

Do We Need to Gossip? A structural Analysis of Gossip and its Functional Manifestations in Society

هل نحن بحاجة إلى النميمة؟ تحليل بنيوي للنميمة وتمظهراتها الوظيفية في المجتمع

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Received 15/04/2023 Accepted 12/07/2023 Published online 15/09/2023

تاريخ الوصول 2023/04/15 القبول 2023/07/12 النشر على الخط 2023/09/15

Abstract

The tendency to gossip is at the heart of the social life of many people, and most casual conversations are concerned with matters of social importance. All available historical information and cross-cultural data suggest that this has always been the case. Language and the ability to share gossip may have enabled ancestral human beings to form large cooperative alliances and to exploit diverse and uncharted ecologies. Most of the evolutionary research on gossip has focused on its social control function within groups. gossip asserts collective values or establishes normative boundaries, the effect of this being to increase group cohesion, and as a sanctioning mechanism of moral policing. sociologists have long argued that gossip may be an important mechanism through which people can resolve social dilemmas. and that social cooperation can be an evolutionary stable strategy if group members can exchange gossip that conveys reputational information. the totality of evidence to date demonstrates argued that heterosexual women may use gossip as their primary weapon of choice to derogate same-sex rivals in order to damage their reputation and render them less desirable as mates to the opposite sex. This involves attacking the physical attractiveness and sexual reputation of other women, which correspond to men's evolved mating preferences.

Keywords: Gossip - language - social control - reputation - women.

ملخص

يقع الميل إلى النميمة في صميم الحياة الاجتماعية لكثير من الأفراد، وتهتم معظم المحادثات غير الرسمية بالقضايا ذات الأهمية الاجتماعية. قد تكون اللغة والقدرة على مشاركة النميمة قد مكنت أجداد البشر من تكوين تحالفات تعاونية كبيرة. ركزت معظم الأبحاث التطورية حول القيل والقال على وظيفة الرقابة الاجتماعية داخل المجموعات، ولطالما جادل علماء الاجتماع بأن النميمة قد تكون آلية مهمة تؤهل الأفراد لحل العضلات الاجتماعية. وأن التعاون الاجتماعي يرجح أن يكون إستراتيجية تطورية مستقرة، إذا تمكن أعضاء المجموعة من تبادل النميمة الناقلة لمعلومات السمعة. تبرز مجمل الأدلة حتى الآن أن النساء من طرفين مختلفين قد يستخدمن النميمة كسلاح أساسي في اختيارهن للتخلص من المنافسين من نفس الجنس، بغرض الإضرار بسمعتهم وجعلهم أقل استحساناً كأزواج من الجنس الآخر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النميمة- اللغة- الضبط الاجتماعي- السمعة- النساء.

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1. INTRODUCTION

If one were to enumerate the most influential and universal social behaviors in human societies, gossip would undoubtedly be one of them (Giardini & Conte, 2012). Gossip, which is defined as the exchange of information with evaluative content about absent third parties (Dores Cruz et al., 2021; Foster, 2004; Hallett et al., 2009; Martinescu et al., 2014; Şantaş et al., 2018; Waddington & Fletcher, 2005). always involves at least three individuals: the gossiper, the social target (i.e., the topic of gossip), and the audience (Peters & Kashima, 2007). Jaworski & Coupland 2005 sees gossip as a form of talk that is essentially information giving, with much of that information of a confidential or personal nature, and researchers have estimated that people spend 65% (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Dunbar, 2004; Ellwardt et al., 2012; Farley et al., 2010; Feinberg et al., 2012) of their day-to-day conversations gossiping. Exchanging social information is fundamental for partner selection, social control, and coalition formation, just to name some of its main functions (Giardini & Conte, 2012). The tendency to gossip is at the heart of the social life of many people, and most casual conversations are concerned with matters of social importance (McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002). Thus, as Wilson et al. (2000) eloquently put it, the evidence suggests that people “gossip with an appetite that rivals their interest in food and sex” (p. 347). According to Beersma & Van Kleef (2012), by gossiping, people can exchange news with one another and create a “social map” of the environment in which they live. Gossip is an efficient way, and often the only way, to get access to information. This is especially the case when it concerns unfavorable information about a person. Individuals may gossip to validate the assumptions they have about the social world around them. Gossip targets (i.e., the people whom gossip is about) are absent when gossip is shared and have limited access and control over it. Gossip can be positive or negative, and research shows that positive and negative gossip co-occur frequently (Foster, 2004; Martinescu et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2000). The pervasiveness of gossip has been attributed to its multifaceted nature as it can serve many purposes: flagging norm violators, defaming competitors, venting negative emotions, sharing insights, entertainment, or strengthening social bonds (Beersma & Kleef, 2012; Mills, 2010; Waddington, 2005).

