

WHISPERED WORDS AND ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS

The Nuanced Perception of Gossipers' Morality and Sociability and Its Effect on Workplace Advice Seeking



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*denotes equal contribution



Abstract

How do observers evaluate gossipers versus non-gossipers? **While they perceive gossipers as less moral, they also perceive gossipers as more social than non-gossipers.** Consequently, observers are less likely to turn to gossipers for advice on morality-related issues, but more likely to do so for sociability-related issues in the workplace.

Overview

Due to a lack of clear conceptualization of gossip in prior literature, **how people evaluate gossipers versus non-gossipers in general** remains largely inconclusive.

By adopting an integrative definition of gossip [1] – controlling for its valence, content, and the formality of its context – we show that:

- Gossipers (vs. non-gossipers) are evaluated **distinctively** across two fundamental personality dimensions – **morality** and **sociability**.
- Gossip is construed as a **means to gain social power** by harming others' reputations [2], thus lowering gossipers' (vs. non-gossipers') perceived morality.
- Gossip is also construed as an **instrument to build social intelligence** to succeed in the workplace [3], thus enhancing gossipers' (vs. non-gossipers') perceived sociability.
- The presence of **incidental moral cues** enhances gossipers' perceived morality, whereas the presence of **incidental social cues** enhances non-gossipers' perceived sociability.
- Observers **seek workplace advice** from gossipers (vs. non-gossipers) **selectively** based on these nuanced evaluations.

[1] Does Cruz, T. D., Nieper, A. S., Testori, M., Martinescu, E., & Beersma, B. (2021). An integrative definition and framework to study gossip. *Group & Organization Management*, 46(2), 252–285. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601121992887>

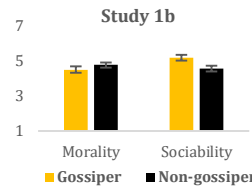
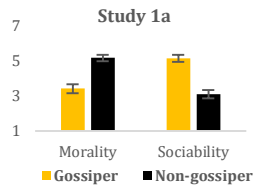
[2] Does Cruz, T. D., van der Lee, R., Bechtoldt, M. N., & Beersma, B. (2023). Naïve and noble notes: Interdependence structures drive self-serving gossip. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672231171054>

[3] McAndrew, F. T. (2019). Gossip as a social skill. In F. Giardini & R. P. M. Wittek (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of gossip and reputation* (pp. 173–192). New York, USA: Oxford University. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190494087.001.0001>

Studies 1a & 1b

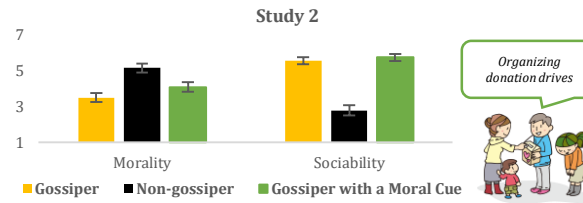
Study 1a: N=299
Gossiper: chit-chat about others
Non-gossiper: not chit-chat about others

Study 1b: N=301
Gossiper: chit-chats about others
Non-gossiper: work-related topics

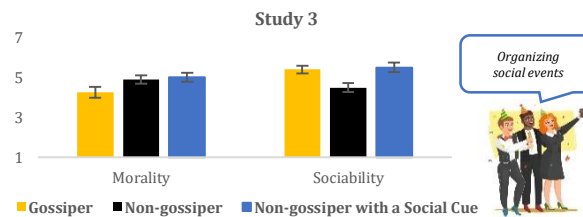


Studies 2 & 3

Study 2: N=303 (chit-chat about others vs. not chit-chat about others)
Study 3: N=300 (chit-chat about others vs. work-related topics)



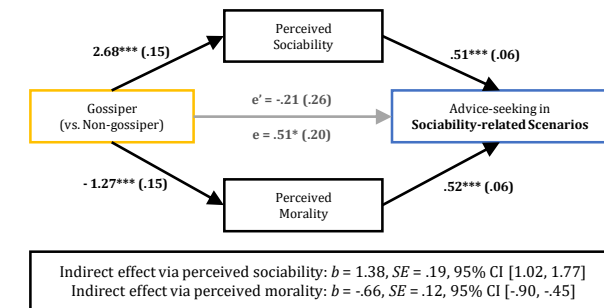
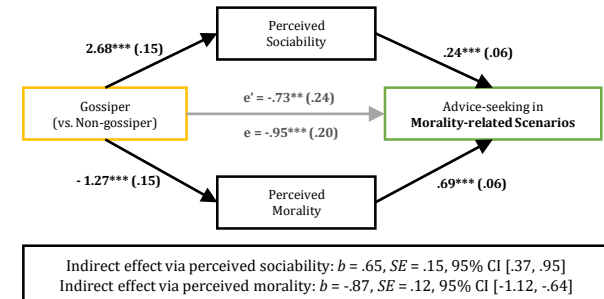
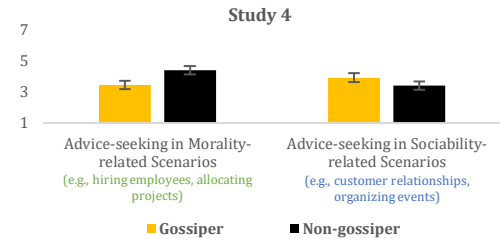
Incidental moral cues enhance gossipers' perceived morality



Incidental social cues enhance non-gossipers' perceived sociability

Study 4

Study 4: N=302 (chit-chat about others vs. not chit-chat about others)
2 (agent) x 2 (scenario; within-subjects) mixed design



Error bars in graphs depict 95% confidence intervals
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (standard errors are in parentheses)

All preregistrations, study materials and datasets: https://osf.io/4byr6/?view_only=7c4b2615efc040c088e9a0b53991c22d