Division or Solidarity: The Double-Edged Sword of Workplace Gossip

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Abstract

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Despite the ubiquity of gossip, current scholarly perspectives of gossip conceptualize gossip as a largely uniform behavior, which simplifies its inherent complexity, ambiguity, and broader consequences in organizations. In this dissertation, I seek to contribute to theory on gossip in organizations by addressing two key questions. First, how do group members interpret and respond to gossiping? Second, what are the consequences of gossip on the perceived social structure of the group? In Chapter 1, I theorize how recipients of gossip interpret and react to gossip in order to develop a typology of gossip and an attributional process model that integrates the divergent outcomes of gossiping. In Chapter 2, I integrate faultline theory to examine the relational implications of gossip in the broader group context. I suggest that gossip affects groups by activating both dormant and socially constructed faultlines that result in the perception of subgroups. In Chapter 3, I conduct a two-wave field study and two experimental studies to empirically examine the theory presented in Chapter 2. In Chapter 4, I offer a summary and concluding remarks for future research on gossip.

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INTRODUCTION

Gossip is a ubiquitous form of informal social interaction in organizations. A cross-disciplinary definition of gossip has emerged as the informal exchange of evaluative talk about absent third parties (Brady, Brown, & Liang, 2017; Dunbar, 2004; Foster, 2004; Kurland & Pelled, 2000). Although lay perceptions of gossip presume that it is malicious, the prevailing research has accepted the potential for gossip to also be positive in its evaluative content (Brady et al., 2017; Fine & Rosnow, 1978; Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, & Labianca, 2010; Kurland & Pelled, 2000).

The study of gossip has evolved across a number of disciplines. In anthropology, the cultural phenomenon of gossip has been examined for its role in maintaining social communities (Gluckman, 1963; Hannerz, 1967; Paine, 1967). In communications research, scholars have examined the ability of gossip to inform, influence, and entertain its participants (Rosnow, 1977; Suls, 1977). Although management research has traditionally treated gossip as a form of deviant behavior (Robinson & Bennett, 1995), nascent research has begun to recognize its complexity in organizations (Brady et al., 2017), examining its implications on social norms (Baumeister, Zhang, & Vohs, 2004) and employee relational dynamics (Kurland & Pelled, 2000). This research has often taken a social network approach to examine the role of gossip in the evolution of interpersonal relationships (Burt, 2005; Ellwardt, Labianca, & Wittek, 2012; Ellwardt, Steglich, & Wittek, 2012).

While informal conversations are commonplace in organizations, the definitional criteria of gossip as 1) evaluative and 2) about absent third parties distinguish it from other types of communication frequently studied in the management literature. For example, employee voice is similarly an informal form of communication (Morrison, 2014), but it is specifically concerned

with bringing change to organizational practices, policies, or behaviors rather than evaluating an absent third party. As another example, evaluative information about organizational members is often provided in the workplace through feedback (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979; Zhou, 1998), yet the evaluative content of feedback focuses on its recipient rather than an absent third party. Researchers have even examined the informal communication of personal information about the self through self-disclosure in the workplace (Phillips, Rothbard, & Dumas, 2009). While each of these forms of informal communication may share some similarities with gossip, the distinguishing features of gossip present unique implications for organizations. These defining features of gossip have thus guided the emerging theories of workplace gossip and its consequences (Brady et al., 2017; Kurland & Pelled, 2000).

Despite the growing interest in gossip and the recognition of its pervasiveness in organizations, the current literature offers a limited perspective of the implications of gossip by focusing on the consequences of gossip for those who are the subject of gossip and treating gossip largely as a uniform behavior. While this approach highlights that gossip is a social phenomenon that shapes relationships (Michelson, van Iterson, & Waddington, 2010), it simplifies the complexity and ambiguity inherent in gossip and its broader consequences in organizations. On one hand, gossip has the potential to offer many social functions in organizations (Foster, 2004). On the other hand, the prevailing lay perception of gossip suggests that it is interpersonally harmful and deviant (Emler, 1994). To reconcile these divergent implications of gossip, it is imperative to broaden our understanding of how workplace gossip impacts the way that people relate to others in organizations. Therefore, in this dissertation, I seek to contribute to theory on gossip in organizations by addressing two key questions:

First, how do group members interpret and respond to gossiping? While much of the research on the consequences of gossip has emphasized the person who is the subject of gossip (Ellwardt, Labianca, et al., 2012; Feinberg, Willer, & Schultz, 2014; McAndrew, Bell, & Garcia, 2007; Sommerfeld, Krambeck, & Milinski, 2008), the consequences of gossip ultimately depend on those actually involved in the exchange of gossip. Given the ambiguity inherent in gossip (Hess & Hagen, 2006; Kuttler, Parker, & La Greca, 2002), recipients of gossip are faced with the burden of interpreting gossip, which creates uncertainty regarding the relational implications for the sender and recipient directly involved in its exchange. Thus, new theory is needed to understand the different ways that people make sense of the gossip they receive and what this suggests about the consequences of gossiping.

Second, what are the consequences of gossip on the perceived social structure of the group? While the existing management literature has largely focused on the specific individuals involved in episodes of gossip, early anthropological research on gossip emphasized the inherent group-orientation of gossip (Gluckman, 1963; Hannerz, 1967; Paine, 1967). This discrepancy points to a need to examine the broader relational implications of gossip beyond these isolated episodes. Shifting the perspective of gossip to consider the broader group context, integrates a fundamental aspect of gossip that is critical to understanding its consequences in organizations more fully.

In the first chapter of this dissertation I will review the research on how participants of gossip interpret and react to gossip in order to develop a typology of gossip and theoretical model for its relational consequences. I theorize several patterns for how gossip may be interpreted that may yield conflicting implications for group members. I propose that through an attributional process, gossip is interpreted, and its relational consequences for the gossip sender

are manifested through the contrasting possible responses by the recipient. In the second chapter, I integrate the relational implications of gossip into the broader group context by suggesting that gossip is a mechanism through which the perception of subgroups may form through the activation of both dormant and socially constructed faultlines. I propose that this effect of gossip on the perceived social structure of the group reconciles the divergent consequences that it produces in organizations. In the third chapter, I review the results of three studies to empirically examine the theorized relationships from Chapter 2. Using fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), I take a configurational approach to identify unique configurations of the dimensions of gossip associated with the activation of faultlines in a two-wave field study of elementary school teachers. I then evaluate the causal effect of gossip on the activation of faultlines in two experimental studies. In the fourth chapter, I provide an overall summary of my dissertation and offer concluding remarks on future directions for gossip research.

Note: Chapter 1 of this dissertation is based on the following published article:

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CHAPTER 1: TYPOLOGY AND ATTRIBUTIONAL PROCESS MODEL OF WORKPLACE GOSSIP

Despite the ubiquity of gossip in the workplace, the management literature has focused primarily on the person who is the subject of gossip. However, gossip is a complex social phenomenon, and its consequences depend on the multiple parties involved (Michelson et al., 2010). In addition to the gossip target (the absent person who is gossiped about), a gossip episode involves a gossip sender (the person who shares the gossip) and a gossip recipient (the person who receives the gossip). The extant literature has devoted much attention to the gossip target in terms of the antecedents of being a target of gossip (Ellwardt, Labianca, & Wittek, 2012; McAndrew, Bell, & Garcia, 2007; Wert & Salovey, 2004) and the social consequences of gossip for the gossip target (Feinberg et al., 2014; Sommerfeld et al., 2008; Zinko & Rubin, 2015). However, the role of the gossip sender has largely been limited to the antecedents that promote gossip activity and its subsequent effects on the social network structure (Ellwardt, Steglich, & Wittek, 2012; Ellwardt, Wittek, & Wielers, 2012; Grosser et al., 2010). A notable exception is Kurland and Pelled's (2000) conceptual model of the effects of gossip on the acquisition of power, which demonstrates the potential for self-gain from spreading gossip.

Because of the ambiguity inherent in gossip (Hess & Hagen, 2006; Kuttler et al., 2002), the outcomes for gossip senders are contingent upon whether their behavior of gossiping is interpreted and evaluated favorably by gossip recipients. Given the ambiguity inherent in gossip (Hess & Hagen, 2006; Kuttler et al., 2002), gossip recipients must account for several potential social motives for gossiping as they interpret the gossip episode (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Fine & Rosnow, 1978; Rosnow, 1977). Gossip may benefit the gossip sender when it is

interpreted favorably and elicits reciprocity or cooperation. Yet, it may yield social consequences for the gossip sender when it is interpreted unfavorably.

In this chapter, we seek to advance the literature on workplace gossip by developing a multilevel process model of gossip recipient attributions in response to gossip and the subsequent social outcomes for the gossip sender. By taking the perspective of the gossip recipient, we develop theory on how the gossip sender is impacted by the gossip recipient's attributions of and responses to gossip. we focus on integrating theories of gossip (Brady et al., 2017; Kurland & Pelled, 2000) with attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967), which provides a foundation for understanding the social evaluations of behaviors, to explain how gossip recipients react to gossip. We begin by reviewing the social function of gossip in organizations and the attributional process that underlies its implications. We then develop a typology of gossip based on key characteristics of gossip (Kurland & Pelled, 2000) that capture archetypal patterns of gossip. The proposed typology delineates four types of workplace gossip based on the dimensions of valence and work-relatedness: 1) *protection-based gossip* that alerts the workgroup to potential threats, 2) *derogation-based gossip* that negatively influences a coworker's reputation, 3) *endorsement-based gossip* that enhances a coworker's reputation through praise of exemplary behavior, and 4) *communion-based gossip* that strengthens interpersonal ties through social enjoyment. Finally, we present a process model of how gossip recipients engage in an attributional process to interpret the social implications of the gossip they receive. At the episodic level, the attribution process contributes to the gossip recipient's decision to reciprocate gossip. Over time, gossip also contributes to perceptions of the gossip sender's trustworthiness and can help or backfire on gossip senders in the form of cooperation or social undermining by gossip recipients.

Gossip in Organizations

Research on gossip suggests that gossip is prevalent in organizations because it offers several purposeful functions for group members (Baumeister et al., 2004; Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Noon & Delbridge, 1993; Wert & Salovey, 2004). Specifically, gossip promotes effective functioning amongst group members through the dissemination of reputational information (Dunbar, 2004; Emler, 1994; Foster, 2004). Gossip is an efficient and valuable mechanism for both building and undermining reputations in groups by spreading evaluative information (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011; Feinberg, Willer, Stellar, & Keltner, 2012; Zinko & Rubin, 2015). Reputational information accumulates as the gossip sender and recipient engage in the reciprocation and mutual exchange of gossip (Eder & Enke, 1991; Ellwardt, Steglich, et al., 2012; Rosnow, 1977). This reputational information influences the formation of relationships in the workplace (Ellwardt, Steglich, et al., 2012; Erdogan, Bauer, & Walter, 2015; Grosser et al., 2010) and helps group members to identify who they can and cannot trust (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011; Sommerfeld, Krambeck, Semmann, & Milinski, 2007; Wu, Balliet, & Van Lange, 2016).

Gossip thus presents its recipients with valuable information that can facilitate both positive and negative future social interactions with others. These consequences of gossip are not limited to the gossip target but also extend to the gossip sender by influencing their reputation amongst group members (Kurland & Pelled, 2000) and their relationships in the workgroup (Ellwardt, Steglich, & Wittek, 2012). Gossip senders are susceptible to these consequences because of the critical role they play in exchanging sensitive information when they gossip (Ellwardt, Steglich, & Wittek, 2012). As the initiator and source of the gossip, gossip senders are likely to be implicated and held responsible for the gossip they spread. Ultimately, gossip poses

social consequences for the gossip sender that can manifest through both positive behaviors of cooperation and negative behaviors of social undermining. Although gossiping can positively influence who people choose to cooperate with (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011; Sommerfeld et al., 2007; J. Wu et al., 2016), it can also elicit social disapproval of the gossip sender (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012) expressed through negative interactions to socially undermine the gossip sender (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002). Whether gossip results in positive or negative consequences for the gossip sender thus depends on how it is interpreted by the gossip recipient.

To further understand the responses of gossip recipients, We draw from attribution theory to develop a theoretical model of the causal attributions that determine the consequences of engaging in gossip. Because attribution theory describes how individuals make sense of social experiences and the motives behind others' behaviors (Heider, 1958; Kelley & Michela, 1980), our theorizing examines unsolicited gossip where gossip recipients are likely to use an attributional process to seek causal explanations for why a gossip episode was initiated. Although gossip can be solicited by the recipient (Ayim, 1994), gossip recipients are less likely to question why the gossip episode occurred when it is a direct result of their own request. Thus, to understand the consequences of gossiping for gossip senders, we focus on unsolicited gossip where gossip senders play a more agentic role in the gossip episode.

Attribution Process in Social Interactions

According to attribution theory, individuals form perceptions of their social experiences through a process of attributing and interpreting causal explanations (Heider, 1958). In interpersonal relationships, people infer the motivations of others from their behaviors to form judgments of their dispositions and characteristics (Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967). In the workplace, the attribution of motives influences how individuals evaluate and respond to

coworker behaviors, including citizenship behaviors (Allen & Rush, 1998; D. E. Johnson, Erez, Kiker, & Motowidlo, 2002), social influence tactics (Stern & Westphal, 2010), social undermining (Crossley, 2009), and even unethical behaviors (Fragale, Rosen, Xu, & Merideth, 2009). These motives influence how individuals make sense of their interpersonal relationships and determine the nature of future interactions (Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003).

Gossip is a complex social behavior that can be attributed to several motives, ranging from malicious to prosocial motives (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Brady et al., 2017; Lyons & Hughes, 2015). From the gossip sender's perspective, gossip can reduce uncertainty that may be perceived in the situational context (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Brady et al., 2017; Wert & Salovey, 2004). Thus, gossip is a purposeful behavior by gossip senders to manage this uncertainty and bring about various social consequences (Paine, 1967). However, it remains unclear how gossip recipients evaluate the gossip sender's motives. Gossip may be considered a violation of normative behavior in the workplace due to lay perceptions of gossip as a deviant behavior (Emler, 1994; Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Yet, gossip may also signal friendship and solidarity by indicating a willingness to share sensitive information (Ellwardt, Steglich, & Wittek, 2012; Grosser et al., 2010). Thus, gossip recipients are faced with the challenge of discerning why the gossip sender is gossiping in order to understand its relational implications.

Because of this ambiguity and uncertainty inherent in gossip, the reactions of gossip recipients depend on the motives that they perceive or infer from the gossip sender's behavior (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Gambetta, 1994). Attribution theory suggests that an actor's intentions are inferred from the effects of their behavior (Jones & Davis, 1965). In the context of communication, this is demonstrated by the influence that evaluations of the message have on how recipients evaluate the source of the message (Slater & Rouner, 1996). In the same way, the

nature of the message that is being gossiped is likely to influence the attribution of motives that gossip recipients form. In other words, *what* the gossip sender is gossiping about provides cues for gossip recipients to discern *why* the gossip sender is gossiping. Therefore, the content of gossip offers insight to how gossip recipients may form their attributions of the gossip sender's motives. In the subsequent section, we develop a typology of workplace gossip based on the key dimensions of its content to organize archetypal patterns of interpreting workplace gossip.

Typology of Gossip

Although all gossip share the definitional criteria of evaluative talk of absent third parties, the content of gossip can vary in meaningful ways. We review the key dimensions along which the content of gossip varies and develop a typology to explain how conceptual differences in the content of gossip are likely to influence the interpretation of gossip by gossip recipients. The benefit of a typological approach is that it offers a parsimonious representation of potentially complex and asymmetrical implications that result from a configuration of constructs (Cornelissen, 2017; Doty & Glick, 1994; Fiss, 2011). Thus, the primary purpose of the typology is not to serve as a taxonomy for categorizing examples of gossip but to capture conceptual archetypes or schemas that are likely to explain variance in its attributional outcomes (Doty & Glick, 1994). To identify the key dimensions of the content of gossip for the typology, we draw from prior conceptualizations of gossip and consider the characteristics of valence, work-relatedness, and credibility (Kurland & Pelled, 2000).

Valence is the positivity or negativity of the information that is gossiped (Baumeister et al., 2004; Fine & Rosnow, 1978; Kurland & Pelled, 2000). For example, positive gossip includes praising a coworker whereas negative gossip includes blaming a coworker. Prior research has largely focused on the distinct implications of valence, particularly for the gossip target

(Bozoyan & Vogt, 2016; Burt & Knez, 1996; Ellwardt, Labianca, & Wittek, 2012; Kniffin & Wilson, 2005; Sommerfeld et al., 2008). However, positive and negative gossip do not necessarily result in contrasting effects (Bozoyan & Vogt, 2016; Brady et al., 2017; Grosser et al., 2010), suggesting that the implications of valence may be more complex.

The work-relatedness of gossip refers to the extent that the content of the gossip focuses on workplace topics, which includes gossip about job performance, career progress, relationships within the organization, or other workplace behaviors (Kurland & Pelled, 2000). The work-relatedness of gossip captures whether the gossip is pertinent to the immediate workplace context in which it is shared as opposed to gossip concerning purely social or personal matters. Given the group-oriented functions of gossip (Baumeister et al., 2004; Dunbar, 2004; Emler, 1994; Foster, 2004), the work-relatedness of gossip is particularly relevant to its consequences in the domain of work. Recent research on gossip has also highlighted the implications of domain relevance on gossip behavior (Reynolds, Baumeister, & Maner, 2018).

Credibility is defined as the extent to which the gossip statement is perceived to be accurate, truthful, and believable (Kurland & Pelled, 2000). The risk for error or deception in the information shared through gossip necessitates gossip recipients to evaluate the accuracy of gossip statements (Hess & Hagen, 2006). Lack of credibility can be the result of several factors such as exaggerated positivity or negativity (Sommerfeld et al., 2008), the salience of alternative explanations (Hess & Hagen, 2006), or conflicting information (Kuttler et al., 2002). However, credibility is subjective and often not immediately discernable (Kuttler et al., 2002; Smith, 2014), requiring the interpretation of social cues to determine whether the messenger is both a knowledgeable and unbiased source of information (Birnbaum & Stegner, 1979; Giffin, 1967; Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; Pornpitakpan, 2004). Because perceptions of credibility are

closely associated with attribution processes (Kaplan, 1976; Kelley & Michela, 1980), we distinguish it from the typology as a separate construct in the attribution model.

The qualitative differences that emerge from integrating the dimensions of valence and work-relatedness are likely to align with archetypal patterns of gossiping that inform plausible attributions. Attribution theory suggests that patterns or schemas provide a basis for drawing causal inferences from limited information (Kelley, 1971, 1973). Situations that align with these schemas influence the attribution process through the features and inferences associated with these prototypical patterns (Feldman, 1981). Thus, the distinct features of the content of gossip offers insight to the common or prototypical patterns of interpretation that are likely to follow.

In research on gossip, several key social functions of gossip have emerged that present plausible ways for people to make sense of gossip. Early work on gossip suggested that these functions included sharing valuable information about others, influencing or manipulating others, and providing mutual entertainment (Rosnow, 1977). Foster (2004) described in his review of gossip similar social functions of information sharing, reputational influence, and social enjoyment, while elaborating the potential of gossip to strengthen interpersonal relationships in groups or protect group interests (Dunbar, 2004). Beersma and Van Kleef (2012) further demonstrated that these social functions reflect perceived explanations for why people gossip by empirically examining the key social functions of information sharing, reputational influence, group protection, and social enjoyment or friendship. While the sharing of information is a broadly applicable function of all types of gossip, the relevance of these other social functions of gossip can vary depending on the nature of the gossip (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012). Because salient explanations are more likely to influence the attribution process (Pryor & Kriss, 1977), the prominent social functions of gossip that are reflected by its content are more likely to affect

the interpretations of gossip recipients. Thus, these social functions provide a starting point for understanding how gossip may lead to conceptually distinct patterns of interpretation.

As depicted in Figure 1, we integrate valence and work-relatedness as dimensions of the content of gossip that characterize distinct types of messages communicated through gossip. The theorized typology includes 1) *protection-based gossip* that alerts the workgroup to potential threats, 2) *derogation-based gossip* that negatively influences a coworker's reputation, 3) *endorsement-based gossip* that enhances a coworker's reputation through praise of exemplary behavior, and 4) *communion-based gossip* that strengthens interpersonal ties through social enjoyment. The labeling of the typology reflects the common social function that most closely represents the content of each type of gossip and serves as a likely schema for how gossip recipients will interpret the gossip episode. We examine the unique content of each type of gossip, the likely attributions of motives associated, and the additional factors that contribute to the actual attributions formed by gossip recipients.

Insert Figure 1 about here.

Protection-Based Gossip

The first type of gossip is characterized by a negative valence and work-relatedness. We refer to this type of gossip as protection-based gossip because the content of this type of gossip reflects the potential for gossip to alert the recipient to an impending danger or threat. Negative gossip that is relevant to the domain of group membership is uniquely associated with the group protective function of gossip (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012). For example, gossip that a coworker is unreliable may protect others from the risks of delegating a critical task to this coworker. The

negative valence indicates the potential for harm, whereas the work-relatedness highlights the relevance of the harm to the immediate work context. In conjunction, the content of this type of gossip is most likely to offer direct implications for gossip recipients in the workplace and is consistent with the potential for gossip to warn group members of threats (Dunbar, 2004; Foster, 2004). Gossip recipients can use this gossip to protect themselves from exploitation by other group members (Feinberg et al., 2014; Sommerfeld et al., 2007), especially given the heightened relevance of work-related information for future interactions (Kurland & Pelled, 2000).

The content of this type of gossip also offers information about social norms that gossip recipients can apply to their own behavior. Negative gossip about norm violations is a valuable mechanism for facilitating social learning in groups (Baumeister et al., 2004). Gossip recipients benefit from this type of gossip by learning behavioral expectations of the workgroup. Negative examples are particularly informative because of the potentially severe repercussions of violating workplace norms (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Baumeister et al., 2004). For example, negative gossip about a coworker's tardiness to meetings reinforces expectations of punctuality for other group members. The social learning benefits from this type of gossip may inhibit and protect group members from engaging in inappropriate behaviors relevant to the workplace (Foster, 2004). Thus, we expect that this distinct association with the group protective potential of gossip will influence the likely attributions and responses of gossip recipients in response to negative, work-related gossip.

Derogation-Based Gossip

The second type of gossip is characterized by a negative valence and nonwork-relatedness. We refer to this type of gossip as derogation-based gossip because the content of this gossip reflects the potential for gossip to negatively influence and damage the reputation of

others. As a mechanism for negative influence, the content of gossip can be used to manipulate how others view the gossip target (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Rosnow, 1977). Derogating others through negative gossip interferes with and potentially stigmatizes how the gossip target will be viewed by the group (Foster, 2004). For example, gossip about a coworker caught having an affair outside of the workplace may generate social disapproval towards the coworker despite the affair being a personal matter. The nonwork-related content of this gossip is unlikely to have a direct implication for gossip recipients in the immediate work context. Yet, the negative valence still damages the gossip target's reputation. Gossip recipients may view this exposure of sensitive, nonwork information as a violation of the coworker's privacy (Bies, 2001) that associates it with the lay notion of gossip as an immoral behavior (Emler, 1994; Foster, 2004).

Unlike protection-based gossip, the content of derogation-based gossip offers less value for gossip recipients while harming the gossip target. Negative gossip is damaging because gossip targets do not have the opportunity to directly disconfirm the gossip or defend their reputation when negative gossip is shared (Ellwardt, Labianca, & Wittek, 2012). Regardless of whether it is true, this makes the reputational effects of negative gossip difficult for the gossip target to correct (Denrell, 2005; Smith, 2014). Furthermore, research on social undermining suggests that spreading information to damage the reputation of coworkers can lead to harmful outcomes for the target such as depression (Duffy, Ganster, Shaw, Johnson, & Pagon, 2006) and diminished self-efficacy (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002). Although the content of protection-based gossip also reflects poorly on the gossip target's reputation, the negative influence function of gossip is more likely to affect the attributions and responses to derogation-based gossip because negative, nonwork-related gossip lacks immediate functional value for the workgroup.

Endorsement-Based Gossip

The third type of gossip is characterized by a positive valence and work-relatedness. We refer to this type of gossip as endorsement-based gossip because the content of this gossip reflects the potential for gossip to confer praise and recognition in support of the gossip target's reputation. For example, positive gossip about an employee working late to help coworkers endorses the employee's commitment to the team. Although positive gossip has received less attention, it has been recognized as a mechanism for building solidarity in the workplace by displaying support for others (Ellwardt, Labianca, & Wittek, 2012). When it is also work-related, it affirms the relevant behaviors of an exemplary team member (Kniffin & Wilson, 2005).

As a result, the content of endorsement-based gossip conveys a positive model of work-related behavior to the benefit of the gossip target. Through these endorsements, the gossip target is likely to gain a more favorable reputation amongst peers in the workplace (Wong & Boh, 2010). Positive, work-related gossip provides a signal of which coworkers are competent or reliable for work-related tasks. This praise of a coworker's work-related behavior elevates the gossip target as a positive reference point for others when making evaluations of achievement, abilities, and opportunities for improvement (Suls, 1977; Wert & Salovey, 2004). The relevance of this information to the domain of work also raises its significance for others in the workplace, given that knowledge of others' expertise and competence is a valuable source of social capital (Krackhardt, 1990; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001). Thus, we expect this association with the potential for gossip to enhance others' reputations to affect the likely attributions and responses of gossip recipients to positive, work-related gossip.

Communion-Based Gossip

The fourth type of gossip is characterized by a positive valence and nonwork-relatedness. We refer to this type of gossip as communion-based gossip because the content of this gossip

reflects the potential for gossip to foster relational bonding. Gossip functions as a means for developing friendship as a socially enjoyable interaction that distracts from routine activities (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012). An example of this type of gossip is praise of a coworker successfully running a marathon. Although it is evaluative, the content of this gossip does not suggest any imminent risk due to its positive valence, nor does it directly concern the work domain in which it is shared. Instead, it resembles the lay-perception of inconsequential office chit-chat that is neither harmful nor practical (Ben-Ze'ev, 1994). Despite the seeming triviality of its content, this type of gossip is still valuable for the maintenance of workplace relationships by exercising lines of communication (James G March & Sevon, 1988; Michelson et al., 2010) and disclosing personal opinions (Collins & Miller, 1994). These friendly gestures carry social meaning that contribute to the development of friendships (Lydon, Jamieson, & Holmes, 1997).

The content of communion-based gossip also offers potential for social entertainment amongst coworkers. While gossip is necessarily evaluative, the narrative aspect of sharing gossip can be entertaining (Foster, 2004). Gossip is a way of communicating evaluative information through narration (Michelson et al., 2010), and this narrative form of communication plays an important role in the formation of friendships (Cheshire, 2000). When these evaluative stories do not concern work-related matters, gossip can be a welcome reprieve from serious or monotonous task-related conversations (Foster, 2004). Furthermore, employees can bond over the content of this type of gossip without guilt because there is no reputational harm to the gossip target. Thus, we expect this association with the social bonding potential of gossip to affect the likely attributions and responses of gossip recipients to positive, nonwork-related gossip.

A Process Model of Gossip Recipient Reactions to Gossip

Although the proposed typology of the content of gossip represents the archetypal functions of gossip that are likely to affect its interpretation, the actual attributions and responses of gossip recipients involve the integration of additional contextual cues into the attributional process. Attribution theory suggests that people seek to understand why social interaction occur and the motives underlying the behaviors of others in order to better inform future social interactions (E. E. Jones & Davis, 1965; Kelley, 1967; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Determining the underlying causal motives provides insight into predicting whether the other party can be trusted (Kelley, 1971; Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009). These attributions ultimately manifest in the behavioral responses of gossip recipients that determine the relational consequences for the gossip sender. We first consider the episodic level of analysis and develop the proposed process model (Figure 2) by examining the attribution of the gossip sender's motives, the role of credibility, the role of the gossip target's status, and the reciprocation of gossip. We then consider the individual level implications of the attribution process by examining perceptions of trustworthiness, the locus of causality, and behavioral responses towards the gossip sender.

Insert Figure 2 about here.

Attribution of Gossip Sender Motives

Because people seek to match actions to motives (Kelley, 1971; Pepitone & Sherberg, 1957), the content of the gossip plays a key role in the motives that are likely to be attributed. Gossiping provides a means for individuals to satisfy their personal motivations (Brady et al., 2017). Social value orientation theory suggests that these motives vary according to one's

interdependence with others, ranging from a self-interest to a joint-interest or collective-interest perspective (McClintock, 1972; Van Lange, 1999). These social motives reflect one's orientation towards others, which can be characterized as three distinct identity orientations: individual, relational, and collective (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). In organizations, the distinct motives associated with these orientations describe how employee behaviors can benefit the self, the joint relationship, or the group (Brickson, 2000; Flynn, 2005). The attribution of these motives helps individuals to form impressions (Maki, Thorngate, & McClintock, 1979) and evaluate the behaviors of others (Schlenker, Hallam, & McCown, 1983).

The theorized typology of gossip highlights prominent social functions of gossip based on the content of the message that suggest distinct and plausible underlying motives for explaining the gossip sender's behavior. The attributed motives may not necessarily reflect the gossip sender's true motives (Schlenker et al., 1983), but they reflect the gossip recipient's judgment of the behavior that will drive the gossip recipient's response. We consider the motives likely to be associated with each ideal type of gossip as the basis for the attributional process.

Individualistic or self-interested motives focus on benefitting oneself (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Derogation-based gossip is most likely to be attributed to self-interested motives because the content of this gossip may benefit the gossip sender indirectly without offering a clear function for others. By derogating others, the gossip sender manufactures favorable social comparisons that enhance their own standing (Wert & Salovey, 2004). When it is not productive, it may be perceived by others as a form of political maneuvering to gain status (Loch, Huberman, & Stout, 2000). Gossiping can also be viewed as a self-enhancing tactic to gain power in organizations (Kurland & Pelled, 2000). For example, spreading damaging information about a competitive rival can be a strategic attempt to gain a social advantage (Reynolds et al., 2018).

There may even be a sense of personal pleasure or schadenfreude from reveling in the error of others (Li, McAllister, Ilies, & Gloor, 2018). Thus, gossip focused on negative influence is often associated with self-interested dispositions such as Machiavellianism (Lyons & Hughes, 2015). Although it may reduce uncertainty and threat for the gossip sender (Wert & Salovey, 2004), it does so at the expense of the gossip target and is likely to be attributed to self-interested motives.

Relational motives focus on interpersonal connections with others and the welfare of the joint relationship (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Both endorsement-based gossip and communion-based gossip are likely to be attributed to relational motives because they both contribute to the strengthening of relationships amongst group members. However, they differ in the target of the relational motive. Endorsement-based gossip primarily builds relationships with the gossip target. By highlighting an exemplary employee's behavior, the gossip sender improves and disseminates a positive reputation on behalf of the gossip target (Zinko & Rubin, 2015). This expressed support or endorsement from third parties strengthens the target's reputation and makes the target more influential and valuable in the group (Sparrowe & Liden, 2005; Wong & Boh, 2010). Although this information can be useful for the gossip recipient, it directly benefits the gossip target by making them an attractive group member for future interactions (Sommerfeld et al., 2007). Thus, gossip recipients are likely to view endorsement-based gossip as motivated primarily out of a concern for relations to the gossip target.

In comparison, communion-based gossip primarily builds the relationship between the gossip sender and recipient. Although it also reflects well on the gossip target's reputation, gossip that is not work-related is less likely to be influential and beneficial as a source of information (Kurland & Pelled, 2000). For example, knowing that a coworker is a successful amateur baker may be interesting but not particularly helpful in an office job. However, the

experience of sharing gossip itself contributes to the development of friendship between the gossip sender and recipient as an opportunity to socialize (Ellwardt, Steglich, & Wittek, 2012). Informal socializing that extends beyond the domain of work strengthens employee relationships and contributes uniquely to effective relationships in the workplace (Oh, Chung, & Labianca, 2004). Because communion-based gossip facilitates an opportunity to connect with the gossip sender over harmless topics, it may serve a unique purpose in the development of coworker friendships and is likely to be attributed to relational motives to bond with the gossip recipient.