Gossip is not just universal but also essential for the social orientation of individuals and for achieving group-beneficial outcomes, such as cooperation and social order (Beersma & Kleef, 2011; Feinberg et al., 2014; Kniffin & Wilson, 2010; Wu et al., 2015). More specifically, Dunbar (2004) suggested that gossip might serve as a tool to constrain people from behaving in a self-serving manner at the cost of their group. Gossip also has its downsides, concerning wrecking the reputation and social exclusion of the target (Davis et al., 2019; Feinberg et al., 2012; Jaworski & Coupland, 2005; Kisfalusi et al., 2019; Martinescu et al., 2021). Reputational gossip can allow us to form coalitions with our allies and to destroy others' reputations by spreading negative information about them (Yucel et al., 2021). As important as gossip and reputation are in modern society, they were also likely of great relevance to our human ancestors who evolved in small and highly social nomadic hunter-gatherer groups (Dunbar, 2004). In relation to heterosexual women's competition with members of the same sex, it is reputation gossip that is important. To appreciate why this is the case, it is necessary to assume an evolutionary perspective through which gossip is argued to be an adaptation that influences the capacity of human beings to survive and reproduce (Davis et al., 2019). The recognition of its universality and its consequences for the individual and the group brought gossip into the spotlight of interdisciplinary research interest. this article provides an

expanded framework for exploring a wide range of functional dynamics of gossip through which social interactions of individuals that take place in multiple settings.

2. What is Gossip? Conceptual Construction

The definition of gossip is problematic, as illustrated by Waddington (2005), who identified 11 categories of behavior that can be recognized as gossip. The term 'gossip' has multiple linguistic meanings, as both a verb and a noun, and there is little disciplinary agreement as to precisely what gossip is. It is also linked variously with other communicative and conversational phenomena, such as chatting, bitching, rumors and storytelling. Gossip is therefore an inherently difficult topic to research, fraught with complex conceptual challenges and contradictions, and resistant to paradigmatic summing up. The origin of the word 'gossip' is 'godsibb' which signifies 'a person related to one in God,' in the sense of 'godparent' (Grosser et al., 2010; Homanfar & Johnson, 2003; Nevo et al., 1993). Middle English dropped the "d" and the word became "gossib" meaning godparent, or a drinking companion. It also described the woman who attended births with a midwife to give support and comfort to the mother during labor. Following the birth, this woman was sent out to make the event known to others. by the 19th century, "gossip" had developed its negative connotations. It meant groups of women talking together, idle, malicious talk, or a woman who indulged in this type of talk. Unfortunately, these later meanings prevailed. Other current meanings include: someone who habitually reveals sensational or personal facts; informal, chatty talk or writing about social events and persons; and a report of an intimate nature; and "a preoccupation with the 'nonessential,'" and the "illegitimate" (Grosser et al., 2010; Hafen, 2004; Homanfar & Johnson, 2003; Kuo et al., 2013; Laing, 1993; Nevo et al., 1993).

At the most general level, gossip behavior includes "idle talk" (Baumeister & Zhang, 2004; Farley et al., 2010; Foster, 2004; Laing, 1993). or "chit chat" about daily life (Foster, 2004). "women's talk," inauthentic discourse, to be discouraged or banned (Jaworski & Coupland, 2005; Michelson et al., 2010; Waddington, 2005; Waddington & Fletcher, 2005). 'unimportant chattering,' 'talking about daily life, social or personal matters,' and 'the exchange of personal information' (positive or negative) in an evaluative way (positive or negative) about someone who is not present... that arises in the context of social network formation, change, and maintenance... [and that fulfils] a variety of essential social network functions including entertainment, maintaining group cohesiveness, establishing, changing and maintaining group norms, group power structure and group membership (Ceylan & Çetinkaya, 2020; Clegg & Iterson, 2009; Decoster et al., 2013; Dores Cruz et al., 2021; Fehr & Sutter, 2019; Feinberg et al., 2012; Hallett et al., 2009; Martinescu et al., 2014; Şantaş et al., 2018; Waddington & Fletcher, 2005). Gholipour et al. (2011) describe gossip as transferring invalid information verbally. Gossip is a guess about a definite subject which is not certain to be true and usually goes from one person to another verbally and it is like a snowball, the more it goes around the bigger it becomes. It usually starts by saying: it is said that. A more neutral definition of gossip is proposed by Laing (1993): "Gossip is a topical assertion about personal qualities or behavior, usually but not necessarily formulated on the basis of hearsay, that is deemed trivial or nonessential within the immediate social context" (p.37). These authors stress that gossip is not restricted to assertions about others, but also refers to self-disclosures.

