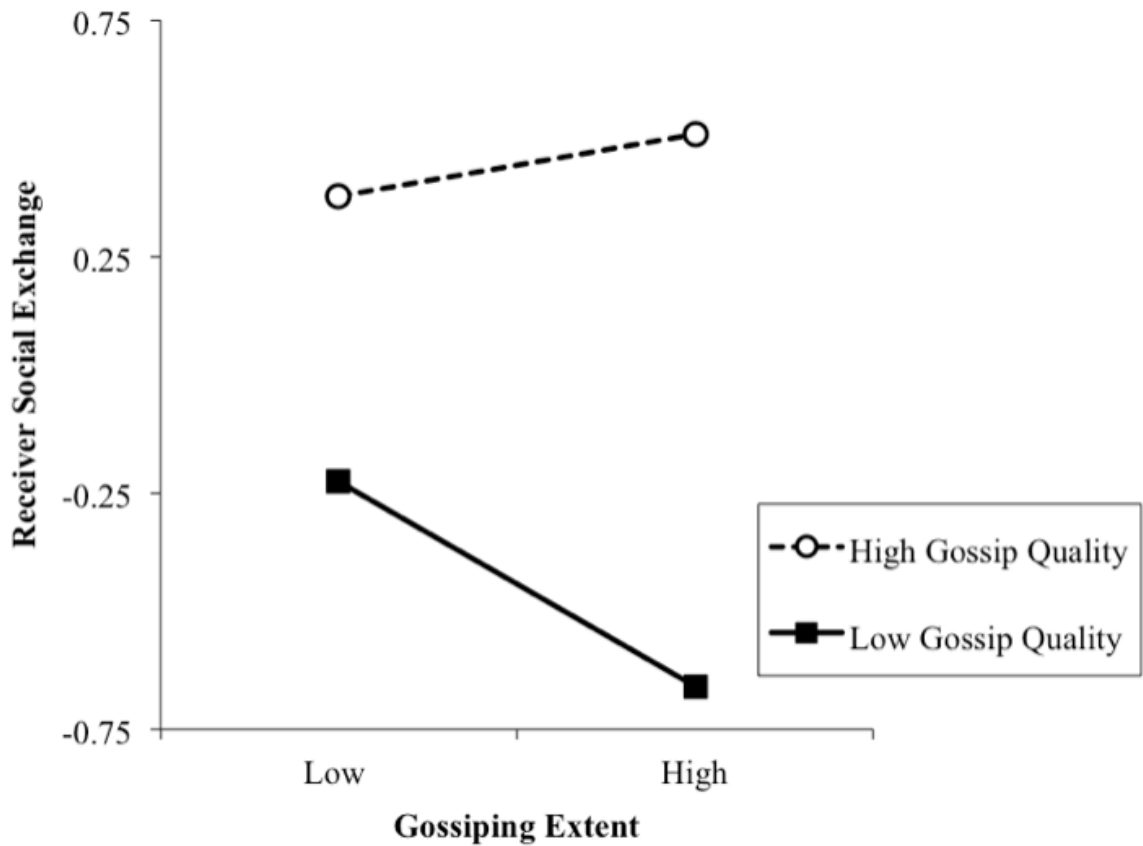**Interaction Effect of Gossiping Extent x Gossip Quality on Receiver Social Exchange**

weakens the negative relationship between gossiping extent and receiver perceptions of social exchange relationships. Thus, gossip quality is still what could be termed a "beneficial moderator," insofar as it weakens a negative effect (as opposed to amplifying a positive effect). The gossiping extent x gossip quality interaction term was not significant when used to predict sender perceptions of social exchange relationships ($b =$ .02), receiver happiness ($b = .09$), sender happiness ($b = -.01$), receiver anxiety ($b = -.12$), or sender shame ($b = .07$), failing to support Hypotheses 18 through 22, respectfully.

CHAPTER 7

DISCUSSION

Practitioners and researchers alike tend to treat gossiping in organizations as a
detrimental phenomenon. Studies have linked gossiping to undesirable outcomes
including lowered self-esteem (Cole & Scrivener, 2013), emotional exhaustion, lowered
job engagement, and depersonalization (Georganta, Panagopoulou, & Montgomery,
2014). Beyond the individual-level, gossiping has also been associated with negative
outcomes such as decreased team performance, a lower safety culture, and lower morale
(Kulik, Bainbridge, & Cregan, 2008; Georganta et al., 2014). However, positive
outcomes associated with gossiping are also possible. The purpose of my dissertation was
to explore positive outcomes of gossiping within the organizational context. My research
questions focused on how changes in gossiping extent and gossip quality were related to
1) perceived relationship quality; 2) affective states; and 3) helping behavior.