Collective or prosocial motives focus on the welfare of the broader group (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Protection-based gossip is most likely to be attributed to this motive because its content demonstrates concern for the well-being of other group members. Warning group members of the negative work-related behaviors of others helps the group to enforce social norms and deters free-riding behavior (Dunbar, 2004; Emler, 1994; Foster, 2004). Negative gossip about work-related behaviors provides information for maintaining cooperation in groups by publicizing selfish behaviors and protecting the recipients of the gossip from potential exploitation (Feinberg et al., 2012). This information also protects group interests by reducing uncertainty regarding normative behaviors (Baumeister et al., 2004) and the dependability of fellow group members (Fonseca & Peters, 2018). When gossip is viewed as benefitting and protecting other group members, it loses its stigma of social disapproval (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012). Although it also negatively influences the gossip target's reputation, it does so for the greater good of the collective group.

> *Proposition 1*: *The content of the gossip will influence the gossip recipient's attributions of the gossip sender's motives such that gossip will more likely be attributed to self-interested motives for derogation-based gossip, relational motives (towards the gossip*

target) for endorsement-based gossip, relational motives (towards the gossip recipient) for communion-based gossip, and prosocial motives for protection-based gossip.

Although the content of gossip points to likely attributions of motives associated with archetypal interpretations of gossip, the attribution process is complex and involves further integration of available cues (Kelley, 1967). Attribution processes can invoke multiple plausible explanations that create uncertainty for perceivers (Kelley, 1973), requiring the integration of information about the context and parties involved to form their attributions (Fragale et al., 2009). For example, despite the group protective potential of negative, work-related gossip, gossip recipients may not always attribute it to prosocial motives. Furthermore, some episodes of gossip may not align perfectly to a single, ideal interpretation. For example, a gossip sender may share negative gossip about a coworker that includes both work-related and nonwork-related content. In such cases, the typology offers multiple plausible interpretations that may lead to the attribution of multiple motives to varying degrees. Based on prior theories of gossip, we examine credibility (Kurland & Pelled, 2000) and the status of the gossip target (Brady et al., 2017) as key features of gossip that provide additional information relevant to the attribution process.

Gossip credibility. A critical factor in the attribution process is the perceived credibility of the gossip. Perceptions of credibility can drastically alter gossip recipients' interpretation of the gossip and introduce alternative motives that explain the gossip sender's behavior. According to attribution theory, prior beliefs create expectations about others that may introduce biases in the attribution process (Kelley & Michela, 1980). Judgments of credibility depend on these beliefs and expectations of the gossip recipient that determine the extent to which the gossip is perceived to be believable (Kurland & Pelled, 2000). Research on credibility and its effects on the process of persuasion has traditionally focused on both source credibility (i.e. the gossip

sender) and message credibility (i.e. the content of the gossip) as key determinants of recipient reactions (Chaiken, 1980; Hovland et al., 1953; Slater & Rouner, 1996). Thus, cues concerning the episodic content of the gossip and the individual sending the gossip will contribute to the gossip recipient's perception of the credibility of the gossip episode (Hess & Hagen, 2006; Kuttler et al., 2002).

At the episodic level, the credibility of gossip depends on how the content of the gossip compares to other information available to the gossip recipient about the gossip target. Gossip recipients may rely on their prior beliefs and experiences concerning the content of the gossip to determine its believability. For example, the presence of conflicting information and plausible alternatives undermines evaluations of gossip credibility (Hess & Hagen, 2006; Kuttler et al., 2002). The evaluative information conveyed is also more likely to be discounted when it requires a larger change in attitude (Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006; Yaniv, 2004). Thus, negative gossip about a well-liked coworker in the group is more likely to be met with pushback than a less-liked coworker (Ellwardt, Labianca, & Wittek, 2012). Similarly, gossip perceived to be an extreme evaluation of the gossip target may seem implausible and be met with more resistance (Sommerfeld et al., 2008). However, the corroboration of gossip by multiple sources improves its perceived credibility (Burt & Knez, 1996; Hess & Hagen, 2006; Sommerfeld et al., 2008).

At the individual level, the credibility of gossip depends on the gossip sender's reputation and the expectations regarding their behavior. Research on credibility has examined perceptions of the speaker's expertise and honesty as the primary factors that influence the effectiveness of persuasive messages and advice (Birnbaum & Stegner, 1979; Giffin, 1967; Pornpitakpan, 2004; Simons, Berkowitz, & Moyer, 1970). Gossip recipients may consider whether the gossip sender would be expected to be a knowledgeable evaluator of the gossip target. For example,

performance feedback and evaluations are more likely to be believed when it is provided by knowledgeable sources (Albright & Levy, 1995). Thus, the perception of a strong relationship between the gossip sender and gossip target may improve the gossip sender's credibility. Gossip recipients may also rely on their prior relationship with the gossip sender and consider the gossip sender tendencies for providing accurate information. Prior behaviors demonstrating honesty and cooperation improve an individual's reputation in the group (Anderson & Shirako, 2008). However, situational factors also influence the perceived credibility of the gossip sender. For example, credibility is undermined when the gossip sender's relation to the gossip target presents clear incentives for falsifying information, such as a competitive dynamic (Hess & Hagen, 2006). Thus, negative gossip about a rival may raise suspicions of credibility. Instead, negative evaluations are more likely to be believable when they come from a source that lacks an incentive to be critical based on the relationship (Hornsey & Imani, 2004). In the same way, overly positive gossip about a close coworker or ingroup member may also raise suspicions of biased information and questionable credibility.

When the source or message credibility of the gossip is in doubt, gossip recipients are more likely to suspect the gossip sender of having ulterior motives or manipulative intent (Kurland & Pelled, 2000; Kuttler et al., 2002). For derogation-based gossip, a lack of credibility strengthens the already plausible explanation that the gossip sender is acting out of self-interest to harm the gossip target's reputation. However, low credibility also undermines the usefulness of protection-based gossip. Although the topic of the gossip may be relevant to the interests of the workgroup, its lack of credibility raises suspicions that the appearance of prosociality by the gossip sender is disingenuous and that the gossip is a self-serving attempt to undermine or humiliate the target (Noon & Delbridge, 1993; Wilson, Wilczynski, Wells, & Weiser, 2000). For

example, spreading potentially untrue gossip about a coworker's performance may be perceived as political maneuvering by the gossip sender to gain a favorable reputation by comparison. Protection-based gossip targeting a work rival may also be interpreted similarly because of plausible reasons for doubting the gossip sender's credibility. Gossip senders who would otherwise be perceived as prosocially motivated may be suspected of self-interested motives.

A lack of credibility may also create ambiguity around the motives associated with endorsement-based and communion-based gossip. Because positive gossip is typically less likely to be considered self-serving (Kniffin & Wilson, 2005), the gossip sender may be perceived to be simply misinformed (Kuttler et al., 2002). Saying something supportive about a coworker, even if suspected to be inaccurate, may still be viewed as a polite and well-intended remark. Even outright dishonesty intended to benefit others still promotes interpersonal trust because of the perceived positive intent (Levine & Schweitzer, 2015). Thus, endorsement-based and communion-based gossip could still elicit some attributions of relational motives.

However, favorable evaluations of others may also be a reflection of underlying self-serving biases (Lewis & Sherman, 2003). Thus, positive gossip may raise suspicions of self-serving motives when there is reason to doubt its credibility. For example, work behaviors are likely to be interpreted as political behavior when it is suspected to maximize the actor's self-interest at the expense of others (G. R. Ferris, Fedor, & King, 1994), which involves using knowledge of others at work to influence others in self-enhancing ways (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, & Ammeter, 2004). Gossip senders may use endorsement-based gossip as impression management to elevate their own status by associating with others who are viewed favorably (Ellwardt, Labianca, & Wittek, 2012). The potential for self-gain offers a plausible explanation for why employees might share gossip that is favorable for the gossip target but

lacks credibility. For example, a mentor may gossip profusely about a mentee in a positive way because it reflects favorably back on the mentor as well. Thus, a lack of credibility also increases the likelihood of attributing self-interested motives instead of relational motives to the gossip sender.

> *Proposition 2*: *The credibility of the gossip source and message will increase the attributions of prosocial and relational motives but reduce the attribution of self-interested motives; a lack of credibility will increase the attribution of self-interested motives but reduce the attributions of prosocial and relational motives.*

Status of the gossip target. The attribution of the gossip sender's motives also depends on who the gossip is about. Although gossip can be about any group member, those with status are often a popular subject of gossip (Gambetta, 1994; McAndrew et al., 2007). Status influences attributions of social motives due to stereotypical associations of higher status individuals to self-interest (Fragale et al., 2009). Thus, negative gossip may be more readily justified when it is about higher rather than lower status individuals.

Specifically, negative gossip about high status individuals may help group members to vent or cope with negative emotions and is less likely to be instrumental (Brady et al., 2017). Venting provides an outlet for individuals to regain a sense of control when they feel unable to safely confront the source of the issue (Alicke et al., 1992). Venting also elicits sympathy from others (Alicke et al., 1992) and facilitates emotional support (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). Although people can also vent about lower status individuals, negative experiences instigated by higher status individuals are more threatening and can be risky to address through direct confrontation due to the imbalance in status (Cortina & Magley, 2009). Thus, seeking support from others by gossiping is a less risky method of coping. For example, gossiping about

supervisor injustice facilitates relational bonding by creating a "common enemy" and reducing uncertainty about these experiences (Stoverink, Umphress, Gardner, & Miner, 2014). Although the protection-based content of this gossip is likely to be associated with prosocial motives, gossip recipients may also be sympathetic and attribute the gossip to relational motives of seeking emotional support from others.

In addition, suspicions of self-interested motives as an explanation of the gossip sender's behavior are less likely, given the gossip sender's disadvantageous position. This may be particularly relevant for mitigating the likelihood that the derogation-based content of negative, nonwork-related gossip is attributed to self-interested motives because higher status individuals are less likely to be considered vulnerable to victimization (Aquino & Bommer, 2003). Thus, gossiping negatively is less likely to harm high status gossip targets who have greater capacity to retaliate if necessary. However, this implication of status is likely to reflect less favorably on the gossip sender when negative gossip is about low status gossip targets. Even if the gossip sender is genuinely well-intentioned and the content of gossip contains group protective potential, the optics of gossiping negatively about a more vulnerable coworker is likely to reflect poorly on the motives perceived by gossip recipients. Similarly, venting through gossip about lower status coworkers, while genuine, is more likely to be considered consequential for the gossip target.

For positive gossip, however, the status of the gossip target may present self-interested motives as a plausible attribution. Positive gossip can be an effective way to create the perception of being connected with the gossip target (Ellwardt, Labianca, et al., 2012). By gossiping positively about a supervisor or high performer, the gossip sender can create the impression that they are friends and belong to the same social group. Associating with higher status group members can produce reputational benefits in the workplace as an effective

impression management tactic (Long, Baer, Colquitt, Outlaw, & Dhensa-Kahlon, 2015). Although this positive gossip may still yield relational benefits and promote solidarity outwardly, gossip recipients may question whether it is an instrumental attempt to elevate the gossip sender's own status for personal gain. When positive behaviors are perceived to be ingratiatory, they are attributed to self-interested motives (Eastman, 1994). Thus, the plausibility of self-interested motives as an additional explanation for the gossip sender's behavior increases when the gossip target has higher status.

Proposition 3a: *For negative gossip (protection-based or derogation-based), the status of the gossip target reduces the attribution of self-interested motives and increases the attribution of relational motives (towards the gossip recipient).*

Proposition 3b: For positive gossip (endorsement-based or communion-based), the status of the gossip target increases the attribution of self-interested motives.

Episodic Reactions to Gossip

Once gossip is shared, it provides the gossip sender with an opportunity to gather valuable and sensitive information that is not available through other channels (Ayim, 1994; Paine, 1967). This typically occurs at the episodic level through the reciprocation of additional gossip from the gossip recipient as a response to the initial gossip (Brady et al., 2017; Ellwardt, Steglich, & Wittek, 2012). The gossip sender's initial gossip acts as an invitation for the gossip recipient to actively participate in gossip together (Bergmann, 1993). Research on the structure of gossip episodes suggests that recipients of gossip often participate in gossip after the initial exchange by offering their own evaluations of the gossip target, even when the gossip is negatively-valenced (Eder & Enke, 1991). By reciprocating gossip, the gossip recipient can clarify or affirm the initial gossip while strengthening their relationship with the gossip sender.

However, gossip recipients face a choice of whether to further engage in gossip. Gossip recipients must consider the risks of reciprocating gossip and how others may react to it (Noon & Delbridge, 1993). Thus, the attributions they form regarding the gossip sender's motives are likely to influence whether they respond by reciprocating gossip.

Gossip recipients can contribute to the prosocial value of a gossip episode by reciprocating gossip. Attributions of prosocial motives imply that the gossip recipient view the information conveyed by the gossip episode to be potentially beneficial. By reciprocating additional gossip, the gossip recipient contributes their own evaluations to support or expand upon the initial gossip (Eder & Enke, 1991). For example, if an employee gossips negatively about a manager's leadership style, the gossip recipient may reciprocate similar gossip from their own experiences with the manager to validate the initial gossip. The accumulation of multiple gossip statements provides group members with greater confidence in the accuracy of the evaluation (Sommerfeld et al., 2008). Thus, gossip recipients may be more willing to reciprocate additional gossip when they perceive that the gossip episode is beneficial for the group's welfare.

Gossip recipients can also strengthen and nurture their relationship with the gossip sender through reciprocation, especially when the initial gossip is interpreted as an invitation to bond (Ellwardt, Steglich, & Wittek, 2012). The mutual sharing of information through reciprocating gossip can be entertaining for both parties and contribute to the development of their relationship (Rosnow, 1977). However, gossip reciprocation involves the sharing of potentially sensitive information and will only occur when gossip recipients have confidence in the gossip sender's intentions (Grosser et al., 2010). Thus, gossip recipients are more likely to reciprocate gossip when the initial gossip is perceived as a signal of a relational orientation. For example, an employee may respond to positive gossip about a coworker's wedding by reciprocating their own

evaluations of the wedding. Doing so may be entertaining and contributes to relational bonding. Even when the relational motive is directed towards others, it reflects the gossip sender's general desire and concern for relationships with people in the group (Ames, Bianchi, & Magee, 2010). Similarly, when the gossip sender is perceived to be seeking emotional support, reciprocation can also validate and demonstrate agreement with the gossip sender's complaints (Alicke et al., 1992). For example, if a coworker is gossiping about a negative interaction with a supervisor and perceived to be motivated by a relational desire for support, gossip recipients may reciprocate their own negative gossip of the supervisor to sympathize with the gossip sender.

However, gossip recipients are less likely to feel compelled to reciprocate gossip when it is attributed to self-interested motives. Gossip recipients are likely to disapprove of self-interested gossip (Wilson et al., 2000) and may hesitate to reciprocate with additional gossip that the gossip sender could use or redistribute for further self-gain (Ellwardt, Steglich, & Wittek, 2012; Rosnow, 1977). Reciprocation would also expose gossip recipients to the risk that the gossip sender may neglect the confidentiality of the information shared, which could jeopardize the gossip recipient's own reputation and relationship with others if the target of the gossip eventually finds out (Hannerz, 1967).

Proposition 4: *Attributions of prosocial or relational motives increase the likelihood that gossip will be reciprocated whereas attributions of self-interested motives will reduce the likelihood that gossip will be reciprocated.*

Perceptions of Gossip Sender Trustworthiness

Attribution theory has long been grounded in the challenge of establishing trust in interpersonal relationships (Kelley, 1967). The motives inferred from the attribution process influence the evaluation of others' behaviors by providing insight into the consequences they

may have expected or desired through their actions (Schlenker et al., 1983). In the context of gossip, these motives reveal whether the gossip sender can be trusted in future situations. Trust is defined as the willingness to be vulnerable to another party's actions and is the result of the perceptions of ability, benevolence, and integrity (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Ability refers to the competencies and skills of the trustee, benevolence refers to the trustee's desire to do good or care for the trustor, and integrity refers to the trustee's adherence to acceptable principles. The attributions that individuals use to make sense of their social situations influence perceptions of trustworthiness (Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009).

The attribution of self-interested motives damages the perceived trustworthiness of the gossip sender and diminishes the likelihood that the gossip recipient will be willing to engage with the gossip sender (Gambetta, 1994). Specifically, self-interested motives directly undermine perceptions of benevolence by suggesting that the gossip sender is primarily interested in self-gain rather than caring for others. For example, gossip motivated out of self-interest may reflect a jealous or envious gossip sender (Wert & Salovey, 2004). Gossip perceived to be self-serving at the expense of others may also be considered morally suspect behavior that undermines perceptions of integrity (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Emler, 1994; Michelson et al., 2010). Thus, gossip recipients may worry about becoming the target of the gossip sender's self-interested gossip (Ellwardt, Steglich, & Wittek, 2012; Emler, 1994). Even if the gossip is positively-valenced in the case of endorsement-based or communion-based gossip attributed to self-interested motives, gossip recipients may be skeptical of those perceived to be engaging in self-serving or opportunistic political behavior in the workplace (Gandz & Murray, 1980).

The attribution of relational motives will likely improve perceptions of the gossip sender's trustworthiness. When gossip recipients perceive that the relational motive is directed

towards them, gossip may be perceived as an exchange of trust and desire for friendship (Ellwardt, Steglich, & Wittek, 2012; Foster, 2004). Even when this relational motive is directed towards the gossip target, the gossip recipient may perceive the gossip sender's supportive behavior towards others as a reflection of the gossip sender's innate integrity and dependability in the workplace (Ferrin, Dirks, & Shah, 2006). This positive treatment of others may be used as a heuristic for global evaluations of the gossip sender's trustworthiness as suggested by fairness heuristic theory (Lind, 2001). Similarly, when protection-based or derogation-based gossip are attributed to a desire for relational support, gossip recipients are more likely to perceive the gossip sender's vulnerability as a signal of trustworthiness. For example, expressing negative and potentially sensitive judgements about others demonstrates the gossip sender's desire to connect with someone they can trust (Behfar, Cronin, & McCarthy, 2019), making them appear more relatable to those who sympathize (Elsbach, 2004). These displays of trust are likely to have a reciprocal effect and contribute to perceptions of trustworthiness (Ferrin, Bligh, & Kohles, 2008).

The attribution of prosocial motives is most likely to benefit perceptions of the gossip sender's trustworthiness. Prosocially motivated gossip demonstrates a concern for the welfare of the overall group (Feinberg et al., 2012, 2014). This not only signals the benevolence of the gossip sender but also demonstrates that they have valuable knowledge or competence relevant to important group norms (Baumeister et al., 2004). Given the inherent risks of sharing gossip (Grosser et al., 2010), prosocial gossip demonstrates the benevolence of the gossip sender in taking on personal risk for the benefit of the group. In addition, prosocially motivated gossip signals one's loyalty to the group (Wert & Salovey, 2004), and reflects positively on the gossip sender's principles and values (Mayer et al., 1995).

Proposition 5: *Attributions of prosocial or relational motives will improve the perceived trustworthiness of the gossip sender whereas attributions of self-interested motives will damage the perceived trustworthiness of the gossip sender.*

Locus of Causality

Episodes of gossip may not necessarily influence perceptions of trustworthiness equally. The impact of a gossip episode on attributions of trustworthiness depends on the perceived locus of causality. The distinction between internal and external causal inferences is a key element of attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967; Kelley & Michela, 1980). An internal locus of causality suggests that the behavior of interest reflects the actor's disposition whereas an external locus of causality suggests that the behavior reflects the external pressures of the situation (Kelley, 1973). Thus, the locus of causality may influence the extent to which motives inferred from each episode of gossip are perceived to reflect the gossip sender's disposition.

Attributions of the locus of causality require the perceiver to evaluate the situational information available and consider the plausible explanations for the observed behavior (Kelley, 1971). This may involve considering whether there is consensus in how others behave, whether the actor's behavior is distinct, and whether the actor's behavior is consistent over time (Kelley, 1967, 1973). For example, when a coworker frequently engages in the same type of gossip while other group members do not, gossip recipients are likely to infer an internal locus of causality from the low distinctiveness, low consensus, and high consistency. In this case, the attributed motives are more likely to be considered an accurate reflection of the gossip sender's disposition. This may be particularly problematic when the attribution of self-interested motives is plausible, as the gossip sender's distinct willingness to gossip increases the likelihood that their trustworthiness will be undermined by their gossiping.

However, individuals are often faced with ambiguous or conflicting information that requires them to weigh the plausibility of competing causal explanations (Kelley, 1973). Characteristics of the context may provide salient situational explanations for the observed behavior (Kelley & Michela, 1980). One of the salient external causes of gossip is the presence of uncertainty, since gossip is often used as a means to reduce uncertainty (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Brady et al., 2017; Paine, 1967). Uncertainty suggests an inability to predict future events and outcomes (Milliken, 1987), which provides a salient external cause for engaging in gossip to gather information. If there are salient cues suggesting high situational uncertainty, gossip recipients may perceive a gossip episode to be the result of the external pressures of uncertainty. For example, in an organization facing impending layoffs, employees may perceive gossip to be driven by uncertainty about job security. Gossiping negatively about others may provide employees with greater comfort about their relative standing (Wert & Salovey, 2004) and an outlet for relieving tension or discomfort caused by uncertainty (Rosnow, 2001). In these cases, gossip recipients may blame the external situation for causing others to gossip.

Similarly, gossip is often triggered by uncertainty regarding social norms when witnessing deviant behaviors (Peters, Jetten, Radova, & Austin, 2017). Gossip as a channel for gathering information in the face of uncertain norms reflects a relatively neutral explanation for gossiping (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012). For example, employees might not be surprised by gossip after observing an employee's sudden dismissal, especially if this is atypical for the organization. While the attributed motives offer a potential explanation for the gossip episode, the presence of other plausible external pressures for gossiping produces a discounting effect that weakens internal attributions (Kelley, 1973). Thus, gossip recipients may discount the extent to

which a given gossip episode influences their perception of the gossip sender's trustworthiness when there are salient external reasons for gossiping.

Proposition 6: *Attributions of the gossip sender's motives are more likely to affect perceptions of trustworthiness when the gossip is attributed to an internal locus rather than an external locus of causality.*

Individual-Level Behavioral Reactions

Attributions in social interactions ultimately guide the attributor's decisions to reward or sanction the other party's behaviors (Kelley, 1971). Over time, episodes of gossip influence the gossip recipient's social interactions with the gossip sender as the attributed motives enhance or undermine the gossip sender's trustworthiness. In the following sections, we examine the implications of the attributional process on the gossip recipient's potential positive and negative behaviors towards the gossip sender through cooperation and social undermining.

Cooperation. Gossip senders may benefit from the cooperation of the gossip recipient when the gossip episode is interpreted as a signal of trustworthiness. Behaviors signaling trustworthiness promote future cooperation (G. R. Jones & George, 1998; Mayer et al., 1995) and contribute to the development of positive relationships of mutual trust and support (Balliet & Van Lange, 2013; Ferrin et al., 2008; Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, & Werner, 1998). The extent to which gossip improves or damages the gossip sender's trustworthiness is likely to correspond with the gossip recipient's future cooperation with the gossip sender.

When individuals feel secure about the intentions of others, they feel empowered to engage in the interpersonal risk-taking necessary for cooperation to occur (Burt & Knez, 1996; Edmondson, 1999). Gossip perceived to be well-intentioned can signal the gossip sender's willingness to cooperate. For example, gossip perceived to benefit other group members shows

the gossip sender's willingness to take the risk of sharing potentially sensitive information to help others (Grosser et al., 2010) and invites the gossip recipient into a stronger relationship (Ellwardt, Steglich, & Wittek, 2012).

Trustworthy gossip senders are also likely to benefit from cooperation because they are viewed as a valuable resource. When the gossip sender is trustworthy, gossip can provide valuable information about other group members (Kurland & Pelled, 2000) and social norms (Baumeister et al., 2004). Gossip recipients may pursue a cooperative relationship with the gossip sender to have continued access to this information. Being connected with the gossip sender also benefits the gossip recipient by creating indirect connections to others in the group (Granovetter, 1973). These connections may provide access to resources, expertise, and other valuable forms of social capital (Coleman, 1988).

Proposition 7: *Gossip positively influences the gossip recipient's cooperation with the gossip sender when it improves perceptions of the gossip sender's trustworthiness.*

Social Undermining. Despite the potential for gossip to benefit the gossip sender, gossip senders risk facing social sanctions from gossip recipients when the gossip leads to perceptions of untrustworthiness. Social undermining in the workplace encompasses a range of negative social behaviors that impair one's relationships or reputation, such as withholding important information, spreading rumors, or criticizing a coworker in unhelpful ways (Bordia et al., 2014; Duffy et al., 2002). In organizations, social undermining may take the form of ostracism when used to punish an individual by socially excluding them (D. L. Ferris, Brown, Berry, & Lian, 2008). Given that the social undermining can be a covert form of retaliation in the workplace (Duffy, Scott, Shaw, Tepper, & Aquino, 2012; Lee, Kim, Bhave, & Duffy, 2016), it is an accessible way for gossip recipients to punish the gossip sender for engaging in gossip.

When the instrumental motives of the gossip sender are evident, gossip is less likely to have the intended beneficial effects for the gossip sender (Gambetta, 1994). Untrustworthiness leads to the expectation that similar self-interested and harmful offenses may be repeated by the offender (Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009). Gossip that is self-interested and undermines the gossip sender's trustworthiness, may thus prompt retaliation from the gossip recipient. Although gossip recipients may not be direct victims of the gossip sender's untrustworthiness, retaliation can be motivated by a broad range of actions that violate one's expectations of civil and orderly social conduct (Bies & Tripp, 1996). Even third parties are sensitive to the interpersonal mistreatment of others and likely to punish transgressors (O'Reilly, Aquino, & Skarlicki, 2016; Wang et al., 2011), especially when the victim is powerless to act on their own (M. S. Mitchell, Vogel, & Folger, 2015; Skarlicki & Kulik, 2005). Whether the gossip target is a perceived powerless victim of the gossip or if others are perceived to be indirectly disadvantaged by the gossip sender's self-serving gossip, gossip recipients may use social undermining to sanction gossip senders.

Furthermore, untrustworthy gossip senders may be viewed as a source of relational conflict that threatens group performance. The trustworthiness of group members is crucial for the group to function effectively, and the lack of mutual trust inevitably causes group performance to suffer (De Jong & Dirks, 2012). Even if the gossip does not directly harm the gossip recipient, gossip recipients are likely to consider self-advancing behaviors detrimental to the group (Gandz & Murray, 1980). Given the destructive impact of relational conflict on team performance (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1995, 1997), the gossip sender may be viewed as a threat to group cohesion. However, social exclusion may hinder the gossip sender's ability to jeopardize the collective welfare of the group through negative role modeling of behaviors for

other group members (Kerr et al., 2009). For example, gossip recipients may withhold sensitive information or exclude the gossip sender from important roles in the future to minimize the gossip sender's potential influence on others.

Proposition 8: *Gossip positively influences the gossip recipient's social undermining of the gossip sender when it damages perceptions of the gossip sender's trustworthiness.*

Discussion

Despite the ubiquity of gossip in the workplace, research in the management literature has provided a limited perspective of employee responses to gossip without a clear theoretical framework. In this chapter, we present a typology of the content of gossip based on the valence and work-relatedness of the gossip that delineates four archetypal interpretations of workplace gossip. we also develop a multilevel process model grounded in attribution theory to explain why gossip recipients may attribute distinct motives to the gossip sender and how this affects perceptions of the gossip sender's trustworthiness. We suggest that this attributional process influences how gossip recipients respond at the episodic level through the reciprocation of gossip and further influences whether gossip recipients cooperate with or socially undermine the gossip sender over time. By emphasizing the perspective of the gossip recipient and the implications for the gossip sender, this chapter offers several theoretical contributions that advance our understanding of workplace gossip.

Theoretical Contributions

First, we contribute to the literature on workplace gossip by offering a framework for understanding how gossip leads to social consequences for the gossip sender through an attributional process. By shifting the focus to the gossip recipient's perspective, we highlight the ambiguity gossip recipients must interpret through the attribution process that determines the

outcomes of gossip. While much of the existing literature on gossip in organizations and groups has focused broadly on the nature of gossip activity (Baumeister et al., 2004; Ellwardt, Labianca, & Wittek, 2012; Kniffin & Wilson, 2005; Michelson et al., 2010; Noon & Delbridge, 1993), the proposed attributional process underscores how gossip may produce a range of outcomes for the gossip sender dependent on the gossip recipient. Additionally, as noted by Michelson et al. (2010), prior conceptual models of gossip have not captured the processual aspects of gossip. The multi-level perspective embedded in the proposed attributional framework highlights the range of behavioral responses by gossip recipients as part of this process, ranging from the episodic reciprocation of gossip to the relational responses over time. By unpacking the underlying interpretive process, we offer a framework to study the process through which employees synthesize information from the gossip episode to interpret it and how this process drives subsequent social interactions.

Second, we offer a typology of gossip to distinguish four prototypical patterns of gossip in organizations. Gossip is a unique form of communication because of its inherent ambiguity (Rosnow, 1977; Suls, 1977). Whereas much of the prior research on workplace gossip focuses on the valence and frequency of gossip (Ellwardt, Labianca, et al., 2012; Farley, Timme, & Hart, 2010; Grosser et al., 2010), we expand on the work-relatedness, credibility, and status of the gossip target as key factors that shape the attributional process. The theorized typology integrates both the constructive and destructive potential of gossip by considering the common patterns of interpretation that are likely to be associated with the content of distinct configurations of gossip dimensions. Although gossip episodes may take on many different structures and patterns (Eder & Enke, 1991), the proposed model offers a theoretical framework for understanding how distinct types of gossip may be interpreted by gossip recipients.

Third, whereas prior conceptual models focus on gossip as a means of gaining power for the gossip sender (Kurland & Pelled, 2000), We examine a spectrum of behavioral responses that affect the gossip sender's relationship with others. As suggested by Michelson et al. (2010), the primary value of gossip is its impact on how people relate to one another. By examining the multilevel implications of gossip, the theorized model offers explanations for both the immediate responses to gossip at an episodic level and its consequences for the gossip sender over time. We contribute to the limited research on the consequences for the gossip sender and suggest that gossip is not solely a means to influence perceptions of the gossip target (Burt & Knez, 1996; Feinberg et al., 2012, 2014; Sommerfeld et al., 2008; Zinko & Rubin, 2015), but it is also a behavior of consequence for the gossip sender's relationships with others.

Future Research

By emphasizing the ambiguous nature of gossip and shifting the focus to the perspective of the gossip recipient, this model offers several avenues for future research. First, the proposed model offers several propositions for guiding future empirical research on workplace gossip. The model highlights opportunities for future research to test the various characteristics of the gossip episode that are likely to influence responses to gossip. Empirical testing of these factors may also advance research on gossip in the management literature by further demonstrating how gossip is distinct from other types of social interactions in the workplace (Brady et al., 2017).

Second, the proposed model builds on prior conceptualizations of gossip (Brady et al., 2017; Kurland & Pelled, 2000) to emphasize that gossip is not simply a unidimensional construct. To fully understand the effects of gossip, future empirical research on gossip may benefit from addressing the dimensions beyond just valence that jointly contribute to the interpretation of gossip. Recently developed measures of workplace gossip reflect this

multidimensional approach by distinguishing the status of the gossip target (Brady et al., 2017). Further attention to the multidimensional nature of gossip may enrich several areas of management research, such as social networks and relationships in organizations, by bringing clarity to how different types of gossip influence the formation and maintenance of relationships.

Although we identify specific features of the gossip episode integral to the attributional process, the theorized model presents opportunities for future extension by considering the potential impact of additional factors in the attribution process. Future research may examine how individual differences and attributional biases (see Kelley & Michela, 1980) may color the lenses through which employees interpret gossip. For example, individuals with a higher propensity to trust (Mayer et al., 1995) may give the gossip sender the benefit of the doubt when the motives for gossiping are ambiguous, but hostile attribution bias (Milich & Dodge, 1984) may increase perceptions of gossip as an aggressive behavior. Other contextual factors may also influence the attributional process of gossip. For example, the interpretation of gossip received in a group context may be influenced by the reactions of fellow gossip recipients (Eder & Enke, 1991), such as whether others are surprised or angered by the gossip. At the organizational level, cultural views of gossip that antagonize and increase the social costs of gossiping may also influence the attribution process (Kulik, Bainbridge, & Cregan, 2008; Kurland & Pelled, 2000).

Future research may also benefit from the integration of additional theories with the proposed attributional perspective. For example, research on emotions suggests that emotional displays convey social information that affects perceiver reactions (Van Kleef, 2009). Since venting is a strategy of coping with emotions (Carver et al., 1989), integrating an affective perspective may further explain the complexity of attributions related to gossip as a form of

venting. Gossip recipients may consider whether the gossip sender's display of emotions, such as anger or contempt, reflect an underlying desire for emotional support or manipulative influence.

