ABSTRACT

Title of Document:	GROUP NORMS AND INTIMACY AMONG BEST FRIENDS: A NORMATIVE CROSS-SECTIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL STUDY
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The focus of the current dissertation was on 1) the prevalence and nature of observed gossip behavior in the friendships of children in grades five and six, and 2) the associations of observed gossip behavior and perceptions of friendship quality. Scholars have argued that gossip is a *normal* part of communicative development and it also has been linked to perceptions of close and positive friendship (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986).

The findings of the current dissertation indicated that gossip was prominent in children's conversations with their best friends, and that different forms of gossip behavior were evident. Results also confirmed the association of gossip and perceptions of friendship quality (Parker & Gottman, 1989; Sullivan, 1953), and that these relations were stronger for girls than for boys (Foster, 2004; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Leaper &

Holliday, 1995). In addition, these relations varied depending on other contextual factors, such as whom the gossip was about.

Generally, gossip functioned in two apparently contradictory ways for the friendships of girls. On the one hand, gossip was associated with positive aspects of friendship quality. On the other hand, gossip was also associated with negative aspects of friendship quality, such as conflict. Perhaps gossip was more important for the friendships of girls due to the motivations and importance of friendships for girls. In other words, girls are argued to focus their relationship efforts on building close dyadic relationships that involve high levels of disclosure and conversation whereas boys are argued to engaged in more activities that do not require as much disclosure or conversation (e.g., sports, video games; Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Leaper & Smith, 2004; Schneider & Tessier, 2007). Moreover, it may be that conflict resulted from greater engagement and higher frequencies of interaction within the friendship and thus may not necessarily indicate relationship difficulties. The results of the current dissertation highlighted the complexity of the ways in which gossip and perceptions of friendship quality were inter-related in the friendships of children, as well as provided direction for further investigations of the general functions of gossip.

GROUP NORMS AND INTIMACY AMONG BEST FRIENDS: A NORMATIVE
CROSS-SECTIONAL DEVELOPMENTAL STUDY

By

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Generally, gossip refers to any talk about a third party person or persons regardless of tone (Foster, 2004), and it is widely prevalent in conversations (e.g., Elmer, 1994; McDonald et al., 2007). Perhaps surprisingly, there has been little research on the topic of gossip, especially with a focus on youth (for a recent review, see McDonald et al., 2007). Scholars have noted that gossip is a normal part of communicative development and is often found within the confines of friendships due to its private and sensitive nature (Banny, Heilbron, Ames, & Prinstein, 2011). Within dyads or small groups, it is used to establish similarities between group members and to allow individuals to share personal information about non-group members in order to build intimacy and solidarity between friends (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986).

Given these notions, the *overall goal* of the current study was to examine the quality of gossip behavior in the friendships of youth in late childhood and early adolescence; there were two primary goals and several secondary goals. The *first primary goal* was to examine the prevalence and *quality* of gossip behavior during conversational interchanges between best friends. More specifically, I examined the extent to which gossip among friends was positive, negative, or neutral, and whether responses to gossip were encouraging or not. Two secondary goals with regard to the quality of gossip in children's friendships were to test for gender-related differences between boys and girls, and age-related differences between children in grade five versus grade six. Another *primary goal* of the current study was to examine the relation

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between quality of gossip behavior and perceptions of friendship quality, with special considerations for possible gender- and/or age-related differences (*secondary goals*).

Theoretical Rationale

In middle childhood, children spend much of their time together hanging out and talking with each other (Zarbatany, Hartman, & Rankin, 1990). Four researchers on social development were particularly relevant for the current dissertation: Parker and Gottman (1989), Selman (1980), and Sullivan (1953). These scholars have suggested that the periods of middle childhood and early adolescence are marked by heightened concerns with peer group norms; the establishment of in- versus out-group distinctions; and concerns about friendship intimacy, trust, and validation. And through these concerns, gossip becomes a part of everyday communication among friends, especially best friends. For example, Parker and Gottman (1989) speculated that children in middle childhood place importance on being accepted by peer groups, and adolescents place importance on understanding the self in relation to others (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). However, during both developmental periods, gossip with friends was speculated to be associated with high levels of closeness or positive friendship quality between friends (Parker & Gottman, 1989).

Similarly, Selman (1980) proposed that with age, children begin to understand the importance of intimacy, acceptance, and trust in friendships, and these conceptions become dependent on reciprocity, positive reinforcement, and validation. Like both Parker and Gottman (1989) and Selman, Sullivan (1953) proposed that friendships developmentally become more intimate over time; for example, the friendships of children were speculated to be less intimate than the friendships of adolescents. Sullivan

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argued that starting in preadolescence, youth begin to value intimacy, trust, and validation of personal worth in in their dyadic same-sex friendships. More specifically, these "chumships" were proposed to be contexts within which children could disclose personal thoughts and opinions with their friends, and within the confines of friendships, friends could help each other with problems, validate each other's opinions and attitudes, and trust each other that their opinions and attitudes were safe from the ears of other peers and persons. In each of these theories, disclosing personal thoughts was speculated to be associated with high, positive friendship quality.

Importantly, these scholars concurred that friendships in middle childhood and beyond are high in intimacy and trust, and as such, disclosing personal opinions and attitudes about objects, persons, and experiences were theorized to occur at high rates (Parker & Gottman, 1989; Selman, 1980; Sullivan, 1953), and that these opinions and attitudes could be positive and/or negative. Thus, gossip, for example, may take many *forms and affective qualities*, such as positive, negative, and neutral/non-evaluative (e.g., Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; McDonald et al., 2007). Scholars referred to negative gossip as evaluations that were derogatory, blaming, or negative in manner; positive gossip as evaluations that were complimentary, praising, or positive in manner; and neutral gossip as statements that were non-evaluative or non-judgmental in manner.

Of the four aforementioned theoretical scholars, Parker and Gottman (1989) were the only ones who specifically discussed the relation between different forms of gossip and social development. Parker and Gottman believed that the social goals of children in middle childhood comprised peer acceptance and friendship intimacy. Through these goals, the communicative processes among friends comprised high levels of social

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support and reciprocated *negative* evaluative gossip. These qualities of gossip behavior not only were argued to build intimacy within friendships but were also argued to allow children to learn the social norms of behaviors for their peer group. In contrast, Parker and Gottman believed that the social goals of adolescence included identity formation, such as the development of personal attitudes, values, and opinions. Through these processes, discussions of attitudes, values, and opinions would become increasingly evident; many of these discussions were believed to include gossip, or evaluations about other people.

Developmentally, Gottman and Mettetal (1986) argued that negative gossip should be more prevalent than positive gossip in the friendships of youth in middle childhood, due to a large emphasis on being accepted by the peer group and learning social norms. While negative gossip was argued to still have a presence in adolescent conversation for similar reasons as in childhood, positive gossip was argued to become increasingly prevalent. Gottman and Mettetal (1986) speculated positive gossip might be more prevalent at this age than earlier ages due to an increased interest in romantic relationships. Thus one secondary goal of the current study was to address possible age-related differences in the nature of children's gossip for children in fifth and sixth grade.

In addition to age-related differences, many scholars have speculated that girls gossip more often than boys. Yet, little *empirical* research has actually supported this claim (Banny et al., 2011; Dunbar, 1994; Eckert, 1990; Foster, 2004; Haviland, 1977; Levin & Arluke, 1985; Nevo, Nevo, & Derech-Zehavi, 1993; Wilkinson, 1988). While some researchers have found that females used more negative gossip than males, and, in general, were more likely to gossip about personal relationships than are boys (Leaper &

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Holliday, 1995), few researchers have focused on the late childhood and early adolescence period. Most work on children and adolescents has focused exclusively on the friendships of girls (e.g., McDonald et al., 2007), has focused only on the negative aspect of gossip (via relational aggression) of boys and girls (e.g., Banny et al., 2011), or has focused on boys and girls in early childhood (e.g., Wilkinson, 1988). In line with these notions, an additional secondary goal of the study was to address possible gender-related differences in the nature of children's gossip for children in mid-to-late childhood.

The quality of the *responses to gossip* can also vary from encouraging to discouraging. Theoretically and developmentally, it has been proposed that gossip behavior increases with age, especially positively reinforced gossip, and moreover, aspects of mutuality, reciprocity, and validation of personal worth become more important with age (Parker & Gottman, 1989; Selman, 1980; Sullivan, 1953). Responding with negative reinforcement or no reinforcement, such as being unresponsive or discouraging would demonstrate the *lack* of validation, which could lead to rejection within peer interactions (Foster, 2004; Parker & Seal, 1996). In addition, general consensus has suggested that gossip may be more related to "girl culture" than "boy culture," and thus mutual engagement in gossip behavior would be more evident in the friendships of girls than boys (e.g., Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; McDonald et al., 2007). Thus, the last secondary goal with regard to the qualities of gossip behavior was to address responses to gossip generally, and then to examine age- and gender-related differences.

