2012

Gossip and the Group: A Self-Categorization Perspective

Dana Turcotte
Claremont Graduate University

Gossip and the Group: A Self-Categorization Perspective

BY

DANA TURCOTTE

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Claremont Graduate University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate Faculty of Psychology

Claremont, California
2012

Approved by:

_____

Michael Hogg

We, the undersigned, certify that we have read this dissertation of Dana Turcotte and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Michael Hogg, Chair

Dr. William Crano, Member

Dr. Eusebio Alvaro, Member

Dr. Cynthia Pickett, Visiting Examiner

Abstract of the Dissertation

Gossip and the Group: A Self-Categorization Perspective

by

Dana Turcotte

Claremont Graduate University: 2012

Gossip is a little studied topic and even fewer studies have examined gossip from the perspective of social identity and self categorization theories. However, many of the functions of gossip have significant implications for group processes, including bonding, norm transmission and reinforcement, marginalization of deviants, and social influence. Particularly for those on the margins of the group, gossip may be used as a tool to gain acceptance in the group, as gossip is an effective way to express group loyalty and adherence to group norms. Study One investigated the extent to which being a prototypical member of one's group was predictive of likelihood to spread gossip. Using sororities as the group, members were presented with a hypothetical piece of gossip and asked the extent to which the member who gossiped is peripheral, how likely they would be to share the gossip with other group members, and how prototypical they perceive themselves to be of the sorority. It was predicted that peripheral group members would be more likely to spread gossip than other group members, particularly about other peripheral group members, and particularly when the information was not highly negative. Study Two was conducted in parallel, using the same methodology, but with a piece of gossip about a celebrity instead of a fellow sorority member. It was predicted that the results would mirror those of Study One and that peripheral members would be most likely to spread the gossip. While none of the stated hypotheses were supported, there were several unanticipated interactions. In both Study One and Study Two, there was a significant three-way interaction, in that a highly uncertain

respondent, a prototypical target, and relatively mild negative gossip was associated with anticipated transmission to the highest number of sorority members. While the results were unanticipated, they are not inexplicable and the implications for research in the areas of gossip, celebrity, and self categorization theory are discussed.

.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I want to thank my committee for their guidance, mentorship, and continued enthusiasm for my somewhat unconventional research path. Thanks to my number one editor and cheerleader, Dani Blaylock, to whom I am so grateful for her endless support and encouragement. And finally, to Robert, thank you for your love and your patience.

Table of Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements …….	*v*
Chapter One: Introduction ……..	1
Chapter Two: Literature Review …….	4
Gossip ……...…….	4
Self Categorization Theory……..……	16
Chapter Three: The Present Studies ……	25
Overview of research questions and hypotheses……..	26
Chapter Four: Study One.……	31
Method. ……..	31
Results…….	34
Discussion...…….	47
Chapter Five: Study Two……	52
Method. ……..	53
Results…….	54
Discussion...……	62
Chapter Six: General Discussion…….	65
References ……...	72
Appendix A: Informed Consent Form Study One ……..	80
Appendix B: Debriefing Statement Study One ……...	81
Appendix C: Measurements (Studies One & Two)……..	82

List of Tables

Page

Table 1. Factor loadings based on a principle components analysis with verimax rotation for 13 item uncertainty scale (Study One) ……..……... 36

Table 2. Correlations Between Likelihood to Tell Another Member, Number of Members One Would Tell, and Perceived Interestingness and Believability of Gossip (Study One)……..... 37

Table 3. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Likelihood to Tell Gossip to Another Member (Study One)……...…. 39

Table 4. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting How Many Member One Will Tell Gossip (Study One)…… 42

Table 5. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting How Many Member One Will Tell Gossip (Study One)…… 45

Table 6. Correlations Between Likelihood to Tell Another Member, Number of Members One Would Tell, and Perceived Interestingness and Believability of Gossip (Study Two) 55

Table 7. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting How Many Member One Will Tell Gossip (Study Two)……. 60

Tables of Figures

Page

Figure 1. Likelihood to tell gossip as a function of self-prototypicality and uncertainty (Study One)…… 40

Figure 2. Number of sorority members one would tell gossip as a function of target prototypicality and negativity (Study One)…… 43

Figure 3. Number of sorority members one would tell as a function of target prototypicality and negativity among those high in uncertainty (Study One) 46

Figure 4. Number of sorority members one would tell as a function of target prototypicality and negativity among those low in uncertainty (Study One) 47

Figure 5. Number of sorority members one would tell as a function of uncertainty and negativity (Study Two) 59

Figure 6. Number of sorority members one would tell as a function of target prototypicality and negativity among those low in uncertainty (Study Two) 61

Figure 7. Number of sorority members one would tell as a function of target prototypicality and negativity among those low in uncertainty (Study Two) 62

Chapter One: Introduction

Gossip is a part of everyday life and, whether they will admit it or not, many people engage in it on a regular basis. Perhaps due to its mundane nature, academic researchers have largely ignored the topic, or perhaps even scoffed at the study of it, but gossip's ubiquitous nature suggests that it may play an important function for individuals, groups, and society. Researchers who have studied gossip have begun to identify several potential functions, including transmitting social information (Baumeister, Zhang, & Vohs, 2004) and increasing intimacy (Levin & Arluke, 1987). However, this research typically examines gossip from an interpersonal or evolutionary perspective and rarely explores the importance of gossip within a group context. It is surprising that this group dimension has been overlooked – after all, many of the functions of gossip have significant implications for group processes, including bonding, norm transmission and reinforcement, marginalization of deviants, and social influence. Particularly for those on the margins of the group, gossip may be used as a tool to gain acceptance in the group, as gossip is an effective way to express group loyalty and adherence to group norms.

The social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and more specifically self categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), may be an ideal framework to use when examining the role of gossip within the group. Not only is self categorization theory one of the most widely explored and developed theories in the study of group behavior, it also provides a clear framework for predicting how one's place within a group will impact one's motivations and behavior.

Self categorization theory argues that prototypes, fuzzy sets of characteristics, play a central role in group life because they guide the way in which groups are conceptualized. Those

group members who match the prototype are considered central group members, while those who do not are more peripheral group members. Central and peripheral group members may have different feelings about the group and have different motivations when interacting with the group. For example, because peripheral group members are on the fringes of the group, they may be more driven to gain acceptance from the group and to be perceived as a more central member. In fact, Pickett and Brewer (2005) demonstrated that it is peripheral group members who are most likely to enforce strict group norms and marginalize those who do not comply – a motivation that is potentially achieved by gossiping. Gossiping about a group member who has violated a norm is an efficient way to bond with other group members while appearing more central by comparison to the norm-violator.

The aim of the current research is to explore gossip in a group context, using self-categorization theory as the conceptual framework. Specifically, Study One will investigate the extent to which being a prototypical member of one's group influences the likelihood that one will spread gossip. Using sororities as the group, members will be presented with a hypothetical piece of gossip and asked the extent to which the member who gossiped is peripheral, how likely they would be to share the gossip with other group members, and how prototypical they perceive themselves to be of the sorority. It is predicted that more peripheral group members will be more likely to spread gossip than other group members, particularly about other peripheral group members.

It is possible that gossiping about a fellow group member is risky and makes the gossiper vulnerable to damaged relationships, should the gossip reach the target. For those seeking to gain a more central position, gossiping about a non-group member third party, in the form of a celebrity may be an attractive option. The ubiquity of the celebrity tabloid industry leaves no

doubt about the public's appetite for celebrity gossip - for a peripheral group member, sharing celebrity gossip may be a safer strategy to gain acceptance. Gossiping about the misdeeds of a celebrity could likewise build intimacy around shared Schadenfreude, as well as demonstrate knowledge of norms and convey that one has, so to speak, "the inside scoop." Study Two was conducted in parallel and, using the same methodology but with a piece of gossip about a celebrity, instead of a fellow sorority member. It is predicted that the results will mirror those of study one and that it will be peripheral members who will be most likely to spread the gossip.

The use of self categorization theory to understand likelihood to gossip is a novel approach that has not previously been used to examine gossip, and in turn self-categorization theorists have not previously focused on gossip. However, as a comprehensive theory of self, identity and group life, self categorization theory is an excellent framework for studying gossip and the results of the study will have novel implications not just for gossip research, but also for self-categorization theory.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Gossip

The most commonly used definition of gossip is personal information about an absent third party that is conveyed in an evaluative manner (Foster, 2004), however the nuances of when gossip is occurring may be more subtle. First, it is the personal nature of the information that distinguishes gossip from rumor. Gossip can be considered a subset of rumor, as rumors may contain more general information (e.g. rumors of a company lay-off), while gossip is, by definition, personal information (Rosnow & Fine, 1976). Additionally, the target of gossip is always an absent third party which is related to the fact that there is an element of secrecy about gossip. Sharing of personal information about oneself is self-disclosure and not gossip (Nevo, Nevo, & Derech-Zehavi, 1994) and sharing personal information about a person who is present may be a form of ostracism, but is not gossip. In general, if personal information about a third party is being shared and conversation would not take place were the person present, the topic would likely be defined as gossip. While gossip, like rumor, may fall under the umbrella of communication, gossip goes far beyond simply being a communication phenomenon and has implications for interpersonal relationships, intra and inter-group process, and ultimately one's own self perceptions.

Finally, the evaluative nature of gossip separates it from the generally innocuous act of simply sharing news. Given that gossip occurs when a social norm has been violated, the act of sharing gossip is a means of identifying the violation and passing judgment on the violator. For example, sharing the news that a mutual friend has had a baby is likely not considered gossip, but sharing the news that an unwed friend has had a baby, with an accompanying tone of judgment, would be considered gossip. Context is a crucial factor, as a piece of information may

or may not be gossip, depending on who is telling the information to whom and the context and intentions (Nevo, Nevo, & Derech-Zehavi, 1994).

Who gossips to whom?

The short answer is that just about everyone gossips. Gossip has been observed by historians and anthropologists, dating back thousands of years and across all cultures (Gluckman, 1963; Schein, 1994). However, gossip is especially likely to occur among some people, and in certain contexts more than others.

Although popular culture has cast women as the stereotypical gossiper, research suggests this may not necessarily be true. While some studies have found women are more likely than men to gossip (e.g. Nevo, Nevo, & Derech-Zehavi, 1994), others have suggested this is an artifact of gender norms and men are simply more likely to underreport the amount of gossip they engage in. Levin and Arluke (1985) examined gender differences relating to gossip and found men and women gossiped in fairly equal amounts, however the topics they gossiped about differed. Men were more likley to gossip about sports celebrites, while women were more likely to gossip about personal relationships.

The likelihood of gossiping can also be conceptualized as an individual difference, which correlates with specific personality traits. The tendency to gossip has been found to correlate, not surprisingly, with extroversion (Litman & Pezzo, 2005) and other-directedness (Levin & Arluke, 1987), as well as anxiety (Jaeger, Skleder, & Rosnow, 1998; Rosnow & Fine, 1976). In a study of adolescent girls, the most popular girls not only gossiped the most, but also gossiped more harshly about others (McDonald, Putallaz, Grimes, Kupersmidt, & Coie, 2007), which is consistent with a conceptualization of gossip as a tool to gain (or maintain) power. But that is not to say that those who gossip the most are the most socially adept. Jaeger, Skleder, and

Rosnow (1998) used the tendecy to gossip questionnaire (TGQ; Nevo, Nevo, & Derech-Zehavi, 1994) among a sample of sorority members and found the optimal level of gossip to be a relatively moderate level. Those who were most likely to gossip were also the most anxious and seen as less likelable by peers. Those who gossiped the least were seen as likeable by peers, but had fewer friends and were likley to be high in need for approval. Those sorority members who gossiped at a moderate level had the most friends, suggesting that gossip is a social skill, and those who master it are more likley to be socially accepted.

Ironically, in identifying those who have violated a norm, the gossipers are themselves violating a social convention of not "talking behind someone's back." Gossip is almost exclusively a secret activity – people prefer to keep it below the radar in order to avoid being negatively labeled "a gossip" and considered untrustworthy and possibly vindictive. That gossip is such an integral part of social life, if only conducted in secrecy, suggests it serves valuable social functions.

Functions of Gossip

Aside from the entertaining nature of gossip as a form of storytelling, gossip can be used to transmit information, exert social influence, increase intimacy, and as a mechanism for social comparison processes (Levin & Arluke, 1987; Foster, 2004; Rosnow & Georgoudi, 1985). These functions are not mutually exclusive and any act of gossiping is likely to serve more than of them.

Entertainment. There is no denying one of gossip's most basic features: it is just fun. Gossip, like other forms of storytelling, is an enjoyable activity and obvious source of pleasure (Ben-Ze'ev, 1994). Rosnow & Fine (1976) observed there are times when gossip serves no other function aside from pure amusement. Gossip and humor share the key components of surprise

and irony and as Spacks (1985) noted, trying to understand why gossip is fun is like trying to understand why a joke is funny; it just is.

The ever-expanding world of celebrity gossip exemplifies gossip for the sake of pure enjoyment. This fascination with celebrities has created an enormously lucrative industry for media outlets that report on the goings-on in celebrities' daily lives – and through "reality TV" even creates "celebrities" for people to gossip about. This culture of celebrity media has given rise to scores of photographers called "paparazzi" who follow the every move of celebrities, hoping to get that scandalous shot that will make them rich. Sensation and scandal have always been a part of Hollywood, but in today's media there are even more outlets for celebrity slip-ups to be broadcast across the world. The celebrity gossip phenomenon is not unique to the United States and has become a global industry, as Britain's tabloids chronicle the lives of celebrities and the royal family (Conboy, 2006), and in India, tabloid gossip about Bollywood actors and cricket players is a major part of popular culture. Considering the salacious details of a celebrity scandal are unlikely to have a real impact of the life of the reader, the seemingly universal interest in them suggests gossip is inherently enjoyable.

Information. Gossip provides the listener with information about the world around them. Frequently examined from an evolutionary perspective, gossip can be understood as an adaptive behavior because of its instructive nature, which may increase the likelihood of survival and reproduction. It allows one to gain a wealth of information about the world in a more efficient and indirect way than personal experience, which may be dangerous or inefficient (Levin & Arluke, 1987). In general, many of the pervasive topics of gossip are also themes that have evolutionary relevance for the species, such as cheater detection and reputation assessment and management (Davis & McLeod, 2003). Dunbar (2004), among other evolutionary psychologists,

has argued that from the standpoint of sexual selection, gossip is a useful way to gain information about potential mates (see also Shermer, 2004). Likewise, a study by DeBacker, Nelissen, & Fisher (2007) found that, when presented with gossip, women were most attentive to information about the attractiveness of other women, while men were attentive to information about the wealth and status of other men. The authors suggest these findings imply that gossip is frequently used to gain knowledge about a potential sexual rival and is an important part of reproductive strategy.

Beyond mates and rivals, gossip provides information about the larger social world around us. Because people strive to adhere to social norms (Sherif, 1936), gossip provides a roadmap for proper social behavior. Gossip occurs after violation of a social norm, and thus teaches us about group norms and acceptable social behaviors. Baumeister, Zhang, and Vohs (2004) posit that when we hear a piece of gossip, it lets us know that the topic is important and relevant, or it would not be worth discussing. Such vignettes are powerful cautionary tales that give the listener information to navigate their social world, and reinforce social norms.

Intimacy. In addition to providing the listener with information, the act of gossiping is likely to increase intimacy between those involved in the exchange of gossip (Levin & Arluke, 1987). Gossip is most likely to occur in a dyadic exchange among friends (Emler, 1994) and when two people gossip about a non-present third party, an alliance forms. As in Heider's (1958) well-known balance theory, two people with a common enemy are likely to be friends. While the two gossipers may not view the target as an outright enemy, the evaluative nature of gossip lends itself to an "us versus them" mentality, which strengthens the bond between "us".

That two people would engage in gossip at all implies a certain level of intimacy. First, the two people gossiping share knowledge of the target, as well as an understanding of the group

norms violated by the target. Nevo, Nevo, and Derech-Zehavi (1994) suggest that the meaning conveyed in gossip is subtle and context-dependent and personal information may or not be considered gossip, depending on the intentions and context. A statement such as “John is dating Sally” may seem innocuous to an outsider, but with the shared knowledge that John is married and Sally is his assistant, the information becomes scandalous.