CHAPTER 2: FAULTLINE PERSPECTIVE OF WORKPLACE GOSSIP

The conceptual model presented in Chapter 1 highlights the relational consequences when individuals encounter distinct patterns of gossip. However, in the context of organizations, these relational consequences are embedded in the broader social structure of the group through which individuals understand the social landscape. Indeed, gossip has long been recognized as a group-oriented phenomenon (Gluckman, 1963; Hannerz, 1967; Paine, 1967). The existence of gossip itself necessitates the context of a group, considering that there are at least three individuals involved (i.e. the gossip sender, recipient, and target). Although nascent research on gossip acknowledges that it serves important social functions in groups, much of the research on gossip has focused on its interpersonal effects on dyadic relationships (e.g. Ellwardt, Steglich, et al., 2012; Grosser et al., 2010). Yet, the divergent outcomes suggested in the previous chapter raises the question of how patterns of gossip affect not only the individual relationships within the immediate triad but also the broader group dynamics that capture how individuals relate to the groups in which they belong.

In this chapter, I address this question by examining the impact of gossip on the perceived social structure of groups. I integrate theory on subgroups and faultlines (Carton & Cummings, 2012; Lau & Murnighan, 1998, 2005) to suggest that gossip is a mechanism that alters how group members perceive similarities and differences within the group and creates perceptions of activated faultlines. In doing so, gossip may result in both positive and negative consequences by facilitating solidarity with some members but sowing discord and divisiveness towards others; gossip may be beneficial in creating a sense of social support within subgroups at the cost of creating perceptions of division and conflict at superordinate levels of the group.

Gossip and Subgroups

As described in Chapter 1, gossip serves an important social function in groups by providing a mechanism through which members of a group can share valuable information about other group members without being limited by the constraints of direct observation (Dunbar, 2004). In doing so, gossip influences the way that people perceive and relate to others within the group (Michelson et al., 2010; Zinko & Rubin, 2015) and serves as an antecedent to the social structures that emerge (Halevy, Halali, & Zlatev, 2019). Early research on gossip observed that gossip plays a role in bringing people together (Gluckman, 1963) yet at the same time creates factions in the form of rival quasi-groups (Paine, 1967). Specifically, gossip helps to define and maintain the boundaries of social groups by demarcating the difference between insiders and outsiders (Hannerz, 1967). This tension between the integrative and disintegrative potential of gossip suggests that to understand the consequences of gossip in groups, it is necessary to consider how it influences the perceived social structure of the group.

While groups represent a social unit of interdependent individuals (Mcgrath, 1991), decades of management research on diversity in groups have highlighted that the differences among the individuals that comprise these groups affect the social dynamics that emerge in the group (Milliken & Martins, 1996; Daan van Knippenberg & Mell, 2016; Williams & O'Reilly III, 1998). Knowledge and understanding of these differences can provide a valuable roadmap of the members in the group (Bunderson, 2003). However, these differences can also manifest through smaller collectives that are not necessarily beneficial to the group (Gibson & Vermeulen, 2003). These consequences of heterogeneity emerge when the individuals within the group perceive the social structure of the group as consisting of smaller collectives or subgroups (Cronin, Bezrukova, Weingart, & Tinsley, 2011). Thus, the extent to which gossip communicates

these differences within the group holds important implications for the social structures that emerge.

Subgroups are defined as subsets of individuals from the same workgroups that share some degree of unique interdependence compared to other members (Carton & Cummings, 2012). Subgroup theory draws from the diversity literature (Harrison & Klein, 2007) to suggest that subgroups may form based on different types of similarities and differences (Carton & Cummings, 2012). According to Harrison and Klein (2007), diversity in teams may exist in the form of separation (i.e. horizontal differentiation), disparity (i.e. vertical differentiation), and variety (i.e. categorical differentiation). The types of subgroups that emerge (resource-based, identity-based, and knowledge-based) are theorized to be a consequence of whether faultlines exist along these types of diversity (Carton & Cummings, 2012). Faultlines are defined as the "hypothetical dividing lines that may split a group into subgroups based on one or more attributes" (Lau & Murnighan, 1998, p. 328). When the alignment of these differences and similarities amongst group members create distinct and nonoverlapping groups, the salience of these implicit subgroups influences attitudes and evaluations of the broader group (Lau & Murnighan, 2005).

The existing research on faultlines has focused on the composition of groups (e.g. Bezrukova, Jehn, Zanutto, & Thatcher, 2009; Ou, Seo, Choi, & Hom, 2017; Spoelma & Ellis, 2017; Zellmer-Bruhn, Maloney, Bhappu, & Salvador, 2008); however, the origins of this theory point to the potential for faultlines to develop along more complex, less observable dimensions (Lau & Murnighan, 1998). In addition, although the importance of the activation of faultlines is recognized (Antino, Rico, & Thatcher, 2019; Jehn & Bezrukova, 2010), the mechanisms through which activation occurs remains unclear. While some research has examined the types of events

that lead to the activation of faultlines (Chrobot-Mason, Ruderman, Weber, & Ernst, 2009), a common thread across these precipitating events is the communication or expression of the perceived differences amongst organizational members.

As an informal process of sharing evaluative information, gossip thus offers a natural social mechanism for circulating the type of information that activates faultlines. Integrating faultline theory with organizational gossip research presents a unique approach to understanding the implications of gossip within the broader group context while providing an explanation for how these perceptions of division in groups may come about. In the following sections, I examine the implications of a faultline perspective on gossip and how gossip may be a mechanism for not only activating dormant faultlines but also creating the dimensions along which the perception of faultlines form. As a result, gossip is likely to create an "us versus them" mentality within the group that heightens the salience of potential dividing lines in the group.

Gossip and the Activation of Faultlines

Gossip circulates evaluative social information about other group members (Foster, 2004). In doing so, it informs group members of what characteristics and behaviors are valued by other in the group. Positive gossip provides examples of exemplary behaviors whereas negative gossip provides examples of unexemplary behaviors (Baumeister et al., 2004). For example, gossip may be used to warn other group members of the exploitive behavior of free-riders in the group (Dunbar, 2004). Gossip can also spread reputational information about the tendencies of group members to behave cooperatively or selfishly (Feinberg et al., 2014, 2012) and evaluations of their work ethic or attitude (Kniffin & Wilson, 2005). Gossip may also spread information about behaviors that are considered normative by other group members (Peters et al., 2017). In addition, individuals may solicit gossip to better understand how other group members are

evaluated (Emler, 1994). Through the exchange of gossip, group members become aware of the evaluative criteria that are used by other group members. Thus, the more a group engages in gossip, the more exposure its members will generally have to this type of information.

Simultaneously, gossip provides relational information about other group members that contributes to their perception of the social landscape. First, gossip indicates a positive relationship between the gossip sender and the gossip recipient because it demonstrates a willingness to share sensitive information (Ellwardt, Steglich, et al., 2012; Grosser et al., 2010). Second, gossip also indicates the nature of the relationship between the gossip sender and the gossip target by revealing the gossip sender's impression of the gossip target (Smith & Collins, 2009). Negative gossip indicates a negative relationship and dislike for the gossip target whereas positive gossip indicates a positive relationship (Labianca & Brass, 2006). Over time, a given employee must reconcile the accumulation of gossip that they experience in a workgroup (Sommerfeld et al., 2008) and integrate it with their own impressions of others (Smith & Collins, 2009). According to balance theory, the properties of symmetry and transitivity are used to integrate this information and affect perceptions of relationships (Granovetter, 1973; Heider, 1958). Thus, a focal individual is more likely to evaluate a friend of a friend favorably and an enemy of a friend unfavorably. Applying this perspective to gossip supports the notion that gossip influences the perceptions of relationships amongst group members (Burt & Knez, 1996) and provides knowledge of the social landscape (Emler, 1994). An employee may adopt impressions of group members consistent with the gossip they receive to make sense of the social structure of the group. These impressions contribute to an "us versus them" mentality by highlighting perceived similarities and differences amongst how group members feel about each other (Wert & Salovey, 2004). The accumulation of this information allows group members to

gain a more complete picture of the different ways in which members of the group may be socially categorized.

By making certain attributes and behaviors more salient and providing information on how other group members are evaluated on these dimensions, gossip provides the groundwork for categorizing group members into potential subgroups. According to the categorization-elaboration model (CEM: Van Knippenberg, De Dreu, & Homan, 2004), the salience of social categories is driven by comparative fit (i.e. whether the categorization results in high similarity within groups and high differences between groups), normative fit (i.e. whether the categorization is meaningful in the social context), and cognitive accessibility (i.e. whether these differences and similarities are easily perceived). These components of the CEM underly the emergence of activated faultlines (Spoelma & Ellis, 2017; Thatcher & Patel, 2012). Gossip increases the comparative fit of certain social categorizations by providing group members with information that reveals the similarities and differences between group members. Gossip also provides evidence for normative fit of certain social categorizations by demonstrating which attributes and behaviors are meaningful, evaluative criteria commonly used by other group members. As gossip increases, these social categories should become more cognitively accessible as a result of repeated exposure.

As an illustrative example, consider a situation where a focal employee hears negative gossip about a supervisor's management style. As an isolated episode, this may affect the focal employee's perception of the particular supervisor's reputation. However, it also highlights a potentially important evaluative criterion in this workgroup: preferred management style. As a recurring phenomenon, the focal employee may also encounter gossip from another coworker criticizing another supervisor's similar management style. The focal employee may also

encounter some coworkers who praise these supervisors for their management style. Over time, the focal employee is able to socially categorize supervisors and coworkers based on whether they are perceived to favor a particular management style. Additionally, the focal employee may notice other similarities between the managers and employees who use and prefer a particular management style; perhaps they are all graduates from the same business program; perhaps they tend to belong to the same age group. These additional differences may become integrated into the content of subsequent gossip. Thus, in this example, gossip makes management style a salient attribute to use for social categorization by making it cognitively accessible. In doing so, it heightens the normative fit of these social categories by demonstrating that management style is important enough to compel employees to gossip about it. The relational information from gossip further helps group members to identify additional similarities and differences that maximize comparative fit.

However, for the perception of activated faultlines to emerge, it is necessary that the accumulation of gossip in a group is a reinforcing process. That is, the consistency of the content of the gossip increases the likelihood that faultlines will be perceived based on the attributes or characteristics evaluated in the gossip. There are several reasons why gossip is conducive to this reinforcing process. Research on the structure of gossip exchange suggests that the exchange of gossip tends to elicit responses that support or elaboration of the gossip, making it difficult for others to jump in and challenge it (Eder & Enke, 1991). By definition, the target of the gossip is not present when gossip is exchanged, thus preventing them from directly refuting any negative evaluations. Lastly, people are also more likely to gossip with those they expect to agree with the content of the gossip (Gambetta, 1994). For example, an employee may avoid gossiping negatively about a coworker with the coworker's friend out of fear that it will elicit a retaliatory

response. Therefore, gossip is selectively shared with those who will likely agree with it, increasing the likelihood that group members encounter consistent types of gossip.

This reinforcing tendency of gossip also extends to the recurrence of gossip amongst the same groups of individuals (Ellwardt, Labianca, et al., 2012). As gossip is shared with those with similar views, these shared attitudes promotes interpersonal attraction and closeness (Bosson, Johnson, Niederhoffer, & Swann, 2006). Gossip strengthens the relationship and trust between the gossip sender and recipient because of the risk involved in sharing negative evaluations of other group members (Grosser et al., 2010). As a result, the exchange of gossip often facilitates the reciprocation of gossip in the future (Ellwardt, Steglich, et al., 2012). Over time, the continued sharing of gossip amongst the same subset of employees contributes to the saliency of a potential subgroup comprised of those sharing similar evaluations. Research on gossip networks provides evidence that gossip tends to occur in clique-like clusters (Ellwardt, Labianca, et al., 2012). Thus, the patterns in which people tend to exchange gossip over time lends itself to the likelihood that it is a reinforcing mechanism

In a given group, however, multiple faultlines may exist (Lau & Murnighan, 1998). Thus, the distinction between dormant and activated faultlines is important. When faultlines remain dormant, the consequences may not manifest (Meyer, Shemla, & Schermuly, 2011; Pearsall, Ellis, & Evans, 2008). This then raises the question of which faultlines will become activated. As noted in the diversity literature, group members may vary in their perception and interpretation of objective similarities and dissimilarities within the group (Shemla, Meyer, Greer, & Jehn, 2016). In other words, the same composition of differences and similarities may be experienced differently across individuals.

Gossip is a mechanism that may help explain why these differences in experiences may occur. Given the same objective composition of member attributes, gossip shapes how group members interpret these differences and similarities by directing group members towards specific faultlines. For example, by highlighting differences in values, status, or demographics, gossip influences which of these attributes become the most salient in how group members make sense of interpersonal dynamics. Frequent gossip amongst junior employees about senior employees may activate one's awareness of the potential division of the group into subgroups based on tenure. Alternatively, frequent gossip amongst gender groups about the opposite gender may activate faultlines based on gender. Thus, gossip shapes the perception and subjective experience of activated faultlines that determine how a group may be divided.

Hypothesis: Gossip is positively associated with the perception of activated faultlines.

Beyond Group Composition

Although the traditional perspective of faultlines would suggest that these subgroups form based on the composition of the group, gossip need not align along clearly defined, compositional characteristics of the group. Gossip may facilitate the social construction of dividing lines that go beyond demographic attributes (e.g. state or emergent forms of diversity, see review by van Knippenberg & Mell, 2016). For example, there is evidence that faultlines may form between employees who are perceived to be stressed versus nonstressed (Kalish, Luria, Toker, & Westman, 2015). Gossip may also simply create a subgroup defined by the shared negative attitudes about others (Bosson et al., 2006). A certain set of employees may share no other observable similarity besides the fact that they frequently criticize a certain subset of other employees. The shared value that binds the ingroup in this case may be based solely on the similarity of their evaluation of particular group members. Over time, employees may make

sense of this gossip by identifying or inferring the characteristics that define these dividing lines. Thus, gossip may create the perception of activated faultlines along socially constructed differences and similarities that go beyond the mere activation of dormant faultlines.

Because these subgroups are not necessarily based on compositional characteristics of the group, the defining features of these subgroups may also change over time. New gossip may reveal changes in expectations in the social context (Baumeister et al., 2004). These changes may shift the perception of which individuals are part of one subgroup or another. New values that are highlighted may redefine the differences between subgroups or diminish the significance of previously salient values. For example, gossip may initially create the perception of a divide between junior and senior employees. However, a shift in the nature of gossip in the group, such as negative gossip about the data analysts, may redefine the salient social categories around functional expertise.

Furthermore, gossip may not necessarily result in symmetrical perceptions of subgroups. Asymmetry is likely to occur if group members are not equally exposed to the same amount of gossip (Ellwardt, Labianca, et al., 2012). Given the secrecy that is often associated with gossip (Rosnow, 2001), it is plausible that group members may perceive the activation of different faultlines depending on the subset of gossip they encounter. As suggested by the faultline literature, perceptions of inter-subgroup dynamics by one subgroup might not be shared by other subgroups (Thatcher & Patel, 2012). Even when gossip contributes to strong shared perceptions within a subgroup, it may not result in shared perceptions by those outside of this subgroup. Especially initially, those who are left out of the gossip or are themselves the subject of gossip may not be aware that subgroups are forming around them through the exchange of gossip. Over time, evidence of these subgroups may become more evident, as employees notice or overhear

gossip that they are excluded from. These excluded members may then find solidarity with one another and form their own subgroup through gossip about their shared experiences.

Implications of a Faultline Perspective of Gossip

Integrating faultline theory offers a unique perspective of why gossip may lead to both positive and negative outcomes for groups. On one hand, the exchange of gossip may contribute to the effective functioning of the group by creating a sense of cohesion and social support amongst those who gossip with each other. On the other hand, gossip also comes at a cost by communicating social disapproval of the gossip target and implying an outgroup. These mixed consequences parallel the findings that have emerged from the faultline literature. Research suggests that when these faultlines become activated, they may have negative consequences for group outcomes (Jehn & Bezrukova, 2010) and perceptions of the group (Lau & Murnighan, 2005). However, faultlines may also produce potential benefits as a result of the social connections formed in subgroups (Bezrukova, Spell, & Perry, 2010).

At the subgroup level, coworkers are likely to have more favorable and cooperative interactions as a consequence of faultlines (Bezrukova et al., 2010). When subgroups are more salient, group members are more likely to care about and contribute cooperatively to the concerns of the subgroup (Wit & Kerr, 2002). The smaller size of these subgroups that emerge can also improve cooperation because of the greater sense of accountability to group members (Hart & Van Vugt, 2006). Furthermore, the subgroups created by faultlines can also help group members better cope with threatening situations such as injustice (Bezrukova et al., 2010). By creating strong bonds with other group members, subgroups provide social support for its members (Thatcher & Patel, 2012). This shared belonging with others serves as an important source of social support and resource for coping with stress (Haslam, O'Brien, Jetten, Vormedal,

& Penna, 2005). Attending to these needs suggests that employees will be able to find social support and solidarity amongst these coworkers that belong to the same subgroup.

These benefits of activated faultlines and the emergence of subgroups also correspond to the benefits of gossip. Gossip is often shared for cathartic reasons as a way to vent and cope with one's negative emotions (Brady et al., 2017; Foster, 2004). When coworkers exchange gossip, they disclose personal evaluations of others and creates an opportunity to bond over shared attitudes with coworkers (Bosson et al., 2006). By venting their feelings, employees may find emotional support through the sympathy and understanding of others (Carver et al., 1989). As demonstrated in the organizational justice literature, shared perceptions of supervisor injustice can facilitate greater team cohesiveness as a result of shared psychological experience (Stoverink et al., 2014). Gossip, then, may serve as the mechanism through which these stories of injustice are shared, facilitating the emergence of shared perceptions that bring solidarity to the group members who hold this shared perception. Furthermore, the exchange of gossip requires interpersonal trust (Burt & Knez, 1996; Rosnow, 2001). People are selective about who they gossip with and tend to gossip in smaller cliques (Ellwardt, Labianca, et al., 2012), which can promote solidarity and signals trust within these subgroups that emerge (Ellwardt, Steglich, et al., 2012). Gossip steers employees towards the concerns that are shared amongst those they perceive to belong to the same subgroup.

Despite these potential benefits, the consequences of gossip also parallel the consequences of faultlines. The activation of faultlines increases the likelihood of stereotyping and other interpersonal biases based on subgroups that promote conflict in the group (Choi & Sy, 2010) and reduces trust in group members who belong to other subgroups (Polzer, Crisp, Jarvenpaa, & Kim, 2006). Activated faultlines increase the salience of social categories, making

the differences across these subgroups a potential source of conflict (Pearsall et al., 2008; Polzer et al., 2006). This may be the result of the heightened perception of different values that define the perceived subgroups (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2009) or the "us versus them" mentality that arises from identification with a subgroup (Lau & Murnighan, 2005). When group members adopt a subgroup perspective, they are also less likely to behave in ways that promote the broader collective (Wit & Kerr, 2002).

Gossip is similarly likely to contribute to perceptions of intragroup conflict, specifically relationship conflict (Jehn, 1995), by creating the impression that group members do not get along. A high frequency of gossip implies that people in the workgroup regularly evaluate each other and discuss these evaluations with others. Employees are likely to be more aware of divergent preferences or opinions among group members and may interpret this to indicate interpersonal disagreements and incompatibilities in the group. Gossip may even be interpreted as a form of social undermining (Duffy et al., 2002). Furthermore, gossip creates the perception of a fragmented team where members do not necessarily trust each other. Gossip often evokes elements of secrecy, given that it is exchanged outside of the presence of the gossip target (Rosnow, 2001), which may create the impression that group members are unwilling to communicate openly with each other. For example, if gossip creates a faultline between senior and junior employees, it may create a perception of distrust between these groups: junior employees may suspect that senior employees may not have their best interests in mind and senior employees may suspect that junior employees do not share the same priorities. Furthermore, the difficulty of directly verifying the veracity of gossip means that there is always the potential that gossip may be inaccurate due to malicious intent (Hess & Hagen, 2006; Kuttler et al., 2002; Smith, 2014). When employees are exposed to a high frequency of gossip, they will

inevitably encounter conflicting pieces of information and face the dilemma of figuring out who can be trusted when there are inconsistencies (Sommerfeld et al., 2008).

Thus, a faultline perspective of gossip helps to integrate the benefits and consequences associated with gossip. Examining how gossip influences the perceived social structure of the group unveils a potential explanation for why people are drawn to engage in gossip despite the lay perspective that it is harmful. Although gossip may be divisive in its consequences for the overall group, it also promotes solidarity within the subgroups that emerge.

Configuration of Gossip in Groups

Despite the potential for gossip to activate faultlines, not all gossip and faultlines are the same. Gossip can vary along several key dimensions that influence its consequences. Within workgroups, employees are likely to encounter a wide variety of gossip that jointly contribute to the perception of faultlines and emergence of perceived subgroups. Thus, the exact patterns or configurations of the types of gossip that employees experience may influence the nature of the faultlines that are likely to be activated by gossip. In the following subsections, I first review the key dimensions of gossip and then theorize how they may be relevant to the configurations of gossip that activate different types of faultlines. Taking a configurational approach allows for more complex theorizing of the integration of multiple dimensions, such as potentially asymmetrical or equifinal causal effects (Doty & Glick, 1994; Fiss, 2011). Given the vast number of combinations possible when considering the 6 different types of gossip that characterize these key dimensions ($3^6 - 1 = 728$ combinations), the theorizing I present will offer guiding expectations of what may be observed in configurations of gossip that activate faultlines and address the following questions:

Research Question 1: Which, if any, dimensions of gossip are relevant to the activation of faultlines in general?

Research Question 2: Which, if any, combinations of gossip lead to the activation of faultlines associated with each type of subgroup (resource-based, identity-based, and knowledge-based)?

I will then use fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), which is a configurational approach that involves both quantitative and qualitative assessment (Ragin, 2012), to inductively identify the patterns and configurations of gossip that are empirically sufficient for the activation of each type of faultline.

Valence of Gossip

The evaluative nature of gossip can vary in valence. Valence has been a focal dimension in previous conceptualizations of gossip (Brady et al., 2017; Kurland & Pelled, 2000). Empirical studies have suggested that negative gossip occurs more frequently than positive gossip (Baumeister et al., 2004; Robbins & Karan, 2019). Negative gossip may entail complaining or criticizing others whereas positive gossip may involve praising or complimenting others. Both are capable of highlighting shared views and differences, providing information on how group members are connected, and plausibly contributing to the activation of faultlines. Yet, there are key differences between positive and negative gossip that may impact their relative roles in the activation of faultlines.

The negative evaluative information that is communicated through negative gossip tends to elicit stronger reactions in general and provides more diagnostic information (Baumeister et al., 2004; Wert & Salovey, 2004). Negative gossip implies a perceived violation of norms or expectations in someone else's behavior. For example, hearing an employee gossip critically

about another coworker's behavior directly illustrates the behaviors that others should avoid. In general, negative experiences also have more pervasive and persistent effects on subsequent moods (Baumeister et al., 2001). Thus, the information shared through negative gossip may create a lasting impression.

The structure of negative gossip also directly expresses both similarities and differences amongst group members. Negative gossip implies negative views about others in the workplace, yet the sharing of negative gossip also implies the expectation that these negative views are likely to be held by others as well. Thus, those who engage in gossip tend to do so with those that they expect to hold the same opinion (Ellwardt, Labianca, et al., 2012). The tendency of gossip to elicit support and agreement offers further evidence that the evaluative views are shared by others (Eder & Enke, 1991). These implied similarities and differences convey relevant information for constructing the social categories that lead to the activation of faultlines.

In contrast, positive gossip may unveil perceived differences in a more indirect manner. In the absence of any negative evaluations, positive gossip would indicate that group members evaluate each other favorably. While it is possible that differences may emerge through positive gossip when group members do not agree with the positive gossip they hear, these differences are unlikely to bring together subgroup members if they are not shared through negative gossip. For example, employees may privately disagree with positive gossip praising a particular coworker. However, if there is no negative gossip about this coworker, it becomes more difficult for employees to identify others who share a less favorable evaluation of the coworker. Employees with privately held views that are inconsistent with positive gossip might refrain from negative gossip unless they expect others to agree (Gambetta, 1994). Furthermore, the exchange of negative gossip requires greater levels of dyadic trust to be shared (Grosser et al.,

2010). Thus, the absence of negative gossip may indicate insufficient trust amongst potential subgroup members for subgroups to emerge.

On its own, positive gossip may even reduce the perception of activated faultlines. The sharing of positive evaluations creates the impression that group members generally evaluate each other favorably. Those who hold dissenting opinions may withhold their negative evaluations for the sake of conformity with the group (Janis, 1982). Individual group members may discount their own perceptions of potential divides within the group if these views are not evident in the gossip shared by the rest of the group. Though both positive and negative gossip may be observed in the patterns of gossip that activate faultlines, it is more difficult to imagine situations where gossip would activate faultlines in the absence of negative gossip.

Work-relatedness of Gossip

Gossip can also cover a wide range of topics. Although organizational gossip focuses on gossip that occurs within organizations amongst organizational members, the content of the gossip need not necessarily concern work-related matters. Work-related gossip includes topics such as job performance, career progress, relationships within the organization, or other workplace behaviors (Kurland & Pelled, 2000). However, gossip may include social or personal topics about organizational members that do not directly relate impact the immediate domain of work but is still relevant because it concerns fellow organizational members.

Research on gossip suggests that gossip behavior is influenced by domain relevant characteristics (Reynolds et al., 2018). In the workplace, the content of work-related gossip concerns behaviors and actions with direct implications on the outcomes of other employees in the shared domain of work. Thus, the information conveyed through work-related gossip is directly relevant to the organizational context in which it is shared.

However, there are many reasons that employees may engage in nonwork-related gossip with each other. Gossip can be enjoyable as a welcome reprieve from task-related conversations in the workplace (Foster, 2004) or can be motivated by its entertainment value (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012). Thus, employees may choose to engage in gossip about topics that are most entertaining or intriguing. While some work-related topics may be enjoyable to gossip about, nonwork topics present a vast range of scandalous or novel topics that can be intriguing to gossip about (Ben-Ze'ev, 1994). Nonwork gossip also allows employees to disclose more personal information by revealing their opinions on topics that go beyond the workplace. By gossiping about nonwork-related topics, employees reveal beliefs that are important to them. For example, by gossiping about someone else's political values, employees reveal both their own political values and the importance of politics to themselves. The disclosure of these personal views and beliefs is impactful on the formation of relationships (Collins & Miller, 1994). Through the accumulation of nonwork-related gossip, differences and similarities that extend beyond topics relevant to the workplace become more salient.

Verticality of Gossip

Recent conceptualizations of gossip have also highlighted the relative status of the gossip target as another dimension of gossip (Brady et al., 2017). Differences in hierarchy, power, or status are often perceived as vertical differences (Giessner & Schubert, 2007). Thus, gossip may concern vertical targets when it is about supervisors or horizontal targets when it is about coworkers. I refer to this dimension of gossip as the verticality of gossip.

Research indicates that people in positions of power are often appealing subjects of gossip (Gambetta, 1994; McAndrew et al., 2007). Because these individuals have greater access to resources, their actions and decisions may have greater implications for other group members.

Especially in the workplace, gossip about higher status individuals may reflect feelings of unfairness or that differences in status or power are unjustified (Wert & Salovey, 2004). Gossip is a mechanism for employees to vent about these individuals, which helps group members cope with negative experiences and regain a sense of control when they feel unable to safely confront the source of the issue (Alicke et al., 1992). Especially when it involves higher status individuals, venting is a less risky coping mechanism than direct confrontation (Cortina & Magley, 2009). However, positive gossip may also reflect awe or admiration for these higher status individuals. Gossip about higher status individuals is thus unique in that it implies that the value and impact of their actions are recognized by others. Frequent gossip about higher status individuals brings the attention of other group members to the actions of these high status individuals and implicitly places an emphasis on differences related to status.

Horizontal gossip that targets peers, however, may reflect different cognitive and social processes. One of the reasons that employees may gossip is to engage in social comparisons (Wert & Salovey, 2004). Social comparison states that individuals prefer to compare themselves to similar others, which offers more insight for making accurate self-evaluations (Festinger, 1954; Mumford, 1983). In the context of groups, this social comparative information contributes to the perceptions of differentiation that facilitate social categorizations (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Tajfel, 1982). Thus, gossip about coworkers facilitates comparisons that reflect the defining characteristics of the social categories perceived by group members. Frequent gossip about coworkers increases awareness of the prevailing social categories as defined by peers. The salience of these social categories activates the effects of faultlines (Meyer et al., 2011). While the nature of these differences may depend on the other dimensions of gossip, the existence of

these differences among coworkers implies that the defining attributes of the social categories that emerge from gossip do not necessarily align with hierarchical differences.

Types of Activated Faultlines

The configuration of these dimensions of gossip represents the overall nature or pattern of gossip experienced in a given group. This pattern of gossip poses a potential explanation for not only the presence but also the types of subgroups that may emerge when multiple types of subgroups are possible. Activated faultlines lead to the emergence of different types of subgroups, depending on the nature of the attributes pertinent to the faultlines. As theorized by Carton and Cummings (2012), the activation of different types of faultlines may lead to the emergence of resource-based, identity-based, and knowledge-based subgroups. It is possible that some dimensions of gossip, such as negative gossip, may be common characteristics of the patterns of gossip that activate any faultline. However, the exact nature of the faultline activated may depend on the combined influence of the various dimensions that characterize the gossip shared within the group.

Resource-based subgroups. Resource-based subgroups form on the basis of differences in access to resources such as power, authority and status (Carton & Cummings, 2012). This type of subgroup is based on social dominance theory, which suggests that groups maintain dominance over other groups through a disproportionate control of power and resources (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). The unequal distribution of these resources is captured in the diversity literature through the disparity of these vertical differences (Harrison & Klein, 2007). Thus, faultlines that form along these vertical differences are most likely to contribute to the emergence of resource-based subgroups (Carton & Cummings, 2012).

Considering the various dimensions of gossip, the verticality of gossip may align with the activation of faultlines along disparity-based differences for several reasons. First, gossip about individuals in positions of power occur when there is less trust in vertical relationships with supervisors and more trust in horizontal relationships with coworkers (Ellwardt, Wittek, & Wielers, 2012). This type of gossip heightens the salience of hierarchical differences between employees as lower status employees gossip together about higher status employees. The individuals with higher positions in organizations influence the emergence of resource-based subgroups because of their control over resources (Meyer, Shemla, Li, & Wegge, 2015). Thus, gossip that targets these employees is likely to result in categorizations of employees into subgroups with disproportionate resources. For example, frequent gossip amongst employees about their supervisors may activate a faultline based on hierarchical differences that results in perceptions of a high-power subgroup of supervisors and a low-power subgroup of subordinates.

Second, gossip that targets hierarchical differences may contribute to the group processes associated with the emergence of resource-based subgroups. Resource-based subgroups are characterized by distinct processes such as asymmetric perceptions of fairness and the centralization of power (Carton & Cummings, 2012). Especially when the gossip is also negatively-valenced, gossip about higher status individuals may reflect unfair, disadvantageous experiences (Brady et al., 2017). By gossiping about others based on hierarchy, coworkers can validate opinions of unfairness caused by those in more advantageous positions and convey their resentment towards these superiors (Wert & Salovey, 2004). These shared negative experiences of discrimination or disadvantage can help to overcome other identity differences (Cortland et al., 2017). Thus, lower status employees may put aside other dormant, personal differences to find solidarity with their peers because vertical gossip creates salient hierarchical differences.

However, it is also plausible that the activation of resource-based faultlines may emerge through other combinations of gossip. Even if the gossip in an organization largely concerns other coworkers, employees may perceive some coworkers to have unfair advantages or rewards (Wert & Salovey, 2004). For example, perceptions of resource-based subgroups may reflect perceptions that some coworkers have an unfair amount of influence on decisions compared to others. Thus, I do not expect the presence of vertical gossip to be the only way through which gossip may activate faultlines that create the perception of resource-based subgroups.