Scholars also have also argued that gossip is important for *friendship formation, maintenance, and quality.* For example, Gottman and Mettetal (1986) found that in

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dyads of 11-to-12 year-old female children and 16-to-17 year-old female adolescents,

strangers who bonded or 'hit it off' were more likely to use negative gossip than strangers

who did not hit it off; strangers who did hit it off used more positive gossip than strangers

who did not hit it off, though these results were only found for dyads of 16-to-17 year old

girls and not 11-to-12 year old girls. McDonald and colleagues (2007) found that among

girls in the fourth grade, observed gossip was related to observed positive friendship

quality. And among adolescents, observed negative gossip among best friends was found

to be associated with increases in perceptions of positive friendship quality over time

(Banny et al., 2011).

However, the negative repercussions of gossip may also be evident: negative

gossip among close or best friends was associated with increases in the negative

dimensions of friendship quality, such as criticism, dominance, and conflict (Banny et al.,

2011). Banny and colleagues speculated that negative gossip could be seen as a form of

relational aggression, which has been linked to negative friendship quality. Still, little

work on this topic has been focused on boys (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). Moreover,

little work has focused on negative dimensions of friendship quality; of that which does

exist, researchers have claimed that observed negative gossip was associated with

negative dimensions of perceived friendship quality for both boys and girls (Banny et al.,

2011).

Additionally, scholars have also argued that close friends rely on each other for

mutuality and reciprocity in communication. These processes may be significantly tied

to perceptions of intimacy and high positive friendship quality. Perhaps then, gossip,

especially when encouraged or positively reinforced, would be positively associated with

high quality friendships (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986) and inversely associated with negative friendship quality (Banny et al., 2011). Consequently, a *second primary goal* of the current study was to examine the relation between qualities of gossip behavior and how close children felt that their friendships were, with a focus on *both* positive and negative features of friendship quality. Secondary goals were to address age-related and gender-related differences in the associations between gossip behavior and perceptions of friendship quality.

Research Hypotheses

Researchers have noted that the qualities of gossip was both theoretically and empirically associated with friendships and peer relationships of youth and the aim of the current dissertation was to confirm these associations as well as add to the literature by testing associations that have not yet been addressed in the literature.

Hypotheses part I: Prevalence and qualities of gossip initiation and response.

Hypotheses 1.a. Qualities of gossip initiations.

It was expected that gossip would be prominent in the friendships of youth (Banny et al., 2011; McDonald et al., 2007; Parker & Gottman, 1986). Furthermore, researchers have claimed that the quality of the *initiations* of gossip may vary during this developmental period, and it was expected that neutral, positive, and negative gossip would be evident, and that the proportions of neutral, positive, and negative gossip would differ (McDonald et al., 2007; Parker & Gottman, 1986).

Hypotheses 1.b. Qualities of gossip responses.

Scholars have also noted that the *quality of the responses* to gossip were just as important as the initiations of gossip (Parker & Gottman, 1986; Selman, 1983; Sullivan,

1953). Individuals could either positively reinforce gossip or not. It has been suggested

that encouraging gossip or positively reinforcing others' gossip behavior would give a

positive impression of gossip in communication. Given that gossip was speculated to be

a salient aspect of late childhood and early adolescent interaction, it was expected that

responses to gossip would predominately take the form of encouragement or positive

reinforcement.

Hypotheses 1.c. Gender differences.

In the literature, there was little support for the notion that girls gossiped more

than boys, despite claims that such differences existed. Girls have been argued to gossip

more about familiar others, such as family and friends, whereas boys have been argued to

gossip more about unfamiliar individuals (Levin & Arluke, 1985), yet this work has

focused on older adolescents and young adults. Wilkinson (1988) countered this

argument and found that, among children in grade four, boys and girls gossiped about

family equally, but that girls gossiped more about celebrities. Despite inconsistent claims

in the literature, it was expected that gender differences would emerge with regard to the

target of the gossip (friends, family, and others), the valence of gossip (positive, negative,

neutral), and the responses to gossip (encouraging, not encouraging), all in favor of girls

engaging in gossip behavior more than boys.

Hypotheses 1.d. Age differences.

 In addition to gender differences, researchers have argued for developmental

differences in the nature and prevalence of gossip (e.g., Parker & Gottman, 1989). Given

these developmental speculations, another focus of the current study was to examine

potential age differences in gossip behavior among children in grades five and six, and it

was expected that age differences may emerge with older children gossiping more than younger children.

Hypotheses part II: The association of gossip quality and perceived friendship quality.

Hypotheses 2.a. Qualities of gossip and friendship quality.

Researchers have reported that gossip, in general, was associated with feelings of closeness between friends and thus was also positively associated with positive perceptions of friendship quality (McDonald et al., 2007; Parker & Gottman, 1986). It was hypothesized that all qualities of gossip would be associated with positive friendship quality (McDonald et al., 2007; Parker & Gottman, 1986). Given recent findings, it was also expected that negative gossip, specifically, would be associated with negative dimensions of friendship quality, such as conflict (Banny et al., 2011). The associations of positive and neutral gossip with friendship quality were also explored in the current study. However, they were not expected to be associated with negative dimensions of friendship quality.

Certain responses to gossip were expected to be associated with friendship quality (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Parker & Gottman, 1986). It was expected that encouraging responses to gossip would be associated with positive friendship quality and inversely associated with negative friendship quality. Furthermore, the interaction of initiation and response in predicting perceptions of friendship quality were also explored, although no hypotheses were offered.

Hypotheses 2.b. Gender and age differences.

As with examining the nature and prevalence of gossip as a function of gender and age, other aims of the current study were to examine gender and age differences in the associations between gossip and friendship quality. Positive and neutral gossip have been linked to positive friendship quality for girls (McDonald et al., 2007), and the use of negative gossip has been associated with both positive and negative perceptions of friendship quality for girls *and* boys (e.g., Banny et al., 2011). Researchers have also suggested that girls place more *importance* on friendships, intimate disclosure, and communication, in general, compared to boys. As a result, gossip behavior was expected to be more related to how girls felt about their friendships than to how boys felt about their friendships. In addition, given the notion of developmental issues, it was also expected that the gossip behavior of older children would be more strongly related to friendship quality than the gossip behavior of younger children.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Definitions

Gossip.

The origin of the term "gossip" dates back to Old English. During this time, it was a contraction of the phrase "god sib," which meant god-parent (Fine & Rosnow, 1978; Rosnow, 2001; Rysman, 1977). In the present day, gossip has been referred to as talk about a third party person, or someone who is not present (for a review, see Foster, 2004). It has usually been associated with malicious intent via negative evaluations (Banny et al., 2011; Eggins & Slade, 1997; Foster, 2004), and has often been ascribed as a sex-stereotyped behavior in favor of females (Foster, 2004; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Grotpeter & Crick, 1996).

While gossip has undertaken a negative connotation, historically as well as contemporaneously, some scholars have suggested that the quality of gossip should not be limited to negative evaluations, but should include *any* speech about a third party person (Dunbar, 2004; Eder & Enke, 1991; Foster, 2004; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Kuttler, Parker, & La Greca, 2002; Levin & Arluke, 1985). Others have suggested that the quality of gossip should only refer to negative evaluations (e.g., Banny et al., 2011), and still others have suggested that the quality of gossip should also include positive or neutral evaluations (e.g., McDonald et al., 2007). Researchers have stated that neutral gossip refers to general, non-evaluative descriptions or accounts of people (e.g., "Jane is blonde and blue-eyed") (Bergmann, 1993; Besnier, 1989; Eggins & Slade, 1997; Hannerz, 1967; Tannen, 1990). Positive gossip refers to evaluative statements that denoted respect or admiration (e.g., "I really like Jane, she is smart and pretty"), and

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negative gossip refers to evaluative statements that denoted disgust or dislike (e.g., "I really detest Jane, she thinks she so great and better than everyone else") (Baumeister, Zhang, & Vohs, 2004; Jaworski & Couplan, 2005; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Sabini & Silver, 1978; Rosnow, 2001). Elias and Scotson (1965) distinguished between positive and negative gossip by phrasing them "praise gossip" and "blame gossip", respectively. And Westen (1996) distinguished between "complimentary gossip" and "derogatory gossip", respectively.

Importantly, Rosnow (2001) argued that the quality of gossip could influence others' behaviors, opinions, and values. For example, Burt and Knex (1995) argued that positive and negative gossip influenced people's opinions of others in the workplace. It could ruin reputations and careers when negative, but also could enhance them when positive (Westen, 1996). Similarly, among youth, gossip could be used to convey the acceptability or unacceptability of certain social behaviors performed by peers or others (Gottman & Parker, 1989). Gossip has also been argued to be influential for people's friendships, in both positive and negative ways (Banny et al., 2011; McDonald et al., 2007). Thus, for the purposes of the current dissertation, gossip was defined as any statement about a third party person or group. Gossip quality was further identified as positive, negative, or neutral, using the classifications discussed above.

Prevalence and functions of the qualities of gossip.