Summary of Results

Gossiping and Social Exchange Relationships

I proposed two theoretical perspectives to help explain why gossiping might lead to
helping behavior. The first theory I discussed was social exchange theory. Empirical
evidence suggests that gossiping may negatively impact trust and liking (Turner, Mazur,
Wendel, & Winslow, 2003). However, I took the opposite view. My arguments were
based on the idea that gossiping is a risky behavior that involves trust as well as potential
benefits exchanged between coworkers. From the receiver's perspective, I suggested

gossiping may represent a risky behavior that results in the receiver feeling valued. From the sender's perspective, gossiping may represent a risky behavior that, upon reflection, signals to the sender that she values her relationship with the receiver.

Gossip quality had a strong positive relationship with both sender and receiver perceptions of social exchange relationships. Previous theorizing on social exchange has suggested that when benefits are exchanged, the relationship between exchange partners will likely deepen (Blau, 1964). My findings support this theorizing to the degree that gossip quality is an approximate measure of benefits exchanged between sender and receiver. It is important to note the relatively high agreement between sender and receiver perceptions of gossip quality. What seemed useful, truthful, and interesting to the sender also seemed useful, truthful, and interesting to the receiver. Moreover, the relative magnitude of the relationship between gossip quality and social exchange perceptions was similar (although slightly stronger for the receiver compared to the sender).

Gossiping extent did not appear to predict perceptions of social exchange relationships, however. There was no significant relationship between gossiping extent and either sender or receiver perceptions of social exchange relationships. It may be that, when controlling for gossip quality, the act of gossiping is as much a detriment as a benefit. Although the act can be perceived as rapport-building, it can also consume time from a busy day. Indeed, if the receiver is not all that engaged in the gossiping, the exchange could amount to involuntary withdrawal behavior. These results suggest that, when it comes to gossip, *what* is said (in terms of quality) is more predictive of relationship quality than *how much* is said (in terms of extent).

Gossiping and Affective States

The second theoretical perspective that could be useful in explaining why gossiping leads to helping behavior is Lazarus's (1991) cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotions. I anticipated that gossiping extent and gossip quality would be positively related to receiver happiness, sender happiness, receiver anxiety, and sender shame. However—as with perceptions of social exchange relationships—an unexpected pattern of results emerged. On the one hand, gossip quality was positively related to receiver and sender happiness but was not related to receiver anxiety or sender shame. On the other hand, gossiping extent was positively related to receiver anxiety and sender shame but was not related to receiver happiness or sender happiness.

I proposed that gossiping leads to happiness because gossiping would be instrumental in satisfying senders' and receivers' basic needs (e.g., the need to be part of a broader collective). In terms of magnitude, there were no stronger relationships than the relationships between gossip quality and happiness. This finding suggests that gossip quality plays a pivotal role in perceptions of goal progress towards satisfying basic needs. Sharing and hearing information that is useful, interesting, and truthful could have furthered belonging goals for both parties in the gossiping. As with social exchange relationship perceptions, it may also be that *what* is said furthers such goals more than *how much* is said. Gossiping extent may not have been related to sender or receiver happiness because the act of gossiping is a "mixed bag" for happiness when gossip quality is considered simultaneously.

That "mixed bag" for gossiping extent became a bit less mixed with negative affective states, as gossiping extent predicted both sender shame and receiver anxiety.

Here *how much* was said "moved the needle" on such negative states even when controlling for *what* was said. I predicted that gossiping extent could create shame for the sender because of the failure to live up to an idealistic standard for behavior, as well as a sense of felt accountability for that failure. With respect to the receiver, I argued that gossiping events would create anxiety due to vague and uncertain threats (e.g., being overheard, the target finding out about "behind the back" conversations). These results wind up creating a striking duality for the effects of gossip quality versus gossiping extent on the mediators in my model. In general, gossip quality predicted beneficial reactions only, in terms of social exchange relationship perceptions and happiness. Gossiping extent, in contrast, predicted detrimental reactions only, in terms of sender shame and receiver anxiety.

Gossiping and Helping Behavior

My overarching research question dealt with how changes in gossiping were related to changes in helping behavior. One approach to answering this question is to consider whether the proximal outcomes of gossiping were related to helping. In fact, both sender and receiver social exchange perceptions were related to helping behavior. The previous finding makes sense as both sender and receiver would be motivated to maintain their respective social exchange relationships and helping behavior is one way to do that (Blau, 1964). In terms of emotions, only sender shame had a significant relationship with receiver-targeted helping behavior. Therefore, it appears that gossip quality impacts helping behavior via obligation-based helping behavior (e.g., Organ, 1988) instead of spontaneous helping behavior (e.g., George, 1991). Finally, given that there were no direct effects from gossiping to helping behavior, my model was fully mediated.