In addition, the taboo nature of the act of gossiping requires an established level of trust between the gossipers. In the same way as self-disclosure increases intimacy (Reis & Shaver, 1988), gossip too involves a level of vulnerability and an expectation of responsiveness. Gossiping to an unsympathetic listener might label a person “a gossip.” A study by Turner, Mazur, Wendel, & Winslow (2003) found that those who heard gossip made negative judgements about the source, regardless of whether the gossip was postive or negative. This suggests those who spread gossip must do so with discretion to a trusted ally. Sharing gossip indicates to both parties that they have established trust and intimacy is increased.

Social Influence. Gossip is also a mechanism of social control. Because gossip occurs when a social norm has been violated, it is a way to informally police the actions of group members, and to guard against such violations (Foster, 2004). In general, when a group member violates a social norm, attempts are made to encourage conformity and should those attempts fail, the group member may be marginalized and ultimately excluded (Marques, Abrams, Paez, & Hogg, 2001). Because gossip draws negative attention to such a violation, it may be viewed as a form of social sanction against the violator, serving as punishment or encouragement to reform (Cox, 1970). For example, Kniffin and Wilson (2005), observed gossip as a tool among sports teams to marginalize and eventually exclude team members who were perceived as lazy, while praising those members who worked hard.

Gossip also serves as a warning to others to adhere to group norms. Given that gossip is inherently evaluative, it is either praise or criticism of another person's actions. Baumeister, Zhang, and Vohs, (2004) argue that when gossip is critical, it is a form of cautionary tale based on the behaviors of others and reinforces social norms and cultural values. It communicates not only which behaviors are acceptable but also that deviations may result in being gossiped about and should be avoided (Foster, 2004), thus encouraging behavior that is beneficial to the group. Results from several studies suggest that the threat of gossip encourages prosocial behavior, specifically affecting the outcome of economic exchanges. Piazza and Bering (2008) found that when the participant knew they may be gossiped about, they were likely to allocate more money to other participants in an economic game. Likewise, in a similar study involving economic decision making, Sommerfeld, Krambeck, Semmann, and Milinski (2007) found that postive gossip encouaged cooperation and reciprocity.

Increased Social Status. Gossip also has the power to elevate the relative status of the gossiper (McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002). Conceptualized as a form of indirect aggression, the information transmitted via gossip can be very powerful, even malicious. For example, anthropologist Mellville Herskovits (1937) observed gossip in Caribbean cultures as an indirect attack on a rival, while also being more safe and efficient than a direct physical attack. In a more contemporary study among adolescent girls, McDonald, Putallaz, Grimes, Kupersmidt, & Coie (2007) concluded that gossip can be a social weapon used to ostracize, although eventually becomes refined into a more subtle social skill. Likewise, McAndrew, Bell, & Garcia (2007) found respondents were most attentive to positive information about allies and negative information about rivals, further supporting the notion that gossip may play a role in strategies to increase social status. Gossip has the power to damage another person's reputation, and in doing

so, one's own position is comparatively elevated. However, the gossiper need not trash another person to increase status. Simply having a piece of personal information about another person is indicative of being "on the inside", which leads to an increase in relative status (Levin & Arluke, 1987).

Kurland and Pelled (2000) explored the relationship between gossip and power in a number of research propositions. They proposed that gossip had a generally positive effect on several aspects of the gossipers' power: expert (having knowledge or expertise), referent (being attractive to others), reward (having the ability to reward others) and coercive power (having the ability to influence others). Given that gossip is by definition private information, possession of that information is valuable social currency, thus elevating the gossiper's status.

Social Comparisons. According to social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954; also see Suls & Wheeler, 2000), people are driven to evaluate themselves using objective measures, but should none be available, one will use other people as a form of social reality testing. Gossip frequently is about topics for which there is no objective measure, such as proper social behavior, and provides an opportunity for the listener to judge the appropriateness of his or her own actions in relation to those of others (Wert & Salovey, 2004). According to social comparison theory, it is with others who are similar that comparisons are typically made, as they provide the most accurate information. This suggests that when gossiping, it is those who are most similar to the gossiper who are most likely to be a target.

Additionally, social comparisons can be used to increase positive self evaluations. According to Wills' downward social comparison theory (Wills, 1981), making social comparisons to a less fortunate other improves ones self-evaluations by creating a feeling of relative superiority. If the gossip is negative, a downward social comparison to the target can

allow the gossipers to feel relatively superior. Again, it is those who are most similar that provide the most relevant comparison point and most effectively boost self-evaluations.

Social comparisons can also be made at a group level, which establish and strengthen group identity. Hogg and Gaffney (in press) argue that the more one understands group norms and prototypes, the closer one will feel to the group. When other group members share the same prototypes for "us" and "them," one's own worldview is confirmed, as are the expectations for how members of the ingroup ought to think and behave. Gossip is an effective tool with which to gather information about and confirm the validity of these prototypes.

It is clear that gossip is an important part of group interaction based on how the functions of gossip lend themselves to creating closeness within a group, defining group boundaries, and facilitating bonding between members. One type of gossip within a specific group context that has been investigated is gossip within organizations. Specifically workplace gossip has been addressed by a handful of organizational management researchers, which highlight the risks as well as the potential positive implications of the workplace.

Workplace gossip

Gossip has been the topic of few empirical studies within the organizational literature. It is a topic that is either ignored altogether or discussed alongside topics such as "informal communication networks" when the topic is really gossip. When it is openly discussed, it is most often presented as a problem to be managed or eliminated from the workplace by management or Human Resources (e.g. DiFonzio, Bordia, & Rosnow, 1994). Gossip is considered divisive, distracting, and lowering of morale – all of which are threats to productivity. Likewise, Noon & Delbridge (1993) note that management can view gossip as a threat to power because it can erode reputation and undermine authority, particularly since it is beyond their control.

From the perspective of the employee, some authors also note that gossip can be used by managers as a tool to manipulate their subordinates. Goff and Goff (1988) describe managers who maintain control of the workplace by using their employees as a source of office gossip. While the employee is led to believe they share a close relationship with the manager, the manager is simply manipulating the employee to maintain their own status. Baker and Jones (1996) take a more extreme position that likens such a relationship to emotional abuse in a dysfunctional family, with the potential for managers to use gossip to get close to a subordinate to meet their own emotional needs. Once the employee has a favored position with the manager, they must continue to supply information to the manager until the eventual breakup of the dysfunctional relationship.

However, others see the value of gossip within an organization. According to Kniffin and Wilson (2010), gossip can increase productivity, particularly when group level outcomes are salient or incentivized. Group level incentives increase "mutual monitoring" as the outcome for any one worker is now dependent on the performance of the other workers. Gossip plays a prominent role in mutual monitoring as a way for employees to discuss who is and is not making a fair contribution to the group, while serving a warning to those listening that that contribution is being monitored. Using an evolutionary psychology framework, Kniffin and Wilson (2010) describe gossip as a form of "cheater detection" or a way to identify those who are not contributing to the group and are a threat to group outcomes. For example, they describe gossip within a college rowing team as a means of identifying, and eventually sanctioning, a "slacker" on the team who wasn't working as hard as the rest of the team. The offending team member was eventually pushed out of the team and the team performance and morale was strengthened. Given its utility in a team environment, it is not surprising that gossip that is self serving is met

with disapproval, while gossip that promotes a group-level outcome is more likely to be met with approval (e.g. Kniffin & Wilson, 2010; Wilson, Wilczynski, Wells, & Weiser, 2000).

Michelson, van Iterson, & Waddington (2010) outline a number of ways gossip can be beneficial in the workplace. Gossip can also be a means of bringing coworkers together and creating social networks. As previously discussed, gossip has the potential to create an increased level of intimacy, and coworkers who gossip are likely to create closer relationships, which may also serve as an outlet to decrease stress. Additionally, gossip concerning the workplace reinforces the norms of the workplace and helps employees to make sense of workplace dynamics. For example, it may help an employee who has littler personal contact with the boss, get to “know” the boss and feel they have a better understanding of the company and what is expected of them.

Gossip can also be a means of gaining power for those in the workplace who have been excluded from the formal workplace hierarchy. Secretaries and assistants, for example, may be privy to large amount of information about employees and, more importantly, the boss. Ogasawara (1998), discussed the role of gossip in Japanese businesses, where reputation can make or break a career. Clerical workers in the study had a degree of power over executives (and aspiring executives), due to the role secretaries play in shaping reputation.

From a management perspective, gossip can also be leveraged by management to keep a pulse on the workplace. It can be an effective way to get feedback on new policies or procedures, but also a way of keeping track of general morale, grievances, or flagging employees who may not be a good fit with the organization (Michelson, et al, 2010). According to Baumeister, et al. (2004), employees who are excluded from social networks are less successful and effective as managers, compared to their counterparts who are included in such networks.

As it is outside of the workplace, gossip can potentially be used both in ways that harm others or that have a number of beneficial outcomes. Managers seeking to gain power by collecting “dirt” on colleagues or seeking to gain closeness in a dysfunctional parent-child-like relationship are examples of the use of malicious gossip that can damage an organization. However, it can be argued that managers with a Machiavellian streak could also use pay or perks to manipulate subordinates, so the use of gossip as such a tool does not necessarily entail a hostile or harmful workplace. Gossip serves a number of beneficial roles, such as stress release, bonding, improved productivity, all of which benefit both employees and managers. In any case, those managers seeking to remove gossip from the workplace will face an uphill struggle and in the final analysis will probably be unsuccessful.

However, there is another type of gossip in that may serve similar roles, but where the target is not only outside the group, but is not personally known to the gossipers. Celebrity gossip is as ubiquitous as gossip about a personally known target and fuels a multi-million dollar tabloid industry. So far we have discussed gossip within a group context with the assumption that the target is personally know, but celebrity gossip mimics everyday gossip in a number of ways and may also fit neatly within the framework of a group processes analysis.

Celebrity gossip.

What is curious about the prevalence of celebrity gossip (e.g. newspapers, magazines, TV shows, blogs, etc) is why anyone would care about the behavior of a person they don’t even know, and in the case of reality shows people whose “celebrity” is entirely constructed by the media . Horton and Wohl (1956) referred to the celebrity-audience relationship as a *parasocial relationship* and suggested that the audience member creates a relationship with the celebrity by making an investment of time spent watching, but also an emotional investment and loyalty

towards the personality. Given that celebrities and public figures feel known to the viewer, viewers are interested in the celebrity's behavior as if they were a member of the same social circle. Like gossip about a friend or acquaintance, celebrity gossip provides a comparison point for one's own behavior. Particularly when the comparison is made to a celebrity in the midst of an embarrassing scandal or humiliating personal problem, the person who gossips about them is more 'normal' or perhaps superior by comparison. Celebrity gossip has the additional benefit of being a 'safe' way to gossip and make such comparisons, without fear of the target becoming aware of the gossip (Levin & Arluke, 1987).

Regardless of the target of gossip, gossip is a way to identify and discuss violations of social norms, marginalize deviant group members, facilitate social comparison processes, and promote group cohesion – all of which can be understood using self categorization theory a framework. While gossip has rarely been examined from this perspective, self categorization theory provides a unique perspective on gossip and the potential underlying motivations to engage in gossip. To understand why this is so, it is import to first understand the foundations of the theory and the implications for gossip.

Self-Categorization Theory

There may be multiple motivations to join a group, such as self-esteem enhancement (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), self-uncertainty reduction (Hogg, 2007, 2012), or to obtain a feeling of optimal distinctiveness (Brewer, 1991; Leonardelli, Pickett, & Brewer, 2010). Social identity theory proposes that one's self concept is derived, in part, from group membership. Two of the most prominent conceptual components of social identity theory are the social identity theory of intergroup relations (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and the social identity theory of the group, usually called self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) – for recent

overviews see Abrams and Hogg (2010) and Hogg (2006). These two conceptual components focus on closely related, yet distinct aspects of group behavior. Social identity theory describes the processes of intergroup behavior, such as cooperation or competition, as a way in which group members use the group to maintain a positive social identity.

Self categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) is a more cognitive account of the process through which group membership affects the self-concept of the individual group member. People represent social groups in terms of prototypes – fuzzy sets of attributes that both capture ingroup similarities and maximize intergroup differences. Prototypes serve to distinguish one group from another by minimizing ingroup differences (i.e., "The members of our group are very similar."), while maximizing outgroup differences (i.e., "The members of our group are nothing like the members of that other group."). The categorization of individuals into distinct groups causes people to view each other through the lens of the social group to which they belong. However, because the categorization of others is made in reference to one's self, the individual also sees himself or herself through the lens of the social category. Self-categorization transforms self-conception and depersonalizes perception and behavior, such one's own behavior conforms to the ingroup prototype. As group members conform to the group prototype, group norms are created that establish the ways in which group members should and do behave.

Prototypicality

As previously mentioned, prototypes are at the heart of self-categorization processes. This fuzzy set of attributes is what defines a group and its members, and distinguishes it from other groups. The prototype is not only descriptive of the members of the group, but often prescriptive, dictating how group members ought to behave. Of course not all group members are identical – rather, they vary in how closely they match the group prototype. Group members who

closely match the group prototype are considered *central* group members, while those who are less prototypical are considered more *peripheral* group members.

Central and peripheral group members differ in how they relate to the group and in their motivations for pro-group behavior. Central group members enjoy a more secure position within the group and tend to be evaluated more positively than peripheral group members by other members (Hogg, 1993; Hogg & Hardie, 1991). Central group members are more likely to be leaders of the group (Hains, Hogg, & Duck, 1997; Hogg, 2001; Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003) and are better at changing the attitudes of other group members (Hogg & Hardie, 1991). Peripheral group members, on the other hand, are a poorer fit than central members to the group prototype. Because they have a less secure place in the group, they may be much more concerned with attaining group acceptance (Noel, Wann & Branscombe, 1995; van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, & Van Dijk, 2000), as compared to central members who are more secure.

Peripheral group members may use a number of strategies to obtain a more secure and central place in the group. First, the individual can simply adhere more closely to the norms of the group. Alternatively, they may simply view themselves as more as being more prototypical, by assigning the stereotypes of the group to themselves, known as self stereotyping. In a study by Pickett, Bonner and Coleman (2002), sorority members who were made to feel marginal were more likely to describe themselves as “stuck-up” and “superficial.” Similarly, previous studies have examined the ways in which peripheral group members assert themselves as loyal and true group members, such as displaying fierce adherence to group norms (e.g. Noel, Wann & Branscombe, 1995). Peripheral group members have also been found to express especially favorable attitudes toward the in-group or unfavorable attitudes toward the out-group (Ellemers,

Spears, & Doosje, 2002; Jones and Pitman 1982), as compared to central members who hold more moderate attitudes.

Peripheral group members are quite strategic - Noel, Wann & Branscombe (1995) found that peripheral group members' pro in-group attitudes are more likely to be expressed publicly than privately, while central members have higher consistency between public and private attitudes. Likewise, peripheral group members are more likely to express such attitudes when future acceptance is anticipated, but not when rejection is anticipated (Jetten, Branscombe, Spears, & McKimmie, 1993). This indicates acceptance by the group is an important motivator for the behavior of peripheral group members. In short, peripheral group members are eager to prove commitment to the group, particularly when doing so is strategically advantageous in terms of gaining group acceptance. Although not previously investigated, gossip may be one strategy that peripheral group members employ to obtain a more secure and central position within the group.

Gossip and self-categorization

Communication within the group is at the heart of group norms and prototypes because talk within the group plays a key role in the formation of and consensual agreement on a group's norms. Hogg & Reid (2006; also see Hogg & Giles, in press) outline a number of ways this happens, including both subtle nonverbal cues and gestures or explicit conversation about what is and is not normative group behavior. Additionally, they argue, group members can manage how prototypical they are perceived to be by emphasizing their own behavior as normative or by contrasting themselves with a group member who does not fall in line with group norms – a type of conversation that would likely be defined as gossip. Gossip is clearly a type of informal

communication about group norms, but likewise has not been examined from a self categorization perspective.

Gossip as an inclusion strategy. Self-categorization theory may give us some insight into who might be most likely to gossip about whom and under what circumstances. Those who have a threatened place in the group (i.e. peripheral group members) can increase inclusion, or perceptions of greater inclusion, in a number of ways – many of which can be accomplished with the strategic use of gossip.