Scholars have avowed that gossip is a form of communication that spans across the globe as well as throughout history (for a review, see Dunbar, 2004; Foster, 2004). Although many have suggested that gossip is widely prevalent in the conversations of people, and more common between friends than non-friends (e.g., Banny et al., 2011;

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Simpkins & Parke, 2001), research on gossip has been fairly scant (Foster, 2004), especially in the child and adolescent literature (for a recent review, see McDonald et al., 2007). In a review, Foster (2004), a social psychologist, concluded that research on gossip was rare in journals and textbooks. For example, Foster entered the term "gossip" into PsycINFO, ERIC, and JSTROR databases and found that fewer than 30 articles were published between 1971 and 1980, approximately 50 articles were published between 1981 and 1990, and approximately 100 articles were published between 1991 and 2000. When I did a similar search for peer-reviewed articles published between 2001 and 2010 in PsycINFO, I found 221 articles that used the term "gossip", with only 40 devoted to school-aged children and adolescents.

Of the existing research, it has been found that 66-70% of conversation was devoted to talk about a third party, regardless of tone (Dunbar, Marriott, & Duncan, 1997; Elmer, 1994). In studies of college students, the prevalence of gossip also varied depending on the valence of gossip. For example, in descriptive studies of college-aged youth, Levin and Arluke (1985) found that when they made distinctions between positive, negative, and neutral gossip quality, 27% of gossip episodes were positive, 25% were negative, and the remaining were neutral or mixed. In another study, Leaper and Holliday (1995) found that college students were more likely to use negative gossip than positive gossip when gossiping about familiar others, and that college students were also more likely to encourage gossip than to discourage gossip.

Little support exists for the myth that females generally gossip more than males (Banny et al., 2011; 1994; Eckert, 1990; Foster, 2004; Haviland, 1977; Levin & Arluke, 1985; Nevo, Nevo, & Derech-Zehavi, 1993; Wilkinson, 1988). And when such

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differences did emerge, the differences between the genders were small (Foster, 2004).

For example, Leaper and Holliday (1995) found that college-aged females were more

negative in their gossip than males, and they were also more likely to respond to gossip in

an encouraging manner. Other scholars have found that college-aged females were more

likely to gossip about familiar individuals and the social relationships of those

individuals, whereas males were more likely to gossip about sports figures or public

figures (Levin & Arluke, 1985). Additionally, researchers have found little evidence of

gender differences among youth. Some scholars have noted that girls used more

evaluative gossip than boys, though most qualities of gossip were neutral (Wilkinson,

1988). And other researchers have found no gender differences in negative gossip

(Banny et al., 2011).

Developmentally, scholars have suggested that the prevalence and qualities of

gossip varied depending on age (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). First, scholars have

theorized that gossip is a normal part of development and it is used to establish

similarities between others and also is used as a context for which personal information is

shared (e.g., Banny et al., 2011). During early childhood, ages 3-to-7, the goal of peer

interaction has been argued to revolve around coordinated play, where children engage in

predominately social and pretend play and are fun and resourceful playmates (Parker &

Gottman, 1989). In middle childhood, ages 8-to-12, the goal of peer interaction has been

argued to involve issues pertaining to inclusion in larger same-sex peer groups. Children

would spend much of their time together playing sports, hanging out, and talking with

one another (Zarbatany, Hartman, & Rankin, 1990). During this developmental period,

one of the most salient social processed was speculated to be gossip, particularly in its

negative form (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). Gossip has been argued to occur at high rates during this time due to children's increased concerns with norms of the peer group, and in understanding what behaviors conform to the social norms of a peer group. For children who want to be accepted and not rejected, this knowledge could influence them to behave in accord with the norms of the peer group. In adolescence, ages 13-to-17, one of the most salient social processes include self-disclosure, gossip (in both positive and negative forms), exploration of similarities and differences between themselves and others, and problem solving. Moreover, positive gossip was speculated to be more prevalent in the discussions of adolescents than of children in middle childhood (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). Gottman and Mettetal proposed that the increased prevalence of positive gossip was due to an increased interest in romantic relationships: for example, girls could often be found discussing which boys they like.

Researchers have also found support for an increase in the prevalence of gossip with age (Mettetal, 1982). For example, Wilkinson (1988) found that fourth graders gossiped more than kindergarten children, and that girls from kindergarten to fourth grade used more evaluative gossip than boys, though most gossip in general was neutral in valence. Given the developmental notions and findings that gossip was highly prevalent during middle childhood to early adolescence, the focus of this dissertation was on the periods of late childhood or early adolescence (grades five and six).

While the prevalence of gossip is important to note, another factor that would be necessary to understand is the *function* of gossip. Foster (2004) argued that gossip serves four major social functions: information, entertainment, friendship or intimacy, and influence. Gossiping for *information* purposes referred to using gossip to gather and

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disseminate information about others, which was then used to help people understand their social environments (Hannerz, 1967), and could be used to influence social status (Baumeister et al., 2004). Gossiping for *entertainment* purposes referred to using gossip to aid in storytelling and narratives (Foster, 2004). For example, a person could tell a story about something that happened to them or someone that they know. During these accounts, they might describe the progression of events and who was involved in such events.

Gossiping for *intimacy* purposes referred to using gossip to achieve high quality friendships or social support within friendships (Foster, 2004). In the form of disclosure, gossip was argued to be related to increased intimacy and feelings of trust (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977; Foster, 2004; Hannerz, 1967). For example, because friends were more likely to feel close or intimate with each other and were also more likely to trust that the content of the gossip would not spread to others outside of the dyad, gossip was more likely to happen. If gossip also involved disclosure, gossip could be a context to provide help and guidance to friends, as well as express validation, care, and support for a friend's well-being. Likewise, gossip could also be used to build exclusivity between in-groups and out-groups. For example, it could be used to exclude or ostracize others from friendship (Banny et al., 2011; Dunbar, 2004; Eckert, 1990; Noon & Delbridge, 1993). While it is important to acknowledge the possible causal relations of gossip and intimacy within friendships, it should be noted that these relations were not addressed in the current dissertation, since the present study was cross-sectional.

Lastly, gossiping for *influence* purposes referred to using gossip to establish social boundaries and group norms that people must follow in order to continue their

membership in a certain in-group (Foster, 2004). In maintaining in-group norms of behavior, negative gossip could be particularly useful. For example, negative gossip promoted a strong disapproval of the target of gossip (Baumeister, Zhang, & Vohs, 2004). These biased opinions could then be used to control others and their opinions (Eckert, 1990; Foster, 2004; Leaper & Holliday, 1995; Wert & Salovey, 2004).

Beyond Foster's (2004) functions of gossip, which were more from a social psychology perspective rather than a developmental social psychology perspective, Gottman and Mettetal (1986) theorized that the functions of gossip vary as a function of developmental periods. During early childhood, Gottman and Mettetal argued that gossip has a "we against them" quality, and that gossip could be used to build camaraderie between in-group members. During middle childhood, the "we against them" quality was believed to still be pertinent, however, gossip was then argued to be more related to learning the norms of the desired in-group in order to gain acceptance by that particular group. Gottman and Mettetal proposed that children engaged in predominately negative gossip during this age period. In other words, children considered negative gossip as "the thing to do" during middle childhood. For example, these scholars found that unacquainted girls were more likely to become friends if they gossiped than if they did not (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). Moreover, Parker and Seal (1996) found that children accepted by their peers were those who were centrally located within the social network and were likely to know and spread gossip about others.

Asher and colleagues (1996) also proposed that trust in friendships, such as keeping promises, keeping secrets, and sticking up for one another, were important aspects of friendships during middle childhood. Scholars also have argued that gossip

within friendships was a way to use socially comparative speech in a safe, trusting environment, which protects them from possible "embarrassment or confrontation" in interactions or relationships with others outside of the friendship (Foster, 2004; Wert & Salovey, 2004). Banny and colleagues (2011) found that these actions and values signified trust between the gossiper and the recipient or listener of the gossip. Some researchers have also considered gossip to be a precursor for intimate self-disclosure. In fact, Parker and Gottman (1989) argued that in late childhood and adolescence, intimacy was fostered through gossip, humor, and disclosure. But as previously noted, these causal relations were not addressed in the current study.

In contrast to the above positive functions of gossip within friendships, previous findings also have suggested that the use of gossip was related to maladjustment and/or friendship difficulties (Crick, 1997; McDonald et al., 2007). For example, gossip has often been defined by scholars as a component of relationally aggressive behavior. Much of the extant research on relational aggression, which included *negative* gossip or rumor spreading, has considered relational aggression as a salient aspect of middle childhood and early adolescence (Bjorkqvist et al., 1992), as a more female-oriented behavior (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996), and as a behavior that is highly associated with rejection by peers (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Grotpeter & Crick, 1996; Kuttler, Parker, & La Greca, 2002). Negative gossip, for example, could be used to bully, manipulate, exclude, and negatively influence others, even friends. While Parker and Seal (1996) suggested that knowing gossip information about other peers might make someone appear to be an attractive friendship partner, they also found that those who had reputations as frequent gossipers had relatively unstable friendships.

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Aggression, regardless of whether it was relational or physical, has been found to be associated with peer dislike or sociometric-rejection (Brendgen et al., 2000; Coie & Kupersmidt, 1983; Rose, Swenson, & Carlson, 2004; Menzer et al., 2010; Turner, Mazur, Wendel, & Winslow, 2003). Buhs and colleagues (2006) have reported that aggression was positively associated with *both* victimization and exclusion during early-to-middle childhood. Other researchers, using different methods, have found positive relations between aggression and victimization (Gazelle & Ladd, 2003). Furthermore, relational aggression was also associated with perceived popularity (Bowker et al., 2010; Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Grotpeter & Crick, 1996; McDonald et al., 2007), providing a possible link between gossip and perceived popularity.