Identity-based subgroups. Identity-based subgroups form on the basis of shared values and social characteristics (Carton & Cummings, 2012). This type of subgroup is based on social identity theory (Hogg & Terry, 2000), which suggests that subgroups are a function of the sense of belonging when members perceive that they share core, self-defining characteristics with a subset of the group members. The differences in these characteristics is captured in the diversity literature through the separation of horizontal differences that reflect values, beliefs, and attitudes (Harrison & Klein, 2007). Thus, faultlines that form along these differences are most likely to contribute to the emergence of identity-based subgroups (Carton & Cummings, 2012).

Considering the various dimensions of gossip, nonwork-related gossip may be relevant to the activation of faultlines along separation-based differences because it highlights differences beyond the domain of work that employees may find more personal. Differences related to cultural values, political ideology, and other beliefs that emerge through nonwork gossip are all characteristics that may be important to social identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Thus, gossip that concerns topics beyond the workplace implies that coworkers are exchanging evaluative comments about others concerning these more personal issues.

The activation of faultlines based on these social attributes is associated with identity threats and the fragmentation of identities (Carton & Cummings, 2012). Especially in combination with negatively-valenced gossip, nonwork-related gossip may indicate potential conflicts between the values and beliefs held by employees. The presence of coworkers with conflicting core values may manifest through identity threats (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). Employees may also seek to distance themselves from coworkers with conflicting values that would undermine their own sense of identity (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). In this effort by employees to maintain the personal values that make them distinct and protect their own identity, it may become more difficult for employees to see each other as part of the same unit. For example, if gossip about political values in the workplace reveals stark differences in political preferences, coworkers may feel uncomfortable associating with those who they view as holding philosophically distinct priorities or goals. Instead, identity-based subgroups may emerge along the differences and similarities in values that become salient through gossip.

Although gossip that incorporates topics from nonwork domains may have greater potential to tap into more personally held values and beliefs that define social identities, it is certainly plausible that other combinations of gossip may contribute to the activation of identity-based faultlines. For example, gossip about hierarchical differences may be relevant to the extent that status and power are important to one's social identity. Thus, fuzzy set analysis may reveal additional patterns of gossip associated with the perception of identity-based subgroups.

Knowledge-based subgroups. Knowledge-based subgroups form on the basis of unique cognitions related to the interpretation and acquisition of knowledge (Carton & Cummings, 2012). This type of subgroup is based on information processing theories (Galbraith, 1974), which suggests that subgroups reflect specific domains of knowledge or expertise in an

organization. The differences in these characteristics is captured in the diversity literature through the variety of distinct categories of relevant knowledge, experiences, or information (Harrison & Klein, 2007). Faultlines that form along these differences are likely to contribute to the emergence of knowledge-based subgroups (Carton & Cummings, 2012).

Considering the dimensions of gossip, work-related gossip most closely aligns with the type of information that may contribute to the activation of faultlines along variety-based differences and the perception of knowledge-based subgroups. Work-related gossip communicates evaluative information that is relevant to the immediate domain for coworkers (Kurland & Pelled, 2000). This may include criticism or praise of the decisions and actions of other employees that reveal differences in opinions or exemplary behaviors that are task relevant. Thus, work-related gossip has the potential to communicate information about who is capable and who is incompetent at different tasks in the domain of work. Differences based on job-related characteristics may offer a unique cognitive resource in groups because it indicates a potentially broader pool of information and task-relevant skills (Bezrukova et al., 2009).

Knowledge-based subgroups are associated with the consideration of alternative sources of knowledge and the convergence of mental models (Carton & Cummings, 2012). Work-related gossip contributes to these processes by exposing employees to alternative views regarding decisions and tasks in the workplace. For example, gossip criticizing a manager's decision on a task implicitly indicates a preference for an alternative approach. This form of gossip may reveal differences in expertise or knowledge that affect how coworkers evaluate work-related behaviors. In this way, gossip may resemble the informational value of voice that may be directed laterally towards coworkers rather than necessarily upwards towards leadership (Detert, Burris, Harrison, & Martin, 2013).

In addition, work-related gossip may affect shared mental models by creating the perception of differentiation in knowledge and abilities in the shared domain of work. Gossip concerning the organizational context may highlight perceived differences in other group members' approach or mentality towards the organization's goals (Kniffin & Wilson, 2005). By circulating these evaluative perceptions, gossip facilitates the convergence of these perceived reputational differences about others (Burt & Knez, 1996; Emler, 1994). For example, gossip criticizing the work of certain coworkers may create a shared perception of the divergent knowledge and skills of these coworkers. Gossip in a relevant domain also disseminates knowledge of social expectations (Baumeister et al., 2004), which may highlight similarities and differences in the framework used by others to interpret behaviors in the group.

The activation of knowledge-based faultlines may also be unique in the role of positively-valenced gossip. Although positive gossip on its own may not highlight differences in opinions or values, it may contribute to perceptions of expertise by elevating the reputations of others as exemplars. Combined with the work-related gossip, positively-valenced gossip may entail admiration and praise of task-relevant knowledge and expertise. Thus, it is plausible that fuzzy set analysis may reveal additional configurations of gossip that indicate a contributing role for positively-valenced gossip in the activation of knowledge-based faultlines.

CHAPTER 3: EMPIRICAL TESTS OF GOSSIP AND ACTIVATED FAULTLINES

In this chapter, I review the design and results of a field study and two experimental studies to examine the consequences of gossip in groups. In the first study, two-wave field data was collected from elementary school teachers to evaluate the effects of gossip on the perceptions of activated faultlines and examine the configurations of gossip associated with distinct types of faultlines using fsQCA. In the second and third studies, I used an experimental design to examine the effects of gossip on perceptions of activated faultlines in a controlled environment. Before describing the design of these studies, there are two key methodological considerations I review below regarding the appropriate measurement of faultlines and levels of analysis.

First, there are two conceptual approaches to measuring faultlines. Perceptual measures of faultlines rely on subjective ratings of whether a group divides into subgroups or cliques (Jehn & Bezrukova, 2010). Structural measures of faultlines rely on indices of faultline strength based on the overlap of defined attributes (Meyer, Glenz, Antino, Rico, & González-Romá, 2014). A key distinction of structural measures is that they are based on the composition of the group and depend on predetermined characteristics attributed to each team member. These structural measures represent the strength of dormant faultlines and the potential for activated faultlines rather than the extent to which these faultlines are activated (Antino et al., 2019). Given the theoretical argument that gossip determines which attributes contribute to the emergence of subgroups, it is indeterminable a priori which attributes would be relevant in a structural measure of faultlines in a given context. In cases where gossip creates socially constructed faultlines, these attributes may not be easily observable characteristics of team members. Thus, the use of perceptual measures of activated faultlines more closely aligns with the proposed model.

Second, the perception of activated faultlines can also be evaluated at multiple levels of analysis. Because the subgroups created through gossip are socially constructed, there may be asymmetry in how members perceive the faultlines. As suggested by the faultline literature, perceptions within the group may be asymmetrical across subgroups (Thatcher & Patel, 2012). In theory, gossip is likely to result in asymmetrical perceptions and individual level consequences because it is unlikely to involve all group members equally. By definition, some group members will always be left out of any given exchange of gossip. Thus, perceptions of how the group gossips may vary across individuals. Conceptually, the theorized effects of gossip at the group level reflect the shared perceptions of gossip in the group that emerge from the experiences of individual members and is thus best characterized as a compositional construct (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). However, the question of aggregation can also be evaluated empirically. If there is weak evidence of agreement in individual perceptions of gossip and limited between-group variance relative to within-group variance, then it may be more appropriate to evaluate the model at the individual level instead.

Study 1: Field Survey (Two-Wave Study)

Sample and Procedures

In Study 1, I conducted a field study that focused on evaluating the effects of workplace gossip in a natural group context. The sample consisted of elementary classroom and specialist teachers across four school districts in a large metropolitan in the United States. The school was used as the unit of grouping for several reasons. First, the school provided distinct boundaries that defined groups of interdependent teachers. Within the sample, the number of classroom teachers and specialist teachers (e.g. music, physical education, librarian, etc.) ranged from 12 to 44 (M = 26), and it is common for teachers within the same school to interact with each other on

a regular basis to coordinate school activities and daily logistics. Second, anecdotally, districts encourage teachers to view their school as one team through regular staff-wide meetings, team-building activities, and professional development activities in preparation for the academic year. Thus, the school is a representative unit of grouping in the context of this sample.

Data was collected at two time points in order to evaluate the effects of gossip on the activation of faultlines throughout the school year. The first data collection was administered during the second month of the school year. Given the sensitivity of some of the survey questions and identifiability of responses, invitations to participate in the study were emailed from an external email address to 1,997 teachers to explain the purpose of the study and assure the confidentiality of responses. Potential participants were offered a $10 gift card in exchange for their participation. In total, 180 usable responses across 73 schools were received after removing two responses that skipped focal measures of the survey. The average age of subjects was 41.3 years, and 84% of the subjects were female. Of this sample, 83% of the subjects were Caucasian, 8% were Asian, 3% were Hispanic, 3% were Native American, and the remaining 3% reported other ethnic backgrounds.

The same survey was distributed for Time 2 five months later and completed approximately two and a half months prior to the end of the academic year. In total, 151 usable responses across 63 schools were received, of which 45% had also completed the survey at Time 1. The average age of subjects at Time 2 was 40.8 years, and 84% of the subjects were female. Of this sample, 83% of the subjects were Caucasian, 8% were Asian, 2% were African American, and the remaining 7% reported other ethnic backgrounds.

Measures

Dimensions of gossip. Participants reported the frequency in which they encountered gossip in their school, including gossip that they personally engaged in or heard from others. The measure of gossip was based on the measure developed by Brady and colleagues (2017) but adapted to refer to both work-related and nonwork-related topics in addition to the existing dimensions of valence and status of the gossip target. Given the length of the measure, the lowest loading positive and negative items based on a pilot test were not included in the final survey ("*asked a colleague if they have a negative impression of something that another coworker/supervisor has done*" and "*defended a coworker/supervisor's actions while talking to another work colleague*"). In total, the measure included 32-items on a seven-point scale (1 = *never*, 7 = *more than once a day*), with four items for each combination of valence, work-relatedness, and verticality. For example, a sample item for negative, work-related, horizontal gossip was "*Criticized a co-worker/peer about something related to work while talking to another colleague.*" The items were then aggregated to each respective dimension (α = .96 at T_1 and T_2 for positive; α = .90 at T_1 and α = .91 at T_2 for negative; α = .90 at T_1 and α = .93 at T_2 for work-related; α = .90 at T_1 and α = .93 at T_2 for nonwork-related; α = .87 at T_1 and α = .91 at T_2 for vertical; α = .89 at T_1 and α = .92 at T_2 for horizontal).

Activated faultlines. The perception of activated faultlines was measured using three items (Jehn & Bezrukova, 2010) on a seven-point scale (1 = s*trongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). This measure was repeated three times to refer to the different types of faultlines (i.e. "based on differences in resources or hierarchy," "based on differences in identity or values," and "based on differences in knowledge or abilities"). The measures exhibited strong internal consistency for resource-based faultlines (α = .96 at T_1 and α = .97 at T_2), identity-based faultlines (α = .98 at T_1 and α = .97 at T_2), and knowledge-based faultlines (α = .97 at T_1 and T_2).

Conflict. To capture the potential divisive consequences of gossip, the perception of conflict was measured using a four-item measure of relationship conflict (Jehn, 1995) on a seven-point scale (1 = s*trongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). A sample item was "*There is friction among employees in this organization*" (α = .96 at T_1 and α = .95 at T_2).

Perceived coworker support. To capture the potential relational benefits of gossip, perceived coworker support was measured using an adapted six-item measure (Mossholder, Settoon, & Henagan, 2005) on a seven-point scale (1 = s*trongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). A sample item was "*I have some coworker who really care about my well-being*" (α = .94 at T_1 and α = .95 at T_2).

Control variables. Although the relationship between diversity and faultlines is complex and depends on the alignment of diversity attributes, stronger faultlines are generally associated with diversity (Thatcher & Patel, 2011) and intrateam conflict (Zellmer-Bruhn et al., 2008). Thus, perceptions of perceived workstyle similarity and social category similarity were captured using five-item (α = .86 at T_1 and T_2) and three-item (α = .83 at T_1 and α = .85 at T_2) measure respectively (Zellmer-Bruhn et al., 2008) as alternative explanations for the consequences of gossip. Both were measured on a seven-point scale (1 = s*trongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

In addition, other forms of communication were measured to distinguish the effects of gossip from related types of interaction that lack the full defining criteria of gossip. For example, while gossip is a type of informal conversation, employees likely have many other informal conversations that may not be evaluative or about absent third parties. Thus, I measured the overall frequency of informal conversations in general to distinguish the effects of gossip from other types of informal conversations in general. This was measured using the item, "*How frequently do you chat informally with coworkers (e.g. outside of meetings, regular school*

activities, etc)?" on a seven-point scale (1 = *less than once a week*, 7 = *6 or more times a day*). In addition, a common alternative to gossip that is often encouraged in organizations is to provide feedback directly to others. Similar to gossip, feedback consists of evaluative information that can be informal. However, it does not involve an absent third party. Thus, I measured feedback that participants receive in their organization using a three-item subscale of feedback from others, adapted from the Work Design Questionnaire (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006) on a seven-point scale (1 = s*trongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). A sample item was "*I receive a great deal of information from my superiors and coworkers about my job performance*" (α = .88 at T_1 and α = .85 at T_2).

Tenure was self-reported by participants, given the possibility that the length of time in an organization may also affect differences in knowledge and perspectives relevant to the activation of faultlines (Choi & Sy, 2010).

Lastly, given the possibility that a more challenging work environments may affect teachers' attitudes and perceptions of their school, two school-level indices were obtained from the state's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction as control variables. First, the Combined Proficiency Decile was included, which captures the overall student proficiency across Math and English Language Arts as a decile relative to other schools in the state over the previous three years (OSPI, 2020b). Second, the percentage of low-income students was calculated based on the enrollment data for the current school year (OSPI, 2020a).

Time 1 Analytical Approach

The descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations at Time 1 are summarized in Table 1. Notably, only negative gossip is correlated with any of the three types of activated faultlines (r = .23, $p < .002$ for identity-based; r = .14, p = .06 for resource-based). This indicates that the

relationship between the dimensions of gossip and the activation of faultlines may be more complex, thus requiring a configurational approach to consider multiple dimensions in conjunction. To ensure that the three types of activated faultlines are not only distinct from one another but also distinct from the other measured outcomes of conflict and perceived coworker support, I conducted confirmatory factor analysis. The resulting five-factor model provided good fit of the data: χ^2 (142) = 189.38; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .04. All 10 possible four-factor models were also evaluated and found to be significantly worse fitting, with the next best model consisting of resource-based faultlines and conflict as a combined factor: χ^2 (146) = 807.53; CFI = .84; RMSEA = .16; $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 618.15$, $p < .001$.

I also conducted a separate confirmatory factor analysis to evaluate the structure of the measure of gossip. Since each item of gossip reflected a specific combination of valence, work-relatedness, and verticality, the measure of gossip consisted of eight possible unique combinations (2^3) that then align with the six higher-order dimensions. Thus, I modeled a hierarchical CFA and compared it against three alternative models: one in which the eight combinations of gossip load onto a single second-order factor of overall gossip, a non-hierarchical model in which the eight combinations of gossip were not allowed to freely covary, and a non-hierarchical model in which all items directly loaded onto a single factor. The theorized hierarchical model with six higher-order factors provided the best fit of the data: χ^2 (425) = 838.15; CFI = .93; RMSEA = .07. The next best alternative was the hierarchical model with one overall second-order factor of gossip. This model was significantly worse fitting: χ^2 (456) = 1,034.63; CFI = .91; RMSEA = .08; $\Delta\chi^2(31) = 196.5$, $p < .001$. These results provide evidence supporting the dimensionality of gossip.

Next, I evaluated the potential aggregation of these constructs to the group-level and the appropriate level of analysis by fitting null, random-coefficient models to partition the variance into between- and within-group components. Focusing on schools that received multiple responses ($N = 156$), the results indicated that between-school variance accounted for only 2% of the total variance in overall gossip and less than 1% of the total variance in the overall perception of activated faultlines. These results suggest that the vast majority of variance in subjects' reporting of gossip exists within schools, and thus perceptions of activated faultlines within schools greatly vary. Based on these results, I use fuzzy set analysis to analyze the data at the individual level. I assessed the partitioning of variance again at Time 2 to evaluate whether experiences of gossip and the perception of activated faultlines require a greater amount of time to converge.

Fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) was used to inductively identify the unique configurations of gossip associated with the different types of faultlines. FsQCA is an analytic technique that is based on set theory (Smithson & Verkuilen, 2006) and the representation of the relationship between constructs through set membership. It allows for the examination of equifinality, meaning that the same outcome may be achieved through more than one potential configuration. FsQCA also allow for asymmetrical causal relations, meaning that the absence of a condition may not necessitate contrasting effects as the presence of a condition. In other words, if a configuration of negative and work-related gossip is associated with activated faultlines, it does not necessitate that the opposite configuration (i.e. positive and nonwork-related gossip) is associated with the absence of activated faultlines. Thus, fsQCA is best suited for analyzing how constructs may combine in configurations to produce a key outcome (Gabriel, Campbell, Djurdjevic, Johnson, & Rosen, 2018). As theorized, the various

dimensions of gossip present numerous potential configurations of gossip that may influence employee perceptions of subgroups in the workplace.

The first step involved calibrating all the measures by specifying the thresholds for full membership, non-membership, and the midpoint. The measures for the different types of activated faultlines were measured on 7-point scales with response options ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Thus, full membership and non-membership were set as the endpoints. The measures for each dimension of gossip were measured on 7-point scales as frequency measures. Thus, while the endpoints "never" and "more than once a day" are natural thresholds for full non-membership and membership, the threshold for the midpoint is less intuitive. Consistent with prior applications of fsQCA in management research (Campbell, Sirmon, & Schijven, 2016), I set the midpoints as the median for each dimension of gossip. The presence of a dimension of gossip is thus interpreted as an observation where the frequency of that dimension of gossip was in the upper half of the sample. The midpoints ranged from approximately "*once a month*" for negative gossip to "*2-3 times a month*" for work-related and positive gossip.

After calibrating all measures, truth tables were consolidated by setting the minimum number of cases required for consideration and the minimum level of consistency for a given solution (Fiss, 2011). While empirically rare cases can be insightful, the literature recommends a frequency threshold of at least 1 or 2 while retaining at least 80% of the cases so that solutions are not driven by these rare configurations (Gabriel et al., 2018; Ragin, 2008a). Given the relatively large sample in this study for fsQCA ($n > 50$ considered large; Greckhamer, Misangyi, & Fiss, 2013; Vis, 2012), I employed a minimum threshold of 3 cases, which retained 86% of the sample and was comparable to past research (Fiss, 2011). High consistency indicates that the

combination of conditions "agree" in the outcome produced whereas low consistency indicates that the combination of conditions do not reliably produce the outcome (Campbell et al., 2016). Prior research has typically used a 75%-80% minimum level of consistency while identifying natural gaps in the distribution of consistency scores above this threshold (Campbell et al., 2016; Ragin, 2012). In addition, the PRI (proportional reduction in inconsistency) can be considered in conjunction to minimize paradoxical results where a case may be consistent for both the presence and absence of an outcome (Gabriel et al., 2018). Based on these guidelines and the distribution of the consistency scores, effective consistency scores of .79, .86, and .85 were used for resource-based, identity-based, and knowledge-based faultlines respectively (PRI thresholds were .44, .63, and .53). The resulting truth tables were logically reduced using the fsQCA software (Ragin, 2008b).

The output includes three types of solutions. The complex solution effectively assumes that all missing configurations would not have the outcome, thus no simplifying logical assumptions are applied. The intermediate solution applies simplifications based on "easy" counterfactuals that involve the addition of redundant causal conditions consistent with prior theoretical or substantive knowledge (Fiss, 2011; Ragin, 2008b). These "easy" counterfactuals are incorporated into the analysis by specifying whether it is the presence or the absence of a condition that is expected to be associated with the outcome. Given the focus on how configurations of gossip contribute to the activation of faultlines, intermediate solutions were configured with the expectation that the presence of the dimensions (rather than the absence) would contribute to the activation of each type of faultline as part of the simplification logic. The parsimonious solution further applies simplifications based on "difficult" counterfactuals to remove causal conditions, thus assuming these counterfactuals to include redundant conditions.

Conditions that are present in both the parsimonious and intermediate solutions are considered "core" conditions whereas conditions that are present only in the intermediate solution are considered "contributing" conditions (Gabriel et al., 2018).

Time 1 Results

As summarized in Table 2, the results of the fuzzy set analysis revealed five unique configurations of gossip for the three types of activated faultlines. The overall consistency scores for each type of faultline ranged from .79 to .85, suggesting adequate agreement in the results. There was a larger range in the overall coverage scores, which represents the proportion of the outcome that is explained by the configurations (Ragin, 2008b) and is analogous to an R^2 in regression analysis (Greckhamer et al., 2013). In the management literature, coverages scores can vary widely, depending on the amount of randomness or idiosyncrasy in the configurations associated with the outcome (Fiss, 2011), and tends to be lower with larger samples (Greckhamer et al., 2013). The coverage scores for resource-based (coverage = .47) and identity-based faultlines (coverage = .45) suggest that the configurations accounted for nearly half the cases where these faultlines were activated. For identity-based faultlines (coverage = .63), this proportion was even higher. Since gossip is not theorized to be the only determinant of activated faultlines, it is unlikely that the configurations will explain every occurrence of activated faultlines in the data. In other words, there are likely other paths for faultlines to become activated that are not accounted for solely by gossip. Nonetheless, the overall coverage scores indicate that approximately half of the cases where activated faultlines were observed are accounted for by the resulting configurations.

The uniqueness of the configurations suggests that there are different configurations associated with each type of activated faultline and multiple configurations associated with the

same type of activated faultline. Overall, a common condition across almost all the configurations that emerged is the presence of negative gossip. Of the five configurations, all but Configuration 3 included the presence of negative gossip as part of its configuration. Although Configuration 3 is ambivalent to the presence or absence of negative gossip, it requires the absence of positive gossip. This configuration implies that negative gossip is at a minimum, similarly infrequent if not relatively more frequent in these cases.

However, it is also notable that each dimension of gossip emerges in at least one configuration of gossip. This suggests that none of the dimensions of gossip could be completely ignored when evaluating the patterns of gossip associated with the activation of faultlines. Thus, with regards to Research Question 1, negative gossip emerged most frequently as a condition in the configurations of gossip that activate faultlines, but each of the other types of gossip also emerged as conditions in at least one configuration.

Next, I examined the configurations for each type of activated faultline to address Research Question 2. For resource-based faultlines, two unique configurations emerged. The configurations shared three of the same conditions: the absence of positive gossip, the presence of negative gossip, and the presence of work-related gossip. The similar unique coverage of these configurations (i.e. the proportion of the outcome explained that is not accounted for by other configurations), suggests that they are similarly prevalent in this sample (Gabriel et al., 2018). Configuration 1 included the presence of vertical gossip whereas Configuration 2 included the presence of horizontal gossip, suggesting that there is more than one way for gossip to activate resource-based faultlines. The inclusion of vertical gossip in Configuration 1 indicates that resource-based faultlines were consistently activated when teachers reported encountering a combination of negative gossip, gossip concerning work topics, and gossip targeting those at

other hierarchy levels. A potential explanation for this is that complaining and venting about school administrators likely highlights the discrepancy in control over decisions that affect the school. This is consistent with the general expectation that negative gossip about those in vertical positions may reflect perceived unfairness or inequity caused by those with greater power (Wert & Salovey, 2004). However, Configuration 2 included the presence of horizontal instead of vertical gossip, suggesting that shifting the target of this type of gossip to coworkers can also activate resource-based faultlines. A potential explanation for this configuration is that coworkers are salient referents for social comparison because they would be expected to have similar amounts of control over resources (Festinger, 1954; Shah, 1998). Thus, negative gossip concerning work topics about coworkers may activate resource-based faultlines by creating perceptions of inequity amongst coworkers who are expected to be equals.

For identity-based faultlines, two unique configurations also emerged. Configuration 3 included the absence of positive gossip and the presence of nonwork-related gossip. This is consistent with the expectation that nonwork-related topics may be attributed to identity-based differences. Configuration 3 is ambivalent to the presence or absence of both horizontal and vertical gossip, which suggests that identity-based faultlines depend more on the topic and valence of the gossip rather than who the gossip is about. As noted, the absence of positive gossip in this configuration indicates that its frequency was below the median. The ambivalence of this configuration towards negative gossip implies that negative gossip was, at a minimum, similarly below the median if not relatively more frequent. It also suggests that in cases where the presence of positive and nonwork gossip was observed, identity-based faultlines were not consistently activated, regardless of whether negative gossip was present. However, Configuration 4 offers an alternative configuration of gossip for the activation identity-based

faultlines that required only the presence of negative gossip. This configuration reflects the potential for any number of characteristics to be interpreted as identity-defining characteristics. Configuration 4 was also notably more prevalent than Configuration 3 as indicated by the larger unique coverage, which is expected given that Configuration 4 subsumes a wider set of possible configurations. Thus, regardless of who group members are gossiping about and what the topic of gossip is about, the presence of negative gossip alone consistently created the perception of subgroups based on identity differences. As Carton and Cummings (2012) noted in their theory of subgroups, even disparity-based or variety-based differences may contribute to identity-based subgroups when these characteristics carry social significance.

Lastly, only one configuration emerged for the activation of knowledge-based faultlines. Configuration 5 included the presence of negative gossip, vertical gossip, work-related gossip, and the absence of nonwork-related gossip. The combination of work-related gossip with the absence of nonwork-related gossip suggests that knowledge-based faultlines are activated when gossip predominantly concerns the domain of work. This is consistent with the general expectation that work-related gossip would provide more relevant information or knowledge differences in the context of the workplace. Although the presence of positive gossip did not emerge as a condition, its absence is also not required. This suggests that in contrast to both configurations for resource-based subgroups and one of the configurations for identity-based subgroups, knowledge-based subgroups can emerge when positive gossip is present but does not require it. Interestingly, the presence of vertical gossip also emerged as part of this configuration, which implies that gossip may be a means for teachers in this sample to communicate disagreement or alternate perspectives about how school administrators are approaching organizational goals and situations. Some participants voluntarily expressed rifts

between teachers and administrators in their private communication with me about the study, which anecdotally reflect the differences in responsibilities between teachers and administrators that affect the way they process key decisions and situations in their school.

Time 2 Analytical Approach

Given that the data at Time 1 was collected near the beginning of the school year, the results represent how gossip in the early stages of a workgroup's development is associated with the initial activation of faultlines. As several respondents noted in their feedback, each school year offers unique social experiences, and thus their responses to the survey would likely be different compared to previous years. Examining the same relationships at Time 2 may then offer insight into whether the relevant patterns of gossip for the activation of faultlines evolve over the relevant timeframe of the school year. It is important to recognize that the exact configurations at Time 2 are likely to differ because the analytical method employed by fsQCA is sensitive to the inclusion of even rare configurations observed in the data (Ragin, 2008a). Thus, the primary purpose of examining the configurations at Time 2 is to determine whether distinct patterns of gossip are consistently associated with the activation of different types of faultlines at a time point later in the lifecycle of the school year and, if so, to draw insight from the qualitative similarities or differences in the configurations compared to those observed at Time 1.

The descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations at Time 2 are summarized in Table 3. Compared to Time 1, the correlations between the types of gossip and faultlines at Time 2 were noticeably stronger. In fact, each of the six types of gossip were positively correlated with identity-based faultlines (all rs $\geq .19$, all ps $\leq .021$) and knowledge-based faultlines (all rs $\geq .23$, all ps $\leq .004$). With the exception of positive gossip and vertical gossip the other types of gossip were also positively correlated with resource-based faultlines (all rs $\geq .16$, all ps $\leq .045$).

I again conducted analysis to evaluate the partitioning of the variance by fitting null, random-coefficient models. Focusing on schools that received multiple responses ($N = 129$), the results indicated that between-school variance accounted for 12% of the total variance in overall gossip and less than 1% of the total variance in the overall perception of activated faultlines. While the between-school variance for gossip was noticeably higher at Time 2 than Time 1, these results indicate that the vast majority of variance in subjects' reporting of gossip continued to exist within schools and even more so for perceptions of activated faultlines. Thus, there appeared to be only slight convergence in the reporting of gossip within schools over time, which may reflect the possibility that more people may become aware of the gossip within their school as it spreads. However, the exchange of gossip necessarily excludes some individuals, creating variance in people's experience of gossip within the same group.

I then used fuzzy set analysis to analyze the data at the individual level. The measures were calibrated following the same procedure at Time 1, using the medians at Time 2 as the midpoints for each dimension of gossip. The Time 2 midpoints similarly ranged from approximately "*once a month*" for negative gossip to "*2-3 times a month*" for work-related and positive gossip.

I again employed a minimum threshold of 3 cases, which retained 81% of the sample. Truth tables were consolidated by identifying natural gaps in the distribution of consistency scores in conjunction with the recommended 75%-85% minimum consistency from prior research. The effective consistency scores used at Time 2 were .87, .87, and .85 for resource-based, identity-based, and knowledge-based faultlines respectively (PRI thresholds were .60, .68, and .58). The effective consistency scores were similar to those used at Time 1 with the exception of resource-based faultlines, which was noticeably improved at Time 2 and indicates

greater "agreement." Similarly, the PRI thresholds were all improved, which suggests a greater reduction of inconsistencies in the results.

Time 2 Results

The logical reduction of the truth tables at Time 2 using the fsQCA software produced eight total configurations (seven unique) across the three types of activated faultlines, as summarized in Table 4. The overall consistency scores ranged from .83 to .85, which were similar to the consistency scores at Time 1. The overall coverage scores were noticeably improved for knowledge-based faultlines (coverage = .69) while slightly improved for both resource-based (coverage = .50) and identity-based faultlines (coverage = .68) compared to Time 1. This suggests that the configurations at Time 2 explain a larger proportion of the cases where activated faultlines were observed.

Similar to Time 1, negative gossip emerged as part of at least one configuration for each type of activated faultline. However, the same was also true for positive, nonwork-related, vertical, and horizontal gossip at Time 2. Each of the six dimensions of gossip also emerged in at least one configuration, indicating that each is still relevant for identifying the configurations of gossip that activate faultlines. In fact, three of the seven unique configurations of gossip that emerge are completely ambivalent to negative gossip as a condition. Thus, with regards to Research Question 1, while the presence of negative gossip emerged as a condition in most of the configurations at Time 2, its prevalence was not as consistent as it was at Time 1. Instead, there was greater evidence of several patterns of gossip that activated faultlines but were ambivalent to the presence or absence of negative gossip.

To address Research Question 2, I examined the configurations for each type of activated faultline. For resource-based faultlines, three unique configurations emerged. The configurations

all included the presence of negative and work-related gossip. Furthermore, Configurations 1 and 2 both included the presence of vertical gossip. However, Configuration 1 included the absence of horizontal gossip, indicating that the negative, work-related gossip was focused only on those at other hierarchy levels. Configuration 2 included the absence of nonwork-related gossip, indicating that the negative gossip about nonpeers was focused only on work-related topics. These two configurations were similar to Configuration 1 at Time 1 and suggest that the resource-based faultlines were activated when negative, work-related gossip was focused on administrators in the school. In contrast, Configuration 3 included the presence of horizontal gossip and absence of vertical gossip. Thus, this pattern of gossip is focused on coworkers at the same hierarchy level, similar to Configuration 2 at Time 1. In addition, Configuration 3 is distinct in that it also included the presence of positive and nonwork-related gossip. The inclusion of these dimensions deviates from the solutions that emerged at Time 1 and suggests that resource-based gossip can also be activated by negative, work-related gossip about coworkers, but only if there is also positive, nonwork-related gossip. In aggregate, these three configurations suggest that resource-based faultlines are indeed activated by gossip that targets those at other hierarchy levels, yet this dimension of vertical gossip is not enough, nor is it the only way for gossip to activate resource-based faultlines. While these configurations do not perfectly match the configurations that emerged at Time 1, they share similarities in 1) the presence of negative and work-related gossip in all configurations and 2) the presence of vertical and horizontal gossip in separate configurations.