Gossip is potentially a way for peripheral group members to bond with other group members by creating intimacy based on shared, and perhaps secret, knowledge. Gossip also provides an opportunity to display pro-group behavior, by identifying another group member who has ostensibly violated the group's norms. By identifying themselves as a group member who is knowledgeable about the group's norms and identifying norm violators, while bonding with other group members, this display of loyalty could be a way for peripheral group members to gain stronger footing within the group.

Another way for peripheral group members to become central is to monitor and even modify the group norms and the group boundaries. Maintaining norms and boundaries are critical to the existence of the group, since that is what defines who the group is, and perhaps more importantly, who they are not (Turner, et al., 1987).

As described previously, gossip is one such way that group members monitor one another and detect those who are not conforming to group norms. To protect the identity, and perhaps existence, of the group, members must pay attention to who is acting in ways that correspond to group norms. Group members who do not act in accordance with the group norms threaten the definition of group and the integrity of its boundaries. Known as the black sheep effect

(Marques, 1990; Marques & Páez, 1994), other in-group members are actually judged more harshly than out-group members, because their behavior reflects on the group. Because these members threaten the definitions of the group, other members take action. Those who do not behave in a way that is consistent with group norms are first encouraged to reform (Marques, et al., 2001). If they don't conform, they are eventually pushed out of the group. Ironically, it is those who are themselves marginal members who are most likely to be attentive to the group's norms and boundaries, and consequently attentive to other group members who do not conform (Pickett and Brewer, 2005). This suggests peripheral group members would be particularly alert to gossip about other peripheral group members who have violated a norm.

Another strategy that peripheral members can employ is to reinforce the boundaries of the group by being strict about who is a group member and who is not. Known as overexclusion, this strictness about who is a group member and who is not is a demonstration of loyalty and commitment to the group, protecting the group from undesirable outsiders (Noel, Wann, and Branscombe, 1995). It is ironic that marginal members would be the strictest about group boundaries, since they themselves are easy targets for exclusion, but maintaining strict boundaries is critical to ensuring they are within the group and are clearly not part of the out-group. It is often the case that marginal members are likely to exclude those who threaten the group's distinctiveness. Schmitt and Branscombe (2001) found that feeling marginal leads to active dislike or even rejection of other marginal members.

Gossip is one way to identify in-group members who have violated a group norm and it is peripheral group members who are most likely to be vigilant. Identifying deviant group members displays loyalty, as it spotlights the transgression, but also helps to delineate group boundaries.

Given that gossip can be a potent tool of inclusion and exclusion it would be expected that peripheral group members gossip more, particularly about other peripheral group members.

Gossip and risk. Not all gossip, in all situations, will increase intimacy. If the goal of gossip is to create a closer bond with the group, the gossiper needs to be strategic about who they are talking about and what they say, particularly if the gossiper is a peripheral group member. For instance, gossiping about a central group member could be dangerous, as other members may come to that member's defense or relay the information back to them, which could jeopardize the gossiper's standing in the group. For this reason, other peripheral group members would be particularly attractive targets, as they are less threatening and unlikely to possess enough status within the group to create risk. By marginalizing another peripheral group member, the gossiper becomes comparatively more central within the group.

Another consideration is the type of information conveyed in the gossip, as gossip that is malicious is also risky. Turner and colleagues (2003) examined the impact of gossip valence on perceptions of the gossiper. They found liking and perceptions on trustworthiness decreased for any type of gossip, but plummeted with negative gossip. Spreading highly negative gossip puts the gossiper at risk, socially. For both central and peripheral group members, information that is not perceived to be too negative would likely be a preferred vehicle for gossip, and could be relayed to more people, with less risk.

Gossiping about a celebrity may also be an attractive option. Because the celebrity is not personally known by those gossiping, celebrities are 'safe' to gossip about, as compared to gossiping about someone in one's social group. Therefore, sharing gossip about a celebrity may also provide the bonding experience and demonstration of knowledge of social norms related to gossiping, but without the danger of hurt feelings, damaged social relationships, or retaliation.

Because parasocial relationships with celebrities tend to mimic our real social relationships, sharing celebrity gossip should mimic the sharing of gossip about a known person. Specifically, both central and peripheral group members should be likely to share gossip about a celebrity they feel is similar to themselves; central members should prefer those who are similar to the group, while peripheral group members may be likely to share gossip about someone who is similarly an outsider. Like gossip about a personally known target, celebrity gossip that is less negative would be preferred, as celebrity gossip is meant to be entertaining and gossip that is too serious could lose appeal.

Summary

Using self categorization theory as a framework to understand gossip is a novel approach, but one that allows for an understanding of the motivations to gossip and predictions for when one might be motivated to do so and thus who might gossip to whom and about whom or what. Self categorization theory suggests it may be peripheral group members who are likely to be the strictest about group norms and values, which group members are adhering to the group norms, and where the group boundaries lie. Gossip is an efficient and effective way for such group members to achieve closeness with other members, while marginalizing other peripheral group members. The result for the peripheral group member is increased intimacy with other group members and a group with clearly defined norms and boundaries, in which they have securely placed themselves.

Gossip also helps to define group boundaries by establishing which group members are adhering to the group norms and which members are not. By identifying the violation of another peripheral member, the gossiper may hope that the bounds are more clearly established – with the gossiper on the inside, and the target on the outside.

However, given that peripheral group members are in a precarious position within the group, they can take quite a substantial risk if they gossip about a fellow group member. Gossiping about another peripheral group member is one way to mitigate such risk. Another way to lessen potential risks is to gossip about a person who is not personally known to the gossipers. A celebrity may be an attractive potential target, considering that the celebrity may feel like they are known to the gossiper, but gossiping about them poses no risk to the gossiper.

Another potential way to minimize the social risk attached to gossiping is to avoid malicious gossip. While gossip typically involves misfortune or social mishap, gossip that is serious or tragic loses its entertainment value. Those engaging in very negative gossip are the most likely to be judged by others as a gossip or as malicious. Gossip about funny or minor incidents keep the gossip light and fun and more effectively and easily create the desired outcomes.

Examining gossip through the lens of self categorization theory, it is likely that it is peripheral group members who are most likely to gossip, particularly about other peripheral group members or celebrities. Given the risk of gossiping, these members should be likely to gossip about topics that are not very negative. The current studies have been conducted to address these topics and examine the role of perceived self-prototypicality, perceived target prototypicality, and negativity of gossip when predicting how likely one will be to gossip and how many people one might tell.

Chapter Three: The Current Studies

A number of functions of gossip have been identified and researched, such as creating intimacy, asserting social influence, and as a means of social comparison; however, one that has not been examined is the function of securing a position within the group, particularly for peripheral group members. From a self-categorization theory perspective, much work has been done on the desire for peripheral group members to gain group acceptance (e.g. van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, & Van Dijk, 2000) and the ways in which they attempt to do so, including adherence to norms and demonstration of commitment (e.g. Noel, Wann & Branscombe, 1995), but none has examined gossip as a potential inclusion strategy. Given that gossip is a way to enforce norms and demonstrate commitment, while also increasing intimacy, it would seem to follow that gossip would be an effective way for peripheral group members to secure a more central position in the group. However, gossip has not been investigated, using a self categorization framework, as a potential strategy for increased inclusion within the group.

As previously discussed, research in the area of self categorization theory has suggested that it is peripheral group members who are most likely to be vigilant for other group members who do not adhere to the group norms (Pickett & Brewer, 2005). Further, it is other peripheral group members who make the most attractive targets for such vigilance, allowing the group member who alerts the group to be viewed as loyal and committed to the group, and a more central member by contrast. Applying this framework to gossip, it is likely to be peripheral group members who are most likely to gossip about another member who has violated a norm, thereby appearing more loyal and relatively more central within the group. Likewise, other peripheral group members should be the most likely target, as they are the most vulnerable to exclusion. However, gossiping about any group member is a risky proposition, given that those who engage

in highly negative gossip are likely to be branded “a gossip.” One strategy to mitigate such a risk might be to avoid highly negative information as the topic of gossip. Two studies, conducted concurrently, tested the relationship between perceived prototypicality of the gossiper, perceived prototypicality of the gossip target, perceived negativity of the gossip and their impact on likelihood to gossip and amount one would gossip.

Overview of research questions and hypotheses

Gossip has rarely been examined from a group processes perspective and goal of the current study is test a self categorization theory analysis of the likelihood to gossip. This is a novel extension and application of the theory, which generates predictions about who will gossip and when. The essential idea is peripheral group members could use gossip about other peripheral group members as a potent strategy to gain acceptance by and secure inclusion in the group.

Previous prototypicality research (e.g. Hogg and Gaffney, in press) suggests it is those on the periphery of the group who are most motivated to create bonds with other group members and establish themselves as loyal and committed to the group. It is hypothesized that it will be these group members who are more likely to spread gossip than those who are viewed as central to the group. Additionally, peripheral group members should be most likely to gossip about other peripheral group members, as it is these other peripheral group members who provide a desirable point of comparison because they make the gossiper appear more prototypical by comparison. For central group members however, gossip about a peripheral group member may not be such a self-relevant social comparison. Central group members would likely talk about other central members, as they are more similar to them and therefore provide more meaningful comparisons.

It is also likely that the most preferred gossip topic for all group members is gossip that is not highly negative. The goal of gossiping within a group is to create a bond/increase intimacy and to display insight about group norms – ironically, it is not to be malicious. Very negative gossip casts a negative light on the gossiper and defeats the purpose creating intimacy via gossip.

Additional research questions

It is possible that there are other factors that moderate the relationship between prototypicality and likelihood to gossip; namely, identification with the group and self uncertainty. Identification with the group may affect how motivated a group member is to act in ways that will increase acceptance or that will benefit the group. It is likely that those who do not identify strongly with the group will not be as motivated to secure a central position in the group, and may not be as likely to use strategies to achieve that end, such as spreading gossip.

Uncertainty also creates motivation to join the group and will likely impact the relationship between prototypicality and gossip. Uncertainty-identity theory (Hogg, 2000, 2007, 2012), based on the assumptions of social identity and self-categorization theories, states that feeling uncertain about oneself makes the individual feel discomfort, which produces a motivation to reduce that uncertainty. Identification with a group is an efficient and effective way to reduce that uncertainty because the norms of the group provide structure, thus reducing the discomfort.

There is some preliminary evidence to suggest that those who are uncertain are likely to spread positive, but not negative, gossip to other group members (Turcotte & Hogg, 2009), but the implications for prototypicality and gossip remain unknown. Given that little research has been conducted on gossip as it relates to self-categorization, it was difficult to predict exactly how identification and uncertainty might interact with prototypicality and negativity to predict

likelihood to gossip. In the current studies, of sororities, a measure of identification with the sorority and a measure of self uncertainty were included – however, no specific predictions were made regarding how these variables might impact the relationship between prototypicality and likelihood to gossip.

Hypotheses

Given that peripheral group members should be more motivated than central group members to gain greater acceptance into the group, it was hypothesized that peripheral group members would be more likely than central members to gossip. Peripheral group members will mitigate the risks of gossip by choosing less risky targets and less negative topics. Other peripheral members in particular should make the least risky gossip target, suggesting that peripheral members should be particularly likely to gossip about another peripheral group member – likewise, a celebrity might be a safe target to gossip about for peripheral group members. Central group members are less concerned with attaining a more secure position within the group and should be likely to gossip about their social peers, other central members.

Hypothesis 1a:

Peripheral group members will be more likely to gossip about other group members than central members.

Hypothesis 1b:

Peripheral group members will be more likely to gossip about other peripheral group members than gossip about other central members.

Hypothesis 1c:

Peripheral group members will be more likely than central members to gossip about a celebrity.

Hypothesis 2:

Central group members will more likely than peripheral group members to gossip about other central group members.

Hypothesis 3:

Peripheral group members will be more likely then central members to gossip about topics that are less negative, than topics that are highly negative.

While identification and uncertainty are closely tied to self-categorization processes, it was difficult to predict how they might interact with prototypicality to predict gossip. Therefore, no specific hypotheses were formulated regarding the impact of uncertainty and identification on likelihood to gossip.

Studies

Two studies were conducted to examine the role of position within the group and likelihood to gossip, in the context of sororities. Study One measured the perceived prototypicality of the respondent within the sorority, as well as perceived prototypicality of the gossip target, and likelihood to spread gossip to other sorority members. It was predicted that peripheral group members would be more likely to spread moderately negative gossip about other peripheral members, supporting the hypothesis that gossip may be used as a strategy for increasing inclusion – and that less threatening targets and topics are preferred to those with more social clout.

To further support this hypothesis a second study was conducted using a slightly varied context, in that the target was less risky than a known other: a celebrity. The second study also measured the prototypicality of the respondent, but presented gossip about a celebrity and measured the likelihood to share the gossip with another group member. It was predicted that

peripheral group members would be more likely to spread the gossip, further supporting the notion that peripherals will use gossip to increase intimacy and inclusion in the group and that they will mitigate potential risks associated with gossiping by selecting relatively less threatening targets and topics.

In both studies the dependent variables were how likely the respondent was to tell another sorority member the gossip they had heard, and also the number of fellow sorority members they would tell. How many people one would tell was included because it requires the respondent to think through whom exactly they might tell, eliciting a more thoughtful answer and making the dependent one step closer to behavior. While no survey measure can say with certainty what a respondent would actually do, collecting an estimate of *if* one will tell and *to what extent* creates a more complete picture of the volume of gossip generated from one piece of information.

Chapter 4: Study One

Using self-categorization theory to predict likelihood to gossip, it was hypothesized that the prototypicality of the gossiper and the gossip target impacts likelihood to gossip. In Study One, the independent variables of self prototypicality, target prototypicality, information negativity, uncertainty, and identification with the group were measured among sorority women. The dependent variables were likelihood to pass along gossip and the number of people one would tell.

Method

Participants and design

In Study One, self prototypicality, target prototypicality, gossip negativity, uncertainty, and identification were measures among sorority women. After exposure to a hypothetical piece of gossip, the outcome variables of likelihood to spread gossip and how many other members one would tell were also measured.

Participants were 152 sorority members attending a large public university in Southern California. They were recruited during their sorority's weekly chapter meeting and asked to participate in a survey about communication. Sororities were chosen as the group of study because they are well-defined groups that are likely a significant source of social identity for the members and the members have a stake in the outcomes of the group.

Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 22 years-old, with an average age between 19 and 20 years (M = 19.74, SD = 1.05). The majority self-identified as Caucasian (78.9%), followed by Asian (6.6%), Hispanic (5.3%), African American (.7%), and unidentified (8.6%).

Overall, the respondents engaged with other sorority members on a regular basis. Just under half lived in their sorority house (42.1%), while 9.9% had in the past, but no longer did,

and 38.2% never had. The majority attended two to three sorority events per week (*M* = 2.85, *SD* = 1.05).

Procedure

Data were collected via an online survey. A personal announcement was made by the researcher at each sorority's Monday night chapter meeting, asking the members to complete the online survey. That night the president emailed the members of her chapter the link to the survey. All respondents viewed and initialed an informed consent document which outlined the requirements of the study, an assurance of confidentiality, and the minimal potential risks associated with participation. After completing the study, the study design and hypothesis were revealed and the contact information for campus mental health resources were provided should there be any anticipated emotional distress.

First, participants completed a measure of perceived prototypicality within their sorority, identification with their sorority, as well as a measure of self- uncertainty and uncertainty related to their place in the world. They then read a hypothetical piece of gossip about another sorority member: "Imagine you have just heard the following…*That member of your sorority has been sleeping with another member's boyfriend."* They were asked several questions about how they might respond to such a piece of information, including how negative the information was, how likely they would be to tell another sorority member, and how many sorority members they might tell. Respondents were also asked how interesting and how believable the piece of gossip was, although these measures were simply thought to be potentially useful for guiding future research and no predictions about them were made (see Appendix C for all measures).

Measures

Prototypicality within sorority. Participants' own perceived prototypicality within the sorority was measured with a six-item scale adapted from previous self-categorization research (e.g., Hains, Hogg, & Duck, 1997), and included "I am similar to the other members of my sorority," "I have a lot in common with the other members of my sorority," "I am a typical member of my sorority," "Other members of my sorority would say I am a pretty typical member," "Members of other sororities would say I am a typical member of my sorority," "I feel like I fit in with the other members of my sorority" which were rated on a 9 point scale, 1 *disagree*, 9 *agree*. The scale had a high degree of internal consistency (α = .95).