A more comprehensive approach to investigating the degree to which changes in gossiping are related to changes in helping behavior is to examine the indirect effects. As expected the cumulative indirect effects from gossip quality to both receiver-targeted and sender-targeted helping behavior were significant. In the case of the receiver, significant specific indirect effects included the gossip quality → receiver social exchange perceptions → sender-targeted helping behavior path and the gossip quality → receiver happiness → receiver social exchange perceptions → sender-targeted helping behavior path. For the sender, only the gossip quality → sender social exchange perceptions → receiver-targeted helping behavior path was significant. Finally, it is worth noting that the total effects from gossip quality to both receiver-targeted and sender-targeted helping behavior were significant. These results reveal that sharing useful, interesting, and truthful information is associated with tangible behavioral changes within the dyad.

The cumulative indirect effects from gossiping extent to both receiver-targeted and sender-targeted helping behavior were not significant. This finding is to be expected given the non-significant relationship that gossiping extent had with sender and receiver social exchange perceptions as well as sender and receiver happiness. Moreover, there were no significant specific indirect effects between gossiping extent and helping behavior. Taken together, the lack of significant direct effects, total indirect effects, and total effects suggests that gossiping extent has very little to do with helping behavior. Based on these observations, it appears that gossip quality—not gossiping extent—is critical in predicting helping behavior.

Gossiping Extent and Gossip Quality Interaction

I suggested the relationship between gossiping extent and desirable outcomes (e.g., social exchange perceptions) would be amplified in the presence of high quality gossip while the relationship between gossiping extent and undesirable outcomes (e.g., receiver anxiety) would be neutralized. Unfortunately, gossiping extent did not have a significant relationship with four out of six mediators. Moreover, only one of the predicted interaction effects was statistically significant. That finding revealed that gossip quality weakened the negative relationship between gossiping extent and receiver perceptions of social exchange relationships. That pattern adds to the uniformly positive effects associated with gossip quality. Not only did it predict positive relationship quality perceptions and positive emotions, it also neutralized the negatives associated with gossiping extent.

Theoretical and Methodical Contributions

This dissertation has resulted in several theoretical and methodological contributions. First, I created and validated a measure of gossiping extent using content validation procedures recommended by Hinkin and Tracey (1999). This scale development was significant given the problematic nature of existing measures. For example, one sample item from an existing scale asked participants about the degree to which they enjoyed reading gossip columns and reading biographies of famous people (Nevo et al., 1993). The amount of construct valid variance captured by these types of items is highly questionable. Another sample item from a different measure asked participants whether they gossiped about a coworkers performance (Wittek & Wielers,

1998). However, items like this do not specify whether the gossip was positive or negative or whether the target of the gossip was present during the gossiping episode.

Second, I built theory by introducing a new construct—gossip quality. To my knowledge, there are no existing scales designed to evaluate the content of gossip. I used an inductive approach to explore the components of gossip quality. Specifically, I asked participants to respond to questions about previous gossiping experiences. I then content analyzed these responses which resulted in three sub-facets of gossip quality: utility; truthfulness; and interestingness. Next, I wrote definitions and items for each facet. Using the same content validation procedures as before, I demonstrated that these measures were also content valid. As evidenced by results from this dissertation, gossip quality contributes above and beyond gossiping extent in explaining a number of outcomes. Based on my findings, it is difficult to imagine future gossip studies that do not capture both gossiping extent and gossip quality.

Third, I used social exchange theory to ground my hypotheses, and in doing so, contributed to the basic understanding of what constitutes a valuable social exchange resource. Foa and Foa (1974; 1980) suggested that information (e.g., opinions) may constitute resources. This suggestion led scholars such as Rosnow (1976, p. 158) to speculate about "the value of gossip in the marketplace of social exchange." Indeed gossip does seem to derive value based on the degree to which senders and receivers perceive content to be useful, truthful and interesting. According to social exchange theory, if gossip quality is an actual benefit, it should deepen social exchange relationships. This reasoning is precisely what my results reflect. It is also worth noting

the relatively high agreement (based in ICCs) between sender and receiver regarding the value of the benefits exchanged (i.e., gossip quality).

My study is also the first—to my knowledge—to utilize an experience sampling methodology (ESM) to study gossiping. This represents an important advance, for several reasons. First, gossiping is viewed by many as a routine, day-to-day behavior that might not stick in the memory of the sender or receiver, if surveyed about it several weeks later. Second, my focus on gossip quality demands a recollection of the content of the gossiping, not just its general occurrence—further straining the memories of dyad members. Third, many of the consequences of gossiping are affective in nature and such states are more validly assessed in the moment, rather than retrospectively.