For identity-based faultlines, three unique configurations also emerged. Configuration 4 included only the presence of negative gossip and is identical with Configuration 4 from Time 1. Configurations 5 and 6 both included the presence of nonwork-related gossip, which had

emerged as a condition only for identity-based faultlines at Time 1 in one configuration. Configuration 5 also included the presence of coworker gossip, which suggests that teachers who encountered high levels of nonwork-related gossip about their peers attributed the differences similarities and differences highlighted by gossip to underlying values or beliefs and perceived activated identity-based faultlines regardless of any pattern in the valence of the gossip. In contrast, Configuration 6 included the presence of vertical and positive gossip, which suggests that teachers who encountered high levels of nonwork-related gossip about administrators and other non-peer staff members perceived activated identify-based faultlines only when there were high levels of positive gossip. The presence of positive gossip is particularly distinct, given that it did not emerge as part of any configuration of gossip at Time 1. This configuration provides evidence that it is not exclusively the negative valence of gossip that leads to the activation of faultlines and that in some cases, positive gossip can also create the perception of fractured groups. What is unclear is whether the subgroups perceived as a consequence of this configuration are perceived more favorably than the subgroups that result from configurations involving negative gossip. Overall, these configurations suggest that 1) the presence of negative gossip continues to be a broad configuration associated with the activation of identity-based faultlines but is not the only way for identity-based faultlines to be activated and 2) nonwork-related gossip plays a role in some patterns of gossip that activate identity-based faultlines.

Lastly, two configurations emerged for the activation of knowledge-based faultlines. Configuration 7 included the presence of every dimension of gossip except for negative gossip and is distinct in that it is the only configuration that requires the presence of both work-related and nonwork related topics about both peers and nonpeers. In other words, this configuration reflects high levels of nearly all types of gossip. This suggests that when teachers encounter high

levels of positive gossip that specifically covers a wide range of topics about people across a range of hierarchy levels, the subgroups they perceive are attributed to differences in knowledge. Notably, this configuration is subsumed by Configuration 6 for identity-based faultlines. Furthermore, Configuration 8 is identical to Configuration 4 for identity-based faultlines and included only the presence of negative gossip. This indicates that both configurations of gossip associated with the emergence of knowledge-based subgroups were simultaneously associated with the emergence of identity-based subgroups. Thus, at Time 2, the perception of subgroups based on differences and similarities in knowledge, expertise, and ways of processing information were simultaneously attributed to differences and similarities in underlying values and beliefs.

In summary, while some of the configurations that emerged at Time 2 shared similarities to their counterparts at Time 1, there were also new configurations that emerged that suggest distinct patterns of gossip for subgroups that may have taken a greater amount of time to emerge. Overall, a notable shift at Time 2 was the emergence of the presence of positive gossip and the ambivalence towards negative gossip in multiple configurations. There was also an increase in the number of configurations involving nonwork-related gossip. This may be a reflection that the sharing of nonwork-related information through gossip, which may involve disclosing opinions about others considered to be more personal, is facilitated by trust and takes time to develop (Nifadkar, Wu, & Gu, 2019). Lastly, at Time 2, the configurations that emerged for knowledge-based faultlines were subsumed by the configurations for identity-based faultlines, suggesting that perceptions of knowledge-based subgroups were a subset of the perceptions of identity-based subgroups. Although the existing faultline literature often contrasts identity-based and knowledge-based faultlines (Bezrukova et al., 2009; Carton & Cummings, 2013; Spoelma &

Ellis, 2017), the results at Time 2 suggest a great deal of overlap between the two. This may reflect the tendency that differences in knowledge or information often emerge from differences such as functional roles and work experiences (Bezrukova et al., 2009; Bezrukova, Thatcher, Jehn, & Spell, 2012) that are potentially important to the identities valued by employees in the workplace (A. M. Grant, Berg, & Cable, 2014).

Supplemental Analysis

Conflict and perceived coworker support. To further evaluate whether these configurations of gossip were associated with the potential positive and negative implications of gossip, I conducted supplemental analysis using the membership scores for each of the five configurations to predict conflict and perceived coworker support in a series of hierarchical linear models. The use of a regression-based analysis allows for the inclusion of theoretically relevant controls, such as perceived diversity (work style similarity and social category similarity), tenure, informal conversations, feedback, and characteristics of the school. This approach has been used by researchers to test the robustness of the configurational results from fsQCA (D. Grant, Morales, & Sallaz, 2009).

As summarized in Table 5, all but one of the configurations at Time 1 were positively and significantly associated with conflict (all βs $\geq$ 0.25, all ps $<$ .001). The only exception was Configuration 3, which notably did not require the presence of high levels of negatively-valenced gossip as part of its configuration (β = 0.10, p = .12). In addition, all the configurations were positively and significantly associated with perceived coworker support (all βs $\geq$ 0.18, all ps $\leq$ .007). Notably, both informal conversations (all βs $\geq$ 0.26, all ps $<$ .001) and feedback (all βs $\geq$ 0.34, all ps $<$ .001) also significantly predicted perceived coworker support but not conflict. Thus, the effects of gossip were not only distinct from these alternate forms of communication

but also uniquely predictive of both conflict and perceived coworker support above and beyond the included controls. Overall, almost all the configurations of gossip associated with the activation of faultline reflected both the divisive consequences and relational benefits of gossip.

The same analysis was conducted using the configurations at Time 2. As summarized in Table 6, the results for predicting conflict were consistent with Time 1. Each configuration associated with the activation of faultlines was a positive and significant predictor of conflict (all βs $\geq$ 0.26, all ps $\leq$ .001). However, in contrast to the results at Time 1, none of the configurations at Time 2 were significant predictors of perceived coworker support. Meanwhile, informal conversations (all βs $\geq$ 0.32, all ps < .001) and feedback (all βs $\geq$ 0.17, all ps $\leq$ .033) continued to positively predict perceived coworker support.

To further evaluate whether the findings at Time 2 were limited to the new configurations of gossip that emerged at Time 2, the configurations from Time 1 were applied to the Time 2 sample. In other words, I repeated the regression analyses to examine whether the configurations from Time 1 predicted conflict and perceived coworker support using the data at Time 2. The results summarized in Table 7 showed that each of the five configurations were positive and significant predictors of conflict (all βs $\geq$ 0.26, all ps < .001) but not of perceived coworker support (all βs $\leq$ 0.15, all ps $\geq$ .06). Thus, the null results predicting perceived coworker support at Time 2 were consistent across both sets of configurations.

Lastly, as a more conservative test of the relationship between the configurations of gossip and the activation of gossip, I also conducted the regression analysis at Time 2 while controlling for the activation of faultlines at Time 1 and the respective dependent variable (i.e. conflict or perceived coworker support) at Time 1. Doing so also restricts the sample to participants who completed all necessary measures at both time points and eliminates changes to

the sample of respondents across timepoints as a potential explanation of the results for perceived coworker support. This resulted in a subsample of 66 participants. As summarized in Table 8, two of the configurations of gossip significantly predicted conflict while four other configurations were marginally significant. These results suggest that at Time 2, these patterns of gossip reported by subjects over the current school year were marginally predictive of the change in conflict between Time 1 and Time 2. However, these patterns of gossip did not significantly predict the change in perceived coworker in support. In fact, several of the configurations for the activation of identity-based and knowledge-based faultlines demonstrated a marginal negative effect, suggesting that patterns of gossip that lead to the emergence of these types of subgroups may have a slight negative effect on the change in perceived coworker support over time.

Absence of faultlines. While the primary purpose of this study was to identify the patterns of gossip associated with the *presence* of activated faultlines, the use of fsQCA also allows for the evaluation of potential causal asymmetry by examining whether there were distinct patterns of gossip associated with the *absence* of activated faultlines. Because the absence of one type of faultline does not necessitate that other faultlines were not activated, I aggregated the three measures of activated faultlines into an overall measure of activated faultlines as the outcome for this analysis. I used the same procedure as before to conduct the fuzzy set analysis on the absence of overall faultlines, with the exception that the intermediate solutions were configured with the expectation that *either* the presence or absence of each dimension of gossip would contribute to the absence of activated faultlines (instead of expecting only the presence).

The results produced three configurations at Time 1 and two configurations at Time 2 as summarized in Table 9. It is notable that the configurations were very similar across both time

points. All five configurations included the presence of positive gossip and nonwork-related gossip. The absence of negative gossip and the absence of work-related gossip were each also part of four of the five configurations. These results indicate that it is not simply the absence of all gossip but the presence of certain types of gossip (combined with the absence of others) that is associated with the absence of activated faultlines. In particular, the presence of positive and nonwork-related gossip appears particularly relevant to the lack of activated faultlines.

Change in configurations over time. The differences between the configurations of gossip that activated faultlines at Time 1 versus Time 2 raises the question of whether these differences are a consequence of when the data was collected or idiosyncrasies between the respondents at Time 1 versus Time 2. To examine whether these differences were driven by different respondents, I conducted the fuzzy set analysis on the subsample of 68 teachers who completed the measures of gossip and activated faultlines at both time points. The average age in the subsample was 41.1 years, and 91% were female.

Due to the smaller sample, a minimum frequency threshold of two (instead of three) was applied, which retained 84% of the sample. Given the changes to the sample, the consistency of the results and the configurations that emerge are also expected to differ from the full sample analysis. The reduced sample resulted in eight configurations of gossip each at Time 1 and Time 2 associated with activated faultlines as summarized in Tables 10 and 11. There were several configurations similar to those from the original analysis but also several entirely new configurations, which suggests that the subsample is likely not fully representative of the full sample.

Nonetheless, a comparison between the configurations at Time 1 and Time 2 can offer insight to the source of differences between Time 1 and Time 2. While Configuration 4 is

identical across time points and Configuration 2 is nearly identical, the remaining configurations only partially overlap at best across time points. These results demonstrate that differences across time points persisted even when restricting the analysis to the same set of participants across time points. Thus, changes in the patterns of gossip associated with the activation of faultlines later in the school year cannot be solely attributed to differences in the sample of teachers who participated.

Discussion

The configurations that emerged through Study 1 reveal several broad implications regarding the configurations of gossip associated with the activation of different types of faultlines. Overall, at both time points, unique configurations of gossip emerged for the three types of faultlines, which suggests that the implications of gossip in groups is not necessarily uniform. Distinct patterns of gossip are associated with the perception of different attributes that define the activated faultlines and reflect the types of similarities and differences used by group members to socially categorize group members into subgroups. Furthermore, it is notable that each of the dimensions of gossip emerged in the configurations at both time points. This further indicates the complexity of gossip: Not only are the valence, work-relatedness, and verticality of gossip all important characteristics of gossip, but none of these characteristics of gossip in isolation are able to account for the full range of ways in which gossip divides groups. The specific configurations that emerged also offer several insights.

First, the presence of negative gossip as the most common condition across configurations suggests that negative gossip plays a prominent role in the activation of faultlines overall. In addition, the presence of negative gossip emerged as the sole condition as a configuration for the activation of identity-based faultlines at both time points and for the

activation of knowledge-based faultlines at Time 2. This configuration of gossip also subsumed each of the configurations for resource-based faultlines at both time points, given that each of those configurations also require the presence of negative gossip. In addition, all but one configuration for knowledge-based faultlines (configuration 7 at Time 2), also required the presence of negative gossip. Therefore, it is highly plausible for gossip to activate a faultline that creates multiple types of subgroups, such as a combination of identity and resource-based subgroups. This emergence of multiple subgroups types may influence group processes and outcomes in more complex ways (Carton & Cummings, 2012). However, it is imperative to also recognize that the activation of faultlines through gossip does not depend on just negative gossip. In all other configurations that emerged, the presence or absence of other dimensions of gossip were necessary for faultlines to be activated. Furthermore, at Time 2, three of the configurations that emerged were even ambivalent to the presence of negative gossip. Thus, while negative gossip appears to play a prominent role in the activation of faultlines, negative valence is not the sole determinant of how gossip affects groups.

Second, although the work-relatedness dimension emerged in both configurations of gossip for the emergence of knowledge-based subgroups at Time 1 and one of the configurations at Time 2, it also emerged in all configurations for the emergence of resource-based subgroups at both time points. It is likely that work-related gossip is more important for activating both types of faultlines because the comparison of resources and knowledge within the shared domain or context of work is more relevant to group members than resources or knowledge outside of the work domain. For nonwork-related gossip, however, there is a notable contrast between Time 1 and Time 2. While the presence of nonwork-related gossip emerged in only one configuration at Time 1 for identity-based faultlines, it emerged in four unique configurations at Time 2. This

may suggest an expanded role of nonwork-related gossip in the workplace over time for the activation of faultlines. Given that nonwork-related gossip contains more personal information, it may reveal less observable similarities and differences that tend to become more important over time in the workplace (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998).

Third, while vertical and horizontal gossip both emerged in different configurations, the implications are less intuitive. For the activation of faultlines that created resource-based subgroups at both time points, horizontal gossip and vertical gossip reflected different ways for the same type of subgroup to emerge. Although neither were particularly important for the emergence of identity-based subgroups at Time 1, they emerged in separate configurations for identity-based subgroups at Time 2. Again, this may reflect the possibility for subgroups to emerge when gossip is focused on either peers or nonpeers. Interestingly, for knowledge-based subgroups, the presence of vertical gossip emerged in the lone configuration at Time 1 and one of the configurations at Time 2. While this may be a reflection of the nature of knowledge-based differences between teachers and school administrators in this particular sample, it may also point to the possibility that the salient informational differences in the workplace are often associated with the actions and decisions of those who have the greatest influence over decisions in the organization.

Overall, this configurational approach to the dimensions of gossip reveals how gossip may activate different types of faultlines in the workplace. Furthermore, the supplemental analysis showed that nearly each of these configurations of gossip that activate faultlines were positively associated with both conflict and perceived coworker support at Time 1, which demonstrates the divergent consequences of gossip. The lone exception was Configuration 3, which was the only configuration ambivalent to the presence of negative gossip and was

associated with perceived coworker support but not conflict. In comparison, informal conversations and feedback, which are other forms of communication that lack the definitional criteria of gossip, were only predictive of perceived coworker support but not conflict.

However, the effects of the configurations on conflict were generally stronger than the effects on perceived coworker support at Time 1. Furthermore, the configurations of gossip at Time 2 were positively associated with only conflict. This effect was generally robust even when accounting for conflict and faultlines perceived at Time 1. Thus, while there is evidence for gossip to produce both positive and negative effects amongst teachers in the schools, only the negative effects of gossip persisted later in the school year. In fact, the effect on perceived coworker support was generally negative and marginally significant for some of the configurations at Time 2. These differences across timepoints persisted even when restricting the analysis to the subsample of participants who responded at both timepoints.

Although there may be a multitude of factors that contributed to this contrast between Time 1 and Time 2, one potential explanation could be that the persistence of gossip over time engrains the perception of activated faultlines that makes the divisive consequences more salient. As suggested by Lau and Murnighan (1998) in their original theory of faultlines, the presence of faultlines is likely to legitimize and augment the emergence of subgroups through polarization over time. Thus, the more negative findings at Time 2 may reflect months of accumulated gossip that intensified the schism between subgroups.

Alternatively, it is possible that perceived coworker support was a more relevant positive outcome at Time 1 near the beginning of the school year, given the importance of social support in the socialization process (Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg, Rubenstein, & Song, 2013). At Time 2, gossip may have produced other benefits for teachers that were simply not captured through

perceived coworker support. For example, gossip may have still been a valuable source of information that reduced uncertainty (Martinescu, Janssen, & Nijstad, 2014) or provided insight about changes to social expectations (Baumeister et al., 2004). These potential benefits of gossip could have been associated with alternative configurations of gossip that did not activate faultlines.

Despite these insights, the causal relationship between gossip and the activation of faultlines cannot be ascertained given the correlational nature of the data in Study 1. It is possible that the perception of activated faultlines motivates the subsequent exchange of gossip amongst subgroup members. Given this possibility, I utilize an experimental design in Studies 2a and 2b to evaluate the causal effects of gossip in a controlled environment.

Study 2a: Experiment (Virtual Team Task)

Sample and Procedures

The purpose of Studies 2a and 2b is to provide stronger evidence of the causal effect of gossip on the activation of faultlines using an experimental design. I designed a virtual team task and manipulated the gossip that subjects received through chat messages from their team members. In Study 2a, subjects consisted of 127 undergraduate students at a university in the United States who received credit for a course requirement in exchange for their participation. The average age of subjects was 21.0 years, and 54% of the subjects were male. In addition, 43% of the subjects were Caucasian, 43% were Asian, 5% were Native American, 3% were African American, 3% were Hispanic, and the remaining 3% reported other ethnic backgrounds.

Subjects recruited to participate in this study began by completing demographic information about themselves by indicating their gender, class standing, university, and which academic course they were enrolled in for the research study (i.e. management). To create the

impression that subjects would be interacting with real time with students in other locations, the research assistant instructed subjects that they would begin shortly while pretending to coordinate with other research sites via text messaging. Once the study began, subjects remained in a virtual lobby while three other team members joined. The lobby page displayed time stamps to log all activity (e.g. when people joined the lobby and when the team reached capacity). On this page, the demographic information of each team member was also displayed. In reality, subjects were not interacting with other live participants. The information on this page was manipulated to represent a composition and alignment of demographic characteristics such that the strength of all potential faultlines based on any of the demographic characteristics were equal in strength. This was important to ensure that dormant faultlines based on each of these characteristics were equally likely to become activated. Specifically, the focal subject would align with a different team member in terms of their class standing (i.e. underclassman or upperclassman), university (i.e. focal university or in-state rival), and academic course (i.e. management or psychology). The gender of all team members was manipulated to match the focal subject, thus providing a comparison attribute where differences did not actually exist.

Subjects were told that the purpose of the study was to examine structured communication in virtual teams and were introduced to the chat mechanism of entering single messages of text that would be simultaneously displayed once all team members had submitted their message. Participants were then presented with the "Lost at Sea" survival task that required the team to prioritize items for survival in a scenario following a shipwreck (Nemiroff & Pasmore, 1975). Each team member submitted a message to the team with their suggested item and rationale. The messages from the virtual team members were randomized among three scripted messages supporting items similar in priority based on expert ratings (i.e. items ranked

seventh, eighth, and ninth most important). An example message was "*I would go with the floating seat cushion. We're surrounded by water so having more flotation devices would be safer.*" Then, subjects were told that they would have the opportunity to exchange private messages with each of their team members before making a decision. These messages presented an opportunity for gossip to be exchanged about other team members.

The messages that participants received from their virtual team members were manipulated to correspond to four potential conditions. In a control condition, none of the messages that the participant received consisted of gossip. In other words, none of the messages included evaluative talk about other team members. An example message was "*I like your idea, but hmm… I'm not sure. I think there were a lot of good points. I don't really have a preference.*" In the first gossip condition, the last message that the participant received included gossip about another team member that differed in terms of class standing. The manipulated message was "*I like your idea, but ugh… that freshman/senior was so rude to me in my last chat…*" In an alternate gossip condition, the participant received gossip from a different team member about a team member that attended a different university. The manipulated message was "*I like your idea, but ugh... that [school name] student was so rude to me in my last chat…*" Lastly, an alternative condition for comparison was included to see if the effects of gossip are distinct from the effects of generally expressing a personal bias or prejudice against other groups of people. In this condition, one of the manipulated messages was "*I like your idea, but ugh… I hate working with psych kids.*" While this message expresses a general negative bias against psychology students, it does not contain evaluative talk about other team members.

Following the exchange of these messages, participants completed the survival task by ranking the items that were suggested. Then they were asked to evaluate their team by

completing a measure of the perceptions of activated faultlines (Jehn & Bezrukova, 2010), a manipulation check, and indicating their preferred partner for a subsequent trust activity. Participants also completed measures for team satisfaction and experienced affect in order to assess whether the effects of gossip on the activation of faultlines were merely a reflection of generally negative affective or attitudinal responses to gossip. Participants were then presented with a variation of the trust game where they were given the opportunity to send raffle tickets to any of their team members for a gift card prize. They were told that their team members would receive three times the raffle tickets sent and could payback or return a portion of the raffle tickets they received. Because the short-lived nature of the team in the study likely would not allow for perceived support or conflict to sufficiently develop, these measures of trust were used as an alternative to explore the divergent consequences of activated faultlines caused by gossip.

In addition to the research assistant's verbal instructions and efforts to appear to be coordinating with other research sites, real timestamps for each action during the survival task were documented and displayed in a chat box to create the impression that participants were engaging in live interactions. Nonetheless, it is possible that not all participants believed the purported study design. Although the believability of the study design was not directly measured, only three participants indicated in the debriefing feedback any suspicion or uncertainty about whether there were other live participants. Several others left feedback about different parts of the study that indicated a genuine engagement in the study tasks; one participant even noted that this was "the most involved" study they had completed.

Measures

Activated faultlines. Following Antino, Rico, and Thatcher (2019), the perception of activated faultlines was measured using one item for each of the possible attributes (i.e. I notice

that my team splits into different subgroups based on *gender*… *school*… etc.) on a seven-point scale (1 = s*trongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Gossip. As a manipulation check, participants were asked whether any of their team members gossiped about other team members during the study using two items for negative gossip that were most relevant to the content of the manipulation (Brady et al., 2017) on a seven-point scale (1 = s*trongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The two items ("*criticized another team member*" and "*vented about something another team member had done*") were significantly correlated ($r = .54$, $p < .01$).

Trust (preference). Participants' trust in each of their team members was first measured as a team member selection measure of their preference for working with each team member on a trust activity on a seven-point scale (1 = *lowest preference*, 7 = *highest preference*). This measure of participants' preference for each team member is similar to prior measures of partner selection used in gossip research (Feinberg et al., 2014) that reflect the willingness to trust and engage in a cooperative interaction with each team member. Participants were told, "*The next task for this study involves a trust activity that may require splitting into smaller subgroups. Please indicate the extent to which you would prefer working with each of the team members for this activity.*"

Trust (behavioral). Participants' trust in each of their team members was also measured as the number of raffle tickets that the participant chose to give to each of them. This activity was based on the trust game (Berg, Dickhaut, & McCabe, 1995), which is a paradigm commonly used as a behavioral measure of trust (Feinberg et al., 2012; Levine & Schweitzer, 2015; Wu, Balliet, & Van Lange, 2015). In total, participants were given 10 raffle tickets to allocate or keep for themselves. By giving more raffle tickets to a team member, participants' demonstrated their

willingness to trust the teammate to cooperate. The observed values of trust ranged from 0 to 10 tickets.

Affect. Positive and negative affect were measured using the PANAS (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) consisting of 10 items each on a five-point scale (1 = *very slightly or not at all*, 5 = *extremely*). The measures exhibited strong internal consistency for both positive affect (α = .93) and negative affect (α = .93).

Team satisfaction. Overall satisfaction with the team was measured using a four-item measure (Shaw et al., 2011) on a seven-point scale (1 = s*trongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). A sample item was "*All in all, I am satisfied with my team*" (α = .87).

Analysis and Results

Power analysis. Although no prior research exists on the effect of gossip on faultlines, previous experimental work on how gossip may affect cooperation and trust found moderately large effects (η^2 between .09 and .14; Wu et al., 2015). A post-hoc power analysis indicated that a sample size of 176 and 72 would be required to achieve a power of .80 in detecting a medium (η^2 = .06) or large effect size (η^2 = .14), respectively (Cohen, 1988). Thus, the sample size for this study was adequate for detecting similarly sized effects (*power* = .85 for η^2 = .09) but may be underpowered for a medium or smaller effect size.

Manipulation checks and baseline comparisons. The descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations are summarized in Table 12. First, to evaluate the internal validity of the experiment, I conducted an ANOVA to assess differences in the manipulation check of gossip across conditions. The results indicated that there was a significant difference in gossip reported across conditions, $F(3,123) = 66.37$, $p < .001$. Using the post hoc Tukey's test, I further evaluated the pairwise differences across the four conditions. As intended, gossip reported in the gossip

conditions based on class standing (M = 5.11, SD = 1.17) and based on year (M = 5.52, SD = 1.33) were both significantly higher than the gossip reported in the control condition (M = 1.75, SD = 0.99, ps < .001) and the personal bias condition (M = 4.19, SD = 1.17, ps < .001). Furthermore, the difference between the two gossip conditions was not significant (p = .51). While gossip reported in the personal bias condition was significantly higher than in the control condition (p = .01), the response anchor corresponding most closely to the mean response was "*neither agree nor disagree*," suggesting that participants did not affirm the expression of personal bias as an example of gossip.

To evaluate the hypothesis that gossip activates faultlines by increasing the salience of perceived differences within the team, I evaluated the differences in the perception of activated faultlines across conditions using a series of ANOVAs. Given that dormant faultlines existed along several attributes due to the composition of the teams, I expected that the activation of faultlines based on each possible attribute would be perceived most strongly in the condition where the content of gossip highlighted differences based on that attribute. In addition, *within* each condition in which gossip was manipulated, I expected that the perception of activated faultlines based on the relevant attribute would be stronger than the perception of activated faultlines based on other attributes.

As a baseline, I first conducted an ANOVA to evaluate differences in the perception of activated *gender faultlines*. The results of the ANOVA (see Table 13) indicated that there were no significant differences across conditions, $F(3,123) = 1.51$, $p = .22$. This suggests that participants accurately recognized that there were no differences in gender within the team, and the manipulation of gossip did not affect this perception. Furthermore, within the control condition, the results of an ANOVA (see Table 14) indicated that there was only a marginal

difference across the perceptions of activated faultlines based on the attributes measured, $F(3,124) = 2.33$, $p = .078$. Using a post hoc Tukey's test to examine all the possible pairwise comparisons and as depicted in Figure 4, there were no significant differences between the perception of activated faultlines based on the attributes of class standing, school, and academic course where differences actually existed (all ps > .70). Thus, in the absence of gossip, none of the attributes were particularly more salient than others as a basis for defining perceived subgroups. In fact, even in comparison to the perception of activated *gender faultlines* ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.64$), which was an attribute that was held constant across team members, only the perception of activated *academic course faultlines* was marginally higher ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 1.60$, $p = .060$). This provides further evidence that in the absence of gossip, participants generally did not perceive the group to be split into subgroups despite the manipulated differences in the composition of the team.

I then evaluated potential baseline differences in the perceptions towards each team member. An ANOVA comparing the differences in teammate preferences for the subsequent trust activity showed that there was no difference in preferences in the control condition as a result of the manipulated team composition, $F(2,93) = 3.78$, $p = .17$. Thus, in the absence of gossip, participants equally preferred each teammate. The results of the trust game also revealed no differences in behavioral manifestations of trust. Using Poisson regressions to model the count of raffle tickets given as an outcome, the change in deviance between the null model and a model with the dummy coded conditions as a predictor was not significant based on a chi-square test, χ^2 (3) = 1.05, $p = .75$. Thus, there were no significant differences in the raffle tickets given to each of the teammates within the control condition.

I also conducted ANOVAs to compare potential differences in affect and overall team satisfaction across the conditions. There were no significant differences in positive affect, $F(3,123) = 1.02$, $p = .39$, or negative affect, $F(3,123) = 0.39$, $p = .76$. There was a significant difference in team satisfaction, $F(3,123) = 6.16$, $p < .001$. However, further inspection of the pairwise comparisons using a post hoc Tukey's test reveals that only the personal bias condition differed from any of the other conditions. Participants in the personal bias condition were much less satisfied with their team compared to each of the other conditions (all ps $\leq .035$). Thus, the manipulations of gossip did not affect participant's general satisfaction with their team. This suggests that any differences in the activation of faultlines observed in the gossip conditions are not simply a reflection or proxy of how encountering gossip may influence participants' affective state or general attitude towards the team.

Activation of class standing faultlines. To evaluate the effect of the gossip manipulation on the activation of faultlines, I first conducted an ANOVA to examine the activation of faultlines based on class standing. The results (see Table 13) indicated that there was a significant difference across conditions, $F(3,123) = 3.87$, $p = .01$. The perception of activated *class standing faultlines* was highest in the gossip based on class standing condition ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.86$). A comparison of these differences is summarized in Table 15. A linear regression using the gossip based on class standing condition showed that the perception of this faultline was significantly higher than it was in both the gossip based on school ($b = -1.03$, $p = .019$) and the personal bias condition ($b = -1.40$, $p = .002$). Interestingly, it was only moderately higher compared to the control condition ($b = -0.53$, $p = .22$). This suggests that gossip does not lead to a heightened sensitivity to intrateam differences in general, otherwise the perception of all

activated faultlines would be lowest in the control condition regardless of the content of the gossip.

Within the gossip based on class standing condition, a separate ANOVA (see Table 14) indicated that the activation of faultlines differed across the possible attributes, $F(3,124) = 3.94$, $p = .01$. A comparison of these differences is summarized in Table 16. A linear regression using the perception of activated *gender faultlines* as a baseline comparison shows that only the perception of activated *class standing faultlines* was significantly higher ($b = 1.63$, $p = .005$). An alternative model using activated *class standing faultlines* as a baseline showed that it was also near significantly higher than the activation of *school faultlines* ($b = -0.91$, $p = .058$) and *academic course faultlines* ($b = -0.91$, $p = .058$) as depicted in Figure 4. Overall, these results support the hypothesized effect of gossip on the activation of faultlines.

Activation of school faultlines. Next, I evaluated the differences in the activation of faultlines based on school. Testing the effect of gossip on an alternative attribute provides evidence of whether the effects observed for gossip based on class standing are generalizable to gossip about other differences while holding the context constant. The results of an ANOVA (see Table 13) indicated that there was a significant difference across conditions, $F(3,123) = 5.02$, $p = .003$. The perception of activated *school faultlines* was highest in the gossip based on school condition ($M = 4.97$, $SD = 1.67$). A comparison of these differences is summarized in Table 17. A linear regression using the gossip based on class standing condition showed that the perception of this faultline was significantly higher than it was in both the gossip based on class standing ($b = -1.19$, $p = .009$) and the personal bias conditions ($b = -1.65$, $p < .001$) but only moderately higher than it was in the control condition ($b = -0.63$, $p = .16$). These results mirror the results for activation of *class standing faultlines*.

Within the gossip based on school condition, a separate ANOVA (see Table 14) indicated that the activation of faultlines differed across the possible attributes, $F(3,124) = 6.84$, $p < .001$. A comparison of these differences is summarized in Table 18. A linear regression using the perception of activated *gender faultlines* as a baseline comparison showed that only the perception of activated *class standing faultlines* was significantly higher ($b = 1.78$, $p < .001$). An alternative model using activated *school faultlines* as a baseline showed that it was also significantly higher than the activation of *class standing faultlines* ($b = -1.31$, $p = .002$) and *academic course faultlines* ($b = -1.22$, $p = .004$) as depicted in Figure 4. These results corroborate the results for the activation of *class standing faultlines* and support the hypothesized effect of gossip on the activation of faultlines.

Comparison with expression of personal bias. To evaluate whether the effects of gossip are distinct from other types of communication that may trigger faultlines, I evaluated the expression of personal bias, which was operationalized in the study as a bias against psychology students. The expression of personal bias may be interpreted as evidence of differential values and treatment that are common triggers of activated faultlines in the workplace (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2009). While it may appear to share similarities with gossip, it is conceptually distinct in that it fails to meet the definitional criteria of gossip as containing evaluative talk about someone else. Thus, although it may indicate a negative preference against others, it does not directly include judgment of specific, absent individuals. In addition, while my theorizing suggests that gossip provides a channel through which team members perceive similarities and associate with subgroup members, it is less likely that team members would associate themselves with others who express bias or prejudice given its strong negative connotation. To assess these differences, I conducted similar analyses focusing on the activation of faultlines based on academic course.

The results of an ANOVA (see Table 13) indicated that there was a significant difference in the activation of faultlines based on academic course across conditions, $F(3,123) = 3.18$, $p = .027$. The perception of activated *academic course faultlines* was highest in the personal bias condition ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 1.80$). A comparison of these differences is summarized in Table 19. A linear regression using the personal bias condition showed that this perception was significantly higher than it was in both the gossip based on class standing ($b = -1.03$, $p = .02$) and school conditions ($b = -1.06$, $p = .017$) but only slightly higher than the control condition ($b = -0.21$, $p = .63$). While these results generally mirror the effects of gossip on the respective activated faultlines, the differences compared to the control condition was noticeably weaker for the personal bias condition than the gossip conditions by more than 60%. This suggests that the expression of personal bias increased the perception of activated faultlines above the baseline in the control condition much less than the exchange of gossip.