Identification with sorority. The ten-item scale included "I identify with the members of my sorority," "I feel committed to my sorority, I like the members of my sorority," "My sorority is an important part of who I am, I feel a sense of belonging with my sorority," "I have a lot of friends in my sorority," "When I am with other members of my sorority," "I feel like I belong, I am well-liked by the other members of my sorority," "I feel accepted by the members of my sorority," "I have a lot of friends in my sorority." Items were measured on a 9 point scale, 1 *disagree*, 9 *agree*, and had high internal consistency (α= .97).

Uncertainty. Uncertainty was measured using a thirteen-item scale. Respondents were presented with eight personal attributes, judged previously to be neutral in valence (Anderson, 1968), such as "restless" and "skeptical." They were asked to rate the degree to which they possess each attribute as compared to other college students, 1 *less*, 9 *more*, and then the degree to which they were uncertain about that rating, 1 *not uncertain*, 9 *uncertain*. Respondents then were asked to rate the extent to which they were uncertain about five items relating to one's place in society, such as "place among your circle of friends," on a nine-point Likert scale, 1 *not uncertain*, 9 *uncertain*.

Negativity of gossip. Respondents were asked to evaluate how negative they perceived the gossip to be, using a single-item measure "How would you rated this information?" using a 9 point Likert-type scale, 1 *very negative*, 9 *very positive*.

Prototypicality of gossip target. Perceived prototypicality of the gossip target within the sorority was evaluated with a single-item assessment of how similar they felt the target was to the members of their sorority 1 *not at all similar*, 9 *very similar*.

Likelihood to tell gossip. Using a single-item measure of likelihood to gossip, respondents were asked to report the likelihood they would tell the gossip to another sorority member, 1 *very unlikely*, 9 *very likely*.

Number of members one would tell. Respondents were asked the open-ended question of how many of their sorority members they thought they would tell.

Interest in piece of gossip. Respondents were asked to evaluate how interesting they perceived the gossip to be, using a single-item measure "How interesting is this information?" using a 9 point Likert-type scale, 1 *not interesting*, 9 *interesting*.

Believability of gossip. Respondents were asked to evaluate how negative they perceived the gossip to be, using a single-item measure "To what extent do you believe this information?" using a 9 point Likert-type scale, 1 *I don't believe it*, 9 *I believe it*.

Demographics. Finally, demographic information was collected, including age, ethnicity, and amount of sorority participation.

Results

Study One measured the predictor variables self prototypicality, target prototypicality, gossip negativity, uncertainty, and identification among sorority women. The dependent variables were likelihood to spread gossip and how many other members one would tell.

A total of 152 respondents completed the survey. Age, ethnicity, and length of membership were not found to be correlated with any other variables measured, and thus subsequent analyses were conducted on all ages and ethnicities in aggregate. Three respondents provided responses which indicated they did not understand the exercise and were removed, leaving a final sample size of 149.

Preliminary analyses

A factor analysis of the 13 uncertainty items revealed three factors with an eigenvalue greater than one, together explaining 57% of the variance. The first factor accounted for 33% of the variance, the second factor accounted for 17%, and the third factor accounted for 8%. Varimax rotation showed factor loadings in factor one representing personality attributes (shy, restless, skeptical). Factor loadings of factor two included place in society and ability to reach goals, while the third factor loaded place among family and place among friends. The proportion of variance explained by each variable by the factors can be found in the communalities chart, scores ranged from a low of .46 to a high of .74.

For the context of the present study, ability to reach goals and place among family and friends were the most relevant factors. College students are likely to be most impacted by uncertainty surrounding abilities and future goals, as their primary focus as a college student is evaluation of abilities via grades and preparation for future goals. For sorority members, particularly during a sorority meeting where uncertainties about social standing may be most

Table 1
Factor loadings based on a principle components analysis with verimax rotation for 13 item uncertainty scale (Study One; N = 148)

	Factor Loadings			
Item	Self & Personality	Society & Goals	Family & Friends	Communality
Cautious	**.75**			.57
Skeptical	**.74**			.57
Persistent	**.72**			.55
Unpredictable	**.71**			.51
Perfectionistic	**.69**			.49
Ordinary	**.68**	.27		.53
Restless	**.67**			.46
Shy	**.65**	.28		.51
Life/future goals		**.85**		.74
Ability to reach goals		**.77**	.21	.64
Place in society as a whole		**.56**	**.53**	.59
Place within your family			**.85**	.74
Place among your circle of friends		**.42**	**.63**	.57
Eigenvalues	4.23	1.19	1.05	
% of variance	35.53	16.83	8.09	

Note: Factor loadings over .40 appear in bold; Factor loadings under .2 are suppressed

salient, place among friend and family is a particularly relevant type of uncertainty and also the most theoretically relevant for the current study, given the group context. These two factors were averaged, given the relevance of both, as well as acceptable internal consistency for the five items (α= .71), and subsequent analyses are conducted using only this scale as a measure of uncertainty.

Overall uncertainty had a mean of 3.35 on a 9-point scale (*SD* = 1.47) and, on average, respondents felt more prototypical than not (*M* = 6.62, *SD* = 1.73). The sorority member in the hypothetical gossip, however, was generally seen as a less prototypical group member (*M* = 3.92, *SD* = 2.34). Identification with the sorority was also high (*M* = 7.18, *SD* = 1.63), however given

the high correlation between self-prototypicality and identification (r = .84, p <.001), it was determined subsequent analyses would be conducted using self-prototypicality only, given its theoretical relevance, and the identification measure was not included.

Overall, the gossip was rated as moderately interesting (M = 6.42, SD = 2.23) and very negative (M = 1.93, SD = 1.59). Respondents were slightly more likely than not to tell another sorority member the gossip (M = 6.31, SD = 2.57). The average number of sorority members they would tell was around three, (M = 2.98, SD = 3.35), while the most common response was two people (24.2%, n = 36) and responses ranged from zero (5.4%, n = 8) to ten or more (4.8%, n = 7).

Likelihood to tell another sorority member the piece of gossip, the number of people one would tell, how interesting the gossip was, and believability were all significantly positively correlated (see Table 2). The exception was a lack of significant correlation between how interesting the gossip was and believability, r=.14, *ns*. Apparently, as anecdotal evidence would suggest, gossip need not be necessarily true to pique the interest of the listener.

Table 2

Correlations Between Likelihood to Tell Another Member, Number of Members One Would Tell, and Perceived Interestingness and Believability of Gossip (Study One)

Variables	Likelihood to Tell	Number of Members	Interest	Believe
Likelihood to Tell	—	.26**	.38**	.33**
Number of Members		—	.27**	.24**
Interesting Rating			—	.14
Believe				—

*p < .05. **p < .01.

Hierarchical Multiple Regression

It was predicted that peripheral group members would be most likely to gossip about other peripheral group members, and that that relationship would be especially strong when the information in the gossip was not highly negative. Uncertainty was also thought to be a potential predictor of likelihood to tell, but no specific predictions were made. To test the hypotheses, a series of two-step and three-step hierarchal multiple regressions were conducted to examine self-prototypicality, target prototypicality, and moderators negativity and uncertainty, on likelihood to tell and number of people one would tell. Given the homogeneous nature of the sample, demographic variables were not found to impact the outcome variables and it was not necessary to enter them as control variables. Predictor variables were mean-centered, interaction terms calculated, and interactions were explored using simple slopes analyses (Aiken & West, 1991).

Predictors of Likelihood to Tell Another Member

Self-prototypicality and target prototypicality. To test the hypothesis that peripheral group members are more likely to spread gossip, particularly about other peripheral group members, a model was tested that included self-prototypicality, target prototypicality, and their interaction as predictors of likelihood to tell another person the gossip. The model was not significant, $R^2 = .05$, $F(3, 145) = 2.33$, *ns*.

Self-prototypicality and negativity. It was predicted that negativity would moderate the relationship between self-prototypicality and likelihood to pass along gossip. The model, which included self-prototypicality and negativity as predictors of likelihood to tell someone the gossip was not significant, $R^2 = .05$, $F(3, 145) = 2.38$, *ns*.

Target prototypicality and negativity. Negativity was also tested as a moderator of the relationship between target prototypicality and likelihood to spread gossip but the model was not significant, (R^2 = .03, F(3, 145) = 1.56, *ns*).

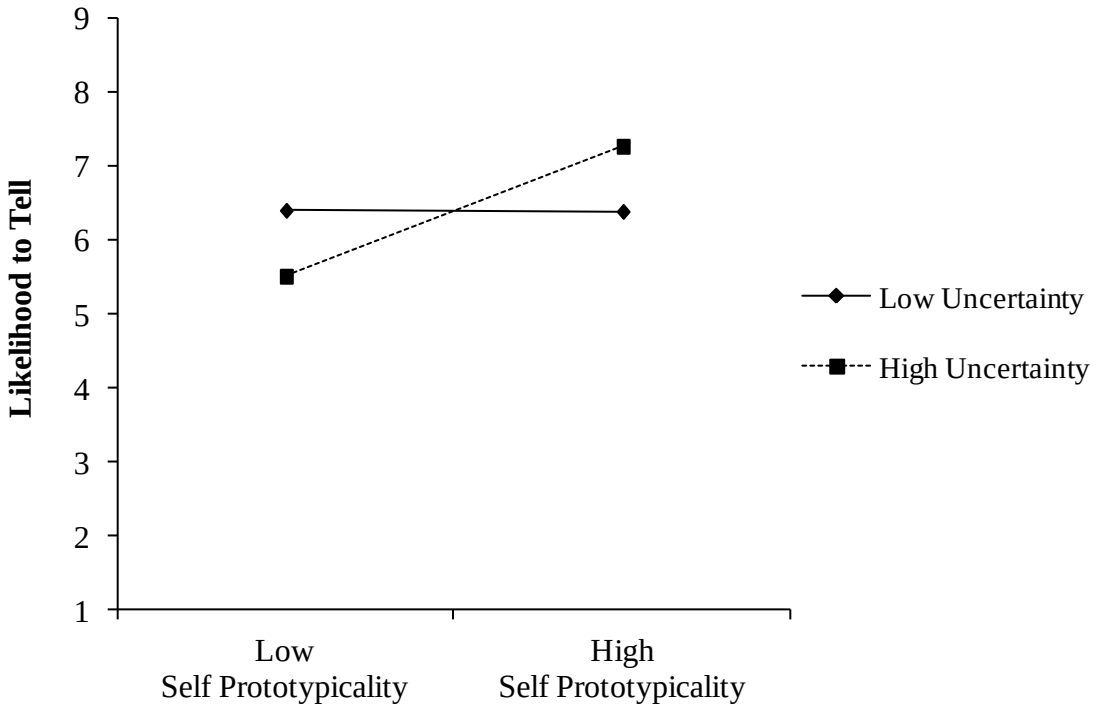
Self-prototypicality and uncertainty. It was predicted that uncertainty may moderate the relationship between self-prototypicality and likelihood to pass gossip. The model, which included self-prototypicality and uncertainty as predictors of likelihood to pass gossip was significant R^2 = .063, F(3, 145) = 3.27, p =.023. There was also a significant main effect for self-prototypicality (β = .176, t = 2.15, p =.03), indicating that as self-prototypicality increased, so did the likelihood to pass along gossip. The interaction between self-prototypicality and uncertainty was also significant, β = .178, t = 2.21, p =.03.

Table 3
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Likelihood to Tell Gossip to Another Member (Study One)

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β
Step 1			
Constant	6.31	0.21	
Uncertainty	-0.02	0.14	-0.01
Self-prototypicality	0.26	0.12	0.18*
Step 2			
Constant	6.38	0.21	
Uncertainty	0.00	0.14	0.00
Self-prototypicality	0.26	0.12	0.18*
Uncertainty X Valence	0.16	0.07	0.18*

Note. R^2 = .06 for Step1; ΔR^2 = .03 for Step 2 (*ps* < .05)
*p < .05. **p < .01.

Figure 1. Likelihood to tell gossip as a function of self-prototypicality and uncertainty (Study One)



A simple slopes analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between self-prototypicality and likelihood to tell gossip, when uncertainty is high, $\beta = .50$, $t = 3.08$, $p < .01$, but not when uncertainty is low, $\beta = .02$, $t = .14$, *ns*. Those who were the most prototypical, but also the most uncertain, were most likely to gossip. The relationship between uncertainty and likelihood to tell gossip was not significant at either high levels of self prototypicality ($\beta = .27$, $t = 1.41$, *ns*.) or low levels of self-prototypicality ($\beta = .18$, $t = -1.51$, *ns*).

Target prototypicality and negativity. Uncertainty was also examined as a potential moderator of target prototypicality and likelihood to pass along gossip, but that model was not significant, $R^2 = .05$, $F(3, 145) = 2.38$, *ns*.

Self-prototypicality, uncertainty, and negativity. A model was tested including self-prototypicality, negativity, and uncertainty as predictors of how likely one would be to tell someone else the gossip. That model was not significant, $R^2 = .09$, $F(7, 141) = 2.10$, *ns.*

Target prototypicality, uncertainty, and negativity. A model was tested including target prototypicality, negativity, and uncertainty as predictors of how likely one would be to tell someone else the gossip. The model was not significant $R^2 = .07$, $F(7, 141) = 1.51$, *ns*.

Predictors of Number of members one would tell

Self-prototypicality and target prototypicality. The model that included self-prototypicality and target prototypicality as predictors of how many people one would tell was also not significant, $R^2 = .005$, $F(3, 145) = .22$, *ns*.

Self-prototypicality and negativity. The model testing self-prototypicality and negativity as predictors of how many one would tell was also not significant, $R^2 = .03$, $F(3, 145) = 1.49$, *ns*.

Target prototypicality and negativity. When target prototypicality and negativity were examined as predictors of how many people one would tell, the model was significant, $R^2 = .06$, $F(3, 145) = 3.07$, $p = .03$. Within the model, there were no significant main effects, but the interaction between negativity and target prototypicality was significant, $\beta = .18$, $t = 2.18$, $p = .03$.

A simple slopes analysis revealed a marginally significant relationship between target prototypicality and how many people one would tell when negativity was low ($\beta = .23$, $t = 1.92$, $p = .06$), indicating that when negativity of the information is low, the more prototypical the target is, the more people one will tell. When negativity was high, the relationship between target prototypicality and how many people one would tell was not significant, $\beta = -.21$, $t = -1.29$, *ns.*

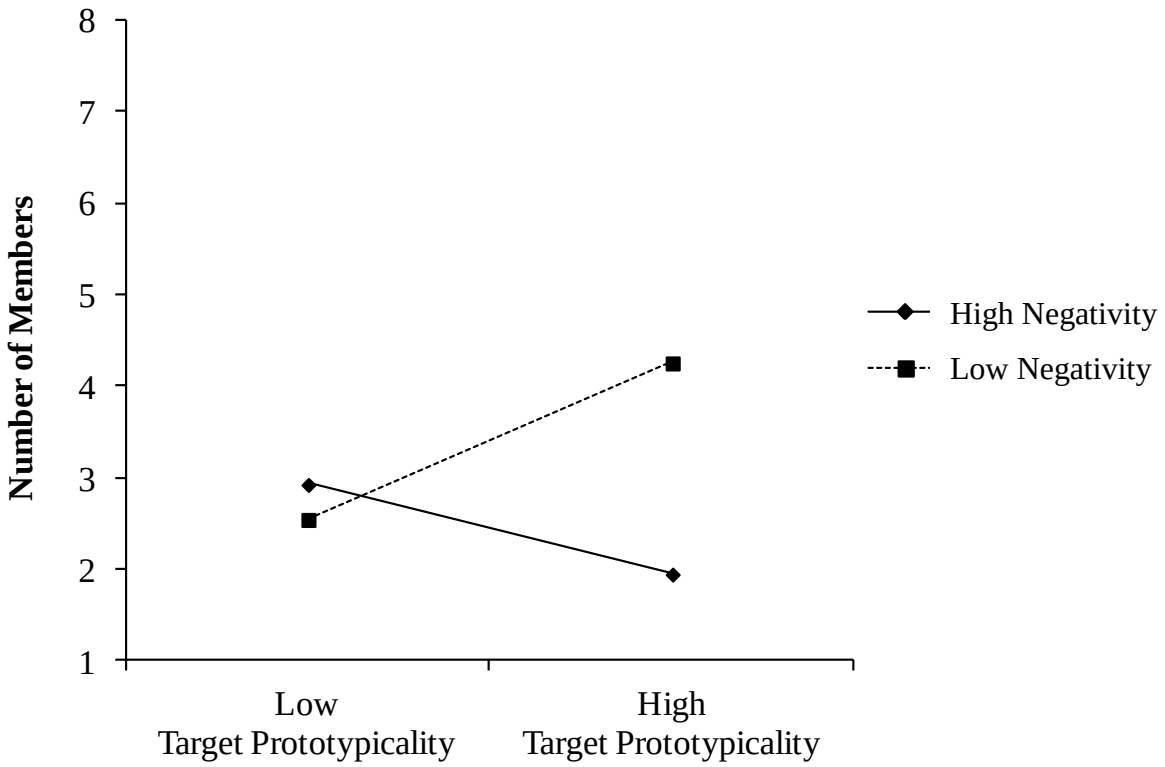
Table 4
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting How Many Member One Will Tell Gossip (Study One)

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β
Step 1			
Constant	3.01	0.27	
Negativity of Gossip	0.35	0.17	0.17
Target Prototypicality	0.04	0.12	0.03
Step 2			
Constant	2.95	0.27	
Negativity of Gossip	0.31	0.17	0.15
Target Prototypicality	0.09	0.12	0.06
Prototypicality X Negativity	0.18	0.08	0.18*

Note. R^2 = .03 for Step1; ΔR^2 = .031 for Step 2 (*ps* < .05)
*p < .05. **p < .01.