Yet, while negative or relationally aggressive gossip has been found to be associated with peer dislike, several scholars have also noted the positive relation of negative gossip to perceptions or observations of positive quality friendships (Banny et al., 2011; McDonald et al., 2007), and also conflict, dominance, and criticism (Banny et al., 2011). Less work has focused on positive gossip quality and its relation to various forms of friendship quality. The current dissertation aimed to address this relation through the examination of positive, negative, and neutral gossip qualities and relation between each type of quality with both positive and negative aspects of friendship quality.

Friendship.

Hinde (1987) described interpersonal relationships as a series of past and future expected interpersonal interactions; examples of these relationships might be friendships or parent-child relationships. During childhood, friendships are one of the most salient

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interpersonal, non-familial relationships that children engage in (Rubin et al., 2006). Scholars have noted that friends are defined as relationships that are reciprocated or mutual, voluntary, and intimate or close (Hinde, 1987; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). These scholars have argued that friendships are fluid in that children are able to initiate, maintain, and relinquish friendships that meet (or fail to meet) their expectations and/or needs due to their *voluntary* participation in the friendship.

Importantly, being friendless or rejected by peers has been argued to be harmful for children's psychological and social adjustment. Parker and Asher (1993) found that friendless children felt lonelier than children with at least one friend. Malcolm and colleagues (2006) found that friendless children were also more likely to be rejected and victimized by peers than were children who had friends or were accepted by their peers.

Developmental Models of Friendship

Parker and Gottman's model of social development.

Parker and Gottman (1989) speculated that children have different social goals and processes during early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence. During middle childhood, in contrast to other periods, children were argued to be more interested in belonging to a peer group, and thus the interactions that they had with friends would be dominated with social support and negative evaluative gossip. Specifically, these interchanges with friends were argued to help children learn group social norms and also learn ways to decrease the likelihood of being rejected by peers. Adolescence, on the other hand, was argued to be a time of self-exploration and identity development. Self-disclosure, positive and negative qualities of gossip, problem solving, and socially

comparative discussions regarding similarities and differences between friends or

between others were speculated to be particularly salient (Parker & Gottman, 1989).

Importantly, Parker and Gottman (1989) have argued that gossip during late

childhood and early adolescence gives youth the opportunity to self-disclose their

thoughts and feelings about other people, which in turn could foster intimacy and display

trust within the friendship. In addition, scholars have suggested that gossip allows youth

to freely compare and contrast themselves with others without the risk of embarrassment.

For example, Parker and Gottman proposed that information gathered through gossip

may inform how others might feel about a same person or situation, which provides

opportunities for youth to learn and understand socially acceptable and unacceptable

behaviors.

Selman's developmental model of friendship conceptions.

Another influential theory with regard to the importance of social relationships

and the development of such relationships emerged from the writings of Selman (1980).

Selman created a developmental model of how children's conceptions of social

relationships change as they age. During Stage 0, friendship referred only to playmates.

Qualities that could draw friends or playmates together included physical or functional

similarities, such as playing with the same thing, having the same hair color, being of the

same sex, and so on. In Stage 1, children are theorized to regard friendships as more

important than they did in Stage 0. Children were argued to begin to understand that

close friendships could take the form of "one-way" assistance: a child may think of a

friend as someone who helped them perform or complete tasks, and paid attention to their

likes and dislikes (Selman, 1980). However, Selman purported that children do not

understand the importance of reciprocity in helping, paying attention to the other's likes and dislikes, and trusting each other. Children were also speculated to be able to cognize that their motives, thoughts, and feelings might not match those of others. Selman (1980) argued that closeness and intimacy during this stage moved beyond Stage 0, to include similarity in interests and trust in the friend's motives and intentions.

In Stage 2, children were proposed to believe that people were social beings who need others and also need to be liked and accepted (Selman, 1980). It was understood that making friends required some similarity in likes and dislikes, but that friends did not have to match each other's likes and dislikes. Selman noted that children were also able to understand others' perspectives during this stage. Selman also argued that intimacy, sharing, and trust became more common and also positively reinforced. For example, children engaged in sharing intimate secrets, gossiping with each other about others, and trusting that their friend would not share these pieces of information with others outside of their relationship.

According to Selman (1980), Stage 3 marked a change in friendship intimacy. Close friendships were argued to become much more intimate, and friends became much more collaborative and cooperative with each other in terms of mutual sharing and interest and positive reinforcement or validation of each other. Commitment became a key component during this Stage. In the last stage, Stage 4, it was argued that children believed that close friendships comprised "autonomous interdependence." Young adolescents were able to understand that people could have different types of relationships for different needs. Thus, while children were committed to their

friendships, friendships were seen as fluid, that they could change and grow, as well as form and dissolve based on the needs of the children involved.

Sullivan's theory of interpersonal relationships.

Another theory that described a developmental model of friendships and peer relationships was Sullivan's (1953) theory of interpersonal relationships. In early childhood, Sullivan argued that friendships were based on the amount of fun children had with their playmates. These notions were similar to the early stages of Selman's (1983) model and Parker and Gottman's (1989) model. However, during the juvenile period (approximately ages 7-to-9), group membership and a sense of belonging became important concerns for children. In other words, rejection by a child's own peer group could account for feelings of loneliness and anxiety.

Following the juvenile period, preadolescents were expected to experience a drastic change in the focus of their interpersonal relationships (Sullivan, 1953). While children in the previous period emphasized the importance of belonging to a peer group, Sullivan argued that preadolescents begin to stress the importance of developing strong dyadic relationships with select same-sex peers. Sullivan identified these types of friendships as "chumships" or close, intimate, and reciprocated peer relationships. As children progress through adolescence, Sullivan argued that the importance of, and need for intimacy with friends increase with age; these notions were shared by Selman (1983) and also Parker and Gottman (1989).

Sullivan (1953) referred to intimacy in these contexts as validation of personal worth, which was derived from maturation and experience. Terming this intimacy as "collaboration," Sullivan argued that the goal of collaboration was to support one another

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and to alleviate anxiety. Having chumships was argued to create an environment wherein friends supported each other and felt secure with each other. A heightened sense of security was an optimal condition in allowing children to disclose their personal thoughts and feelings with someone that they trusted. For example, children might be more open to discuss with their friends how they felt about themselves and about others outside of their dyadic friendship (Leaper & Holliday, 1995). Importantly, Sullivan's theory of interpersonal relationships offered the conjecture that closeness and intimacy within a positive relationship could buffer preadolescents from maladjustment.

Many researchers have found empirical support for the aforementioned theoretical propositions (e.g., Furman & Buhrmester, 1992; Hartup, 1993). For example, in terms of intimacy, Furman and Buhrmester found that the parents of fourth grade children were a main source of social support, whereas the friends of seventh and tenth grade children became the main source of social support, especially in the context of intimacy and self-disclosure. Newcomb and Bagwell (1995) found, in their meta-analysis of research on children's friendships, that self-disclosure, loyalty, and commitment became increasingly important as children entered adolescence, and that the importance ascribed to these values remained elevated during adolescence and beyond (e.g., Bigelow & LaGaipa, 1975; Hartup, 1993). These conjectures were in line with findings that children who were consistently involved in a friendship over time (either with the same friend or replacing old friends with new friends) were similarly rated as prosocial, popular, and not victimized, whereas those who lost friends or were chronically friendless became more victimized over time (Wojslawowicz et al., 2006).

Measurement of Friendship and Peer Relationships

Assessing the existence of a friendship.

Many researchers have argued that a major issue in the operational definition of friendship involved how children are asked to identify their friends (Berndt & McCandless, 2009; Bukowski & Hoza, 1989; Furman, 1996; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995; Rubin, Bukowski et al., 2006). Some have asked children to nominate only their three closest friends; others have asked children to nominate between six and ten nominations; and others have given children the option to nominate limitless numbers of friends (for a recent review, see Berndt & McCandless, 2009). Some researchers have argued that limiting nominations could lead to errors (Furman, 1996). For example, with unlimited nominations, children might nominate friends who were not best friends. On the other hand, limiting nominations to only a couple of friends could lead to an inappropriate exclusion of actual friendships (see Berndt & McCandless, 2009, for a relevant discussion). It was also possible that children nominated those who they wished could be their friends rather than with whom they were actually friends, which could lead to additional errors in the measurement of friendship.

When assessing friendships, scholars have noted that distinctions between best friends, good friends, and acquaintances were also important (Banny et al., 2011). In the case of the former, there could be one, or two at most, children who mutually nominated each other as best friends. Many researchers who have focused on reciprocal best friendships have used the top two nominations for best friendships, in the case that one nomination was of a nonparticipant. Good friends were defined as friends who mutually nominated each other as friends, but one or both friends nominated each other as only a

good friend and not a best friend. Lastly, acquaintances were peers for whom children

knew or knew of, but did not necessarily think of them as good or best friends.