At the broadest level, I have attempted to answer calls for more rigorous research on the impact of gossiping within organizations (Kurland & Pelled, 2000; Michelson & Mouly, 2000). Along the way, I have identified several problematic assumptions such as the generally held belief that gossiping is an undesirable behavior (Noon & Delbridge, 1993). It is true that gossiping may result in undesirable outcomes such as feelings of shame and anxiety. However, results from this dissertation have also demonstrated a number of positive outcomes associated with gossiping, perhaps the most important of which is helping behavior. Helping behavior is relevant because it impacts individual-level outcomes such as performance reviews and compensation decisions all the way up to organizational-level outcomes such as productivity and efficiency (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). Future studies should explore other outcomes—both positive and negative—associated with gossiping in organizations.

Practical Implications

Management- and practitioner-based literature tends to focus exclusively on the negative aspects of gossiping (Noon & Delbridge, 1993). This tendency drives decisions at the highest levels of the organization—decisions which have a direct impact on employees. For example, it is not uncommon to find "zero tolerance of gossiping" language in an organization's employee code of conduct. When employees violate these types of policies, the results can be serious—up to and including termination. Management's prevailing attitude toward gossip is unfortunate given the many potential benefits of gossip. Punishing employees for gossiping may have unintended negative consequences for organizations such as stifled relationship building, decreased positive affect, and reduced helping behavior. Managers should consider these and other unintended consequences when designing human resource policies related to gossiping.

Gossiping is an integral part of organizational life and the idea of eradicating gossip altogether seems farfetched. Yet, entire books have been written advocating exactly that (e.g., Chapman, 2009). I take the view of Noon and Delbridge (1993, p. 32) who write "the removal of gossip from any social setting is not feasible unless there is a complete ban on all forms of communication." A more practical alternative to restricting organizational gossip would be for management to "elevate" gossiping by ensuring that gossip is of high quality. Employees could be encouraged to ask themselves several questions before gossiping. "Is what I am about to say instrumental to my coworker?" "Will my coworker be actively engaged in what I am about to say?" "How credible is my information?" By elevating gossiping, management will be working towards achieving desirable outcomes from an inevitable phenomenon.

Limitations

While my dissertation brings attention to the potential benefits of gossiping, it is not without its limitations. Studies employing experience sampling methodologies are bound by practical constraints including the time participants can allocate towards participation. As with all studies—but particularly with ESM studies—longer surveys run the risk of generating participant fatigue and depleting participant goodwill, thereby damaging the validity of the study (Dimotakis et al., 2013). Accordingly, I was careful to design my study so that participants could complete each survey in a reasonable amount of time. This design choice necessitated employing short scales to measure my constructs of interest and to limit the breadth of behavioral outcomes in my study. Future studies should consider a broader range of outcomes associated with gossiping to gain a more holistic view of the gossiping experience.

A second potential limitation of this study concerns recruiting methods. Participants were invited to participate using online classified advertisements posted in major metropolitan areas across the United States. Recruiting in this manner has certain advantages, such as increased generalizability, but it also has disadvantages. For example, there is no way to know with certainty whether participants self-reported data was valid. It is possible that a single participant could have created and nominated a fictitious coworker and then completed both sender and receiver surveys for the duration of the study. In an effort to mitigate these risks, I employed several screening techniques (e.g., looking for overlap in survey timestamps and IP addresses) to identify potentially fraudulent participants.

Another potential limitation resulting from recruitment methods involves the extent of helping behavior between dyads. Employees may have nominated coworkers who were generally more likely to engage in helping behavior as evidenced by their willingness to participate. However, several points are worth noting. First, the average helping scores in this study are comparably lower than other studies measuring helping behavior (e.g., Van Dyne & Ang, 1998; Zhou & George, 2001). Second, my research centered on within-person fluctuations in helping behavior depending on the level of gossiping. Accordingly, the average level of helping behavior matters less than it would for between-person designs. Still, future researchers may consider alternative recruitment methods such as recruiting employees from a single organization.

A fourth limitation concerns the nature of the study as it relates to the participation rate. At the day-level, several requirements had to be met in order for data to be considered for the final analysis. Those requirements included both sender and receiver completing both early and late afternoon surveys. Additionally, in order to gather data on gossiping activity, both members of the dyad needed to have spent time together before taking the early afternoon survey. While the average number of days per dyad exceeded two-thirds of the 15 day period, the aforementioned requirements resulted in a number of days that could not be included in the final analyses. Future studies may consider using alternative ESM designs such as signal based designs where random signals trigger survey responses or event-contingent designs where events themselves trigger survey responses (Dimotakis et al., 2013).

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