Dores Cruz et al. (2021) study showed that 88.27% of the scientific definitions implicitly or explicitly mention the involvement of a sender and receiver of the communication. Moreover, 90.74% of the definitions (explicitly or implicitly) refer to a target of gossip, which is a person or group of persons about which gossip is communicated. Most definitions (84.25%) refer to the full "gossip triad" or imply it, which is in line with theoretical arguments that the most basic depiction

of gossip's structure is a triad of a sender, a receiver, and a target. Our own definition of 'gossip' follows Nevo et al. (1993) but with some alterations. We define gossip as a verbal or written communication with no conscious purpose, regarding the personal matters of a third party. Accordingly, gossip is a social activity that centers on people and is engaged in by people. Although it does not have a conscious purpose, it nevertheless may serve social and personal needs. We excluded from the category of gossip discussions about one's own affairs, since it seems to us that gossip implies a third person or persons as its object. The most common definitional dimensions for gossip are (a) that it is informal talk, (b) has some degree of veracity, and (c) it is personally focused (usually on an absent third party) (Mills, 2010).

In recent years, the way in which researchers perceive the nature and meaning of gossip has changed significantly. Traditionally, gossip was viewed as socially undesirable and immoral behavior. It is seen as malicious, destructive, and largely reprehensible (e.g., Decoster et al., 2013; Dunbar, 2004; Houmanfar & Johnson, 2003; Kakar, 2013) and commonly understood as negative talk with intention to harm someone. However, more recent studies pointed out that gossip can promote the existence of groups because it often is a response to the observation of antisocial behavior (Decoster et al., 2013). allows for indirect social comparisons, increases intimacy of social bonds, communicates information, clarifies group membership, and enhances perceptions of status, power, or esteem (Farley et al., 2010). Dunbar (2004) offers perhaps the most extreme defense of gossip, arguing that "gossiping is . . . the core of human social relationships, indeed of society itself (p.100). These relatively innocuous roots lead one to wonder whether gossip must always be a negative activity. Indeed, many scholars point out that gossip's valence does not necessarily have to be negative (McAndrew, 2014). Grosser et al. (2010) differentiate "blame gossip" from "praise gossip" and predict that both forms will occur in differentiated organizational cultures. Ben-Ze'ev suggests that an even distribution exists between negative and positive information in gossip exchanges and further argues that contrary to its popular reputation, then, gossip is not basically concerned with detraction, slander, or character assassination. Negative information may be remembered better, and hence the illusory impression of its dominance. It is important to note that whether gossip is viewed as positive or negative depends on the level of analysis employed as well as the point of view from which one is examining gossip. For example, discussing a third party's negative attributes may appear to be a purely negative activity from an individual perspective, but it may serve a positive function at the group level in that this information can potentially protect the group from harmful behavior. This makes each piece of gossip difficult to definitively classify as universally positive or negative.

3. Gossip and the Evolution of Language

Dunbar (1996) proposes that the evolution of language can be traced back to the grooming behavior of primates, and that the development of language can be explained by understanding evolutionary changes in the size of human brains, the size of human social groups, and the need for humans to develop an efficient means for social bonding. The bonds themselves are created largely through GOSSIP, which Dunbar suggests is the human correlate of primate grooming. Therein, language (and thus gossip) functions as a mechanism for social bonding by increasing the potential number of interaction partners (Estévez et al., 2022; Sommerfeld et al., 2007). and it has been suggested that 'language evolved to allow us to gossip' (Dunbar, 2004; Dunbar, 1996; Waddington, 2005). A strong case can, then, be made for the suggestion that language evolved to facilitate the bonding of large social groups (Davis et al., 2019; Fehr & Sutter, 2019). It achieves this mainly because it allows us to increase the size of our broadcast network (the number of people with whom we can