When the target was highly prototypical, there was a significant relationship between negativity and how many people one would tell (β = .72, t = 2.99, p <.01), also suggesting high prototypicality and low negativity were associated with telling gossip to more people. When the target was low on prototypicality, the relationship between negativity and how many people one would tell was not significant, β = -1.12, t = -.44, *ns*.

Figure 2. Number of sorority members one would tell gossip as a function of target prototypicality and negativity (Study One)



Self-prototypicality and uncertainty. Self-prototypicality and uncertainty were tested to predict the number of people one would tell, but that model was not significant, $R^2 = .02$, $F(3, 145) = .80$, *ns*.

Target prototypicality and negativity. Target prototypicality and uncertainty were not found to be significant predictors of how many people one would tell, $R^2 = .02$, $F(3, 145) = .86$, *ns*.

Self-prototypicality, uncertainty, and negativity. Self-prototypicality, negativity, and uncertainty was also examined as predictors of how many one would tell, but that model was also not significant, (R^2 = .08, F(7, 141) = 1.78, *ns*).

Target prototypicality, uncertainty, and negativity. A model was tested with target prototypicality, negativity, and uncertainty as predictors of how many people one would tell, which was significant R^2 = .14, F(7, 141) = 3.20, p <.01. There was a significant main effect for negativity, β = .18, t = 2.10, p =.04, in that when the information was perceived to be more negative, the fewer number of people one would tell. There was also a significant interaction between target prototypicality and negativity, β = .19, t = 2.35, p =.02, which indicates when negativity of the information was low, the more prototypical the target is, the more people one wwould tell. The three-way interaction between target prototypicality, negativity, and uncertainty was significant, β = .24, t = 2.64, p =.01.

Table 5
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting How Many Member One Will Tell Gossip (Study One)

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β
Step 1			
Constant	3.01	0.27	
Negativity	0.38	0.17	0.18
Uncertainty	0.27	0.19	0.12
Target Prototypicality	0.02	0.12	0.02
Step 2			
Constant	2.98	0.27	
Negativity	0.42	0.18	0.20
Uncertainty	0.33	0.19	0.15
Target Prototypicality	0.07	0.12	0.05
Negativity X Uncertainty	0.17	0.12	0.12
Negativity X Prototypicality	0.18	0.08	0.18
Uncertainty X Prototypicality	0.07	0.08	0.07
Step 3			
Constant	2.94	0.27	
Negativity	0.37	0.18	0.18*
Uncertainty	0.20	0.19	0.09
Target Prototypicality	0.09	0.11	0.06
Negativity X Uncertainty	0.05	0.13	0.03
Negativity X Prototypicality	0.19	0.08	0.19*
Uncertainty X Prototypicality	0.15	0.08	0.15
Negativity X Uncertainty X Prototypicality	0.16	0.06	0.24**

Note. $R^2 = .043$ for Step1; $\Delta R^2 = .051$ for Step 2 (*ps* < .05); ΔR2 = .043 for Step 3 (ps < .05)
**p* < .05. ***p* < .01.

A simple slopes analysis revealed a significant relationship between target prototypicality and how many people one would tell when uncertainty was high and negativity was low. When uncertainty was high and negativity was low, as the target prototypicality increased, so did the number of people one would tell, $\beta = .72$, $t = 3.33$, $p < .01$.

The relationship between target prototypicality and number of people one would tell was not significant when uncertainty was low (low uncertainty/low negativity, $\beta = -.15$, $t = -7.22$, *ns*; low uncertainty/high negativity, $\beta = -.03$, $t = -.17$, *ns)* or when uncertainty was high and negativity was high, $\beta = -.30$, $t = -1.94$, *ns*.

Figure 3. Number of sorority members one would tell as a function of target prototypicality and negativity among those high in uncertainty (Study One)

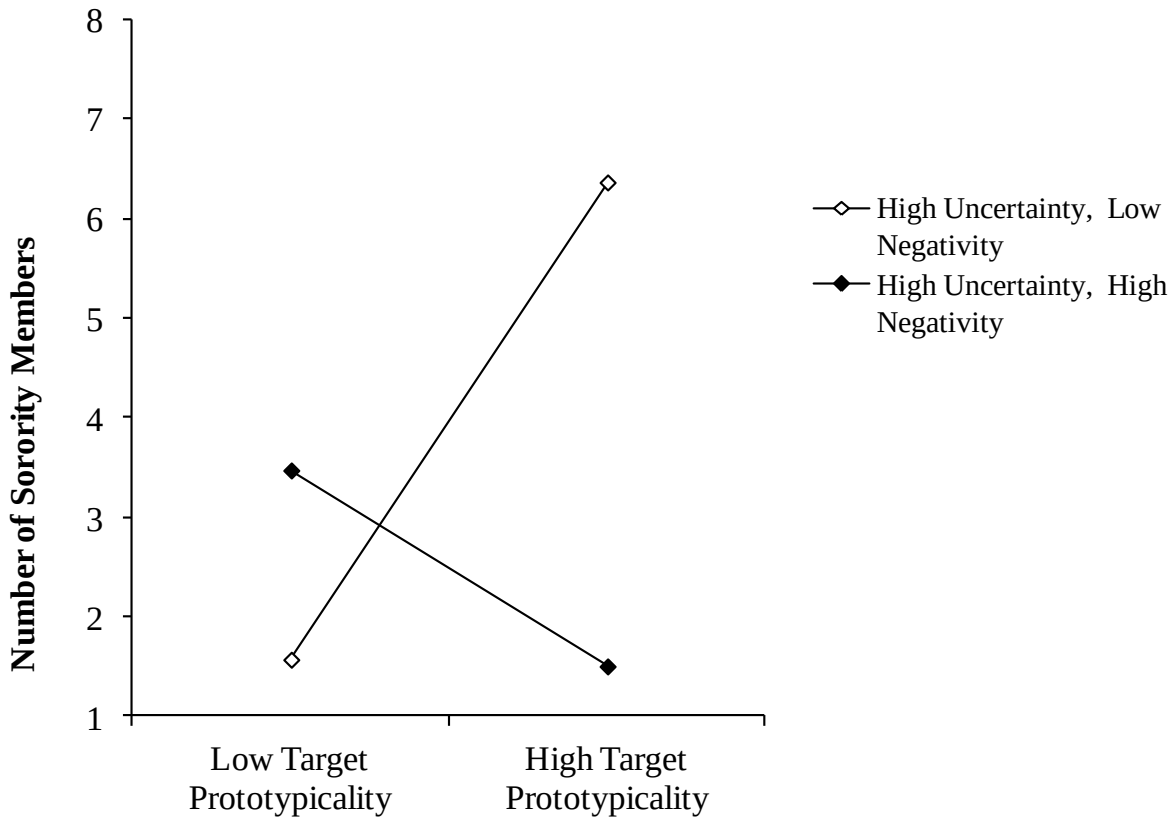
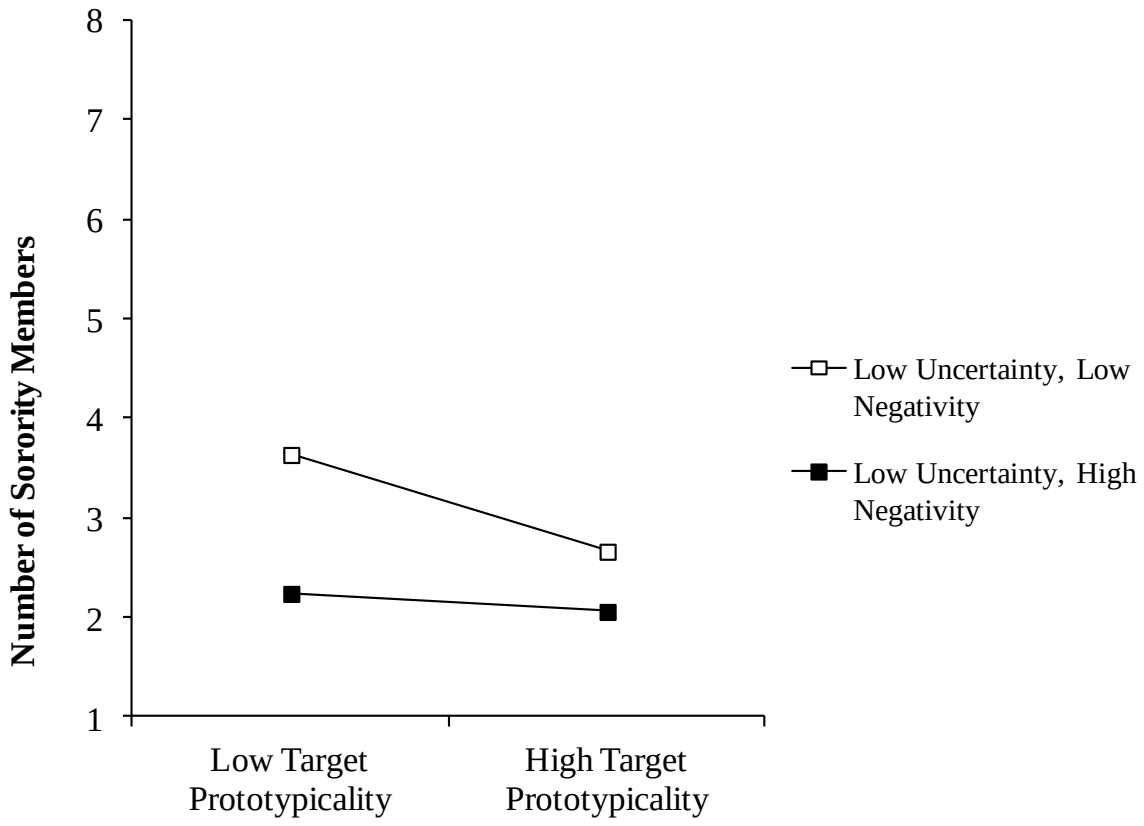


Figure 4. Number of sorority members one would tell as a function of target prototypicality and negativity among those low in uncertainty (Study One)



Discussion

In Study One, self-prototypicality, target prototypicality, gossip negativity, and uncertainty were measured as predictors of the outcome variables, likelihood to tell someone gossip and number of people one would tell. It was predicted that peripheral group members would be more likely to gossip than central members (H1a). It was also predicted that peripheral group members would be more likely to gossip about peripheral group members (H1b) and more likely to gossip when the information was not highly negative (H3). Finally, it was predicted that central members likely to gossip about central members (H2)

Contrary to Hypothesis 1, there was no main effect for self-prototypicality on likelihood to gossip or the number of people one would tell. Also contrary to Hypotheses 1b and 2, there was no interaction between self-prototypicality and target prototypicality when predicting either likelihood to pass along gossip or the number of people one would tell. Finally, contrary to Hypothesis 3, negativity of information did not moderate the relationship between either self-prototypicality or target prototypicality and the likelihood to tell someone a piece of gossip or number of people one would tell.

It was predicted that peripheral group members would be the more likely to gossip that central group members, this was not the case. It is possible that those on the periphery of the group simply don't have as many confidants with which to gossip. Further, a peripheral position in the group may be indicative of a disinterest or disengagement with the sorority. The assumption of the current studies was that a peripheral group member is likely to desire a more central role, but this may not be the case. It may be desire for greater inclusion, rather than simply peripheral status, which motivates gossip. Finally, that prototypicality was self-reported may have been problematic. As demonstrated by Pickett, Bonner and Coleman (2002), those who are marginal may actually describe themselves in more stereotypical terms. It is possible that those peripheral group members who desire greater inclusion, do not actually view themselves as peripheral.

It was also predicted that peripheral group members would be the preferred target of gossip among other peripheral members, but this was not the case. While peripheral targets should carry less risk, they may also be simply less interesting. If gossip is conceptualized as a source of social information from which the listener can benefit, it will be peripheral group members are not likely to be useful sources of social information.

While none of the stated hypotheses were supported, there were several unanticipated interactions. Uncertainty was found to moderate the relationship between self-prototypicality and likelihood to tell someone a piece of gossip. When uncertainty was high, the more prototypical one felt they were, the more likely they were to pass along gossip. Specifically, those who were highly uncertain and highly prototypical of their sorority were the most likely to spread gossip, while those who were highly uncertain and the least prototypical were the least likely. However, when uncertainty was low the relationship between self-prototypicality and likelihood to pass along gossip was not significant. While this result is somewhat unexpected, it is not inexplicable. People who are highly uncertain and are more central members are motivated by uncertainty to bond with other group members and are in a position to do so at the center of group. Those who are uncertain and are more peripheral group members may feel they are in a more precarious position within the group and are not willing to risk any negative repercussions from gossiping about another group member.

When looking at predictors of how many people one would tell, it was the model including target prototypicality, negativity, and uncertainty that was significant. The main effect for negativity indicated that the more negative the information was perceived to be, the fewer people one would tell, which falls in line with the initial hypotheses. However, this was moderated by target prototypicality, as sorority members were likely to tell the most people when the target was highly prototypical and the information was less negative – and were likely to tell the fewest people when the gossip was highly negative information about a central group member. When the target was perceived to be a peripheral group member, the number of people one would tell was consistent regardless of how negative the information was. This interaction reflects the fine line a gossiper must walk between the bonding and inclusion provided by gossip,

and the risk one is exposed to when gossiping. While it is not in line with the initial hypotheses, a central group member potentially makes a more interesting gossip target than a peripheral one, as she is likely known to more members of the group. In much of the research on gossip in the work setting, the gossip tends to concern those who are above the gossiper in the corporate hierarchy, rather than below. It is those who are higher on the ladder that may control the fate of those below them and from whom there may be much to be learned. Similarly in a sorority, it may be the more central members who dictate, implicitly or explicitly, the norms of the group.

However, passing along highly negative information about such a member carries risk as it is passed to more people. Highly negative information about a central member is kept among a smaller group of confidants, while less negative information is more likely to be passed to a larger number of people. Likewise, the sensitivity to social risk would likely be greater among those who are higher in uncertainty, so while the impact of uncertainty was not predicted, it is not entirely surprising.

Although none of the results are in-line with the stated hypotheses, the results are interesting nonetheless. Study One suggests that when uncertainty about one's position in the group is high, they will pass along gossip to the most people when it is about a central group member and the content is not highly negative. While the pattern was unexpected, that the target and negativity play such large roles in predicting the number of people one might tell reinforces the notion that there is a strategic element to gossip, and not all targets are topics are equal. Particularly that the least negative gossip produced the largest effects, suggests sorority members are in fact strategic about gossip and minimize risk while doing so.