Within the personal bias condition, a separate ANOVA (see Table 14) showed that the activation of faultlines differed across the possible attributes, $F(3,120) = 8.81$, $p < .001$. A comparison of these differences is summarized in Table 20. A linear regression using the perception of activated *gender faultlines* as a baseline comparison shows that only the perception of activated *academic course faultlines* was significantly higher ($b = 2.10$, $p < .001$). An alternative model using activated *academic course faultlines* as a baseline further showed that it was significantly higher than the activation of *class standing faultlines* ($b = -1.52$, $p < .001$) and *school faultlines* ($b = -1.48$, $p < .001$) as depicted in Figure 4. These results indicate that the effect of gossip on the activation of faultlines is similar to the effect of blatantly expressing a personal bias or prejudice against others.

Supplemental analysis. While the activation of faultlines indicated that participants indeed perceived the group to be divided based on specific attributes, I also examined whether participants were more trusting of the teammates that belong to the same subgroup based on the relevant attribute as evidence of the consequences of activated faultlines. Differences in trust also provide evidence of whether participants evaluated the teammate who shared gossip with them differently. To do so, I conducted a series of ANOVAs comparing the partner selection preferences for each teammate for the trust activity within each condition.

Within the gossip based on class standing condition, the results indicated a significant difference in partner preference, $F(2,93) = 3.47$, $p = .035$. Surprisingly, participants in this condition preferred the teammate from the same school over the other two teammates as depicted in Figure 5. Based on a post hoc Tukey's test, the preference for the same school teammate was significantly higher than the preference for the same academic course teammate ($p = .034$) but all other pairwise comparisons were not significant. Interestingly, the teammate enrolled in the same course was the subject of the gossip shared by the teammate with the same class standing. Thus, it appears that participants preferred the teammate who was neither the gossiper nor the target of the gossip in this condition.

Within the gossip based on school condition, the results indicated that there was not a significant difference in partner preference, $F(2,93) = 1.34$, $p = .27$. Although the differences were not significant, participants in this condition preferred the teammate enrolled in the same academic course over the other two teammates as depicted in Figure 5. Due to the round robin design of the chat process, the teammate enrolled in the same academic course for this condition was the teammate who was neither the gossiper nor the target of the gossip. Thus, the directional

preference for the teammate who was not involved in the gossip in anyway is similar across both gossip conditions.

Within the personal bias condition, the results indicated a significant difference in partner preference, $F(2,90) = 22.34$, $p < .001$. In contrast to the gossip conditions, participants in this condition indicated a strong negative preference towards the teammate enrolled in the same course who expressed the personal bias as depicted in Figure 5. Based on a post hoc Tukey's test, the preference for the same academic course teammate ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.78$) was significantly lower than the preference for the teammate with the same class standing ($M = 5.29$, $SD = 1.57$, $p < .001$) and the same school ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 1.39$, $p < .001$). Thus, although the expression of personal bias had a similar effect on participants' perception of activated faultlines, participants did not align their preferences according to the salient subgroups. In other words, while participants recognized the similarity they shared with the teammate who expressed a personal bias, their preferences did not affirm the subgroups implied by the salient attribute. Instead, the lack of desire to work with this teammate for the trust activity reflects an active avoidance of the faultline made salient by the expression of personal bias.

I also examined the behavioral manifestation of trust within each condition by conducting Poisson regressions to compare the number of raffle tickets that participants gave to each teammate during the trust game (see Table 22). Within the gossip based on class standing condition, the change in deviance between the null model and a model with the dummy coded conditions as a predictor was not significant based on a chi-square test, χ^2 (3) = 1.27, $p = .74$. Within the gossip based on school condition, the results were similarly not significant, χ^2 (3) = 0.45, $p = .93$. Thus, despite the differences in the preferred teammate for the trust game, participants did not distribute raffle tickets differently across their teammates in either gossip

condition as depicted in Figure 6. Lastly, within the personal bias condition, the results were also not significant, χ^2 (3) = 1.05, p = .79. Thus, even though there was a strong negative preference against the teammate who expressed personal bias, participants did not distribute raffle tickets differently across their teammates in the personal bias condition.

Discussion

The findings of Study 2a build upon the correlational findings from Study 1 by providing evidence of the causal relationship between gossip and the activation of faultlines. As expected, even though each team's composition was manipulated to include identical dormant faultlines, gossip about different team members resulted in the perception of different subgroups. Thus, the content of gossip influenced the similarities and differences that were salient to participants for socially categorizing group members. Furthermore, the lack of observed differences in affect and general team satisfaction indicate that the consequences of gossip on the perceived social structure of the group are not merely a proxy for general affective or attitudinal reactions.

Despite the perceived activation of faultlines, I did not find evidence that participants were more trusting of the subgroup members based on their partner selection preferences and the results of the trust game. In fact, there appeared to be a slight preference by participants to avoid both the gossiper and gossip target even though the gossiper belonged to the same subgroup defined by the activated faultline. This suggests that although participants were cognizant of how the group is divided based on gossip, they did not necessarily affirm this division or align their actions to the subgroups implied by the gossiper. Furthermore, this result contrasts with how participants responded to the expression of personal bias. Whereas gossip generally did not increase or decrease trust in the gossiper, there was a strong preference to avoid the team

member who expressed a personal bias. In addition, expressions of bias resulted in significantly reduced overall satisfaction with the team, which was not observed for gossip.

Because the manipulations of gossip used in the design of Study 2a focused on rude behavior as the topic of gossip, it may have been viewed as gossip that is not clearly relevant to the context of the task at hand for participants. It is possible that the effects observed for the activation of faultlines may be partially the result of the unexpected or surprising nature of rude behavior in the context of the study tasks. Thus, I collected an additional sample using a revised manipulation of gossip that is more directly relevant to the context (i.e. complaining about the study task).

Study 2b: Experiment (Task-Relevant Gossip)

Sample and Procedures

The sample for Study 2b consisted of 146 undergraduate students at a US university who received credit for their participation as a management course requirement. One participant was removed based on feedback they provided expressing strong resentment towards the course requirement and evidence of irrelevant responding during the communication portion of the study. The average age of subjects in the final sample was 22.0 years, and 47% of the subjects were male. In addition, 42% of the subjects were Caucasian, 41% were Asian, 5% were Hispanic, 3% were African American, and the remaining 10% reported other ethnic backgrounds.

The topic of the gossip manipulations was revised to focus on another teammate complaining about the study. The decision to use this topic was based on prior observations of students voicing displeasure with the course requirement of participating in research studies. Thus, this represents a behavior that may seem both realistic to participants and relevant to the

task at hand. Working with someone who is complaining about or displeased with the present study task poses a more direct threat to the outcomes and success on the task compared to the potential relational discomfort implied by the rude behavior in Study 2a. The manipulation of gossip based on class standing was revised to be "*I like your idea, makes sense. not a big fan of that freshman/senior tho. were they complaining about the study to you too?*" Similarly, the manipulation of gossip based on school was revised to be "*I like your idea, makes sense. not a big fan of that [school name] student tho. were they complaining about the study to you too?*" Minor additional changes were made to the wording of messages sent by team members based to mirror actual messages exchanged by participants in the original study.

Measures

All of the same measures from Study 2a were measured in Study 2b. The descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations are summarized in Table 23.

Analysis and Results

Power analysis. Given the observed range of effect sizes observed in Study 2a for the activation of faultlines associated with the gossip and personal bias conditions (η^2 between .072 and .18), a post-hoc power analysis indicated that a sample size of 148 would be required to achieve a power of .80 in Study 2b. Thus, the sample of 145 used in Study 2b was about adequate for detecting similarly sized effects (*power* = .80 for η^2 = .072) but may be underpowered if the true effect size is smaller.

Manipulation checks and baseline comparisons. The results of the manipulation check were consistent with the original study, $F(3,141) = 105.50$, $p < .001$, such that there was no difference between the two gossip conditions but both gossip conditions differed significantly from the control and personal bias conditions. There were no significant differences across

conditions in positive affect, $F(3,141) = 1.40$, $p = .25$, negative affect, $F(3,141) = 1.42$, $p = .24$, and team satisfaction $F(3,141) = 0.69$, $p = .56$.

Effects on activated faultlines. The effects of the revised gossip manipulations on the activation of faultlines were similar to the results from the original study but generally stronger as depicted in Figure 7 and summarized in a series of ANOVAs (see Table 24). For example, the activation of *class standing faultlines* was still highest in the gossip based on class standing condition, $F(3,141) = 4.55$, $p = .005$. A linear regression using the gossip based on class standing condition (see Table 25) showed that the activation of this faultline was significantly higher than it was in not only the gossip based on school condition ($b = -1.42$, $p < .001$) but now also the control condition ($b = -0.94$, $p = .021$). However, the personal bias condition was only slightly lower ($b = -0.52$, $p = .20$), primarily driven by a higher activation of all types of faultlines in the personal bias condition ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.86$) compared to Study 2a ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.83$), despite the manipulation of personal bias remaining unchanged. Within the gossip based on class standing condition, the activation of *class standing faultlines* was higher than the activation of all other faultlines based on a linear regression (all bs ≤ -1.14, all ps $\leq .002$, see Table 26). These differences were all larger than those observed in the original study.

A similar pattern was observed for the activation of *school faultlines*, which was highest in the gossip based on school condition, $F(3,141) = 4.62$, $p = .004$. The results of a linear regression (see Table 27) showed that the activation of this faultline was significantly higher than it was in the class standing condition ($b = -1.39$, $p < .001$), the control condition ($b = -1.24$, $p = .003$), and nearly so in the personal bias condition ($b = -0.78$, $p = .063$). Within the school condition, the activation of *school faultlines* was higher than the activation of all other faultlines based on a linear regression (all bs ≤ -1.41, all ps $< .001$, see Table 28). These differences

depicted were also all similar to or larger than those observed in Study 2a. Thus, the revised manipulation of gossip focusing on a task relevant topic generally resulted in a stronger activation of faultlines compared to the gossip about rude behavior in Study 2a.

Lastly, the activation of *academic course faultlines* was similarly highest in the personal bias condition, $F(3,141) = 10.11$, $p < .001$. The results of a linear regression showed that the activation of this faultline was significantly higher than it was in all other conditions (all bs ≤ -1.73, all ps $< .001$, see Table 29). Within the personal bias condition, the activation of *academic course faultlines* was higher than the activation of all other faultlines based on a linear regression (all bs ≤ -1.11, all ps $< .001$, see Table 30). This was consistent with the results of Study 2a as expected, since the personal bias condition remained unchanged.

Effects on trust. The revised manipulations of gossip did not result in any differences in participants' preference for each teammate for the subsequent trust activity as depicted in Figure 8 and summarized in Table 31. While participants appeared to have a slight negative preference for both the gossiper and the gossip target in the class standing condition for Study 2a, this pattern was not observed in Study 2b, $F(2,105) = 0.26$, $p = .78$. In the school condition, there were no differences again, $F(2,108) = 0.42$, $p = .66$. This lack of difference was also reflected in the actual results of the trust game for both of the revised gossip conditions as depicted in Figure 9 and summarized in Table 32. The only notable deviation from the results of Study 2a was observed in the personal bias condition. Although the manipulation of expressing personal bias was unchanged, there was no longer a significant difference participants' preference for each teammate, $F(2,102) = 1.11$, $p = .34$. However, there was a significant difference in the results in the trust game, where the change in deviance between the null model and a model with the dummy coded conditions as a predictor was significant based on a chi-square test, χ^2 (3) = 12.00,

p = .007. Specifically, participants in this condition on average kept the most raffle tickets for themselves (M = 3.11, SD = 2.59), which was significantly more than the teammate they gave the least number of raffle tickets (same class standing teammate, M = 1.91, SD = 1.20, p = .047) based on a post hoc Tukey's test. This suggests that although the personal bias condition similarly activated faultlines, participants in this condition were generally less trusting in the trust game.

Discussion

The consistency between the results of Studies 2a and 2b demonstrated that gossip activated faultlines irrespective of whether the gossip was related to the task at hand. Similar to the findings from Study 1 that both work-related and nonwork-related gossip play a role in the activation of faultlines, both gossip directly concerning the task at hand and gossip about a less relevant behavior (i.e. rudeness) activated faultlines. However, when the gossip was more directly relevant to the task at hand, the activation of faultlines was generally stronger.

In Study 2b, the differences in manifestations of trust were weaker, yet there was also a notable distinction in the personal bias condition that was not observed in the gossip conditions. Personal bias resulted in participants generally being less trusting as evidenced by the increased tendency to keep raffle tickets for themselves during the trust game. Although the results of the trust game presented mixed findings across Studies 2a and 2b, they generally suggest that gossiping is viewed less negatively than direct expressions of bias towards subgroups despite the similar effect it has on the activation of faultlines.

General Discussion

Across a two-wave field study and two experimental laboratory studies, I examined the effects of gossip on the perceived social structure of the group. I found consistent evidence that

gossip activates faultlines and leads to the perception of subgroups. Furthermore, the configurational approach adopted in Study 1 revealed the complex patterns of gossip – based on the dimensions of valence, work-relatedness, and verticality – relevant for the activation of distinct types of faultlines. As theorized, supplemental analyses further revealed that the implications of these patterns of gossip are mixed. While the activation of faultlines by these patterns of gossip consistently predicted conflict in groups, there was also some evidence that they lead to perceptions of coworker support. The results of Studies 2a and 2b build upon these findings by demonstrating the causal effect of the content of the gossip on influencing which underlying faultline becomes activated. These findings offer several theoretical contributions to the study of gossip in organizations.

Theoretical Contributions

Primarily, the findings from this chapter contribute to research on workplace gossip by providing a novel perspective for understanding its consequences in the context of groups. By integrating a faultline perspective, this research extends the relational implications of gossip beyond the immediate triad. While prior research has shown how gossip may shape relationships within groups at a dyadic level (Ellwardt, Steglich, et al., 2012), the findings from this chapter support the theorized effect in Chapter 2 of how gossip shapes the perceived social structure of the group. By disseminating evaluative information about absent third parties, gossip expresses the perception of differences and similarities within the group that provide salient attributes for socially categorizing group members into subgroups. This theoretical perspective incorporates a distinct group orientation that is inherent in the phenomenon of gossip (Gluckman, 1963; Hannerz, 1967; Paine, 1967), yet has been largely absent in the study of workplace gossip.

Second, this research provides support for a more integrative perspective of the consequences of gossip by highlighting both its positive and negative implications in groups and offering a theoretical explanation for why these divergent consequences emerge. Contributing to the growing literature that challenges the assumption of gossip as a deviant behavior (Brady et al., 2017; Feinberg et al., 2012), the findings of this research suggest that patterns of gossip that activate faultlines are associated with perceptions of coworker support. This highlights an important social function of gossip of bringing people together (Foster, 2004) and suggests that gossip is a mechanism that may help individuals to find a sense of belonging through subgroups.

However, it is also imperative to recognize that this positive implication of gossip was only present at Time 1 in Study 1. In contrast, the negative implication of gossip on conflict was stronger and persisted across time points. While there may be alternative explanations for why this was the case, one possibility is that gossip may be more negative than it is positive for groups in the long run. The theoretical implication of this is that while there is growing research for a functional perspective of gossip (Baumeister et al., 2004; Brady et al., 2017), these social benefits of gossip do not occur in a vacuum. Even though gossip may provide valuable information to the individuals in the group, there are costs for the group when group members spread judgment about each other. Gossip often implies the perception of norm-violating or deviant behaviors (Baumeister et al., 2004; Peters et al., 2017), which may be a source of conflict in groups as it is brought to light through gossip. Thus, a comprehensive perspective of gossip must consider the divisiveness of gossip in tandem with its functional purposes.

Third, this research demonstrates the complexity of gossip itself by identifying the distinct configurations associated with the activation of different types of faultlines. Building on prior work suggesting the multi-faceted nature of gossip (Brady et al., 2017; Kurland & Pelled,

2000), the findings from Study 1 provide empirical evidence of the importance of valence, work-relatedness, and verticality. Although negative gossip indeed emerges as one type of gossip that can activate faultlines, the remaining configurations suggest that the topic of the gossip and who it is about affects the type of subgroups that emerge. Thus, it is not solely the negativity oft associated with lay perceptions of gossip that contributes to its consequences in groups. Furthermore, it is also notable that the majority of configurations that emerged included the absence of at least one dimension of gossip, which suggests that it was not the case that simply more types of gossip would lead to the activation of more types of faultlines.

Finally, this research also contributes to the faultline literature by examining how and why different dormant faultlines may become activated. While the majority of research on faultlines has focused on the composition of groups that provide a basis for the emergence of subgroups (e.g. Bezrukova et al., 2009; Ou et al., 2017; Spoelma & Ellis, 2017; Zellmer-Bruhn et al., 2008), faultline researchers have called for a need to develop a deeper understanding of the activation of faultlines (Thatcher & Patel, 2012). My findings indicate that gossip is a social process that can fuel the activation of one type of faultline over another. An important implication of this is that faultlines are not simply a characteristic of the group embedded in its composition. Instead, members of the group participate in the process of activating faultlines through the exchange of gossip and, to an extent, exercise social influence and control over the types of subgroups that emerge.

Methodological Contributions of FsQCA

The application of fsQCA to the study of gossip also offered unique insight that would not have been possible through a more traditional, variable-centered approach. First, the results from Study 1 demonstrated equifinality in the patterns of gossip that activated each type of

faultline. Especially for identity-based faultlines, the configurations of gossip that emerged suggest vastly different ways through which gossip can activate the same type of faultline. Second, the results demonstrated causal asymmetry in the effects of the dimensions of gossip. For example, while nonwork-related gossip emerged in several configurations for the *presence* of activated faultlines, it also emerged in all configurations associated with the *absence* of activated faultlines overall. Similarly, while a high level of positive gossip was part of every configuration associated with the *absence* of activated faultlines overall, the lack of positive gossip was only part of three configurations associated with the *presence* of activated faultlines. Third, the results indicated that the configuration of multiple dimensions of gossip produced distinct effects from the dimensions in isolation. For example, while vertical gossip was not directly correlated with resource-based faultlines at either timepoint, it in fact emerged as part of several configurations, suggesting that its effect on the activation of faultlines is dependent on the other dimensions of gossip.

Beyond the study of gossip and faultlines, the value of object or person-centered approaches such as fsQCA can also be extended into other areas of management research where equifinality, causal asymmetry, and higher order interactions may offer theoretical insight. For example, research on leadership highlights a range of leader behaviors that contribute to effective work outcomes (Avolio, 1999; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Transformational leadership itself consists of four dimensions (Bass, 1985), yet other forms of leadership have also demonstrated effectiveness in predicting various work outcomes (Hoch, Bommer, Dulebohn, & Wu, 2016). In other words, there may not be a "one size fits all" recipe for effective leadership. FsQCA may be a useful tool for examining the configuration of leader behaviors and their substitutes simultaneously in order to identify potentially complex contingencies. Similarly, research on

organizational culture (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013), which also emphasizes a multitude of typological components, may benefit from such an approach that accommodates potentially complex contingencies.

Many processes in management research are also recognized as having asymmetrical properties. For example, trust and distrust represent separate dimensions that affect relationships in distinct ways (Lewicki, McAllister, & Bies, 1998). Trust itself develops asymmetrically such that it is gained over a period of time but can be quickly lost (G. R. Jones & George, 1998), which then affects team processes and outcomes (M. D. Johnson et al., 2006). Similarly, research on justice suggests that adherence and violations of fairness produce asymmetrical employee reactions and behaviors (Colquitt, Long, William, Rodell, & Halvorsen-ganepola, 2015). Thus, the presence and absence of these constructs may not simply result in opposite effects in the workplace. FsQCA may be a valuable tool for modeling how employee attitudes and relationships critical to work outcomes may be developed or undermined in asymmetrical ways.

Lastly, the inclusion of multiple independent variables and moderators simultaneously in management research often gives rise to the question of higher order interactions (Cronbach, 1975). FsQCA allows researchers to essentially examine these higher order interactions and configurations that would otherwise be difficult to interpret through regression-based analyses. For example, the study of prosocial behaviors and citizenship behaviors has identified a myriad of moderating characteristics relevant to its outcomes, such as whether it is pressured (Koopman et al., 2019), whether it is proactive or reactive (Spitzmuller & Van Dyne, 2013), whether it violates other ethical norms (Umphress, Bingham, & Mitchell, 2010), whether it is attributed to particular motives (Eastman, 1994), and whether it concerns personal problems or task-related work (Lanaj & Jennings, 2020). Other multi-faceted constructs, such as job embeddedness (T. R.

Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, & Erez, 2001), which consists of six subdimensions predictive of voluntary turnover, may similarly benefit from this configurational approach. FsQCA may be a beneficial method for examining potentially complex interactions amongst these characteristics and dimensions.

Limitations

The findings of these studies are not without limitations. It is unclear if the relevant patterns of gossip that emerged in Study 1 are generalizable to other types of organizations, given that the sample focused on elementary school teachers. Furthermore, the response rate for Study 1 was relatively low. Because the data was collected without involvement from school administration in order to protect participants' sense of confidentiality, it was not possible to examine potential differences between respondents and nonrespondents that could also affect the generalizability of the results.

In addition, while there were similarities in the configurations of gossip across time points in Study 1, there were also differences that may be attributed to any number of unobservable factors due to its nonexperimental design. The supplemental analysis on the subset of participants who responded at both time points suggests that these differences are not solely due to different respondents. However, further research is needed to understand if changes in the configuration of gossip and its effect on perceived coworker support are due to the passage of time or other changes that may have been unique to the sample in Study 1.

Another limitation of Study 1 is the correlational nature of the data. Because all measures were assessed at the same time, causal inferences are limited. While the two-wave design allowed for the inclusion of Time 1 measures as control variables in the supplemental regression analyses to help address this limitation, the analytical approach of fuzzy set analysis does not

allow for the inclusion of control variables. Thus, it is unclear if there are omitted dimensions or variables that may offer alternative explanations for the types of faultlines that emerged and their effects on conflict and perceived coworker support.

While the experimental design of Studies 2a and 2b complemented the design of Study 1, a limitation of Studies 2a and 2b is the artificial nature of the group context. It is possible that the effects of gossip in this context may differ from its effect in groups where long-term relational considerations are more relevant. In addition, participants in Studies 2a and 2b did not favor subgroup members as would have been expected from the activation of faultlines. Thus, further research is needed to disentangle why this is the case and whether there is a distinction between the perception of subgroups and the acceptance or resistance of these subgroups.

Furthermore, Studies 2a and 2b were limited in the types of gossip examined. While Study 1 included a wide variety of gossip with regards to the theorized dimensions of gossip, it was impractical to incorporate and manipulate each of these dimensions in an experimental setting. Thus, Studies 2a and 2b focused only on negative, horizontal gossip, and aligns most closely with Configuration 4 from both time points in Study 1 for the activation of identity-based faultlines.

Relatedly, Studies 2a and 2b did not directly examine the broader categories of resource, identity, and knowledge-based faultlines measured in Study 1. Instead, the faultlines in Studies 2a and 2b focused on specific attributes (i.e. class-standing, school, academic program) that are more likely to be perceived as identity-based differences. Thus, although the results suggest that the causal effect of gossip generalizes across different specific attributes, the studies did not directly test if it also generalizes across these broader types of faultlines.

In addition, the lack of any positive outcome of gossip in Studies 2a and 2b contrasted with the findings from Study 1 at Time 1 and prior research suggesting that gossip has relational benefits (Ellwardt, Steglich, et al., 2012; Foster, 2004). It is possible that these discrepant findings may be due to the artificial nature of the experimental design that resulted in a lack of relationship history among team members. Gossip in the workplace is typically shared through existing relationships (Grosser et al., 2010), and thus the absence of a relationship history in the context of these studies may have resulted in the lack of positive findings. Alternatively, it is also possible that the positive effects of gossip in this experimental setting were not reflected through trust but could have manifested through other outcomes that did not require vulnerability towards an anonymous team member.

Lastly, although the personal bias condition in Studies 2a and 2b revealed distinct effects from the gossip conditions, the personal bias condition also focused on a different attribute. Conceptually, the attributes of academic program share similarities with the attributes of class standing and school used in the gossip conditions, such that they are all likely to contribute to participants' identity as an undergraduate student. Nonetheless, it is possible that the effects observed in the personal bias condition are partially attributed to idiosyncratic differences associated with how participants perceived the academic program to which they belonged.

Future Research

The findings from these studies also present several opportunities for future research. Given that the findings of Study 1 revealed multiple patterns of gossip through which faultlines become activated, future research may examine if there are qualitative differences between the subgroups that emerge through different patterns. For example, intersubgroup perceptions may be more or less antagonistic depending on the pattern of gossip. While the consistent findings

from Study 1 predicting conflict suggest generally negative intersubgroup relations, research on intergroup relations also points to the potential for cooperative relations between groups, especially when they share overarching goals (Tajfel, 1982). Thus, future research may examine whether certain patterns of gossip lead to the emergence of more cooperative subgroups than others and consider a broader range of outcomes.

Future research may also further examine the causal relationship between gossip and the activation of faultlines over time. While the findings of Studies 2a and 2b provide support for the causal effect of gossip on the activation of faultlines, this does not preclude the possibility that the activation of faultlines also contributes to an increase in gossip and leads to a spiraling effect. It is possible that gossip and the activation of faultlines may have a reinforcing cycle that results in a recursive relationship. When subgroups emerge, the salient intersubgroup categorization leads to ingroup biases (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). These ingroup biases may motivate individuals to gossip positively about those who belong in their subgroup but not about those who belong to other subgroups (Ellwardt, Labianca, et al., 2012), which may further reinforce the perception of activated faultlines. Research on the temporal nature of faultlines remains limited (Thatcher & Patel, 2012), and gossip may be an intragroup process that helps to explain how faultlines emerge and change over time.

Future research may also examine the boundary conditions that affect the consequences of gossip in groups. One possibility is to integrate the perspective from Chapter 1 that the perceived motives underlying gossip affects how it is interpreted. Whether faultlines are activated and which types of subgroups emerge may be affected by the motives that are associated with the gossip. While it is likely that perceived motives may vary across episodes of gossip as theorized in Chapter 1, a general tendency that gossip is perceived to serve collective

or relational interests may heighten the salience of subgroup boundaries. In contrast, while self-interested gossip may create a perception of conflict and disunity, it is unclear if it would also convey the alignment of attributes necessary for subgroups to emerge.

Alternative analytical methods such as social network analysis may also be useful in future research to further understand the impact of gossip on the social structure of the group. Social network analysis was not feasible in Study 1 due to the large number individuals per school that would have made a round robin style data collection impractical. However, previous work on gossip has pointed to the potential usefulness of a social network approach to understanding patterns of how gossip is exchanged (Ellwardt, Labianca, et al., 2012). Given the findings that gossip is associated with the activation of faultlines, future research could integrate a social network approach to examine shifts in the underlying dyadic relationships that contribute to the emergence of subgroups. This approach to examining the emergence of subgroups would also allow for a more direct evaluation of whether individual perceptions of subgroups caused by gossip converge over time.

Lastly, the finding in Studies 2a and 2b that gossip resulted in the perception of activated faultline but did not result in any positive preference or willingness to trust the implied subgroup member raises the possibility that group members may not necessarily support the existence of faultlines even if they are salient. The diversity literature suggests that mind-sets and attitudes towards diversity affect its consequences in groups (Daan; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Likewise, it is possible that these attitudes affect how people respond to the faultlines and subgroups that they see emerging. By taking action or building relationships that crosscut the salient faultlines, group members may proactively contribute to the *deactivation* or mitigation of the negative consequences of these faultlines (Ren, Gray, & Harrison, 2015).

Practical Implications

The implications of these findings for organizations is mixed. Despite the functional purpose that gossip may offer as a source of valuable information or social support in groups, the findings from these studies raise caution against justifying gossip for its social benefits. While it may indeed be helpful for the individuals in the group, it comes with the tradeoff of fracturing the group that may not be worthwhile for organizations. Although it is likely impractical for organizations to try to monitor and regulate the exchange of gossip, there may be alternatives that can replace the need for gossip. Because gossip is informal and easy to access, it may be the convenient way for employees to find the social support they need. Thus, organizations may need to consider alternatives that can provide a similar outlet for employees to find this support without resorting to gossip.

While the most straight forward solution to gossip may be to encourage employees to confront others directly instead of gossiping, its effectiveness is questionable when considering a key dimension of gossip is whether gossip is about higher status organizational members. These power dynamics and the risks of direct confrontation may be a reason why gossip occurs despite the common lay perception that people ought to refrain from gossiping. Instead, organizations may benefit from considering how to minimize these risks of providing evaluative feedback directly. For example, some organizations have begun to explore the application of technology to allow employees to share their opinions more transparently without the fear of retribution (Wolfe, 2017).

Organizations may also benefit from considering the root cause of gossip. Since gossip is a mechanism that makes intragroup differences and similarities salient, solutions that resolve these underlying differences and similarities may be beneficial in mitigating the emergence of

activated faultlines. For example, anecdotal evidence from Study 1 indicated that gossip often stemmed from disagreements about how to accomplish the goals of the school or the work ethic of certain organizational members. Disagreements such as these are likely to be beneficial for organizations to address and resolve directly. In fact, these different perspectives may be a source of new ideas that would be more beneficial for the group when they are used by organizational leaders rather than being circulated only amongst coworkers (Detert et al., 2013). When organizations choose to ignore these differences that are perceived to be important within the group, gossip may become the channel through which these differences are expressed and become part of the perceived social structure of the group.

However, not all patterns of gossip are necessarily divisive. In fact, some patterns of gossip were associated with the *absence* of activated faultlines. Talking about others through the sharing of positive, nonwork-related gossip may reflect a work environment that appreciates and celebrates differences in the group. This also suggests that nonwork-related talk may actually serve a valuable purpose in the workplace. While it is unlikely that organizations can explicitly encourage this type of gossip, leaders may be able to set the tone through the ways they talk about others informally. Employees may feel encouraged and more comfortable to engage in these types of gossip when they see it modeled by others.

For individuals, it is important to recognize that participating in gossip can contribute to a fractured work environment. While gossip may offer instrumental benefits for the individual or emotional benefits as an effective way to cope with challenges in the workplace, it is also important to consider how gossip affects the broader group. Employees should thus consider how the gossip they share, even if well-intentioned, may introduce divisiveness into the group. Yet, as suggested previously, not all gossip is bad either. Employees can alternatively engage in patterns

of gossip such as the sharing of positive, nonwork-related gossip that may capitalize on the relational benefits of gossip without contributing to the activation of faultiness.

However, there is also the potential that gossip can be a useful process to eventually bring about important changes in organizations. Work-related gossip stemming from disagreements about organizational decisions and work practices may reflect knowledge and information-related differences that are not necessarily detrimental to the organization. Instead of gossiping about these issues, employees should consider if these evaluative views may be more beneficial when they are directed towards the relevant decision makers. Nonetheless, gossip may be a valuable tool to informally gauge consensus on these views and perhaps give employees greater confidence to raise these views in more constructive ways.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this dissertation, I presented novel perspectives for advancing the study of gossip in organizations and integrating the divergent outcomes that have emerged in nascent research on gossip. In Chapter 1, I proposed a theoretical typology and attributional model that highlighted a multi-faceted view of gossip in order to explain the divergent outcomes of gossip for the individuals involved. In Chapter 2, I extended this multi-faceted perspective of gossip and its divergent implications to account for the broader group context by integrating a faultline perspective and theorizing the effect of gossip on the perceived social structure of the group. In Chapter 3, I empirically tested the main theoretical proposition of a faultline perspective of gossip across three complementary studies.

In seeking to understand how group members make sense of and respond to gossiping, my theory and findings offer several insights for the study of gossip in organizations by highlighting the unique complexity of gossip. As theorized in Chapter 1, this complexity manifests through the diverse plausible interpretations of gossip and its underlying motives that affect how individuals will respond to gossiping. Chapter 2 further highlighted how this complexity shapes the perceived social structure of the group as group members integrate the relational implications of gossip into their understanding of the social landscape. What this suggests about gossip is that despite the many ways in which it can vary, it is an insightful source of information used by individuals to manage and understand their relationship with others and with the broader group.

This idea that gossip is ultimately about relationships (Michelson et al., 2010) points to the tension between studying the behavior of gossip versus the content of gossip. The findings of my dissertation suggest that both are important. On one hand, gossip is a behavior that is distinct

from other forms of communication and social interactions in the workplace (Brady et al., 2017). It consists of a unique structure that has important implications for the social dynamics that follow (Eder & Enke, 1991). As demonstrated in Chapter 3, the effects of gossip are thus distinct from other forms of informal communication that may seem conceptually similar. On the other hand, the content of gossip serves important social functions in the context of groups (Foster, 2004). This content has significance for how it is received and interpreted by others in the group, as theorized in Chapter 1, and how it affects the interpretation of the social structure of the group, as theorized in Chapter 2. Thus, it is imperative to recognize not only the distinctiveness of gossip but also the necessity of a multi-faceted conceptualization of gossip in order to comprehensively understand its consequences in organizations.