communicate directly and indirectly) and because it allows us to exchange information about changes that occur within our social networks. according to Davis et al. (2019) Language and the ability to share gossip may have enabled ancestral human beings to form large cooperative alliances and to exploit diverse and uncharted ecologies. social gossip theory states that human language evolved in response to the mounting pressures of maintaining beneficial interpersonal relations within expanding social networks. Furthermore, Dunbar argues that language serves four important social functions: (1) to monitor additions (e.g., births), defections (e.g., deaths), and movement (e.g., changes in social status) of individuals within our interpersonal network; (2) to engage in impression management strategies for our personal benefit (e.g., to attract potential mates); (3) to penalize members of our social networks who do not abide by its rules, laws, or norms (i.e., free riders); and (4) to receive direction or advice from others (Farley et al., 2010).

Dunbar (2004) has argued that gossip, in the broad sense of conversation about social and personal topics, is a fundamental prerequisite of the human condition. Were we not able to engage in discussions of these issues, we would not be able to sustain the kinds of societies that we do. Gossip in this broad sense plays a number of different roles in the maintenance of socially functional groups through time; although simple social bonding is perhaps the single most important of these roles (and was perhaps the original impetus to the evolution of language), language permits other social functions. Of these, the exchange of information on free riders has undoubtedly become important in the large dispersed societies of modern humans. In some respects, its development may be seen as a natural outgrowth of our social brain, because it exploits the intense interest that we naturally have in the doings of others. That it can be carried to extremes may be a matter for regret, but this should not distract us from the central issue that gossip (in its broadest sense) is the central plank on which human sociality is founded. In reality, the cognitive demands of gossip are the very reason why such large brains evolved in the human lineage.

4. Gossip as a Social Control Mechanism

The universally important role played by gossip in human groups has led many researchers to propose that a human propensity for gossip is an evolved psychological adaptation that enabled individuals to be socially successful in our ancestral environments (Kniffin & Wilson, 2005). It is a legitimate style of communication that performs distinct social functions (Laing, 1993). Exposure to gossip is a feature of the social environment that has not been extensively studied, but has been shown to be an issue of growing concern (Kiss et al., 2014). Most of the evolutionary research on gossip has focused on its social control function within groups (e.g., Feinberg et al., 2012; Foster, 2004; Michelson et al., 2010; Sommerfeld et al., 2007; Waddington & Fletcher, 2005). Exercising social control roughly means to isolate and punish cheaters (Giardini & Conte, 2012). The central thesis is that gossip is a powerful mechanism of informal social control, which contributes to the preservation of social groups and their norms (Waddington & Fletcher, 2005; Wittek & Wielers, 1998). This interest stems from the observation that gossip can be a very effective way of enforcing conformity by reminding group members which attitudes, values, and behavior are generally deemed appropriate or inappropriate amongst the group, as well as what happens to those who transgress against these group norms (Davis et al., 2019). gossip plays a significant role in building and maintaining social relationships (Baumeister & Zhang, 2004; Kakar, 2013). the social perspective indicates the value and importance of gossip as a social and cultural phenomenon that maintains social boundaries, and acts as an informal method of social control. To facilitate the interconnection of large social groups, and as a means of regulating networks through the exchange of social knowledge about the misdeeds of others (Waddington & Fletcher, 2005). Gholipour et al.,

(2011) believes that gossip is a social phenomenon that contains social judgments and evaluations and can be used as a way to guide small groups of people and it can teach the group about their good or bad behaviors. and multiple studies have demonstrated that it can have beneficial group-level outcomes when negative reports help identify defectors or norm-violators (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Estévez et al., 2022; Feinberg et al., 2014). This view suggests that gossip may prevent free riding or malicious behavior of individuals whose behavior may become the substance of gossip (Fehr & Sutter, 2019). It is very likely that gossip is necessary for healthy social functioning. It is often the only source of valuable social information. Yet, gossip is considered morally suspect (Wert & Salovey, 2004).