There are several limitations to the current study. First, it should be acknowledged that the group dynamics within a sorority are not necessarily generalizable to other groups, as

sororities may have their own set of group norms that may not match those of other groups. Also, while participants have been asked what they may do in a given situation, it is impossible to know exactly what would happen without an experimental design and measurement of actual behavioral outcomes.

Finally, it is possible that even gossiping about peripheral members is a dangerous strategy, and perhaps gossiping about any other sorority member, even peripheral members, carries a risk of being labeled disloyal or untrustworthy. There are several gossip targets that would carry less risk, including a celebrity – those in the media who are frequently gossiped about, but not known personally by the gossipers. Study Two was conducted to test the role of prototypicality, uncertainty, and negativity on likelihood to gossip, but when the target of gossip was a celebrity, and thus effectively a third party - not a member of one's group.

Chapter Five: Study Two

Study One predicted that peripheral group members would be more likely to gossip about other peripheral group members, as they are an easy, less-threatening target as compared to central members. It is possible that even gossiping about peripheral members is a dangerous strategy, and perhaps gossiping about any other sorority member, even peripheral members, carries a risk of being labeled disloyal or 'a gossip.' There are several gossip targets that would carry less risk, including a celebrity – those in the media who are frequently gossiped about, but not known personally by the gossipers. In that way, celebrity gossip is attractive because there is no threat of retaliation by other members or potential labels of disloyalty. Gossiping about the misdeeds of a celebrity communicates a shared understanding of social norms and potentially creates a bond, but without the threats associated with disparaging a fellow sorority member.

While Study One examined peripheral group members as a likely target for gossip by other peripheral members, study two tested the hypothesis that peripheral group members would be more likely to pass along celebrity gossip than central group members (H1c), further supporting the hypothesis that peripherals use gossip to advance their own position within the group, but only when doing so involves minimal risk.

As Study One and Study Two were conducted concurrently, the design and measures of Study two were identical to Study One, but the hypothetical piece of gossip was about a celebrity instead of a fellow sorority member. As in Study One, the hypotheses were tested using members of sororities and the two independent variables were perceived prototypicality of the respondent and prototypicality of the subject of gossip (in this case, how similar the celebrity was to the members of the sorority). The dependent variables included interest in the gossip and likelihood

to pass along the gossip to another sorority member. Measures of perceived negativity of the gossip, uncertainty and identification were also included to examine any moderating effects.

Method

Participants

Participants were 72 sorority members attending one of several large universities in Southern California. They were recruited during their sorority's weekly chapter meeting and asked to participate in a survey about communication. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 23 years-old, with an average age between 19 and 20 years (*M* = 19.72, *SD* = 1.17). The majority self-identified as Caucasian (79.2%), followed by Asian (2.8%), Hispanic (2.8%), and other/multi-racial/unidentified (15.3%).

Over one third currently live in their sorority house (37.5%), while 8.3% used to and no longer do and 54.2% never have. The sorority members attend, on average, between two and three sorority events per week (M = 2.89, SD = 1.68).

Procedure

Procedure, design, and all measures were identical with Study One. An announcement was made by the researcher at the weekly chapter meeting, and the sorority president sent out the survey link via email to the members that evening.

Measures

As in Study One, participants first completed a measure of perceived prototypicality within their sorority, as well as a measure of self- uncertainty and uncertainty related to their place in the world. They then read a hypothetical piece of gossip about *a celebrity* (see Appendix C) and were asked several questions about how they might respond to such a piece of information.

The same five-item uncertain scale was used, which has acceptable reliability within the Study 2 sample (α=.71). Likewise, the six-item prototypicality scale had high reliability within the Study 2 sample (α=.93). The single item measure of negativity and target prototypicality were identical to Study One.

Results

Study Two measured the predictor variables self prototypicality, target prototypicality, gossip negativity, uncertainty, and identification among sorority women. The dependent variables were likelihood to spread gossip and how many other members one would tell.

A total of 72 respondents completed the survey. Age, ethnicity, and length of membership were not found to be correlated with any other variables measured, and thus subsequent analyses were conducted on all ages and ethnicities in aggregate. Five respondents provided responses that were illogical or could not be quantified, and were removed from subsequent analyses, leaving a total sample size of 67.

Preliminary analyses

Among the sorority members in this study, uncertainty was relatively low (M = 3.82, SD = 1.56), while self-prototypicality was relatively high (M = 6.46, SD = 1.70), but the target of the gossip was deemed to be not prototypical of the sorority (M = 2.94, SD = 1.99),

The information conveyed in the gossip was deemed by most respondents to be very negative (M = 2.07, SD = 1.35), with about half (49.3%, n = 33) rating it a 1 *very negative*. Overall, respondents were slightly more likely than not to tell another sorority member the gossip (M = 5.91, SD = 2.82). The average number of sorority members they would tell was around four, (M = 4.2, SD = 4.02), while the most common responses were two people (19.4%, n

= 13) or five people (19.4%, n = 13) and responses ranged from zero (10.4%, *n* = 7) to twenty (3.0%, *n* = 2).

Likelihood to tell another sorority member the piece of gossip was positively correlated with the number of other sorority members one would tell $r = .48$, $p<.01$ (as shown in Table 1), how interesting the gossip was rated, $r = .66$, $p<.01$, and how believable the gossip was deemed to be $r = .25$, $p<.01$. How interesting the gossip was perceived to be was also positively correlated with the number of other sorority members one would tell was, $r = .27$, $p<.01$, and was also positively correlated with how believable it was $r = .24$, $p<.01$. The number of other sorority members one would tell was not correlated with how believable it was, $r = .18$, *ns*.

Table 6
Correlations Between Likelihood to Tell Another Member, Number of Members One Would Tell, and Perceived Interestingness and Believability of Gossip (Study Two)

Variables	Likelihood to Tell	Number of Members	Interest	Believe
Likelihood to Tell	—	.48**	.66**	.25**
Number of Members		—	.38**	0.18
Interesting Rating			—	.24*
Believe				—

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

Hierarchical multiple regression

It was predicted that peripheral group members would be more likely to share celebrity gossip, particularly when the target was less similar to their group, while central members would gossip about more similar people. It was also predicted that less negativity would decrease likelihood. To test the hypotheses, a series of hierarchal multiple regressions were conducted to examine self-prototypicality, target prototypicality, and moderators negativity and uncertainty, on likelihood to tell and number one would tell. Predictor variables were mean-centered,

interaction terms calculated, and interactions were explored using simple slopes analyses (Aiken & West, 1991).

Predictors of Likelihood to tell someone gossip

Self-prototypicality and target prototypicality. The model including perceived self-prototypicality and perceived target prototypicality as predictors of likelihood to tell someone was significant, $R^2 = .16$, $F(3, 63) = 4.01$, $p = .01$. There was a main effect for target prototypicality, $\beta = .34$, $t = 2.90$, $p = .005$, which demonstrates that as the more prototypical one perceived the target to be, the more likely one would be to tell another member. The main effect for self-prototypicality fell just short of significance, $\beta = .38$, $t = 1.93$, $p = .06$, but suggested there may have been a directional relationship between perceived self-prototypicality and likelihood to tell someone the pieces of celebrity gossip, which is contrary to the initial hypothesis. The interaction between self-prototypicality and target prototypicality was not significant, $\beta = .15$, $t = 1.28$, *ns.*

Self-prototypicality and negativity. It was predicted that negativity would impact the relationship between perceived self-prototypicality and likelihood to tell someone gossip, but that model was not significant $R^2 = .03$, $F(3, 63) = .66$, *ns.*

Target prototypicality and negativity. Perceived target prototypicality and negativity were not significant predictors of likelihood to tell $R^2 = .11$, $F(3, 63) = 2.58$, *ns.*

Self-prototypicality and uncertainty. Uncertainty was not found to moderate the relationship between perceived self-prototypicality when predicting likelihood to tell someone a piece of gossip ($R^2 = .05$, $F(3, 63) = 1.21$, *ns*).

Target prototypicality and negativity. To test if uncertainty moderates the relationship between perceived target prototypicality and likelihood to spread gossip, a model including

uncertainty and target prototypicality was tested with likelihood to tell as the dependent variable. The model was significant $R^2 = .15$, $F(3, 63) = 3.57$, $p = .019$ and included a significant main effect for target prototypicality $\beta = .30$, $t = 2.59$, $p = .012$. However, the interaction between target prototypicality and uncertainty was not significant, $\beta = .19$, $t = 1.62$, *ns*.

Self-prototypicality, uncertainty, and negativity. Self-prototypicality, uncertainty, and negativity were tested as predictors of likelihood to tell, but that model was not significant $R^2 = .08$, $F(7, 59) = .73$, *ns*.

Target prototypicality, uncertainty, and negativity. The model to test if perceived target prototypicality, negativity, and uncertainty predict likelihood to pass along gossip was not significant, $R^2 = .19$, $F(7, 59) = 2.03$, *ns*.

Predictors of the number of other members one would tell

Self-prototypicality and target prototypicality. The model was tested including perceived self-prototypicality and perceived target prototypicality as a predictors of how many people one would tell, which was non-significant ($R^2 = .13$, $F(3, 63) = 1.29$, *ns*).

Self-prototypicality and negativity. Likewise, self-prototypicality and negativity were not significant predictors of how many people one would tell $R^2 = .06$, $F(3, 63) = 1.39$, *ns*.

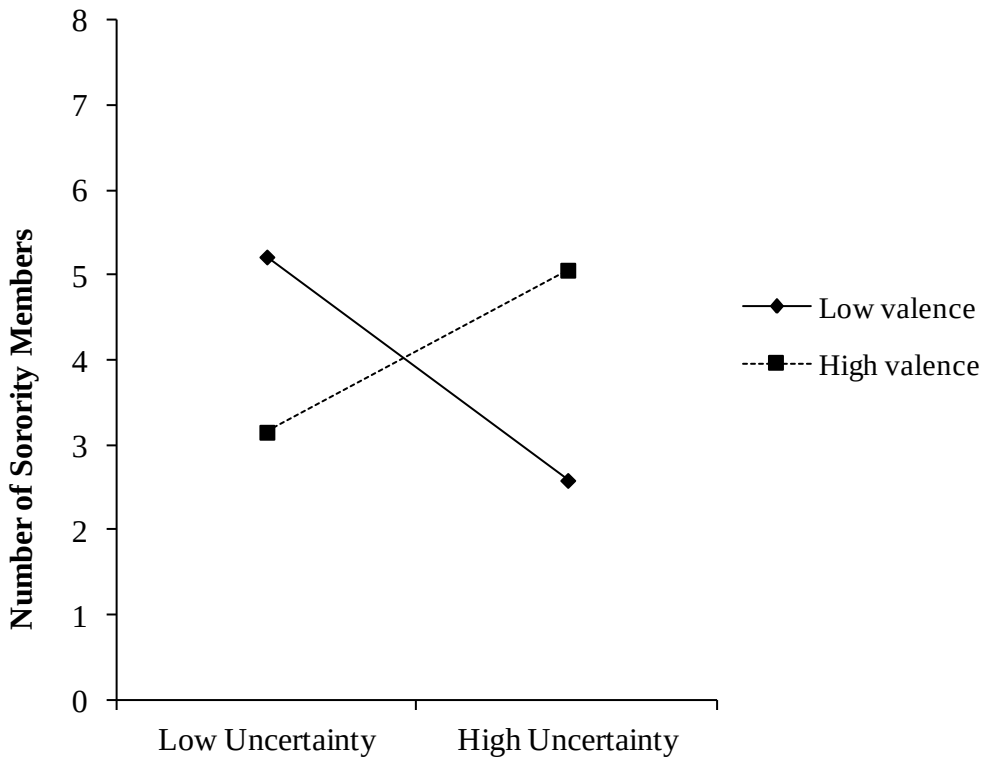
Target prototypicality and negativity. It was predicted that negativity would moderate the relationship between target prototypicality and how many one would tell. Perceived target prototypicality and negativity were not significant predictors of how many people one would tell, $R^2 = .08$, $F(3, 63) = 1.89$, *ns*.

Self-prototypicality and uncertainty. Uncertainty was not found to moderate the relationship between perceived self-prototypicality when predicting how many people one would tell $R^2 = .04$, $F(3, 63) = .83$, *ns*.

Target prototypicality and negativity. Using target prototypicality and uncertainty to predict how many people one would tell, the model was not significant $R^2 = .07$, $F(3, 63) = 1.52$, $p = .22$, however the interaction term within the model was significant $\beta = .25$, $t = 2.07$, $p = .04$, suggesting a directional relationship between the variables when predicting how many people one would tell. Specifically, when uncertainty was high, the more prototypical the target was, the more people one was likely to tell. A simple slopes analysis was conducted, but both lines failed to reach significance (low uncertainty, $\beta = -.45$, $t = -1.21$, *ns*; high uncertainty, $\beta = .63$, $t = 1.82$, *ns*).

Self-prototypicality, uncertainty, and negativity. As predictors of how many one would tell, the model was significant $R^2 = .119$, $F(7, 59) = 2.27$, $p = .04$. While the main effects were not significant and the three-way interaction term was not significant ($\beta = .26$, $t = 1.80$, *ns*), the interaction between uncertainty and negativity was significant, $\beta = .41$, $t = 3.15$, $p < .01$. A simple slopes analysis revealed that when negativity was high and uncertainty was high, the number of people one would tell decreased, $\beta = -.86$, $t = -2.01$, $p = .04$. When negativity was low, the relationship between uncertainty and how many people one would tell was not significant, $\beta = .61$, $t = 1.46$, *ns*. When uncertainty was high, there was a significant relationship between negativity and how many people one would tell ($\beta = .92$, $t = 2.26$, $p = .02$.). Specifically, when uncertainty was high, more negative information was related to telling fewer people. When uncertainty was low, there was not a significant relationship between negativity and how many people one would tell, $\beta = -.77$, $t = -1.31$, *ns*.

Figure 5. Number of sorority members one would tell as a function of uncertainty and negativity (Study Two)



Target prototypicality, uncertainty, and negativity. The model with target prototypicality, negativity, and uncertainty as predictors of how many one would tell was significant, $R^2 = .24$, $F(7, 59) = 1.91$, $p = .02$. The main effects and two-way interactions for target prototypicality, negativity, and uncertainty were not significant, but the three-way interaction was significant $\beta = .36$, $t = 2.41$, $p = .02$.