Future Directions for Gossip Research

Beyond the research presented in this dissertation, there are several promising areas for future research on gossip that I propose for management scholars. First, a deeper understanding of the antecedents of gossip is of both practical and theoretical importance. The insight into the consequences of gossip from this dissertation raises the question of what organizations can do to affect the prevalence of gossip. The various social functions that gossip serves in groups would suggest that gossip may be more likely to occur in organizations and work environments where these functions are more valuable. For example, as discussed in Chapter 1, individuals may gossip to cope with the uncertainty they encounter in the workplace (Brady et al., 2017; Rosnow, 2001). Future research may consider the role of gossip in the context of organizational phenomena that are likely to create uncertainty or stress, such as organizational change (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). This area of research may provide insight into when and why gossip is more prevalent in some groups than others.

Second, the way that gossip is itself communicated may be changing as technology advances. The rise of electronic communication has altered the ease and frequency in which organizational members can communicate informally (Butts, Becker, & Boswell, 2015). Thus, an understanding of how gossip exchanged through electronic mediums – such as text messages, group chats, and other collaboration platforms – may differ from the cliché "water cooler conversation" is of growing relevance. For example, the lack of non-verbal emotional feedback in virtual communication (Cheshin, Rafaeli, & Bos, 2011) may create greater ambiguity in the interpretation of gossip. Relatedly, virtual and geographically dispersed teams also present unique environments that may be relevant to the consequences of gossip, such as the emergence of activated faultlines (Polzer et al., 2006).

Third, while leaders are recognized as a common subject of gossip due to their elevated status (Gambetta, 1994; McAndrew et al., 2007), there is very limited research on the role of leaders in the phenomenon of gossip. Considering how quickly gossip can spread through the assistance of social media and news outlets to undermine the reputation of leaders, this raises the question of how leaders can effectively respond to gossip. Theories such as social accounts theory (Sitkin & Bies, 1993) may offer insight into how leaders may protect their reputation in the face of gossip by directly responding to it and influencing how it is perceived or interpreted. Yet, the tendency for gossip to be ambiguous and difficult to verify (Hess & Hagen, 2006) may also present leaders with unique opportunities to outright deny gossip or distort it for personal gain, reflecting the potential for gossip to serve as a device for manipulating organizational politics (Loch et al., 2000).

Conclusion

Overall, there is great opportunity for further research on gossip, given that it continues to be a ubiquitous (Robbins & Karan, 2019) yet complex social interaction (Brady et al., 2017) that individuals encounter in organizations. The theoretical models presented in this dissertation reveal the underlying psychological processes critical for understanding how group members make sense of the exchange of gossip. By integrating novel theoretical perspectives and analytical methods into the study of gossip, I hope that the findings not only present a path forward for future research on gossip but also shed light on why gossip is of consequential importance in organizations.

FIGURES AND TABLES

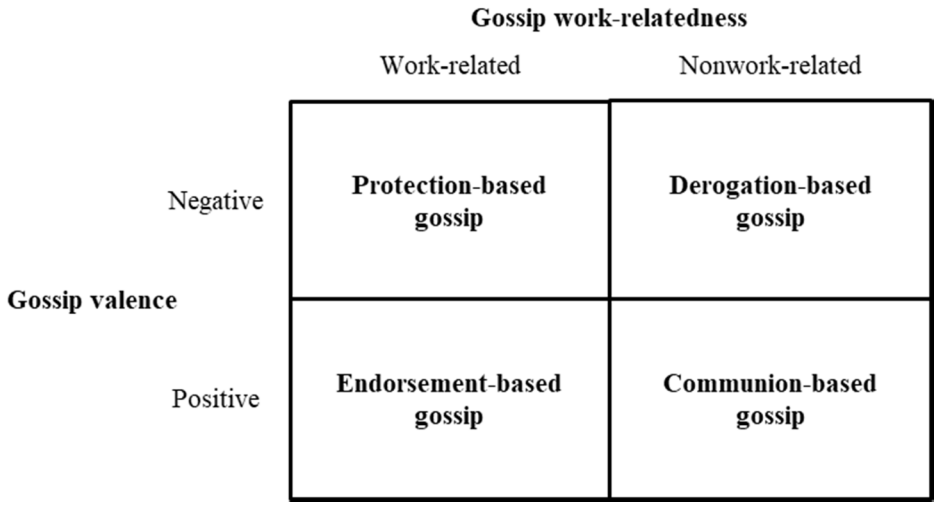

Figure 1. Typology of workplace gossip.

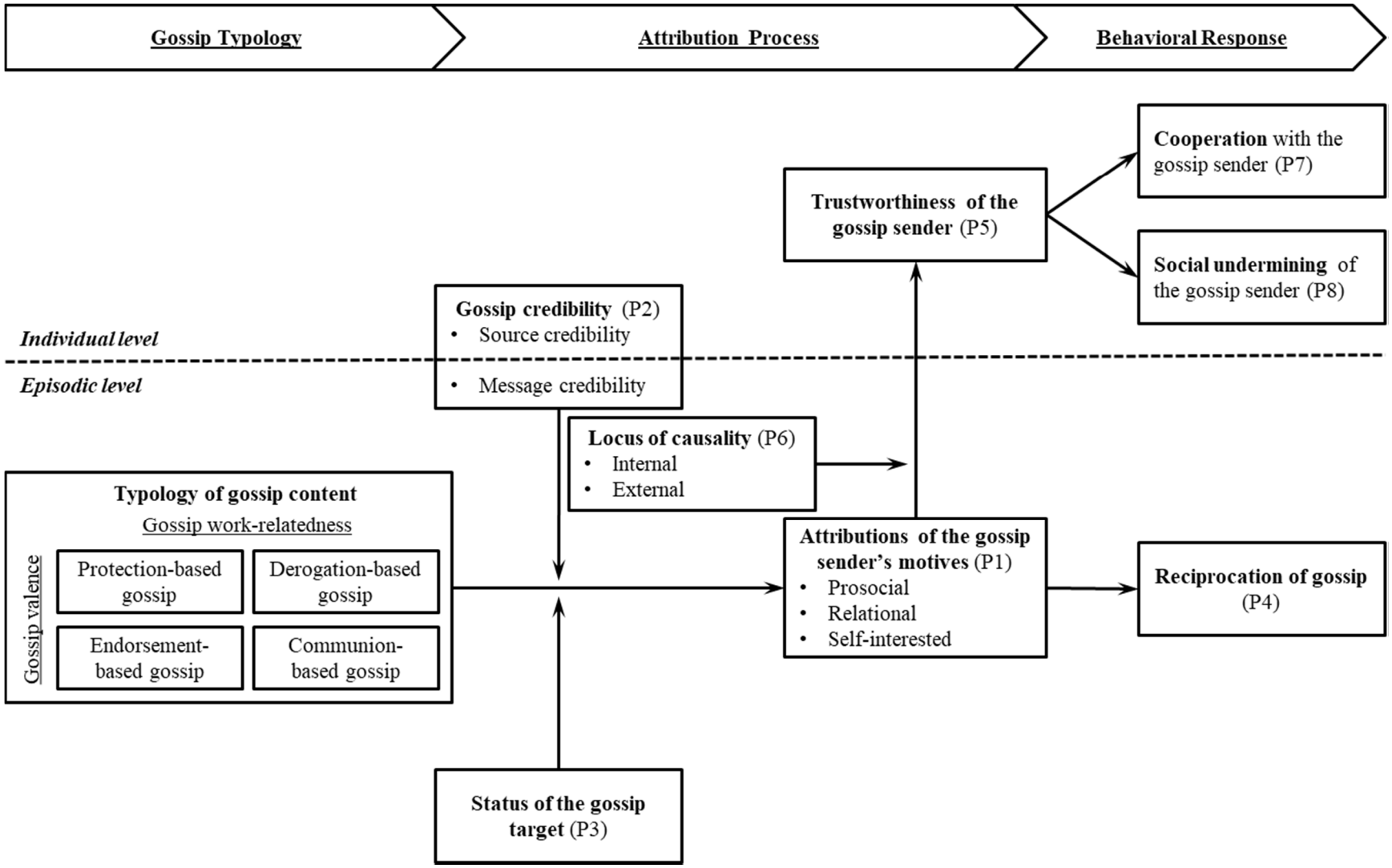

Figure 2. Proposed attributional process model of workplace gossip.

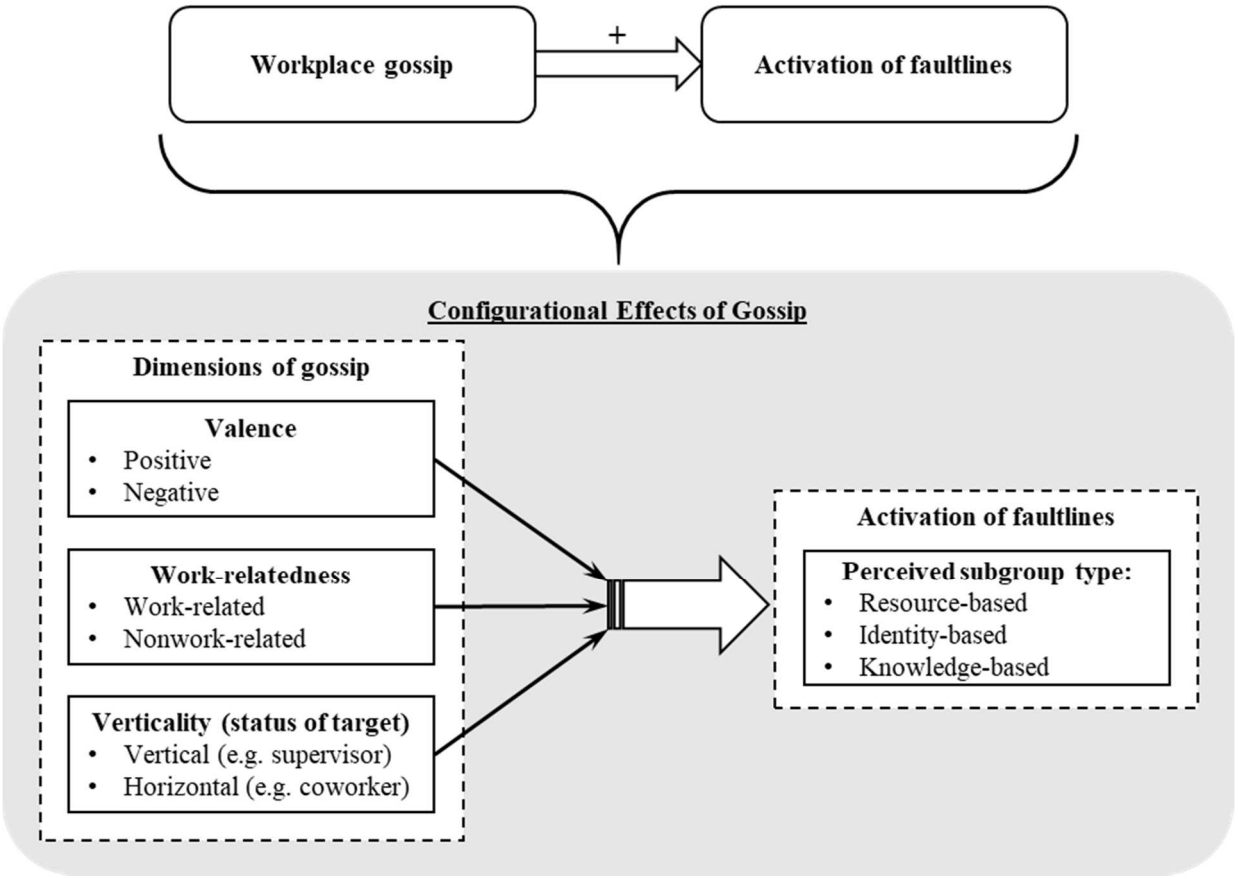

Figure 3. Proposed model of workplace gossip and faultlines.

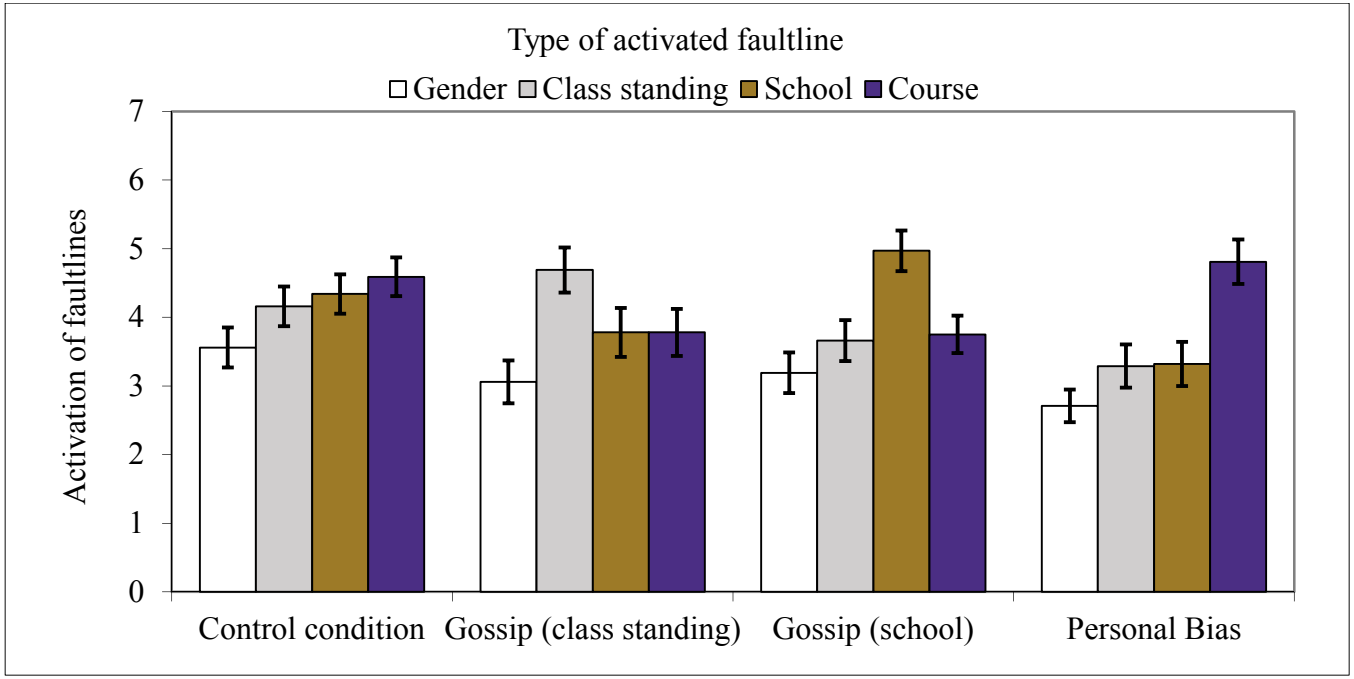

Figure 4. Study 2a: Activation of faultlines.

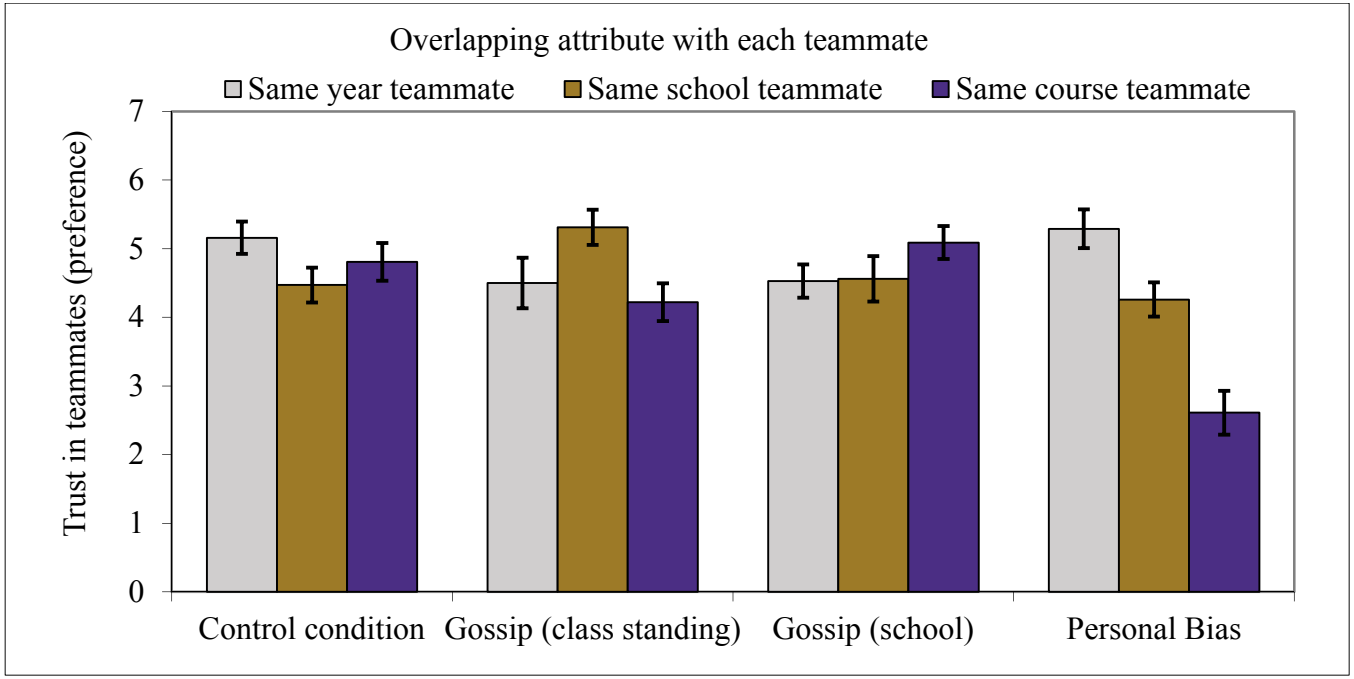

Figure 5. Study 2a: Trust in teammates (preference).

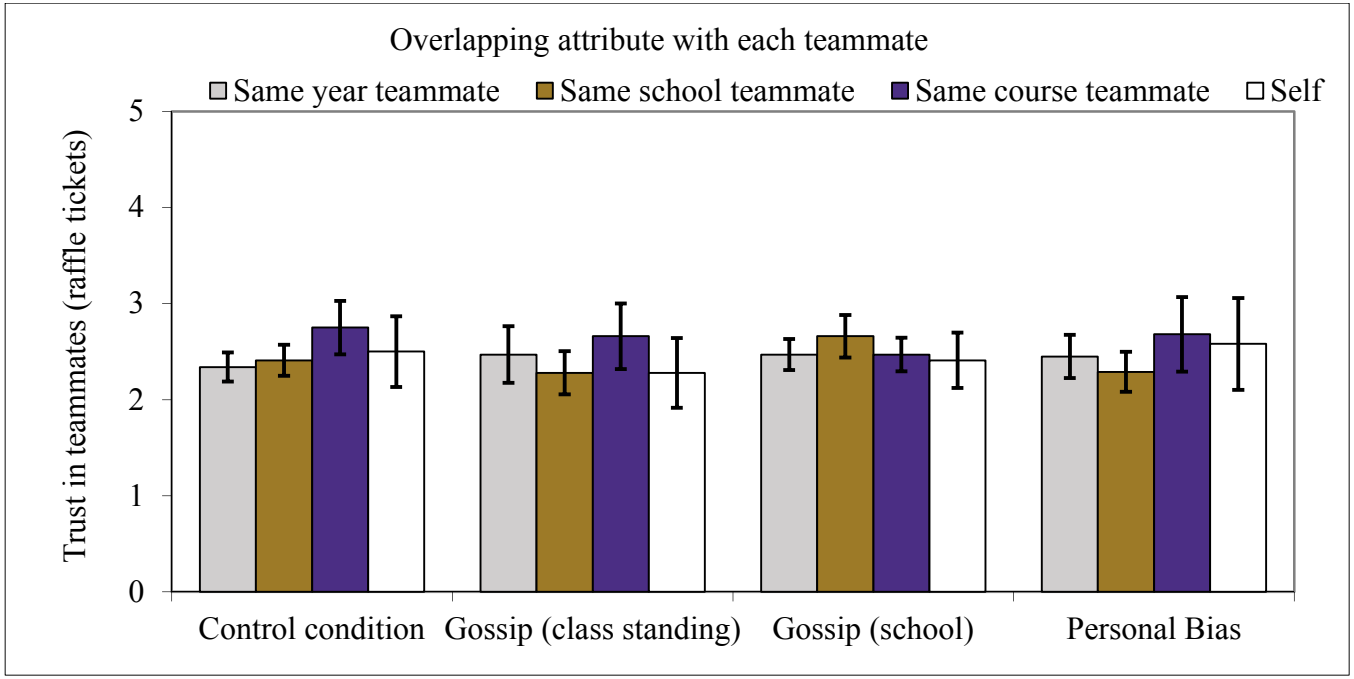

Figure 6. Study 2a: Trust in teammates (trust game).

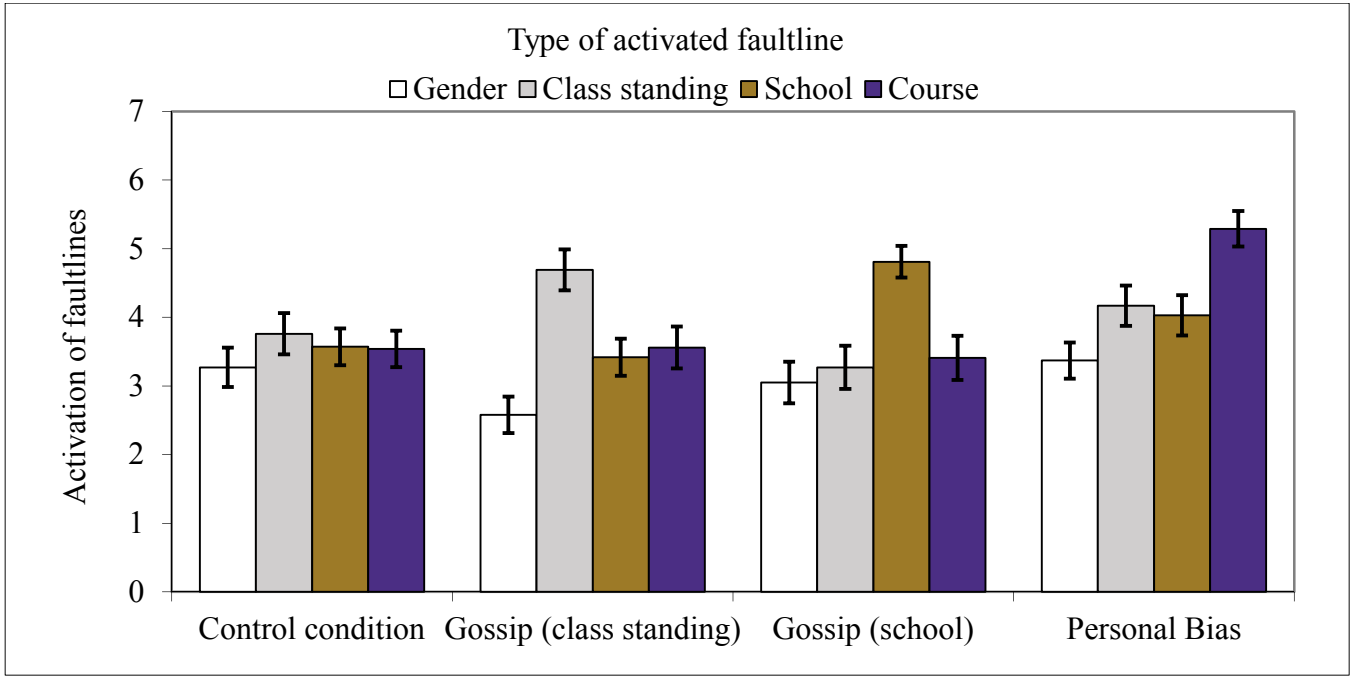

Figure 7. Study 2b: Activation of faultlines.

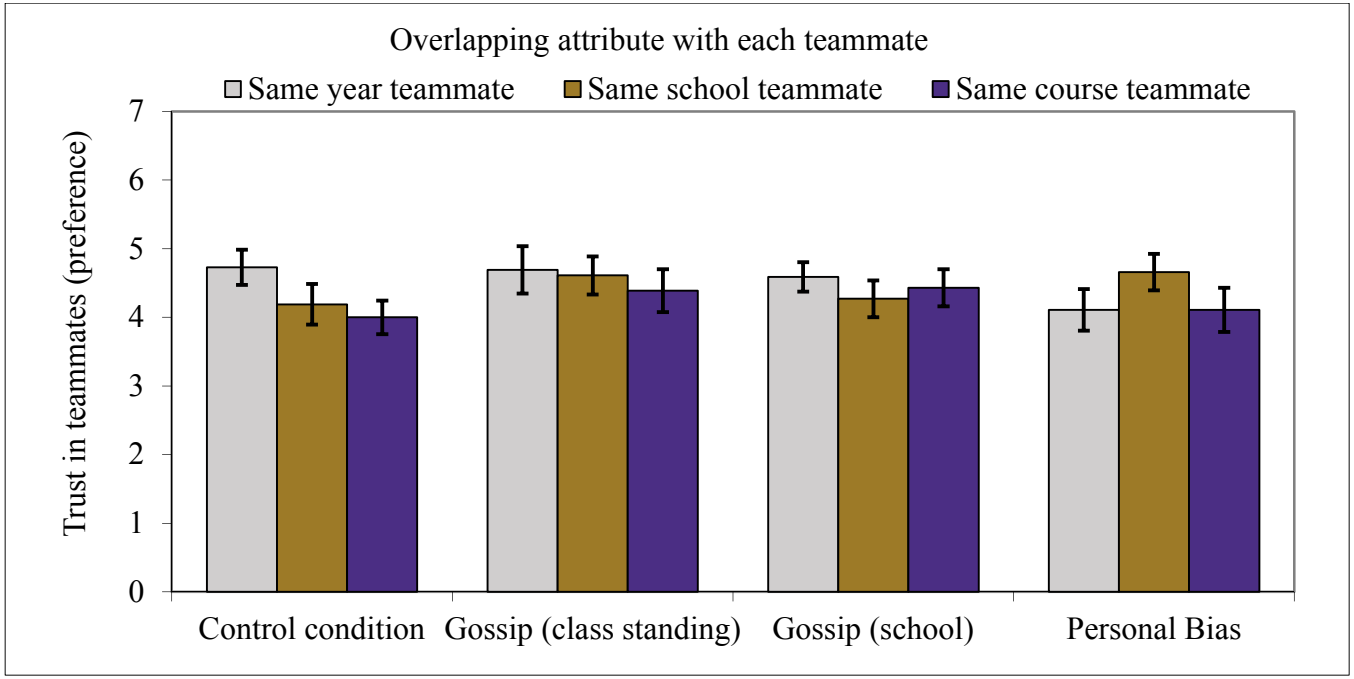

Figure 8. Study 2b: Trust in teammates (preference).

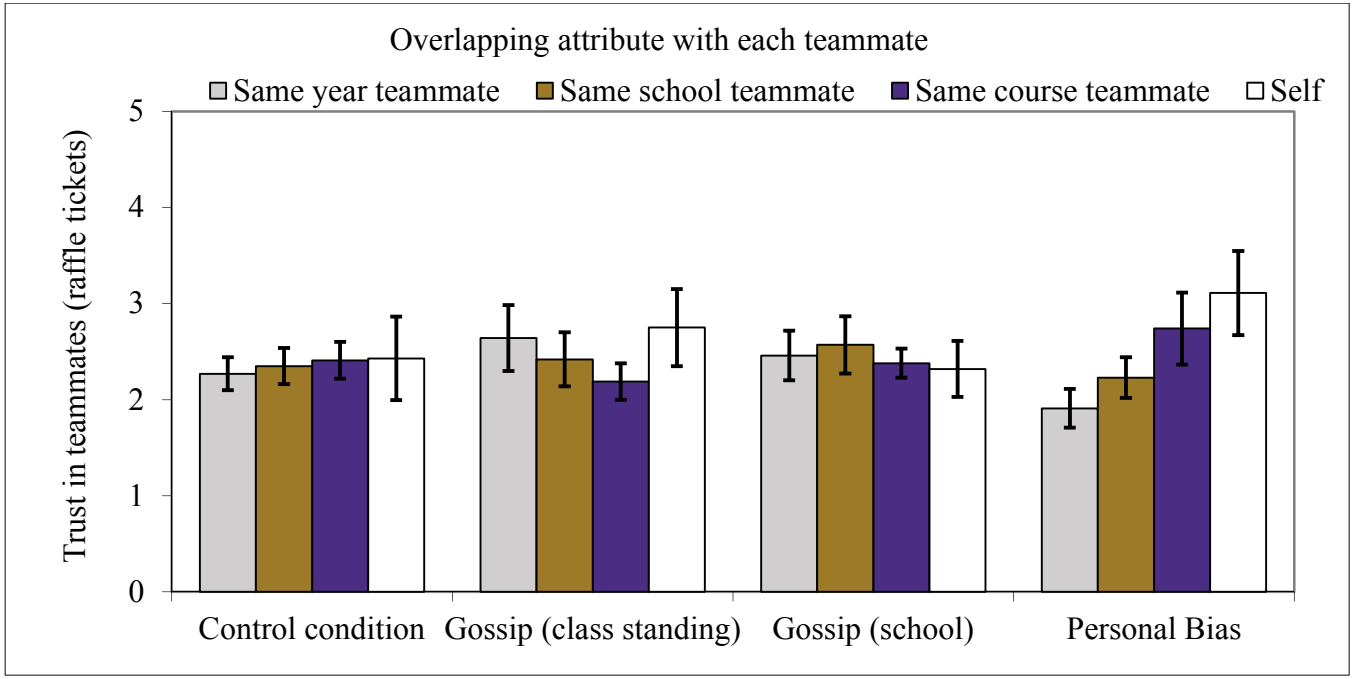

Figure 9. Study 2b: Trust in teammates (trust game).

Table 1

Study 1: Time 1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1. Positive gossip	3.15	1.08	(.96)																	
2. Negative gossip	1.96	0.69	.22**	(.90)																
3. Work-related gossip	3.03	0.83	.70**	.70**	(.90)															
4. Nonwork-related gossip	2.08	0.77	.84**	.44**	.54**	(.90)														
5. Vertical gossip	2.40	0.74	.78**	.63**	.80**	.80**	(.87)													
6. Horizontal gossip	2.72	0.79	.83**	.58**	.83**	.79**	.70**	(.89)												
7. Resource-based faultlines	3.76	1.68	-.11	.14	.05	-.08	.00	-.02	(.96)											
8. Identity-based faultlines	4.28	1.72	-.08	.23**	.10	-.02	.03	.06	.46**	(.98)										
9. Knowledge-based faultlines	4.11	1.55	.01	.06	.07	-.02	.04	.02	.27**	.47**	(.97)									
10. Conflict	3.74	1.64	-.02	.40**	.25**	.06	.21**	.12	.33**	.42**	.29**	(.96)								
11. Perceived coworker support	6.33	0.82	.22**	.05	.19*	.15*	.11	.25**	-.21**	-.10	-.08	-.21**	(.94)							
12. Work style similarity	4.18	1.14	.18*	-.21**	-.05	.12	.00	.05	-.06	-.26**	-.11	-.41**	-.02	(.91)						
13. Social category similarity	4.38	1.44	.01	.09	.15	.05	.10	.11	.11	-.02	.03	.08	-.06	.16*	(.91)					
14. Informal conversation	4.97	1.47	.35**	.10	.28**	.28**	.21**	.37**	-.11	-.03	-.05	-.06	.33**	.07*	-.07	—				
15. Feedback	4.28	1.43	.22**	-.21**	-.06	.18*	.04	.09	-.13	-.24**	-.02	-.20**	.34**	.26**	-.11	.17*	(.88)			
16. Tenure	7.36	8.32	-.03	.06	-.01	.03	.04	-.02	-.06	-.03	-.07	-.05	.10	-.16*	-.33**	.12	.07	—		
17. Proficiency (school)	8.37	2.23	.07	-.12	.04	-.05	-.05	.04	-.08	.03	-.03	.03	.05	-.06	-.02	.04	-.12	.05	—	
18. Low income (school)	0.26	0.26	-.08	.10	-.05	.04	.05	-.06	.07	-.02	.03	.03	-.04	.05	.02	-.06	.12	-.02	-.93**	—

N = 180 except for conflict, perceived coworker support, and feedback (179); WSS, SCS, and informal conversations (178); and tenure (176). Reliability coefficients are reported along the diagonal.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 2

Study 1: Time 1 FsQCA Solutions

	Activation of faultlines				
	Resource-based		Identity-based		Knowledge-based
Configuration	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Positive gossip	⊗	⊗	⊗		
Negative gossip	●	●		●	●
Work-related gossip	●	●			●
Nonwork-related gossip			●		⊗
Horizontal gossip		●			
Vertical gossip	●				●
Consistency	0.79	0.79	0.86	0.82	0.85
Raw coverage	0.43	0.45	0.42	0.58	0.45
Unique coverage	0.02	0.03	0.05	0.21	0.45
Overall solution consistency	**0.79**		**0.82**		**0.85**
Overall solution coverage	**0.47**		**0.63**		**0.45**

Notes: Black circles indicate the presence of a condition. Open circles indicate the absence of a condition. Blank spaces indicate conditions that are not relevant to the configuration. Large circles represent "core" conditions. Small circles represent contributing conditions. Frequency threshold = 3 cases (86% of sample).