Many researchers have assumed that most children would nominate best friends

who were in the same grade and school (Hartup, 1983). Consequently, most researchers

have relied on in-school nominations (e.g., Rubin et al., 2006). In most research,

investigators have often relied on *reciprocal* nominations, particularly when they wanted

to know how friends interacted with each other and how, and whether, friendships

influenced social development. The choice of reciprocity as a defining characteristic of

friendship could limit the data corpus to the same school or classroom. But, researchers

who have examined observations of friendships or Actor-Partner effects (Kenny, Kashy,

& Cook, 2006) would argue that reciprocity (at least in some manner) in friendship was a

necessary component in allowing such research to be conducted. Therefore, to address

the objectives of the current study, I focused on reciprocated best friendships.

Assessing friendship quality.

Whilst just having a friend has benefits to children's psychosocial well-being,

scholars have noted that the quality of the friendship is also important to consider. For

example, Weiss (1974) suggested that there are six basic provisions that individuals strive

to obtain in their close relationships with others: attachment, reliable alliance,

enhancement of worth, social integration, guidance, and opportunity for nurturance.

Friendship researchers have long proposed that high quality friendships buffer young

adolescents from negative outcomes, such as depression and loneliness (Parker & Asher,

1993). Scholars have also noted that high-quality friendships also enhance self-esteem,

adjustment, and the ability to cope with stress (Bowker, 2010; Bowker & Rubin, 2009;

Hartup & Stevens, 1999; Rubin et al., 2004). The inability to form a new best friendship after suffering a loss in friendship has also been linked to increased loneliness (Bowker, 2010).

Researchers often have asked children to report the frequency and intensity of behaviors or interactions that are thought to be important indicators of friendship quality (Berndt & Keefe, 1995; Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1994; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Parker & Asher, 1993). For example, many self-report measures drew from theories of supportive social relationships (Berndt, 1982; Parker & Gottman, 1989; Selman, 1980; Sullivan, 1953) and of what social relationships should provide to those involved (Furman, 1996). Examples of friendship features included such qualities as 1) companionship, 2) prosocial behavior, 3) intimacy, 4) trust, 5) loyalty, 6) conflict resolution, 7) conflict, 8) competition, and 9) power differential (Berndt, 1986; Berndt & Keefe, 1996; Bukowski et al., 1994; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985; Parker & Asher, 1993). According to scholars, the first six features represented positive friendship quality, and the remaining features represented negative friendship quality. Thus, high quality friendships often comprised high levels of positive features and low levels of negative features. Researchers have stressed the importance of examining both positive and negative aspects of friendships (Banny et al., 2011; Laursen & Pursell, 2009).

Beyond basic measurements of friendship quality, scholars have provided a variety of statistical procedures for researchers to consider. For example, Berndt and McCandless (2009) have suggested that researchers take into consideration whether statistical analyses should distinguish between individual features of friendship or if a two-factor model should be used, with one factor comprising positive features (e.g.,

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validation, intimacy, loyalty, prosocial behavior, companionship) and the other factor comprising negative features (e.g., conflict, rivalry, criticism, dominance; Berndt, 1996; Furman, 1996). While many researchers utilized a two-factor model of friendship quality, some have examined individual features separately. Support for this technique involved research regarding age-related changes in intimate disclosure. For example, Berndt and Perry (1986) have suggested that there is an upward trajectory for intimate disclosure over time, whereas the trajectory tends to remain stable for other friendship features. Many theories of friendship included intimacy and intimate disclosure as critical components of friendship and described developmental differences in intimacy from childhood to adolescence (e.g., Berndt, 1982; Selman, 1980; Sullivan, 1953). Because of potential age effects, the current study addressed different forms of friendship quality.

Assessing friendship quality through actor-partner interdependence models.

Simpkins and colleagues (2006) have argued that friends often know different things about each other and do different things for each other (Simpkins et al., 2006). As a result, each member's behaviors or characteristics significantly contributed to how each partner may understand a relationship (Banny et al., 2011; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). For example, in some cases, one friend might disproportionately disclose more often than the other. Thus, friends might sometimes also disagree about how they perceived the quality of their friendship (Banny et al., 2011; Berndt & McCandless, 2009; Brendgen et al., 2001).

Differences in perceptions of quality could also arise due to measurement issues. In the *Network of Relationships Inventory* (Furman & Buhrmester, 1992), for example,

there were three different types of questions that participants were asked about friendship intimacy 1) 'How much do you tell this person everything', 'How much do you share your secrets and private feelings with this person', and 'How much do you talk to this person about things that you don't want others to know?'. Each of these questions assessed the participant's behavior towards their friend, rather than also assessing their friend's behavior towards them. In another example, the *Friendship Quality Questionnaire* (Parker & Asher, 1993) also addressed behaviors that were dyadically based instead of addressing provisions that one child provided another or one child received from the other. For example, items specific to intimate disclosure included, 'My friend and I are always telling each other about our problems', 'I can think of lots of secrets my friend and I have told each other', and 'My friend and I tell each other private thoughts a lot.'

Given the importance of using individual perceptions and behaviors of both dyadic partners (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006), I examined how youth may perceive the quality of their friendship as a function of the individual contributions of gossip and responses to gossip. Issues pertaining to the role of gossip valence and process in friendship quality are discussed in the appropriate sections below.

Measurement of Gossip Quality

In a review of research on gossip, Foster (2004) outlined five different methods that researchers have used to examine gossip: field studies, video and audio recordings, eavesdropping, questionnaire studies, and experimental research that used hypothetical vignettes. In *field studies*, or participant observer studies, the studies described used a variety of controlled factors, such as time taken to observe gossip and the location of the

gossip. Studies were located in, for example, middle schools in a Midwestern state in the United States, a rural Spanish community, an "American ghetto", and Wales.

Gossip researchers have also used *video and audio recordings* to aid in their measurement of gossip (Foster, 2004). For example, Eder and Enke (1991) ate lunch with middle school students over three years and collected audio and video data. Mettetal (1982) also used audio and video data to code the frequency and valence of gossip among children in middle childhood and adolescence. McDonald and colleagues (2007) observed recordings of girls with their friends and coded for a variety of gossip related constructs, such as frequency, valence, target of gossip, topic of gossip, and function of gossip. Wilkinson (1988) also used video and audio recordings of children in kindergarten through fourth grade. And most recently, Banny and colleagues (2011) used audio and video data to code macro-level assessments of negative gossip, in the form of relational aggression, between friends.

Another method Foster (2004) described for collecting gossip data was *eavesdropping* in public places. Foster argued that eavesdropping allows researchers to observe gossip in the natural environment and also take into consideration the spontaneity of gossip. In studies that used this method, researchers have mostly found that men and women did not differ in the prevalence of gossip; however, the content of gossip differed between genders. For example, Levin and Arluke (1985) found that college-aged women typically focused their gossip on personal relationships, whereas typically college-aged men focused their gossip on sports figures or other public figures.

Researchers also have used *questionnaires* to measure gossip. For example, Jaeger, Skleder, Rind, and Rosnow (1994) administered questionnaires to college sorority

members and found that moderate gossipers were more central in their peer network. That is, moderate gossipers had quantitatively more and qualitatively stronger social ties than high and low gossipers. These researchers speculated that high gossipers were more anxious than low gossipers but did not feel the need to be accepted by their peers. Lastly, Foster (2004) described methods for studying gossip that involve *experimental designs with hypothetical vignettes*. For example, Kuttler and colleagues (2002) found that preadolescents understood that they could not believe gossip information blindly. That is, the reliability of the gossipers was important in whether the gossip was accepted as truth or not.

Gossip quality.

Foster (2004) posed a broad question with regard to the future of gossip research: To what extent does gossip contribute to social difficulties and adjustment later in life, at both the individual and group level? This broad question led to the following overarching question that was addressed in the current dissertation: To what extent did the quality of gossip and the dynamic processes of gossip (initiation and response patterns) contribute to social difficulties in the domains of friendship?

A number of researchers have disagreed with regard to whether quality of gossip is important in understanding the role that gossip played in friendships. For example, Mettetal (1982) found that when gossip occurred, the gossip was negative approximately half of the time. Positive gossip and negative gossip were both positively correlated with friendship intimacy (Banny et al., 2011; McDonald et al., 2007), whereas neutral gossip was negatively correlated with friendship intimacy (McDonald et al., 2007). In addition, Banny and colleagues (2011) also suggested that gossip, specifically negative gossip, was

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associated with *both* positive and negative friendship features. Nevertheless, little research has focused on whether different qualities of gossip are associated differently with friendship quality specifically for boys and girls during late childhood and early adolescence.

Responses to gossip.

In addition to understanding how the quality of gossip was associated with friendship quality, it was also important to understand how the process of gossip, such as who initiated gossip and how gossip was responded to, was associated with friendship quality. Scholars have noted that one important feature of interpersonal relationships is positive reinforcement and responsiveness (Berndt, 1982; Sullivan, 1953). Black and Logan (1995) suggested that the ability to respond contingently to peers was linked to social competence and acceptance for preschool age children. Responsiveness in communication has also been found to be an important aspect of in the formation and maintenance of intimate relationships, such as friendships, for adults (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Falk & Wagner, 1986; Sermat & Smyth, 1973) and children (Cohn & Strassberg, 1983; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Rotenberg & Chase, 1992; Rotenberg & Mann, 1986; Selman, 1981; Sullivan, 1953). Likewise, reciprocation or positive reinforcement of gossip was associated with intimacy in friendships (Parker & Gottman, 1989).