Dunbar (2004) argued that gossip may have been selected for because it strengthens the intimacy of social bonds. It has also been argued to have been selected for because it helps to control against norm violations in groups (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Dores Cruz et al., 2021; Mills, 2010; Waddington, 2005). Despite the potentially ruinous consequences of gossip, Gossip is a particularly effective strategy for detecting free riders (Davis et al., 2019; Farley, 2011; Feinberg et al., 2014; Grosser et al., 2010). gossip serves as a mechanism to keep the behavior of (powerful) individuals in check by pressuring them to adhere to social norms. In this way, gossip promotes the common good (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012). Gossip conveys shared conceptions regarding rules and values governing behavior in a particular time and place (Laing, 1993). Frequently, people initiate gossip to make social comparisons between themselves and others. Gossip allows them to learn indirectly what behaviors, achievements or infractions are acceptable within a situation (Laing, 1993; Martinescu et al., 2014). individuals believe that spreading negative gossip is wrong, they also believe that it is wrong to not share information when an individual commits an immoral act. Although gossip is often used to inform about others' deviant behaviours, positive gossip is sometimes used just as often as negative gossip (Caivano et al., 2020). negatively valenced gossip serves to deter people from violating group or societal rules. Thus, gossip serves as a tool to regulate relationships and identify potentially untrustworthy targets within a society (Yucel et al., 2021). By gossiping, one can "warn" group members against others who violate group norms, and it is possible that this explicit motive is a reason to instigate gossip (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012). there is evidence that people who see behaviors that deviate positively or negatively from social norms (i.e., admirable or disgusting behaviors) are highly motivated to discuss these behaviors with others (Peters et al., 2017). Jaworski & Coupland (2005) suggests that gossip functions in at least two ways: as a means of identifying group membership and group boundaries, and as a sanctioning mechanism of moral policing. From this viewpoint, the strategic use of gossip is to debate moral issues, and to assess whether or not the group would sanction certain morally relevant behaviors. Individuals may also gossip to gauge and build community support for punishment that is coordinated and more direct. As Guala argues, punishment that is coordinated carries less risk of retaliation and can be more effective at stabilizing collective action than distributed, individual acts of punishment (von Rueden & Gurven, 2012). Empirical studies have shown that negative gossip is used to socially control and sanction uncooperative behavior within groups (Ellwardt et al., 2012). In this way, gossip can be viewed as an efficient tool of punishment in order to constrain future self-serving behavior (Decoster et al., 2013). In each of these cases, gossip has been recognized as an important line of defense against violations of group-beneficial norms (Kniffin & Wilson, 2005).

5. Gossip Reputation and Promoting Cooperation in Group

One of sociology's major concerns is to explain why the level of social cohesion differs so strongly within and between social collectivities. Why do some societies, groups, communities, or

organizations succeed in eliciting and maintaining high levels of collaboration and contributions to the public good, whereas others fail? How do successful communities enact and foster their participants' sustained compliance with norms and regulations? (Giardini & Wittek, 2019). Most of the studies treat gossip and reputation as different but related phenomena (e.g., Davis et al., 2019; Ellwardt et al., 2012; Giardini & Wittek, 2019; Rosas, 2012; von Rueden & Gurven, 2012; Yucel et al., 2021). They show that gossip, reputation, and cooperation are closely intertwined: gossip affects reputations; reputations can be gained or lost through gossiping; and cooperation affects and is affected by both. Hence, although research into the mechanisms through which gossip and reputation sustain or undermine cooperation has made considerable progress, a systematic overview of the links between these three phenomena is still missing (Giardini & Wittek, 2019). Hardy & Van Vugt (2006) Recent studies have revealed that participants will contribute significantly more to a public good if they can earn greater status and prestige for their generous behavior. Martinescu et al., (2021) proposed that "gossip and reputation systems could have a sustainable effect on cooperation and potentially cultivate voluntary cooperation". Theories of indirect reciprocity explain large-scale human cooperation in terms of conditional helping by individuals who want to uphold a reputation and then to be included in future cooperation. Reputational information can also help to solve the "tragedy of the commons" (Feinberg et al., 2012; Giardini & Conte, 2012; Sommerfeld et al., 2007; Wedekind & Milinski, 2000). a social dilemma referring to the fact that when everyone benefits from an intact resource, there is an individual advantage to cheat (e.g., overexploit or pollute), because cheating brings economic advantages to the executor, whereas costs are distributed among all group members (Giardini & Conte, 2012).