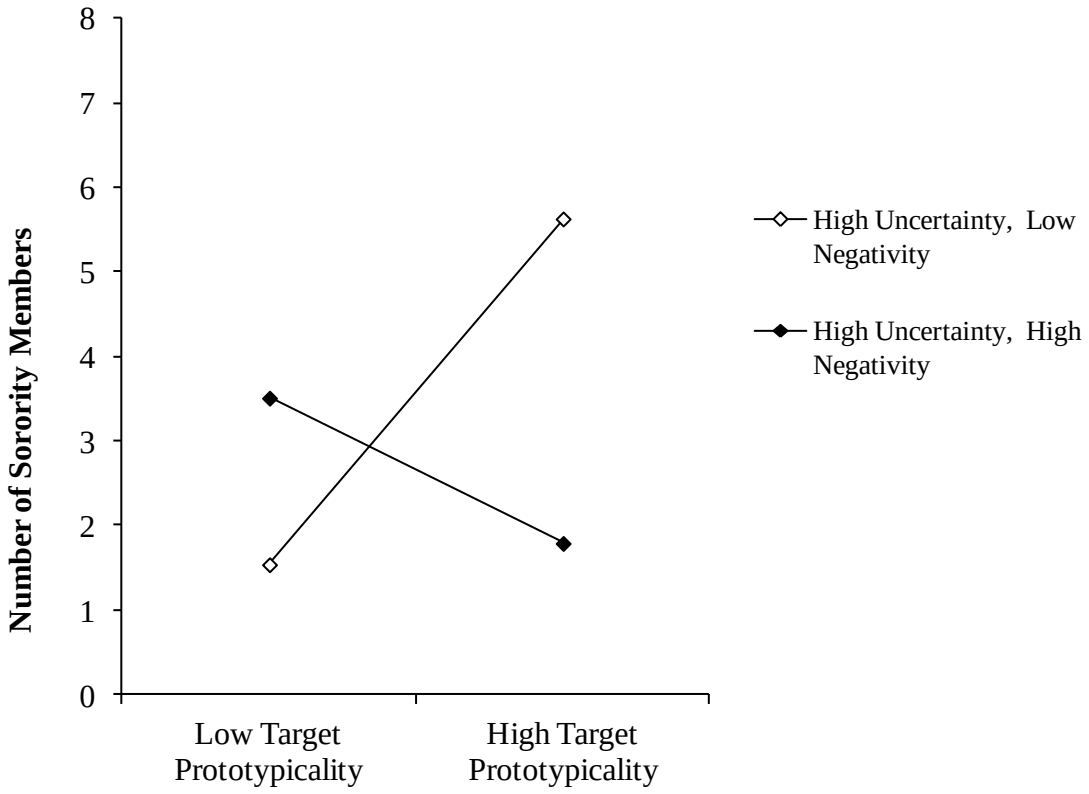
Table 7
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting How Many Member One Will Tell Gossip(Study Two)

Variable	*B*	*SE B*	β
Step 1			
Constant	4.23	0.50	
Negativity	0.42	0.38	0.14
Uncertainty	-0.11	0.33	-0.04
Target Prototypicality	0.12	0.25	0.06
Step 2			
Constant	3.98	0.48	
Negativity	0.07	0.39	0.02
Uncertainty	-0.22	0.33	-0.09
Target Prototypicality	0.08	0.26	0.04
Negativity X Uncertainty	0.40	0.23	0.23
Negativity X Prototypicality	0.27	0.21	0.17
Uncertainty X Prototypicality	0.18	0.18	0.13
Step 3			
Constant	3.65	0.48	
Negativity	-0.20	0.39	-0.07
Uncertainty	-0.35	0.32	-0.14
Target Prototypicality	-0.13	0.26	-0.06
Negativity X Uncertainty	0.35	0.23	0.20
Negativity X Prototypicality	0.00	0.23	0.00
Uncertainty X Prototypicality	0.27	0.18	0.20
Negativity X Uncertainty X Prototypicality	0.33	0.14	0.36*

Note. $R^2 = .023$ for Step1; $\Delta R^2 = .137$ for Step 2 (*ps* < .05); ΔR2 = .075 for Step 3 (ps < .05)
**p* < .05. ***p* < .01.

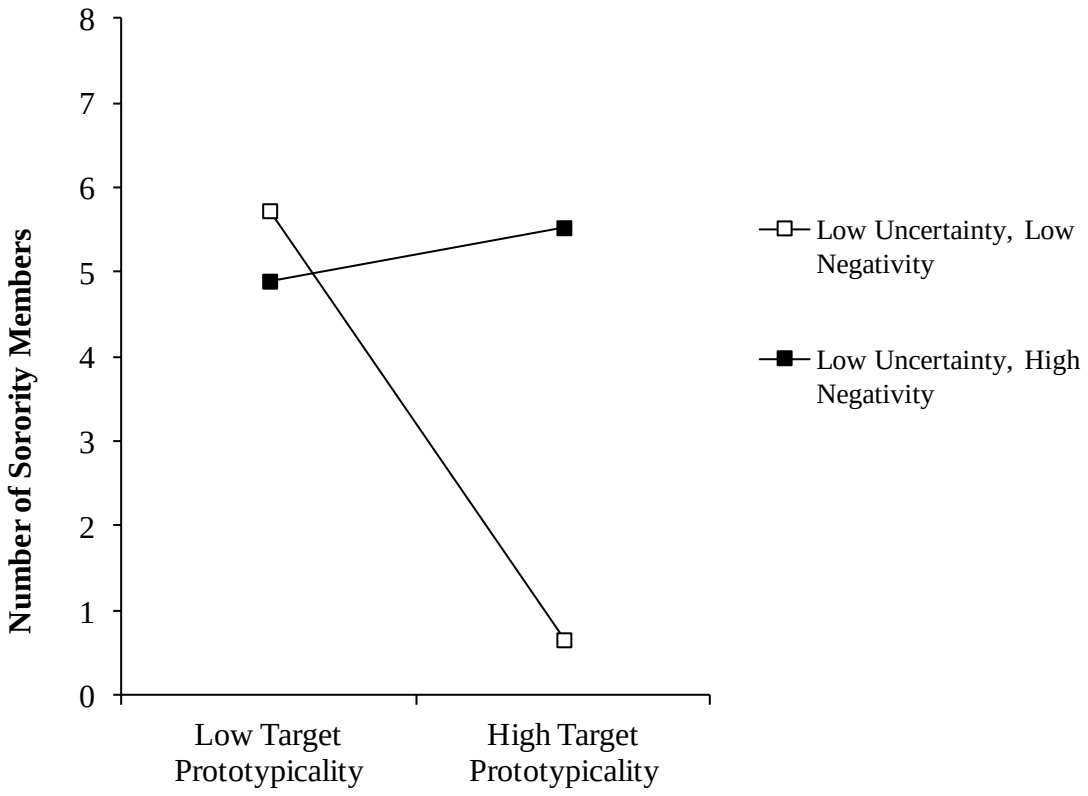
A simple slopes analysis revealed the relationship between target prototypicality and how many one would tell was significant when uncertainty was high and negativity was low, $\beta = .57$, $t = 2.28$, $p = .026$. Sorority members reported they would tell the most people about celebrity

Figure 6. Number of sorority members one would tell as a function of target prototypicality and negativity among those low in uncertainty (Study Two)



gossip when they were highly uncertain, the target was similar to members of their sorority, and the information was not extremely negative. The relationship between target prototypicality and how many people one would tell was not significant when uncertainty was low (low uncertainty/high negativity β = -.64, t = -1.61, *ns* ; low uncertainty/high negativity, β = .08, t = .33, *ns*) or when uncertainty and negativity were both high (β = -.22, t = -.94, *ns*).

Figure 7. Number of sorority members one would tell as a function of target prototypicality and negativity among those low in uncertainty (Study Two)



Discussion

Study Two measured self-prototypicality, target (celebrity) prototypicality, negativity of gossip, uncertainty as predictors of likelihood to pass along gossip and number of other members one would tell. It was predicted that peripheral group members would be more likely to gossip about celebrities than central group members would gossip about celebrities they perceived to be similar to the sorority.

There was a marginally significant effect for self-prototypicality, suggesting that central members may be more likely to gossip. This pattern is contrary to Hypothesis 1c, which

predicted peripheral members would be more likely to gossip about a celebrity. It is possible that more central group members are simply more likely to have one or more close friends with which they share information. However, there was no interaction between self-prototypicality and target prototypicality.

There was a main effect for target prototypicality, indicating a celebrity that was perceived to be similar was more likely to be gossiped about. This finding may reflect the idea that the media personalities that are of greatest interest are the ones with whom we can relate. Additionally, in-line with social comparison perspective, those who are similar make the most relevant comparison points, as opposed to a celebrity that reflects an unattainable ideal.

As with Study One, in Study Two there were a number of findings that were unanticipated, but interesting. The main finding parallels the results of Study One, in that there was a significant three-way interaction between target prototypicality, negativity, and uncertainty when predicting how many people one will tell. As in Study One, when uncertainty was high and valence was low, there was a significant relationship between target prototypicality and how many people one will tell. In terms of celebrity gossip, this means that when a target was similar to one's sorority, the gossiper had a higher level of uncertainty, and the information conveyed wasn't highly negative, the gossiper would tell more people. As in Study One, these finding are somewhat unexpected, in that prototypicality of the gossiper plays almost no role. The findings do fall in line with one aspect of the hypotheses, in that a gossiper would tell the most people when the information was not highly negative. Particularly for celebrity gossip, where entertainment is a key component, keeping the topic light is important. A highly negative or tragic event may counteract the pleasure of gossiping and a target that is too pathetic is no longer a relevant comparison point.

The role of uncertainty was not predicted, but as with Study One, it is not surprising that someone with a higher level of uncertainty would tell more people about a celebrity who was similar to their own group and has committed a relatively minor violation of social norms. Considering those who are most uncertain are the most motivated to be included in the group, gossiping to many people about a celebrity who is similar is an easy way to bond with other members, particularly if the information isn't terribly sad or depressing.

As with Study One, it is the number of people one would tell that was predicted in the model, rather than likelihood to tell someone. The assumption about why that might be, as in Study One, is that how many people one would tell is one step closer to the actual behavior than likelihood to tell. For many sorority members in this study, whether or not they would tell anyone is an automatic response. When asked who, they would tell and in what setting, many reported things like "I would tell my roommate because we tell each other everything." How many people one would tell, on the other hand, requires an extra step in considering who exactly, besides that trusted roommate, she would tell.

Limitations of this study, like Study One, include the fact that the population is not representative of the general populations, and the findings of sororities may not generalize to other types of groups, which may have different norms regarding gossip.

Chapter Six: General Discussion

Gossip is a little studied topic and even fewer studies have examined gossip from the perspective of social identity and self categorization theories. However the functions of gossip that have been identified in the relevant literature , such as increasing intimacy and as an agent of social control, are a natural fit with identity-based theories of group processes. Likewise, from a self-categorization perspective, much work has been done on ways in which peripheral group members attempt to gain group acceptance, such as through strict adherence to group norms and displays of loyalty, but gossip has not been investigated as a potential strategy.

While gossip is relatively understudied, a number of functions have been identified. First, and perhaps most prominently, gossip about real life drama is fun and pleasurable (Ben-Ze'ev, 1994). The tabloid industry has capitalized on the entertainment value with a product that is solely about the personal lives of others. Gossip is also a source of information as a form of vicarious learning, as it is a safe and efficient way to gather information about the world around us . Farther back in our pre-history, that information may have increased the chances of survival of our species, while today it helps us navigate the social world (Dunbar, 2004).

As a social tool, gossip creates a bond between those who are gossiping (Levin & Arluke, 1987). Sharing a secret is to share vulnerability and, similar to the way self-disclosure creates intimacy, interpersonal closeness is created. As a mechanism of social control, gossip is a means of identifying and sanctioning those who have violated a norm (Foster, 2004). It also serves as a warning to others about the guidelines for acceptable behavior and the risks of not following those guidelines. Simply having a piece of personal information can elevate the status of the gossiper, by indicating that they are “on the inside” (McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002). Finally, gossip is vehicle for social comparison. By knowing the behaviors of others, one is able to judge

the appropriateness of their own behavior (Wert & Salovey, 2004). And because gossip usually occurs when there has been a transgression, the gossiper feels and appears superior by comparison.

While gossip is rarely studied from a group perspective, these functions are all ways of creating a close and cohesive group. Self categorization theory is an ideal framework with which to study gossip because research in the area has identified which group members will be most likely to monitor group norms and boundaries, marginalize deviant group members, and seek to create increased intimacy with other group members – in short, it predicts which group members will be most likely to gossip.

Self categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) describes the cognitive underpinnings of group membership and associated group processes and phenomena. Groups are represented as prototypes, which are fuzzy sets of attributes that not only describe ways in which ingroup members are similar, but also how the ingroup is distinct from the outgroup. Group members vary on how similar they are to the prototype, with the more prototypical members holding a more central position in the group, while the less prototypical group members occupying the periphery of the group. It is these peripheral group members who are likely to be the most motivated to gain a more secure place in the group. This can be achieved in a number of ways, one of which is to further marginalize or exclude other peripheral group members (Noel, Wann, and Branscombe, 1995). By excluding another peripheral member, the member has displayed loyalty to the group by identifying those that threaten it, but also appears more central by comparison. It is if the peripheral member has redrawn the group boundaries with the offender on the outside and themselves securely inside. Gossip is the ideal

way to both bond with other members, display group loyalty, and also increase inclusion within the group.

However, gossip also carries risk. Gossiping too much may reflect negatively on the gossiper (Turner, Mazur, Wendel, & Winslow, 2003) and should the gossip reach the person being talked about, relationships can be damaged. One potential strategy to mitigate that risk is to avoid risky targets, who may have more social clout. Gossiping about peripheral group members carries less risk, as the target likely does not have a highly influential role in the group. Another potential strategy is to avoid highly negative topics. Not only does a very serious topic detract from the fun aspect of gossip, a topic that is highly negative is also likely to be highly sensitive and may draw more harsh reaction. To achieve the desired goal of greater inclusion in the group, the peripheral group member must be mindful of both the target and the topic of the gossip.

Predictions about gossip derived from self-categorization theory were tested in two studies of people's response to a hypothetical piece of gossip. The prototypicality of the respondent was measured, as was the perceived prototypicality of the gossip target. The perceived negativity of the gossip was also measured. Because uncertainty has been shown to be closely related to self categorization processes, uncertainty was also included, although predictions about the role of uncertainty were not made.

The studies, conducted concurrently, used sororities to examine the role of prototypicality of both the gossiper and the gossip target in likelihood to gossip. Sorority members completed an online survey which began with a measure of their own prototypicality within their sorority and a measure of their level of uncertainty. They then read a hypothetical piece of gossip about a fellow sorority member (Study One) or a Celebrity (Study Two). They were asked how negative

they felt the gossip was and how prototypical that group member was within the sorority. They then were asked about what their response to the gossip would be, specifically how likely they would be to tell another sorority member and how many other sorority members they would tell. Finally demographic information, such as age, ethnicity, and year in school was collected.

It was predicted from self-categorization theory that peripheral group members would be more likely to gossip than central group members, and that they would be more likely to gossip about other peripheral group members. Likewise, it was predicted that central group members would be more likely gossip about other central members. It was also predicted that both peripheral members would be more likely to pass along gossip that was deemed only mildly negative, as opposed to gossip that was deemed to be highly negative.

Contrary to the hypotheses, peripheral group members were not more likely to gossip than central members. In fact, a directional finding in Study Two suggests just the opposite, that central group members may be more likely than peripheral members to pass along gossip. Peripheral group members were not found to be more likely to gossip about other peripheral group members, as there was not a significant interaction between self prototypicality and target prototypicality.

While the current study did not support the notion that gossip will be used in strategic ways by peripheral group members, the finding were interesting nonetheless. In both Studies One and Two, it was high uncertainty, a prototypical target, and relatively mild negative gossip that elicited transmission to the highest number of sorority members. While not predicted in the hypotheses, these results are not beyond explanation and in some ways highlights the initial assertion that gossiping is a powerful, yet risky endeavor. Particularly for those who are uncertain, paying attention to a more central group member could be valuable as an instructive

tool for gaining a more central position, making a central member a more interesting target of gossip. However, gossip about such a member is risky and spreading highly negative information about her could risk a one's reputation as loyal and trustworthy group member.

In both Study One and Study Two, the prototypicality of the gossiper was not a powerful predictor of likelihood to gossip or how many people with which one would gossip. It is possible that in a very large sorority, where some have close to 200 members, that even members who are not highly prototypical of the sorority as a whole, have a close group of friends in whom they would confide. Given that the group is so large, many subgroups and cliques are likely to exist, all at varying levels of prototypicality with the sorority overall. It may have been a more meaningful exercise to conduct the study in the context of one's group of friends within the sorority, rather than the sorority as a whole.

What is most interesting about the parallels between Study One and Study Two is that these results suggest that parasocial relationships mimic real-life relationships in more complex ways than previous investigated. Like social relationships, parasocial relationships develop over time and varied situations, leading the viewer to feel as if they know the celebrity (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Those who study parasocial relationships have reported many similarities to actual social relationships, such as a feeling of bonding or closeness (e.g. Horton and Wohl, 1956) or a feeling of loss when a favorite show ends (Eyal, K. & Cohen, J., 2006). That patterns of gossip would be so similar however, takes the parasocial relationship to a more advanced place and demonstrates just how similarly we view celebrities.

Limitations

A potential limitation of the studies conducted is that gossip is not considered a socially acceptable behavior. Given the sensitive nature of the behavior, reports of what one might do

were likely colored by the desire to appear (to the researcher or oneself) as someone who does not condone gossip. Similarly, another potential limitation is the use of a hypothetical scenario to determine what course of action a respondent might take. While it a likely that respondents have been faced with similar scenarios in their daily social lives, even honest reported reactions are at best a guess of what behavioral reactions might actually occur.

Future studies

Because gossip within groups is a little-studied area of research, the potential directions for future research a numerous. First, given the limitations of self-reported behaviors in response to a hypothetical scenario, research involving true behavioral outcomes would be ideal. Observing respondents and measuring the number of people one would tell would be one way to avoid social desirability pressures.