Researchers who were interested in initiation-response patterns often have used techniques such as micro-coding observed behavior. For Example, Dishion and colleagues (1995) and Wampold (1989) argued that, in order to examine duration and sequence, researchers needed to create a dyadic sequential structure by combining the behaviors of both people in a dyad (Dishion et al., 1995; Wampold, 1989). In this

sequential structure, researchers would code for antecedents and consequences of behavior. For example, Dishion and colleagues (1995) distinguished between two "nonparallel streams" (Wampold, 1989): 1) Behavior A led to Behavior B, and 2) Behavior B led to Behavior A, when they observed the interactions of aggressive youth with their friends. Others have used similar techniques. For example, Black and Logan (1995) distinguished between different forms of communication: relevant turns (utterances that share thematic content with prior initiations or responses) and irrelevant turns (utterances that lack a shared thematic content), non-contingent response (behaviors indicating failure to reply, such as ignoring and silence), among other such utterance characteristics.

These turn taking behaviors can be applied to work on the qualities of gossip. For example, there are several different ways to respond to gossip (Gottman & Mettetal, 1989; Leaper & Holliday, 1995). Leaper and Holliday outlined five different responses to gossip: discouraging, neutral, mildly encouraging, moderately encouraging, or highly encouraging. Discouraging gossip referred to responses that disrupted someone's gossip, such as expressing disinterest or changing the topic of conversation. Neutral response referred to responses where the listener did not explicitly encourage or discourage gossip, such as silence after a gossip initiation. Mildly encouraging responses involved simple encouragements to continue by using brief acknowledgements, asking questions, or laughing; moderately encouraging responses involved actively encouraging the gossiper to continue by using reflective questions and statements; and highly encouraging responses involved elaborating on the friend's gossip by reciprocating the gossip. Encouragement of gossip was found to be a more common response to gossip than

discouraging or neutral responses. Ginsberg and Gottman (1986) also examined

responses to gossip and distinguished between two types of responses: successful

reciprocation of gossip and failure to reciprocate gossip. Taking these distinctions into

account may allow researchers to understand the dynamic processes of gossip and how

gossip behavior is associated with friendships at a more detailed level.

Qualities of Gossip in Friendships

Many have argued that gossip is a common activity amongst friends, involves

communicative skills, and is also associated with friendship quality and peer relationships

(Banny et al., 2011; Levin & Arluke, 1985; Leaper & Holliday, 1995; McDonald et al.,

2007). Researchers have also found support that various qualities of gossip occur at

different rates within friendships (e.g., Leaper & Holliday, 1995; Levin & Arluke, 1985;

McDonald et al., 2007). Yet, relatively little is known regarding how different qualities

of gossip are associated with perceptions of the quality of their friendships. In some

work that has demonstrated the power of gossip on observed friendship quality,

McDonald and colleagues (2007) found that, in fourth graders, the frequency of girls'

gossip with friends was associated with *observed* positive quality of their friendships,

suggesting that gossip may be a marker of intimacy or even used to build closeness

among friends. In a different vein, it was also found that neutral gossip, or non-

evaluative gossip, was negatively associated with intimacy in friendships (McDonald et

al., 2007), and also was used more for amusement and storytelling or for intimacy

between friends, than for malicious goals. Other work that has focused on negative,

relationally aggressive, gossip has found support for the notion that observed negative

gossip was related to *both* positive and negative dimensions of friendship quality (Banny

et al., 2011). In other words, gossip has the potential to *both* demonstrate a sense of closeness within a relationship but also demonstrate a sense of turmoil (Banny et al., 2011).

With relevance to the association of responses to gossip and perceptions of friendship quality, according to Berndt (1981), Sullivan (1953), and Selman (1981), good friends were expected to share with and help each other more than acquaintances or less good friends. Friends listen to each other during conversation; respond appropriately with similar topics or positive reinforcement; and express concern and caring for each other's thoughts and experiences (Piehler & Dishion, 2007). Reciprocation of or validation of sharing and helping were associated with mutual satisfaction between friends (Sullivan, 1953). For example, scholars have found that friendship dyads were more satisfied with their friendship when they agreed more with each other (Phillipsen, 1999). Chafel (1984) also found that reciprocation of interest or validation of opinion was also associated with building solidarity among children, and others have speculated similar associations (e.g., Banny et al., 2011; Ginsberg & Gottman, 1986; Parker & Gottman, 1989). Perhaps then, gossip, especially when responded to with encouragement, should be positively associated with high quality friendships, at least from the perceptions of the person who *initiated* the gossip in the first place, and perhaps also for the person who encourages their friend to continue or positively reinforces their friend's gossiping behavior.

Thus, it may be that gossip behavior has both positive and negative associations with various friendship features and provisions as well as psychological and social outcomes, depending on prevalence and quality (e.g., Banny et al., 2011), and also the

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response. Based on several of the limitations addressed above and also below, the focus of the current study was to examine the prevalence and quality of gossip behavior, and also the *concurrent* relations between gossip behavior and perceptions of friendship quality, using a cross-sectional, multi-method perspective.

Gossip target.

When examining the quality of gossip in friendships, it is also important to take into consideration the identity of the people that children are gossiping about. For example, some scholars have focused on a variety of targets such as female peers, male peers, female peer groups, male peer group, mixed-gendered peer groups, romantic partners, family members, teachers or school staff/administrators, celebrities, experimenters, strangers, other adults, and others (Elmer, 1990; Levin & Arluke, 1985; McDonald et al., 2006; Sehulster, 2006; Wilkinson, 1988).

Despite the literature, few have discussed reasons for why gossip about one type of target might occur more than others. Yet researchers have suggested that this work is needed, especially through examining gossip about important and close social relationships (e.g., friends and family) compared to less intertwined relationships (e.g., classmates, strangers, celebrities) (Turner et al., 2003). Developmental theory and speculation have suggested that, during middle childhood, gossip about peers takes precedent, given the increased focus on peer acceptance and relationships, and learning the social norms of the peer group (Parker & Gottman, 1989). Furthermore, it has been argued that most school-aged children spend their time in the company of other children while at school. It would be expected that peers would be gossiped about more so than non-peers.

In other work on self-disclosure and topic intimacy, some scholars have noted that discussion of family problems or issues were reported to be one of the most intimate topics friends could talk about (Dolgin & Kim, 1994; for an additional review, see Sehulster, 2006). Furthermore, these intimate topics were more likely to occur in strong or high quality relationships (e.g., best friends) compared to lower quality relationships (e.g., good friends).

Some scholars have also focused on gender differences in gossip targets. Wilkinson (1988), for example, found that children in grade two talked more about adults and experimenters than children in kindergarten and grade four. However, adults were the most talked about target, followed by peers, for all grade levels. In terms of the gender of the gossiper and the gender of the target, it was found that boys in grade two gossiped about girls more than other aged boys did, whereas girls in grade four gossiped about boys more than younger girls did. Similarly, girls were found more likely to talk about other girls, and both boys and girls gossiped about boys at about similar rates. McDonald and colleagues (2006) found that most fourth-grade girls gossiped about *other* girls or experimenters. In other work on college students, Levin and Arluke (1985) and Sehulster (2006) argued that women were more likely to gossip about friends and family, whereas men were more likely to talk about sports figures. Acquaintances were also a common target of gossip (Elmer, 1990). The research described above has suggested that both gender and age differences in gossip targets may be evident; and part of the current study was to address these possibilities. However, much of the described work above has not addressed whether the possible variations in gossip quality separately for different gossip targets; the current study also addressed these possibilities.

Gender differences.

Compared to girls, scholars have noted that boys share less with each other and value prosocial behavior less (Berndt, 1981), use more overt and physical aggression than relational aggression (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996); compete with each other more (Schneider, 1999, 2009); disagree with each other more (Phillipsen (1999); use more deviant talk; and display less contingent behavior in their interactions with their friends (Piehler & Dishion, 2007). However, some researchers have argued that observations of other types of behaviors did not yield gender differences (Leary & Katz, 2005). For example, Piehler and Dishion (2007) did not find gender differences in observed prosocial talk.

Findings on gender differences in communication skills specifically focused on children has been documented in the literature. Importantly, gossip is a form a communication that requires skill. For one, girls have been found to be more talkative than boys, even when taking into consideration language performance and ability (for meta-analyses, see Hyde & Linn, 1988; James & Drakich, 1993). Girls tended to be better and more sophisticated in their communication skills than boys (Leaper & Smith, 2004), perhaps because they were more likely to participate in activities that required more verbal communication than did boys and also were more likely to situate themselves in contexts that promoted conversation amongst peers (for a recent meta-analysis, see Leaper & Smith, 2004). In contrast, boys tended to engage in activities (e.g., sports, video games) that did not require as much disclosure or conversation, (Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Leaper & Smith, 2004; Schneider & Tessier, 2007).