In populations where there is uncertainty about the type of player one is matched with, players may want to discriminate against those who have past histories of uncooperative behavior, and discriminate in favor of those who have reliably cooperated in the past. This means that if reputation-based discrimination is prevalent, strategic reputation building can be a sensible strategy. In these populations, people may find that the immediate costs of cooperation are outweighed by the rewards that their positive reputation delivers over time. Indeed, people do appear to be highly sensitive to the possibility that their behaviours may have reputational consequences, as they cooperate more when they believe that they may be observed. When actions are not perfectly observable, it is still possible for people to acquire reputation information through their social networks by means of gossip (Fonseca & Peters, 2018). Indeed, people with a cooperative reputation are more likely to receive benefits from third parties because people base their behavior on others' reputation. Thus, when interacting with someone who can gossip to one's potential future partners, upregulating generosity and cooperation may improve one's reputation and result in indirect benefits. Also, some evidence suggests that people are more cooperative in response to gossip only when the gossip recipient could personally identify them or when others know about their previous behavior. Importantly, people are also more cooperative when their behavior is known by their future partner (Wu et al., 2015). By contributing to a public good, an individual may thus build up a reputation for being generous, which might make them more attractive as future exchange partners. Whatever the precise mechanism, we suggest that when reputations are at stake, this is likely to induce competition. On one hand, people will be competing with each other in terms of generosity to advertise themselves as future exchange partners, and on the other hand, observers are competing for access to the most altruistic partners, hence, the term "competitive altruism". Competitive altruism is presumably widespread in human societies. The anthropological literature documents various examples of excessive public displays of altruism and generosity. For example,

in a Melanesian tribe, family members organize a party after a relative's death, which includes giving food and gifts to all guests. Turtle meat is most valued, presumably because turtle hunting is a dangerous and time-consuming activity. Therefore, a feast of turtle meat is an honest signal for the quality of the men in a family (Hardy & Van Vugt, 2006).

The recent years have seen a plethora of research on the social functions of gossip and reputation across disciplines (e.g., Estévez et al., 2022; Feinberg et al., 2014; Feinberg et al., 2012; Fonseca & Peters, 2018; Giardini & Conte, 2012; McAndrew, 2014). Reputation exchange through gossip is important in social interactions. On the individual level, it allows people to select reliable and trustworthy partners, avoid being cheated by free riders, and manage their reputation to enhance indirect benefits from third parties. On the collective level, it helps to deter free riding and maintain high levels of cooperation that promote the group welfare. Evidence suggests that reputational cues in the social environment, either explicit or implicit, can promote cooperation. Indeed, people are more cooperative when others know their behavioral history or when their partners will gossip. People also condition their cooperation on others' reputation, and gossip exerts a strong influence beyond direct observation (Wu et al., 2015). Through gossip, group members can influence the target's social reputation: They can paint an image of a person as trustworthy and likable, or, in contrast, selfish and immoral. Ultimately, such gossip can lead to social exclusion, an outcome that people fear and strive to prevent (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011; Rosas, 2012; Tennie, 2012). Gossip also has implications for the overall functioning of the group in which individuals are embedded. concerning wrecking the reputation (Estévez et al., 2022; Yucel et al., 2021). as well as a means of detecting betrayal by others (McAndrew, 2014; McAndrew et al., 2007). despite its harmful consequences for individuals, negative gossip might have beneficial consequences for group outcomes. Empirical studies have shown that negative gossip is used to socially control and sanction uncooperative behavior within groups. Individuals often cooperate and comply with group norms simply because they fear reputation damaging gossip and subsequent ostracism (Dores Cruz et al., 2021; Ellwardt et al., 2012; Feinberg et al., 2014; Martinescu et al., 2021; McAndrew, 2014). Gossip promotes cooperation in groups in two primary ways: (1) by spreading reputational information that warns group members about a transgressor, leading them to avoid or ostracize the transgressor; and (2) by increasing reputational incentives that deter individuals from behaving antisocially (Feinberg et al., 2012).