The interaction between uncertainty, negativity, and target prototypicality was unanticipated and raises questions about the dynamics of these variables. An initial step would be to examine the impact of uncertainty, negativity, and target prototypicality using experimental manipulation to further unpack the findings of this study and make a case for a causal direction.

While identification was excluded from the current studies, it surely plays a role in the interactions between the variables tested. Future studies should examine the ways in which identification impacts the current findings, by more clearly delineating identification and self prototypicality, perhaps via experimental manipulations.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the current studies is the parallel findings when the gossip target was another sorority member and when the gossip target was a celebrity. Future research could further examine this pattern to understand when and why reactions to celebrities

are the same as reactions to known others. Various types of gossip could be tested to understand which topics resonate most and are likely to be gossiped about.

Gossip is a powerful social tool, capable of building bonds, defining group norms, and restructuring group boundaries. Particularly for peripheral group members, it was hypothesized that gossip could be a strategy to gain acceptance in the group, by increasing intimacy and displaying loyalty, as well as casting oneself as relatively prototypical in comparison to the offender. Examining gossip from this perspective provides a more sophisticated look at gossip, and employs social identity principles in a novel way.

References

Anderson, N. H. (1968). Likableness ratings of 555 personality-trait words. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 9*, 272-279.

Aiken, L. S., & West, S. G. (1991). *Multiple regression: Testing and interpreting interactions*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Abrams, D., & Hogg, M. A. (2010). Social identity and self-categorization. In J. F. Dovidio, M. Hewstone, P. Glick & V. M. Esses (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination* (pp. 179-193). London: SAGE.

Archer, J. & Coyne, S. M. (2005). An integrated review of indirect, relational, and social aggression. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 9*, 212-230.

Baker, J.S. & Jones, M.A. (1996). The poison grapevine: How destructive are gossip and rumor in the workplace? *Human Resource Development Quarterly, 7*, 75-86.

Baumeister, R. F., Zhang, L., & Vohs, K. D. (2004). Gossip as cultural learning. *Review of General Psychology, 8*, 111-121.

Brewer, M. B. (1991). The social self: On being the same and different at the same time. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 17*, 475-482.

Cohen, C. (1992). A power primer. *Psychological Bulletin, 112, 1*, 155-159.

DiFonzo, N., Bordia, P. & Rosnow, R.L. 1994, 'Reining in rumors', *Organizational Dynamics, 23*, 47–62.

Emler, N. (1994). Gossip, reputation, and social adaptation. In R. F. Goodman, & A. Ben-Ze'ev (Eds.), *Good Gossip* (pp. 117-138). Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas.

Ellemers, N., Spears, R., & Doosje, B. (2002). Self and social identity. *Annual Review of Psychology, 53*, 161–186.

Eyal, K. & Cohen, J. (2006). When good Friends say goodbye: A parasocial breakup study. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 50*, 502-523.

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations, 7*, 114-140.

Foster, E. K. (2004). Research on gossip: taxonomy, methods, and future directions. *Review of General Psychology, 8*, 78-99.

Goff, J.L. & Goff, P.J. (1988). Trapped in co-dependency. *Personnel Journal, 67*, 50-57.

Hains, S. C., Hogg, M. A., & Duck, J. M. (1997). Self-categorization and leadership: Effects of group prototypicality and leader stereotypicality. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 23*, 1087-1100.

Heider, F. (1958). *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations.* New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Herskovits, M. (1937). *Life in the Haitian valley*. New York: Knopf.

Horton, D.R. & Wohl R. *(1956). "Mass communication and para-social interaction: Observations on intimacy at a distance". Psychiatry, 19, 215-229.*

Hogg, M. A. (2000). Social identity and social comparison. In J. M. Suls, & L. Wheeler (Eds.), *Handbook of social comparison: Theory and research* (pp. 401-421). New York: Kluwer Academic.

Hogg, M. A. (2001). A social identity theory of leadership. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 5,* 184-200.

Hogg, M. A. (1993). Group cohesiveness: A critical review and some new directions. *European Review of Social Psychology, 4,* 85-111.

Hogg, M.A. (2006). Social identity theory. In P.J. Burke (ed.) *Contemporary Social Psychology Theory.* Stanford University Press.

Hogg, M. A. (2007). Uncertainty-identity theory. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), Advances in experimental social psychology (Vol. 39, pp. 69-126). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Hogg, M. A. (2012). Uncertainty-identity theory. In P. A. M. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp. 62-80). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hogg, M. A., & Gaffney, A. M. (In Press). Prototype-based social comparison within groups: Constructing social identity to reduce self-uncertainty. In Z. Krizan & F. Gibbons (Eds.). *Communal Functions of Social Comparisons*. Cambridge University Press: New York, NY.

Hogg, M. A., & Giles, H. (in press). Norm talk and identity in intergroup communication. In H. Giles (Ed.), *The handbook of intergroup communication*. New York: Taylor and Francis/Routledge.

Hogg, M. A.,& Hardie, E. A. (1991). Social attraction, personal attraction, and self-categorization: A field study. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 17*, 175-180.

Hogg, M. A., & Reid, S. A. (2006). Social identity, self-categorization, and the communication of group norms. *Communication Theory, 16*, 7-30.

Hogg, M. A., & van Knippenberg, D. (2003). Social identity and leadership processes in groups. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 35, pp. 1-52). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Jetten, J., Branscombe, N. R., Spears, R., & McKimmie, B. (1993). Predicting the Paths of Peripherals: The Interaction of Identification and Future Possibilities, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29, 130-140.

Jones, E. E., & Pittman, T. S. (1982). Toward a general theory of strategic self-presentation. In J. Suls (Ed.), *Psychological perspectives on the self* (Vol. 1, pp. 231–262). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Kniffin, K.M. & Wilson, D.S. (2010). Evolutionary perspectives on workplace gossip: Why and how gossip can serve groups. *Group & Organization Management, 35*, 150-176.

Kurland, N.B. & Pelled, L.H. (2000). Passing the word: Toward a model of gossip and power in theworkplace. *Academy of Management Review, 25*, 428–438.

Leonardelli, G. J., Pickett, C. L., & Brewer, M. B. (2010). Optimal distinctiveness theory: A framework for social identity, social cognition and intergroup relations. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 43, pp. 65-115) San Diego, CA: Elsevier.

Levin, J., & Arluke, A. (1987). *Gossip: The Inside Scoop.* New York : Plenum Press.

Marques, J. M. (1990). The black sheep effect: outgroup homogeniety in social comparison settings. In D. Abrams & M. Hogg (Eds.), *Social identiy theory:Constructive and critical advances* (pp. 131-151). London and New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf and Springer-Verlag.

Marques, J. M., & Páez, D. (1994). The ‘black sheep effect’: Social categorisation, rejection of ingroup deviates and perception of group variability. *European Review of Social Psychology, 5*, 37–68.

Marques, J. M., Abrams, D., Paez, D., & Hogg, M. A. (2001). Social categorization, social identification, and rejection of deviant group members. In M. A. Hogg, & R. S. Tindale (Eds), *Blackwell handbook of social psychology: Group processes* (pp. 400-424). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Michelson, G., van Iterson, A., & Waddington, K. (2010). Gossip in organizations: Contexts, consequences, and controversies. *Group & Organization Management 35*, 371– 390.

Nevo, O., Nevo, B., & Derech-Zehavi, A. (1994). The tendedncy to gossip as a psychological disposition: Constructing a measure and validating it. In R. F. Goodman, & A. Ben-Ze'ev (Eds.), *Good gossip* (pp. 180-189). Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

Noel, J. G., Wann, D. L., & Branscombe, N. R. (1995). Peripheral ingroup membership status and public negativity toward outgroups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 68*, 127-137.

Noon, M., & Delbridge, R. (1993). News from behind my hand: Gossip in organizations. *Organization Studies, 14*, 23-36

Ogasawara, Y. (1998). *Office ladies and salaried men: Power, gender, and work in Japanese companies*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Pickett, C. L., & Brewer, M. B. (2005). The role of exclusion in maintaining ingroup inclusion. In D. Abrams, M. A. Hogg, & J. M. Marques (Eds.), *The social psychology of inclusion and exclusion* (pp. 289-111). New York: Psychology Press.

Pickett, C. L., Bonner, B. L., & Coleman, J. M. (2002). Motivated self-stereotyping: Heightened assimilation and differentiation needs result in increased levels of positive and negative self-stereotyping. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82*, 543–562.

Pickett, C. L., Gardner, W. L., & Knowles, M. (2004). Getting a cue: The need to belong and enhanced sensitivity to social cues. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *30*, 1095-1107.

Reid, S. A. & Hogg, M. A. (2005) Uncertainty Reduction, Self-Enhancement, and Ingroup Identification. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 31,* 804-817.

Rosnow, R. L., & Fine, G. A. (1976). *Rumor and gossip: The social psychology of hearsay.* New York: Elsevier.

Rosnow, R. L., & Georgoudi, M. (1985). "Killed by idle gossip': The psychology of small talk. In B. Rubin (Ed.), *When information counts: Grading the media* (pp. 59-73). Lexington, MA: Lexington Books/D.C. Health.

Suls, J., & Wheeler, L. (Eds.) (2000), *Handbook of social comparison: Theory and research*. New York: Kluwer/Plenum.

Schmitt, M. T., & Branscombe, N. R. (2001). The good, the bad, and the manly: Threats to one's prototpyicality and evaluations of fellow in-group members. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 37,* 510-517.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin, *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-47). Monterey, CA: Brooks-Cole.

Turcotte, D. C. & Hogg, M. A (2009). *Gossip and Uncertainty*. Unpublished manuscript, Claremont Graduate University, Claremont, CA.

Turner, J. C., Hogg, M. A., Oakes, P. J., Reicher, S. D., & Wetherell, M. S. (1987). *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory.* Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Turner, M. M., Mazur, M. A, Wendel, N. & Winslow, R. (2003). Relational ruin or social glue? The joint effect of relationship type and gossip valence on liking, trust, and expertise. *Communication Monographs, 70*, 129-141.

van Knippenberg, D., van Knippenberg, B., & Van Dijk, E. (2000). Who takes the lead in risky decision making? Effects of group members' risk preferences and prototypicality. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 83, 213–234.

Wert, S. R., & Salovey, P. (2004). A social comparison account of gossip. *Review of General Psychology , 8*, 122-137.

Wills, T. A. (1981). Downward social comparison principles in social psychology. *Psychological Bulletin , 90*, 245-271.

Wilson, D. S., Wilczynski C., Wells A., and Weiser, L. (2000). Gossip and Other Aspects of Language as Group-Level Adaptations. In C. Heyes (Ed) *Cognition and Evolution, ,* (pp. 347-366). Cambridge: MIT Press.

Appendix

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form ……..…….. 80

Appendix B: Debriefing Statement …….…….……... 81

Appendix C: Measurements (Studies One & Two)…….. 82

Appendix A

You are being asked to participate in a student initiated dissertation research project conducted by Dana Turcotte in the School of Behavioral and Organizational Sciences at Claremont Graduate University (CGU).

THE STUDY: The purpose of this study is to understand communication within groups. You will be asked to complete a 10 minute online survey about you and your sorority, and some of the ways you communicate with each other.

RISKS & BENEFITS: The potential risks associated with this study are agitation or discomfort while completing the survey. The name and phone number of a mental health professional will be provided, should any discomfort persist. There is no benefit to you by participating in this study. We expect this research to benefit the field of psychology by providing information about group behaviors.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: Please understand that participation is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will in no way affect your current or future relationship with CGU or its faculty, students, or staff. You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason, without penalty.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your individual privacy will be maintained in all publications or presentations resulting from this study. Data will be stored on the researcher's computer and will be kept for a maximum of five years. In order to preserve confidentiality your responses to the survey will always be kept separate from any identifying information at all times.

If you have any questions or would like additional information about this research, please contact us at dana.turcotte@cgu.edu, michael.hogg@cgu.edu or (909) 607-3707 at the School of Behavioral & Organizational Sciences Claremont Graduate University 123 East Eighth Street Claremont, CA 91711. The CGU Institutional Review Board, which is administered through the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP), has reviewed this project. You may also contact ORSP at (909) 607-9406 with any questions.

I understand the above information and have had all of my questions about participation on this research project answered. I voluntarily consent to participate in this research.

Initials_____ Date_____

Appendix B

Thank you for your participation!

The purpose of this study is to understand if uncertainty is a factor in the tendency to gossip. Gossip is a bonding activity and a way to establish which behaviors the group finds acceptable. Therefore, those who are high in uncertainty may gossip more as a way to increase group cohesion and reduce uncertainty. This study was designed to test the hypothesis that people who are more uncertain will be more likely to spread negative gossip about other group members.

Although no lasting effects are anticipated, should participation in this study cause you any stress, please contact your school's counseling center or find the nearest mental health professional at http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/databases/

If you have any further questions about this research or the outcome of this study, please feel free to contact Dana Turcotte (dana.turcotte@cgu.edu).

Thank you again for participating!

Appendix C

Measures

Identification and Self-prototypicality

INSTRUCTIONS: Please select number that indicates how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements, with 1 indicating "Disagree" and 9 indicating "Agree."

	Disagree								Agree
1. I identify with the members of my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2. I feel committed to my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3. I like the members of my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4. My sorority is an important part of who I am.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
5. I feel a sense of belonging with my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6. I have a lot of friends in my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
7. When I am with other members of my sorority, I feel like I belong.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8. I am well-liked by the other members of my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
9. I am similar to the other members of my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10. I have a lot in common with the other members of my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
11. I am a typical member of my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
12. I feel accepted by the members of my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
13. Other members of my sorority would say I am a pretty typical member.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
14. Members of other sororities would say I am a typical member of my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
15. I feel like I fit in with the other members of my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
16. I have a lot of friends in my sorority.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Uncertainty

INSTRUCTIONS: Listed below are 8 attributes. For each attribute you will answer two questions. The first question asks you to indicate the extent to which you feel you possess this attribute and the second questions asks you to indicate how uncertain you are of this rating. Please circle the appropriate rating for each attribute.

	To what extent do you feel you **possess** this attribute more than or less than other college students? (1 = LESS, 9 = MORE)	How **uncertain** are you of this rating? (1 = Not Uncertain, 9 = Uncertain)
Shy	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Cautious	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Unpredictable	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Perfectionistic	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Restless	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Skeptical	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Persistent	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
Ordinary	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

INSTRUCTIONS: Please answer the following 5 questions (1 = Not Uncertain, 9 = Uncertain).

	Not Uncertain **Uncertain**
How uncertain do you feel about your place in society as a whole?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
How uncertain do you feel about your place among your circle of friends?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
How uncertain do you feel about your place within your family?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
How uncertain do you feel about your ability to reach your goals?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
How uncertain do you feel about what you want to do with your life/future goals?	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Gossip Scenario

INSTRUCTIONS: Think about a member of your sorority who *is very similar* to the other members of your house and has a lot in common with them. She represents what members of your sorority are like and is different from members of other sororities.

Thinking of that sorority member, imagine you have just learned the following:

That member of your sorority has been sleeping with another member's boyfriend.

Target Prototypicality measure

1. How similar is this sorority member to other members of your house?

Very Different								Very Similar
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Negativity measure

2. How would you rate this information?

Negative								Positive
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Dependent variables

3. How likely is it that you would tell this information to another member of your sorority?

Unlikely								Likely
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

4. How many members of your sorority do you think you would tell? _____

Miscellaneous questions

5. How interesting is this information?

Not Interesting								Interesting
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

6. To what extent do you believe this information?

I don't believe it								I believe it
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

7. Please describe who you would tell, in what setting, and why. *Do not use names*.

_____

Demographics

1. What is your age? _____

2. What is your ethnicity?
    a. Caucasian
    b. Black/African-Amercian
    c. Hispanic
    d. Asian/Pacific Islander
    e. Other/Multi-racial
    f. Decline to respond

3. How long have you been a member of your sorority?
    a. Less than one year
    b. More than one year, less than two years
    c. More than two years, less than three years
    d. More than three years, less than four years
    e. More than four years

4. Do you live in your sorority house?
    a. Yes, I currently live-in
    b. I used to, but no longer do
    c. No, I have never lived in my sorority house

5. How many sorority events do you attend per week? (*include meetings, socials, etc*) _____