Table 3

Study 1: Time 2 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1. Positive gossip	3.21	1.10	(.96)																	
2. Negative gossip	2.15	0.83	.49**	(.91)																
3. Work-related gossip	3.21	1.04	.77**	.81**	(.93)															
4. Nonwork-related gossip	2.16	0.86	.84**	.62**	.57**	(.93)														
5. Vertical gossip	2.55	0.90	.85**	.74**	.85**	.79**	(.91)													
6. Horizontal gossip	2.81	0.91	.82**	.77**	.83**	.81**	.71**	(.92)												
7. Resource-based faultlines	4.02	1.65	.12	.29**	.23**	.16*	.15	.26**	(.97)											
8. Identity-based faultlines	4.42	1.64	.19*	.26**	.23**	.22**	.19*	.28**	.48**	(.97)										
9. Knowledge-based faultlines	4.12	1.60	.23**	.33**	.31**	.25**	.25**	.34**	.50**	.49**	(.97)									
10. Conflict	4.09	1.67	.08	.48**	.33**	.17*	.22**	.32**	.38**	.45**	.39**	(.95)								
11. Perceived coworker support	6.37	0.83	.11	.14	.19*	.05	.09	.16*	-.02	-.06	.08	-.04	(.95)							
12. Work style similarity	4.16	1.13	.18*	-.15	-.09	.19*	.06	.02	-.10	-.14	-.04	-.35**	.13	(.86)						
13. Social category similarity	4.48	1.43	.12	.21**	.20*	.12	.11	.23**	.12	.19*	.15	.09	.09	.20*	(.85)					
14. Informal conversation	4.96	1.41	.22**	.23**	.27**	.18*	.25**	.23**	-.01	-.10	-.05	-.05	.38**	.01	.06	—				
15. Feedback	4.26	1.38	.18*	-.16	.01	.06	.05	.02	-.08	-.10	-.08	-.23**	.21**	.19*	-.17*	.11	(.85)			
16. Tenure	6.50	7.37	-.05	.02	-.01	-.03	-.04	-.01	-.17*	-.02	-.16	-.04	.05	-.06	.00	.00	-.01	—		
17. Proficiency (school)	8.22	2.62	.09	.05	.06	.09	.06	.10	-.08	.06	.04	.02	.11	.04	.04	.13	-.05	-.02	—	
18. Low income (school)	0.27	0.29	-.10	-.03	-.04	-.11	-.06	-.09	.08	-.04	-.04	.00	-.08	-.03	-.01	-.10	.05	.03	-.95**	—

N = 151 except for conflict, perceived coworker support, WSS, SCS, and feedback (150); informal conversations (149); and tenure (147). Reliability coefficients are reported along the diagonal.

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 4

Study 1: Time 2 FsQCA Solutions

	Activation of faultlines							
	Resource-based			Identity-based			Knowledge-based	
Configuration	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
Positive gossip			●			●	●	
Negative gossip	⬤	●	⬤	⬤				⬤
Work-related gossip	●	⬤	●				⬤	
Nonwork-related gossip		⊗	●		⬤	⬤	●	
Vertical gossip	⬤	●	⊗			●	●	
Horizontal gossip	⊗		⬤		●		●	
Consistency	0.86	0.86	0.90	0.84	0.87	0.85	0.84	0.84
Raw coverage	0.45	0.47	0.39	0.59	0.55	0.50	0.51	0.65
Unique coverage	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.12	0.03	0.01	0.04	0.18
Overall solution consistency	**0.85**			**0.83**			**0.83**	
Overall solution coverage	**0.50**			**0.68**			**0.69**	

Notes: Black circles indicate the presence of a condition. Open circles indicate the absence of a condition. Blank spaces indicate conditions that are not relevant to the configuration. Large circles represent "core" conditions. Small circles represent contributing conditions. Frequency threshold = 3 cases (81% of sample).

Table 5

Study 1: Time 1 Supplemental Analysis

	DV: Conflict					DV: Perceived coworker support				
	Models					Models				
Variable	**1A**	**2A**	**3A**	**4A**	**5A**	**1B**	**2B**	**3B**	**4B**	**5B**
Intercept	-0.01	0.00	0.00	-0.01	-0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
Configuration 1 (~pos + neg + vrt + wrk)	0.27**					0.19*				
Configuration 2 (~pos + neg + hrz + wrk)		0.25**					0.23**			
Configuration 3 (~pos + nwrk)			0.10					0.18**		
Configuration 4 (neg)				0.37**					0.21**	
Configuration 5 (neg + vrt + wrk + ~nwrk)					0.29**					0.23**
Perceived coworker support	-0.23**	-0.24**	-0.21**	-0.23**	-0.24**					
Conflict						-0.23**	-0.24**	-0.20**	-0.26**	-0.25**
Work style similarity	-0.45**	-0.46**	-0.47**	-0.41**	-0.46**	-0.19*	-0.20**	-0.19*	-0.18*	-0.20**
Social category similarity	0.09	0.10	0.12	0.08	0.08	-0.05	-0.06	0.07	0.05	0.04
Informal conversation	0.06	0.04	0.05	0.00	0.03	0.30**	0.28**	0.29**	0.26**	0.27**
Feedback	0.07	0.08	0.00	0.10	0.09	0.38**	0.39**	0.34**	0.38**	0.39**
Tenure	-0.13	-0.12	-0.09	-0.12	-0.13*	-0.03	-0.03	-0.01	-0.02	-0.04
Proficiency	0.44*	0.44*	0.40*	0.49**	0.45*	0.27	0.27	0.25	0.30	0.29
Low income	0.43*	0.45**	0.42*	0.46**	0.45*	0.18	0.20	0.17	0.20	0.20
AIC	447.12	449.28	460.50	434.07	444.93	452.67	447.98	452.15	451.95	449.19
BIC	485.10	487.26	498.47	472.05	482.91	490.65	485.96	490.12	489.93	487.17
deviance	423.12	425.28	436.50	410.07	420.93	428.67	423.98	428.14	427.95	425.19

N = 175

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 6

Study 1: Time 2 Supplemental Analysis

	DV: Conflict							DV: Perceived coworker support						
	Models							Models						
Variable	**1A**	**2A**	**3A**	**4A**	**5A**	**6A**	**7A**	**1B**	**2B**	**3B**	**4B**	**5B**	**6B**	**7B**
Intercept	0.00	0.00	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01	-0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.02
Solution 1 (neg + wrk + vrt + ~hrz)	0.26**							0.07						
Solution 2 (neg + wrk + ~nwrk + vrt)		0.33**							0.11					
Solution 3 (pos + neg + wrk + nwrk + ~vrt + hrz)			0.35**							0.07				
Solution 4 and 8 (neg)				0.42**							0.07			
Solution 5 (nwrk + hrz)					0.34**							-0.05		
Solution 6 (pos + nwrk + vrt)						0.26**							-0.04	
Solution 7 (pos + wrk + nwrk + vrt + hrz)							0.29**							-0.05
Perceived coworker support	0.04	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.07	0.06	0.07							
Conflict								0.03	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.07	0.06	0.07
Work style similarity	-0.29**	-0.24**	-0.30**	-0.26**	-0.36**	-0.35**	-0.35**	0.09	0.11	0.08	0.09	0.10	0.10	0.10
Social category similarity	0.10	0.08	0.08	0.06	0.07	0.10	0.09	0.07	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.08	0.07	0.07
Informal conversation	-0.08	-0.09	-0.11	-0.14	-0.14	-0.12	-0.13	0.33**	0.32**	0.32**	0.32**	0.35**	0.35**	0.35**
Feedback	-0.11	-0.11	-0.11	-0.08	-0.14	-0.15	-0.16*	0.17*	0.17*	0.17*	0.17*	0.17*	0.17*	0.18*
Tenure	-0.12	-0.11	-0.13	-0.10	-0.12	-0.10	-0.10	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.06
Proficiency	0.33	0.29	0.35	0.30	0.34	0.31	0.31	0.14	0.13	0.14	0.13	0.10	0.11	0.10
Low income	0.28	0.25	0.32	0.27	0.33	0.29	0.28	0.09	0.08	0.09	0.08	0.05	0.06	0.06
AIC	395.44	388.24	384.03	374.90	386.21	394.76	391.73	404.51	403.65	404.71	404.70	405.05	405.15	404.93
BIC	431.24	424.04	419.83	410.70	422.01	430.56	427.54	440.31	439.45	440.51	440.50	440.85	440.95	440.73
deviance	371.44	364.24	360.03	350.90	362.21	370.76	367.73	380.51	379.65	380.71	380.70	381.05	381.15	380.93

N = 146

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 7

Study 1: Supplemental Analysis at Time 2 using Time 1 Configurations

	DV: Conflict					DV: Perceived coworker support				
	Models					Models				
Variable	**1A**	**2A**	**3A**	**4A**	**5A**	**1B**	**2B**	**3B**	**4B**	**5B**
Intercept	0.00	-0.01	-0.01	-0.02	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Configuration 1 (~pos + neg + vrt + wrk)	0.29**					0.13				
Configuration 2 (~pos + neg + hrz + wrk)		0.27**					0.15			
Configuration 3 (~pos + nwrk)			0.26**					0.01		
Configuration 4 (neg)				0.42**					0.07	
Configuration 5 (neg + vrt + wrk + ~nwrk)					0.33**					0.11
Perceived coworker support	0.02	0.02	0.05	0.03	0.03					
Conflict						-0.01	-0.01	-0.05	-0.02	-0.02
Work style similarity	-0.26**	-0.28**	-0.34**	-0.26**	-0.24**	-0.11	-0.10	-0.09	-0.09	-0.11
Social category similarity	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.06	0.08	-0.06	-0.06	0.07	0.06	0.06
Informal conversation	-0.08	-0.09	-0.09	-0.14	-0.09	0.32**	0.31**	0.34**	0.32**	0.32**
Feedback	-0.10	-0.10	-0.11	-0.08	-0.11	0.18*	0.17*	0.17*	0.17*	0.17*
Tenure	-0.10	-0.12	-0.13	-0.10	-0.11	0.04	0.03	0.05	0.05	0.05
Proficiency	0.28	0.25	0.26	0.30	0.29	0.14	0.12	0.12	0.13	0.13
Low income	0.24	0.21	0.25	0.27	0.25	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.08	0.08
AIC	393.06	394.45	395.15	374.90	388.24	402.84	401.80	405.32	404.70	403.65
BIC	428.86	430.26	430.95	410.70	424.04	438.65	437.60	441.12	440.50	439.45
deviance	369.06	370.45	371.15	350.90	364.24	378.84	377.80	381.32	380.70	379.65

N = 146

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 8

Study 1: Supplemental Analysis at Time 2 Controlling for Time 1

	DV: Conflict							DV: Perceived coworker support						
	Models							Models						
Variable	**1A**	**2A**	**3A**	**4A**	**5A**	**6A**	**7A**	**1B**	**2B**	**3B**	**4B**	**5B**	**6B**	**7B**
Intercept	-0.04	-0.05	-0.06	-0.07	-0.08	-0.06	-0.07	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	0.00	0.00	-0.01	0.00
Solution 1 (neg + wrk + vrt + ~hrz)	0.14†							0.05						
Solution 2 (neg + wrk + ~nwrk + vrt)		0.18*							0.02					
Solution 3 (pos + neg + wrk + nwrk + ~vrt + hrz)			0.14							0.01				
Solution 4 and 8 (neg)				0.25**							-0.28†			
Solution 5 (nwrk + hrz)					0.17†							-0.23†		
Solution 6 (pos + nwrk + vrt)						0.14†							-0.22	
Solution 7 (pos + wrk + nwrk + vrt + hrz)							0.14†							-0.22†
T1 resource-based faultlines	0.11	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.09	0.09	0.09	-0.03	-0.03	-0.03	-0.04	-0.03	-0.01	-0.01
T1 identity-based faultlines	0.13	0.11	0.10	0.10	0.12	0.14	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.01	-0.02	0.00
T1 knowledge-based faultlines	-0.05	-0.05	-0.06	-0.08	-0.09	-0.08	-0.09	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.09	0.10	0.09	0.10
T1 conflict	0.52**	0.51**	0.50**	0.50**	0.50**	0.51**	0.51**							
T1 perceived coworker support								0.54**	0.54**	0.54**	0.58**	0.55**	0.54**	0.54**
Perceived coworker support	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.10	0.09	0.09	0.09							
Conflict								0.11	0.12	0.12	0.22	0.19	0.18	0.18
Work style similarity	-0.06	-0.04	-0.10	-0.06	-0.11	-0.09	-0.09	0.10	0.10	0.09	0.08	0.14	0.11	0.12
Social category similarity	-0.12	-0.14	-0.11	-0.12	-0.13	-0.13	-0.13	0.09	0.09	0.10	0.11	0.12	0.12	0.12
Informal conversation	-0.01	-0.01	-0.03	-0.06	-0.05	-0.03	-0.04	0.10	0.11	0.10	0.18	0.17	0.16	0.17
Feedback	-0.20*	-0.19*	-0.18*	-0.14†	-0.20*	-0.22*	-0.22*	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.02	0.08	0.11	0.10
Tenure	-0.05	-0.05	-0.03	-0.03	-0.04	-0.04	-0.04	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.00
Proficiency	-0.23	-0.24	-0.28	-0.28	-0.24	-0.25	-0.26	--0.11	--0.13	-0.13	-0.15	-0.18	-0.17	-0.16
Low income	-0.28	-0.29	-0.32	-0.30	-0.23	-0.25	-0.26	-0.09	-0.10	-0.11	-0.12	-0.20	-0.19	-0.17
AIC	154.77	153.05	154.89	148.82	153.73	154.80	154.66	217.46	217.56	217.58	213.85	214.82	214.90	214.70
BIC	189.81	188.09	189.92	183.85	188.76	189.84	189.70	252.50	252.60	252.61	248.88	249.86	249.94	249.73
deviance	122.77	121.05	122.89	116.82	121.73	122.80	122.66	185.46	185.56	185.58	181.85	182.82	182.90	182.70

N = 66

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 9

Study 1: FsQCA Solutions for the Absence of Activated Faultlines

	Absence of activated faultlines overall				
	Time 1			**Time 2**	
Configuration	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
Positive gossip	●	●	●	●	●
Negative gossip	⊗		⊗	⊗	⊗
Work-related gossip	⊗	⊗		⊗	⊗
Nonwork-related gossip	●	●	●	●	●
Vertical gossip		●	●	⊗	●
Horizontal gossip		⊗	●	●	⊗
Consistency	0.87	0.90	0.87	0.83	0.86
Raw coverage	0.52	0.48	0.51	0.45	0.43
Unique coverage	0.03	0.00	0.03	0.03	0.02
Overall solution consistency	**0.84**			**0.83**	
Overall solution coverage	**0.56**			**0.47**	

Notes: Black circles indicate the presence of a condition. Open circles indicate the absence of a condition. Blank spaces indicate conditions that are not relevant to the configuration. Large circles represent "core" conditions. Small circles represent contributing conditions. Frequency threshold = 3 cases (86% of sample at Time 1 and 81% of sample at Time 2).

Table 10

Study 1: FsQCA Solutions for the Subsample of Overlapping Respondents at Time 1

	Activation of faultlines							
	Resource-based		**Identity-based**			**Knowledge-based**		
Configuration	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
Positive gossip	●				●			●
Negative gossip		●		●		●		
Work-related gossip	●	●			●	⊗		●
Nonwork-related gossip		⊗	●				●	⊗
Vertical gossip		●					⊗	
Horizontal gossip	●				●			●
Consistency	0.78	0.82	0.75	0.77	0.78	0.79	0.81	0.82
Raw coverage	0.59	0.45	0.54	0.55	0.53	0.49	0.50	0.49
Unique coverage	0.17	0.03	0.04	0.05	0.02	0.05	0.04	0.04
Overall solution consistency	**0.78**		**0.74**			**0.79**		
Overall solution coverage	**0.62**		**0.66**			**0.62**		

Notes: Black circles indicate the presence of a condition. Open circles indicate the absence of a condition. Blank spaces indicate conditions that are not relevant to the configuration. Large circles represent "core" conditions. Small circles represent contributing conditions. Frequency threshold = 2 cases (84% of sample).

Table 11

Study 1: FsQCA Solutions for the Subsample of Overlapping Respondents at Time 2

	Activation of faultlines						
	Resource-based			Identity-based		Knowledge-based	
Configuration	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**7**	**8**
Positive gossip	⊗		●			●	
Negative gossip	●	●	●	⬤		⬤	⬤
Work-related gossip	⬤	⬤	⬤			●	
Nonwork-related gossip		⊗	●		⬤		⊗
Vertical gossip	●	●	⊗				
Horizontal gossip		●	●		●	⬤	
Consistency	0.93	0.90	0.93	0.86	0.88	0.86	0.86
Raw coverage	0.46	0.47	0.41	0.56	0.54	0.54	0.50
Unique coverage	0.03	0.02	0.01	0.11	0.08	0.11	0.07
Overall solution consistency	**0.89**			**0.86**		**0.84**	
Overall solution coverage	**0.51**			**0.64**		**0.61**	

Notes: Black circles indicate the presence of a condition. Open circles indicate the absence of a condition. Blank spaces indicate conditions that are not relevant to the configuration. Large circles represent "core" conditions. Small circles represent contributing conditions. Frequency threshold = 2 cases (84% of sample).

Table 12

Study 2a: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Activated faultlines (class standing)	3.95	1.79	—													
2. Activated faultlines (school)	4.11	1.87	.60**	—												
3. Activated faultlines (course)	4.23	1.77	.55**	.54**	—											
4. Activated faultlines (gender)	3.13	1.62	.37**	.44**	.37**	—										
5. Gossip	4.14	1.87	.05	.08	-.08	-.08	—									
6. Trust preference (same class standing teammate)	4.87	1.64	-.04	-.03	.14	-.07	-.16	—								
7. Trust preference (same school teammate)	4.65	1.58	-.01	-.06	-.08	.06	.00	.19*	—							
8. Trust preference (same course teammate)	4.20	1.82	.11	.28*	.06	.10	.02	.08	.17	—						
9. Trust game (same class standing teammate)	2.43	1.21	-.01	.00	-.04	-.08	.03	.30**	.10	-.21*	—					
10. Trust game (same school teammate)	2.41	1.16	-.04	.01	-.05	.03	-.01	.04	.35**	.11	.21*	—				
11. Trust game (same course teammate)	2.64	1.70	-.09	.05	.07	-.10	-.02	-.11	.039	.14	-.24**	-.12	—			
12. Positive affect	2.44	0.90	.14	.26**	.09	-.02	.00	-.05	.077	.06	-.03	.06	.07	(.93)		
13. Negative affect	1.33	0.54	.05	.05	.02	.05	.02	-.04	-.038	.04	-.04	.00	-.07	.27**	(.93)	
14. Team satisfaction	5.01	1.12	.15	.17	.11	.05	-.15	.20*	.33**	.49**	.15	.21*	-.04	.27**	-.02	(.87)

N = 127. Reliability coefficients are reported along the diagonal.
*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$

Table 13

Study 2a: ANOVA on Differences in Activated Faultlines Between Conditions

Criterion	Predictor	*df*	Sum of squares	Mean square	*F*	*p*	η^2
Gender faultline	Conditions	3	11.70	3.90	1.51	.217	.035
	Residuals	123	319.00	2.59			
Class standing faultline	Conditions	3	35.00	11.67	3.87	.011	.086
	Residuals	123	370.70	3.01			
School faultline	Conditions	3	48.00	16.01	5.02	.003	.109
	Residuals	123	392.40	3.19			
Academic course faultline	Conditions	3	28.40	9.45	3.18	.027	.072
	Residuals	123	366.00	2.98			

Table 14

Study 2a: ANOVA on Differences Between Faultline Types Within Conditions

Condition	Predictor	*df*	Sum of squares	Mean square	*F*	*p*	η^2
Control condition	Faultline types	3	18.50	6.17	2.33	.078	.053
	Residuals	124	329.00	2.65			
Gossip (class standing) condition	Faultline types	3	42.50	14.18	3.94	.010	.087
	Residuals	124	445.70	3.59			
Gossip (school) condition	Faultline types	3	55.40	18.47	6.84	.000	.142
	Residuals	124	335.10	2.70			
Personal bias	Faultline types	3	74.50	24.83	8.81	.000	.180
	Residuals	120	338.40	2.82			

Table 15

Study 2a: Comparison of Activated Class Standing Faultlines Between Conditions

Condition	*M*	*SD*	Difference compared to gossip (class standing) condition[a]
Control	4.16	1.65	-0.53
Gossip (class standing) condition	4.69	1.86	–
Gossip (school) condition	3.66	1.68	-1.03*
Personal bias	3.29	1.75	-1.40**

[a] Based on an OLS regression with the gossip (class standing) condition as the reference level.

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 16

Study 2a: Comparison of Activated Faultlines Within the Gossip (Class Standing) Condition

Activated faultline	*M*	*SD*	Difference compared to gender faultlines[a]	Difference compared to class standing faultlines[b]
Gender faultlines	3.06	1.76	–	-1.63**
Class standing faultlines	4.69	1.86	1.63**	–
School faultlines	3.78	2.03	0.72	-0.91†
Academic course faultlines	3.78	1.93	0.72	-0.91†

[a] Based on an OLS regression with gender faultlines as the reference level.

[b] Based on an OLS regression with class standing faultlines as the reference level.

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 17

Study 2a: Comparison of Activated School Faultlines Between Conditions

Activated faultline	*M*	*SD*	Difference compared to gossip (school) condition[a]
Control	4.34	1.62	-0.63
Gossip (class standing) condition	3.78	2.03	-1.19**
Gossip (school) condition	4.97	1.67	–
Personal bias	3.32	1.80	-1.65**

[a] Based on an OLS regression with the gossip (school) condition as the reference level.

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 18

Study 2a: Comparison of Activated Faultlines Within the Gossip (School) Condition

Activated faultline	*M*	*SD*	Difference compared to gender faultlines[a]	Difference compared to school faultlines[b]
Gender faultlines	3.19	1.67	–	-1.78**
Class standing faultlines	3.66	1.68	0.47	-1.31**
School faultlines	4.97	1.67	1.78**	–
Academic course faultlines	3.75	1.55	0.56	-1.22**

[a] Based on an OLS regression with gender faultlines as the reference level.

[b] Based on an OLS regression with school faultlines as the reference level.

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 19

Study 2a: Comparison of Activated Academic Course Faultlines Between Conditions

Activated faultline	*M*	*SD*	Difference compared to personal bias condition[a]
Control	4.59	1.60	-0.21
Gossip (class standing) condition	3.78	1.93	-1.03*
Gossip (school) condition	3.75	1.55	-1.06*
Personal bias	4.81	1.80	–

[a] Based on an OLS regression with the personal bias condition as the reference level.

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 20

Study 2a: Comparison of Activated Faultlines Within the Personal Bias Condition

Activated faultline	*M*	*SD*	Difference compared to gender faultlines[a]	Difference compared to academic course faultlines[b]
Gender faultlines	2.71	1.32	–	-2.10**
Class standing faultlines	3.29	1.75	0.58	-1.52**
School faultlines	3.32	1.80	0.61	-1.48**
Academic course faultlines	4.81	1.80	2.10**	–

[a] Based on an OLS regression with gender faultlines as the reference level.

[b] Based on an OLS regression with academic course faultlines as the reference level.

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 21

Study 2a: ANOVA on Differences in Trust (Preference) Within Conditions

Condition	Predictor	*df*	Sum of squares	Mean square	*F*	*p*	η^2
Control condition	Teammates	2	7.56	3.78	1.82	.168	.038
	Residuals	93	193.06	2.08			
Gossip (class standing) condition	Teammates	2	20.65	10.32	3.47	.035	.070
	Residuals	93	276.34	2.97			
Gossip (school) condition	Teammates	2	6.40	3.20	1.34	.268	.028
	Residuals	93	222.60	2.39			
Personal bias	Teammates	2	113.00	56.53	22.34	.000	.332
	Residuals	93	227.70	2.53			

Table 22

Study 2a: Poisson Regressions on Differences in Trust (Trust Game) Within Conditions

Condition	Model	Predictors	*Residual deviance*	Δ *deviance*	*p*
Gossip (class standing) condition	Model 1	Intercept only	177.42	1.27	.74
	Model 2	Teammate dummy code	176.16		
Gossip (school) condition	Model 3	Intercept only	89.463	0.45	.93
	Model 4	Teammate dummy code	89.018		
Personal bias	Model 5	Intercept only	179.86	1.05	.79
	Model 6	Teammate dummy code	178.81		

Table 23

Study 2b: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Activated faultlines (class standing)	3.97	1.78	—													
2. Activated faultlines (school)	3.96	1.83	.35**	—												
3. Activated faultlines (course)	3.93	1.83	.55**	.46**	—											
4. Activated faultlines (gender)	3.07	1.57	.36**	.32**	.35**	—										
5. Gossip	4.12	1.97	.01	.10	-.05	-.15	—									
6. Trust preference (same class standing teammate)	4.54	1.70	.12	.00	-.05	.10	-.03	—								
7. Trust preference (same school teammate)	4.43	1.66	.03	.13	.11	.00	.07	.08	—							
8. Trust preference (same course teammate)	4.23	1.72	.01	.12	.16	.10	.09	.04	.14	—						
9. Trust game (same class standing teammate)	2.32	1.53	.09	.00	.02	.01	.10	.21*	-.03	-.04	—					
10. Trust game (same school teammate)	2.39	1.49	.03	.11	.07	-.01	-.02	-.20*	.22**	.10	.03	—				
11. Trust game (same course teammate)	2.43	1.44	-.07	-.03	.07	.09	-.01	-.02	-.14	.38**	-.03	-.02	—			
12. Positive affect	2.50	0.89	-.13	-.07	-.08	-.22**	.09	-.03	.11	.05	-.04	-.07	-.17*	(.93)		
13. Negative affect	1.27	0.47	.04	.05	.14	-.06	.12	-.03	.11	.01	.11	.09	.02	.22**	(.90)	
14. Team satisfaction	5.07	0.93	-.01	.13	.15	.12	-.14	.30**	.18*	.30**	.01	.02	.24**	.07	-.14	(.84)

N = 145. Reliability coefficients are reported along the diagonal.
*$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$

Table 24

Study 2b: ANOVA on Differences in Activated Faultlines Between Conditions

Criterion	Predictor	*df*	Sum of squares	Mean square	*F*	*p*	η^2
Gender faultline	Conditions	3	13.20	4.40	1.82	.146	.037
	Residuals	141	340.10	2.41			
Class standing faultline	Conditions	3	40.10	13.37	4.55	.005	.088
	Residuals	141	414.70	2.94			
School faultline	Conditions	3	43.30	14.43	4.62	.004	.089
	Residuals	141	440.50	3.12			
Academic course faultline	Conditions	3	85.20	28.39	10.11	.000	.177
	Residuals	141	396.10	2.81			

Table 25

Study 2b: Comparison of Activated Class Standing Faultlines Between Conditions

Condition	*M*	SD	Difference compared to gossip (class standing) condition[a]
Control	3.76	1.62	-0.94*
Gossip (class standing) condition	4.69	1.79	–
Gossip (school) condition	3.27	1.64	-1.42**
Personal bias	4.17	1.81	-0.52

[a] Based on an OLS regression with the gossip (class standing) condition as the reference level.

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 26

Study 2b: Comparison of Activated Faultlines Within the Gossip (Class Standing) Condition

Activated faultline	*M*	*SD*	Difference compared to gender faultlines[a]	Difference compared to class standing faultlines[b]
Gender faultlines	2.58	1.46	–	-2.11**
Class standing faultlines	4.69	1.79	2.11**	–
School faultlines	3.42	1.89	0.83*	-1.28**
Academic course faultlines	3.56	1.76	0.97*	-1.14**

[a] Based on an OLS regression with gender faultlines as the reference level.
[b] Based on an OLS regression with class standing faultlines as the reference level.

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 27

Study 2b: Comparison of Activated School Faultlines Between Conditions

Activated faultline	*M*	*SD*	Difference compared to gossip (school) condition[a]
Control	3.57	1.83	-1.24**
Gossip (class standing) condition	3.42	1.89	-1.39**
Gossip (school) condition	4.81	1.41	–
Personal bias	4.03	1.90	-0.78[†]

[a] Based on an OLS regression with the gossip (school) condition as the reference level.

[†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 28

Study 2b: Comparison of Activated Faultlines Within the Gossip (School) Condition

Activated faultline	*M*	*SD*	Difference compared to gender faultlines[a]	Difference compared to school faultlines[b]
Gender faultlines	3.05	1.22	–	-1.76**
Class standing faultlines	3.27	1.64	0.22	-1.54**
School faultlines	4.81	1.41	1.76**	–
Academic course faultlines	3.41	1.79	0.35	-1.41**

[a] Based on an OLS regression with gender faultlines as the reference level.

[b] Based on an OLS regression with school faultlines as the reference level.

[†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 29

Study 2b: Comparison of Activated Academic Course Faultlines Between Conditions

Activated faultline	*M*	*SD*	Difference compared to personal bias condition[a]
Control	3.54	1.61	-1.75**
Gossip (class standing) condition	3.56	1.76	-1.73**
Gossip (school) condition	3.41	1.79	-1.88**
Personal bias	5.29	1.53	–

[a] Based on an OLS regression with the personal bias condition as the reference level.

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 30

Study 2b: Comparison of Activated Faultlines Within the Personal Bias Condition

Activated faultline	*M*	*SD*	Difference compared to gender faultlines[a]	Difference compared to academic course faultlines[b]
Gender faultlines	3.37	1.73	–	-1.91**
Class standing faultlines	4.17	1.81	0.80†	-1.11**
School faultlines	4.03	1.90	0.66	-1.26**
Academic course faultlines	5.29	1.53	1.91**	–

[a] Based on an OLS regression with gender faultlines as the reference level.
[b] Based on an OLS regression with academic course faultlines as the reference level.

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 31

Study 2b: ANOVA on Differences in Trust (Preference) Within Conditions

Condition	Predictor	*df*	Sum of squares	Mean square	*F*	*p*	η^2
Control condition	Teammates	2	10.61	5.31	2.03	.137	.036
	Residuals	108	282.97	2.62			
Gossip (class standing) condition	Teammates	2	1.80	0.90	0.26	.775	.005
	Residuals	105	368.80	3.51			
Gossip (school) condition	Teammates	2	1.95	0.97	0.42	.661	.008
	Residuals	108	253.30	2.35			
Personal bias	Teammates	2	6.90	3.44	1.11	.335	.021
	Residuals	102	317.00	3.11			

Table 32

Study 2b: Poisson Regressions on Differences in Trust (Trust Game) Within Conditions

Condition	Model	Predictors	*Residual deviance*	Δ *deviance*	*p*
Gossip (class standing) condition	Model 1	Intercept only	192.03	2.65	.449
	Model 2	Teammate dummy code	189.38		
Gossip (school) condition	Model 3	Intercept only	162.59	0.51	.917
	Model 4	Teammate dummy code	162.09		
Personal bias	Model 5	Intercept only	214.09	12.00	.007
	Model 6	Teammate dummy code	202.09		

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