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In a meta-analysis of gender differences in children's language use, Leaper and Smith (2004) examined differences in affiliative and self-assertive speech, whereby speech characterized by affiliation referred to communication that aided in establishing or maintaining social and interpersonal relationships; and speech characterized by self-assertion referred to language and communication that was used to influence or persuade others. These scholars found that, generally, girls were more talkative (i.e., had more verbal indications of conversation, talk, or discussion) than boys, but that gender differences were smaller for observations of children interacting with peers. These scholars also found that gender differences were small with regard to affiliative speech overall, but that girls were generally found to use more affliative speech than were boys. In this respect, girls were argued to learn to use language in such a way to support close relationships with others. In their meta-analysis, Leaper and Campbell also found that boys used assertive speech more than did girls, but this difference was also small.

Scholars who have focused on gossip have not found much empirical support for the notion that girls used gossip more than boys (Banny et al., 2011; Dunbar, 1994; Eckert, 1990; Foster, 2004; Haviland, 1977; Ginsberg & Gottman, 1986; Levin & Arluke, 1985; Nevo, Nevo, & Derech-Zehavi, 1993). However, scholars who have focused on communication and gender differences have argued that girls encourage social support among same-sex friends more so than do boys (Carli, 1990; Leaper & Smith, 2004), and thus by extension are more likely to encourage gossip behavior. Yet, these pieces of research crossed several different developmental periods, sometimes research was only focused on girls, or sometimes it only focused on certain aspects of gossip. In some literature devoted to gender differences in youth, scholars have noted that girls were more

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likely to use evaluative gossip (Wilkinson, 1988), and use negative gossip in a relationally aggressive manner (Grotpeter & Crick, 1997), while others speculated that gossip was a girl-dominated and -directed behavior and thus excluded the examination of boys completely (e.g., McDonald et al., 2007; Mettetal, 1982).

Although the consensus with regard to gossip behavior and gender differences was unresolved in the extant literature, many researchers have found that boys and girls differed in the nature and significance they *placed* on friendships and peer relationships (Benenson, Apostoleris, & Parnass, 1997; De Goede et al., 2009; Maccoby, 1998; Parker & Asher, 1993). Girls have been found to have a stronger focus on relationships than boys, whereas boys were more focused on acceptance from the broader peer group (Benenson, 1993; Maccoby, 1998). Generally, the friendships of girls are argued to comprise higher levels of intimacy and self-disclosure than the friendships of boys (De Goede et al., 2009; Parker & Asher, 1993; Simpkins et al., 2006). There was some indication in the literature that socializing activities, or activities that promote affiliation, expressivity, and nurturance, such as intimate self-disclosure, were positively related to friendship quality regardless of gender (Zarbatany et al., 2000). However, much of the work on gossip *and* friendship quality has only explored the friendships of girls (Lansford et al., 2006; McDonald et al., 2007), with some exceptions (e.g., Banny et al., 2011). Thus, in the current study, I explored gender differences in the prevalence of gossip, responses to gossip, and the association of gossip with friendship quality.

Need for Observational Studies

Friendships differ on a variety of behaviors and interactions that signify closeness or association. For example, a friend can be defined as a person someone knows and

likes and with whom one is often intimate and trustworthy (Selman, 1980; Sullivan, 1953). However, friendship dyads may differ from each other on how much they spend time together, their interactions with each other, and how much they share with each other. Berndt and McCandless (2009) suggested that aspects of friendships, such as amount of time spent together or how much they disclose to one another are characteristics or qualities of friendships. Berndt and his colleagues (Berndt, 1996, 2002; Berndt & McCandless, 2009) have argued that the understanding of friendship quality allows researchers to examine the impact that relationships have on children's development. However, in the corpus of literature, friendship qualities were most often addressed through self-report measures. Much less work has focused on observations than on perceptions of friendship quality and interactions (Bakeman & Gottman, 1997), and scholars have noted that observations of behavior and communication may shed light on the relation between observable behavior and internal, unobservable processes such as perceptions of friendship quality, and whether actual observed behaviors map on to internal self-perceptions of behaviors (Rubin, Fredstrom, & Bowker, 2008).

Phillipsen (1999) argued that relationships are best understood by examining how children interact with and react to those that they are in a relationship with. Dishion and colleagues (1995) also have suggested that observations may be more strongly related to outcome measures of friendship because they were more sensitive to tone, nonverbal behavior, context, and other behaviors that could influence how a particular verbal statement or behavior was interpreted. Even when observational methods were used, often researchers used frequency counts of specific behaviors, without any consideration for sequential patterns (Gottman, 1986). Examining sequential patterns can provide in

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our understanding of observed behavior and whether these behaviors are associated with perceptions of friendships and peer relationships (Bakeman, 1997; Gottman, 1986; Allison & Liker, 1982). For example, taking into account sequent allows researchers to ask several questions such as: "What happens after Person A does X" and "Are there characteristic ways that Person B responds?"

The extant literature using observations is also underdeveloped in terms of examining such features and qualities as gossip. Gossip may have both positive and negative associations with other friendship features as psychological and social outcomes, depending on prevalence, frequency, quality, and the nature of responses to the gossip. For example, in general, gossip was linked with observed intimacy and closeness, but when positive, negative, and neutral gossip quality were distinguished from each other, the picture became much more complex (McDonald et al., 2007). However, little work has focused on observed gossip quality and perceptions of friendship quality (for an exception, see Banny et al., 2011). Thus, the need to examine how observed behavior was associated with individual perceptions was warranted. The current study aimed to address this relation.

Need for Dyadic Data Analysis

The actor-partner interdependence model.

It has also been suggested that when studying relationships, it is often helpful and insightful to also include perceptions of both members of the dyad (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). However, researchers have predominately used information from only one person in the friendship dyad in isolation. Friendship partners may have different views of their relationship's quality (Banny et al., 2011; Brendgen, Markiewicz, Doyle, &

Bukowski, 2001; Simpkins & Parke 2001), and also may not behavior in the same way towards each other. Also, in observational studies, sequences of behaviors may be associated with a variety of outcomes, and the identity of the initiator and responder, as well as actual behaviors displayed by each person might be important to take into account. Importantly, each member's behaviors or characteristics may make a significant contribution to how each person understands the relationship. For example, is it more important to an actor's perception of a friendship quality if that actor gossips or if their friend gossips? An overriding goal of the current study was to address actor-partner effects in children's gossip behavior and how that gossip behavior and quality were associated with actor-partner perceptions of friendship quality.

Summary, Hypotheses, and Noted Gaps in the Literature

As noted in Chapter 1, several theoretical and empirical works have suggested that gossip should be associated with friendship quality and peer relationships; I tested this relation in the current dissertation by using a cross-sectional design with children in grades five and six. The overall aim of this dissertation was to *confirm* these associations as well as *add* to the literature by testing associations that have not yet been addressed in the extant literature. More specifically, I addressed the prevalence of different *qualities* of gossip, and examined the relations between different *qualities* of gossip to different *qualities* of friendship. The first primary goal of the dissertation was to address the prevalence and qualities of gossip (Hypotheses 1.a.) and gossip response (Hypotheses 1.b.). It was expected that gossip would be highly salient in the friendship interactions of youth, that the proportions of neutral, positive, and negative *initiations of gossip* may vary, and that most *responses* to gossip would comprise positive reinforcement or

encouragement to continue gossiping (Banny et al., 2011; McDonald et al., 2007; Parker & Gottman, 1986; Selman, 1983; Sullivan, 1953).

It was also expected that gender and age differences would be evident (Hypotheses 1.c. and Hypotheses 1.d., respectively). For example, much of the literature has focused on girls and *speculated* that girls gossiped more than boys (e.g., Levin & Arluke, 1985); these speculations were expected to emerge in the dissertation, both with respect to initiations and responses to gossip, despite a large lack of empirical support (e.g., Wilkinson, 1988). In other words, girls were expected to gossip more than boys, and also respond to gossip with positive reinforcement more so than would boys. The dissertation sought to fill the gap with regard to research on boys and gossip behavior, as well as further the understanding of girls' gossip. Furthermore, given that there was a general lack of data on age differences in gossip, children in the 5th and 6th grades were included in this study, and it was expected that older children would use more gossip than younger children (Parker & Gottman, 1989).

The second primary aim of the current dissertation was to address the association between gossip quality and friendship quality (Hypotheses 2.a.). Importantly, the current study aimed to *extend* the current literature by examining the relation between gossip and friendship quality as a function of gender and age/grade (Hypotheses 2.b.). It was hypothesized that, neutral, positive, and negative gossip qualities would be differentially associated with positive and negative dimensions of friendship quality (Banny et al., 2011; McDonald et al., 2007; Parker & Gottman, 1986). Encouraging responses were also expected to be more highly associated with positive friendship quality than discouraging responses (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Parker & Gottman, 1986).

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Exploratory analyses were also conducted to examine the extent to which the valence of gossip initiation interacted with the response to predict friendship quality.