6. Gossip as Women's Intrasexual Competition Strategy of Choice

Gossip is argued to constitute an adaptation that enabled human beings to disseminate information about and to keep track of others within a vast and expansive social network. Although gossip can effectively encourage in-group cooperation, it can also be used as a low-cost and covert aggressive tactic to compete with others for valued resources (Davis et al., 2019). Several studies have confirmed that people are indeed most interested in gossip about individuals of the same sex as themselves who also happen to be around their own age (e.g., McAndrew, 2014; McAndrew et al., 2007; McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002). In line with evolutionary logic, the totality of evidence to date demonstrates that women prefer to aggress indirectly against their rivals via tactics such as gossip and social exclusion, in comparison to men who use proportionally more direct forms of aggression (e.g., physical aggression) (Davis et al., 2019). An interest in the affairs of same-sex others is especially strong among females, and women are more likely than men to use gossip in an aggressive, competitive manner (Farley et al., 2010). Within this context, gossip has been argued to be the weapon of choice among women to indirectly aggress against same-sex competitors. This may be the case because, over evolutionary time, women and men have encountered selective

pressures that have differentially influenced their survival and reproduction, resulting in divergent adaptations to overcome these obstacles (Davis et al., 2019).

The goal of such gossip is to exclude competitors from a social group and damage the competitor's ability to maintain a reliable social network of her own. Timeworn assumptions about an affinity between females and negative gossip appear to be more than just a stereotype (McAndrew, 2014). As such, it has been argued that heterosexual women may use gossip as their primary weapon of choice to derogate same-sex rivals in order to damage their reputation and render them less desirable as mates to the opposite sex. This involves attacking the physical attractiveness and sexual reputation of other women, which correspond to men's evolved mating preferences. (Davis et al., 2019). Recent research suggests that women preferentially disclose reputation-damaging, over reputation-enhancing, information about rivals and this strategic information sharing is predicted by cues of romantic rival threat (e.g., mate poaching, physical attractiveness, and provocative clothing) (Wyckoff et al., 2019). Davis et al. (2019) argued that women primarily compete in two particular ways: (1) through advertising by enhancing their appearance (e.g., using make-up, wearing formfitting clothing, having cosmetic surgery) and (2) by gossiping about other women to tarnish their reputation. Self-promotion through enhancing one's physical appearance is a competitive form of intersexual selection which women use to attract the attention of men. In contrast, gossip is argued to be the key intrasexual tactic that women use to socially exclude other women, as well as to call their appearance and sexual reputation into question. Within this context, women's gossip is principally a form of competitor derogation, which refers to any act performed to reduce a same-sex rival's mate value, relative to one's own, by focusing specifically on the traits that are desired most by the opposite sex. For women, this entails attacking a competitor's youthfulness, attractiveness, and her sexual reputation.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, Gossip is a phenomenon that occurs in everyday life. and is an evolutionary and social tool that is ubiquitous in society and that has the potential to define our relationships for better or worse. Although gossip is often perceived to be negative, both positive and negative gossip play an important role in how we create and maintain relationships with others. Some people gossip from a need for power and control, others from a need for social affiliation, and others from curiosity or a need for social comparison. This review has shown that gossip is a heterogeneous phenomenon in content, forms, and functions. It may be manifested differently across the life span. It may idly fill hours of the day, passing practically unnoticed, or it may be motivationally generated or consumed (consciously or not) to alter internal states and achieve socially important external goals. In this article, we have reviewed several hypotheses about what those functions are, including maintaining or of socially functional groups through time; although simple social bonding is perhaps the single most important of these roles. Gossip allows people to gather and validate information, to enjoy themselves with others, and to protect their group against norm violations. our results add to extant theorizing and research on when and how gossip and reputation promote cooperation. Indeed, people are concerned about their reputation and behave more generously only in specific contexts, such as toward in-group versus out-group members, or when perceiving their group as an entity with interconnected members. Gossip also led the emergence of a new, efficient, and low-cost form of indirect aggression within the realm of courtship and mating: competitor derogation. Language and the ability to share gossip may have enabled ancestral human beings to form large cooperative alliances and to exploit diverse and uncharted ecologies. In summary, continued research on gossip from an evolutionary perspective holds great promise for helping us to

understand the dynamics of human gossip networks, as well as a variety of other related social phenomena. Future research should attempt to determine the extent to which more traditional social psychological models (e.g., social learning theory and social comparison) can themselves be thought of in evolutionary terms, and search for situations in which these alternative theories might make different predictions. Hopefully, such an eclectic theoretical approach ultimately will provide even greater predictive power for social phenomena such as gossip.

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