In addition to general hypotheses regarding gossip, it was also expected that gender differences might emerge in the association between gossip behavior and perceptions of friendship quality (e.g, Benenson, et al., 1997; De Goede et al., 2009; Maccoby, 1998; McDonald et al., 2007; Parker & Asher, 1993). In particular, it was expected that girls might be more affected by gossip behaviors between friends than boys, given that close dyadic relationships via disclosure and discourse were thought to be more important or "girl-gendered" for girls' friendships than for boys' friendships. Lastly, the gossip quality of older children was expected to be more strongly related to friendship quality than the gossip quality of younger children.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

Participants

The dissertation utilized data from Dr. Kenneth H. Rubin's NIMH-funded project, "Friendship: The transitions to middle school and psychological adjustment" (grant #MH58116). Participants were drawn from a large normative sample of 825 fifth graders from eight diverse public elementary schools and 1331 sixth graders from three diverse public middle schools for whom written parental permission was obtained (consent rate = 84%). The mean age of the fifth grade sample was 10.34 years (SD = .53), and the sixth grade sample was 11.41 years (SD = .52). Approximately 53.6% of the participants were Caucasian, 11.1% African American, 15% Asian, 8.6% Latino, and 12.27% were unidentified or multiracial. As their highest level of education, 68% of the mothers (68% of the fathers) had a university degree, 21% had some college education (13% of the fathers), and 9% had high school and vocational education (12% of the fathers). The proportion of students in free or reduced lunch programs ranged from approximately .07-to-.35. Further information with regard to exclusion and inclusion criteria for the analyses in this dissertation are presented below.

Procedure

There were two phases of data collection for the larger research project: (1) assessments in the schools and (2) an assessment in the laboratory. A third phase was added to collect data specifically for this dissertation, which was to code the observational data from Phase 2. During *Phase I*, nominations were obtained in schools to determine mutuality or reciprocities of friendship (Bukowski et al., 1994). Research assistants administered the questionnaire in group-format in classrooms or larger

schoolrooms (e.g., cafeterias). The sample of 825 fifth graders and 1331 sixth graders,

each with parental permission, served as nominators for friendship within their respective

grades. Participants were informed that their answers were confidential and were

instructed not to discuss their responses with classmates.

In the larger sample, children who reported reciprocated best friends were invited

to the laboratory for observation with a best friend (dyad n = 333; N = 666) for *Phase 2*.

Additional questionnaire data were collected during the laboratory visits. Of interest to

the current study were ratings of friendship quality (*Friendship Quality Questionnaire-*

Revised, Parker & Asher, 1993).

Participants also participated in videotaped friendship tasks that took place in a

laboratory playroom. These tasks included free play, a discussion of best times with the

friend, co-solving moral dilemmas, recreating a knot or an origami model, and planning

an imaginary weekend. Of interest for the current study were sessions during which

gossip was most expected to occur (free play, discussion of best times, and planning an

imaginary weekend). *Free-play* was an unstructured task that allowed youth to engage in

any activity of their choice. During *Best Times*, youth were asked to discuss the best

times they have had together. And lastly, during *Plan a Weekend*, youth were instructed

to plan a weekend together where they could do anything they wanted from Friday

evening until Sunday afternoon. They were informed that they had total freedom of

choice regarding the activities for their weekend. A coding taxonomy developed

specifically for this dissertation was used to code these specific sessions for observed

gossip (*Phase 3*). In addition, dyadic conversation/discussion was coded at the macro-

level, using a modification of Simpkins and Parke's (2001) observational coding system for observed friendship quality.

Because participants were gathered from a larger longitudinal study some students were participants in both grades five and six. To eliminate overlap of the data, dyads were randomly selected to represent either grade 5 or 6 in the event that at least one student in the dyad had participated in both grades. The final dataset used for analyses included a random selection of 100 dyads from each grade, with equal numbers of boy and girl dyads in each grade. That is, 50 dyads each were formed for four groups: 5th grade boy dyads, 6th grade boy dyads, 5th grade girl dyads, and 6th grade girl dyads.

School Measures

Friendship Nominations (Bukowski, Hoza, & Boivin, 1994).

Participants were asked to write the names of their "very best friend" and their "second best friend" at their school (Appendix A). Children could only name same-gender friends in their grade, and only mutual (reciprocated) best friendships were subsequently considered. Children were considered "best friends" if they were each other's very best or second best friend choice.

Laboratory Visit

As part of the larger longitudinal project, the school measures of friendship were used to determine mutual best friend dyads, and these dyads were selected and invited to the lab. If an adolescent had two mutual school-based best friendships, the adolescent was invited to visit with his or her "very best friend" choice. During the visit, the young adolescents and their mutual best friend completed a number of questionnaires and also

participated in several interactions together for which video and audio data was obtained. A research assistant administered questionnaires individually to each adolescent.

Friendship Quality Questionnaire-Revised (FQQ; Parker & Asher, 1993).

The FQQ assessed the adolescent's self-perceived quality of friendship with his/her best friend (Appendix B). The 40-item FQQ yielded six subscales in the areas of companionship/recreation (α grade 5 = .59, α grade 6 = .64), validation/caring (α grade 5 = .86, α grade 6 = .87), help/guidance (α grade 5 = .88, α grade 6 = .86), intimate disclosure (α grade 5 = .85, α grade 6 = .86), conflict/betrayal (α grade 5 = .74, α grade 6 = .79), and conflict resolution (α grade 5 = .61, α grade 6 = .63). Additionally, total positivity was the total mean of companionship, validation and caring, help and guidance, intimate disclosure, and conflict resolution (Rubin et al., 2006). Due to recent findings suggesting that gossip was associated with both positive and negative dimensions (Banny et al., 2011), and the notion that intimate disclosure specifically might be a developmentally fluctuating feature of friendships, all features of friendship quality were addressed separately, in addition to broadband positive and negative features.

Observed Gossip Quality and Response

The coding system for observed gossip was adapted from a variety of coding systems (Banny et al., 2011; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Leaper & Holliday, 1995; McDonald et al., 2007; Simpkins & Parke, 2001; Wilkinson, 1988) and created specifically for this dissertation (Appendix C). First, *gossip* instances were identified. In accordance with McDonald and colleagues (2007), gossip included talk about any third party person or persons. Because I examined initiations of gossip and responses to gossip, it was important to give the responder an opportunity to respond; thus,

conversational turns were the unit of analysis. *Conversational turns* were units where one child's initiation followed by the second child's response[1]. For each session (free play, best times, and plan a weekend), the number of conversational turns devoted to gossip were noted. For example, a child may have gossiped once in free play, twice in best times, and once in plan a weekend. In total, this child gossiped four times.

Quality of gossip.

For each Gossip-initiation turn, the *content* of the gossip was coded for the presence of three gossip qualities for each participant. *Positive Gossip* was defined as any gossip talk that was positive in nature, such as praising or complimenting others, or saying something nice about others. *Negative Gossip* was defined as any gossip talk that was negative or derogatory in nature, such as criticizing others. *Neutral Gossip* was defined as any gossip talk that was non-evaluative.

Drawing from the conversation turns observed in the current study, an example of a positive gossip initiation was, "It was fun in third grade, because we had Ms. Smith, she was *nice*"[2]. And example of a negative gossip initiation was, "You would always be nice to me when Jane, when Jane was acting so *mean*"[3]. The word "nice" and the word "mean" were italicized to demonstrate positive and negative gossip, respectively. Lastly,

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[1] Some gossip interactions included a first initiation by Child A, a response by Child B, and another response by Child A; however for the purposes of the current study, coding and analysis only focused on the first conversational turn (i.e., the first initiation and the first response following that initiation). Future research should examine turns that follow the initial gossip initiation and response.

[2] The original name in the transcripts was replaced with a pseudonym, Ms. Smith.

[3] The original name in the transcripts was replaced with a pseudonym, Jane.

an example of a neutral gossip initiation was, "my mom was wondering if you'd like to come to my house, you can call your dad to see".

In addition to the content of the gossip statements, verbal intonations or placing emphasis on certain words, or non-verbal indicators of affect to express positive and negative attitudes were taken into consideration when determining whether a gossip turn was positive, negative, or neutral.

Responses to gossip.

Responses to gossip were coded based on conversational turns, and were defined as statements by one person that *followed* the first initiation of gossip by another person. Drawing from Leaper and Holliday (1995), Ginsberg and Gottman (1986), and McDonald and colleagues (2007), *encouraging responses* were coded as either present or absent for each unique conversational turn. Encouraging responses referred to listener's behavior that encouraged or positively reinforced gossip, such as expressing interest, asking questions, or reciprocating gossip. Higher scores indicated more encouragement. An example from the current dissertation dataset that had an instance of an encouraging response where the responder gossips too is presented below:

Child A: "Jane said that Sarah said that it's her way or no way"[4].

Child B: "Jane always talks about Sarah".

Target of gossip.

The target of the gossip was noted for each gossip initiation, and distinctions were made between four different groups: peers, family, experimenter, and others (McDonald

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[4] This initiation of gossip was denoted as an instance of negative gossip, due to contextual clues that suggested that Child A was being critical of Jane (and also of Sarah). Original names in the transcripts were replaced with pseudonyms, Jane and Sarah.

et al., 2007; Wilkinson, 1988). For example, in the transcripts presented above, Ms. Smith was considered an 'other', Sarah and Jane were considered 'peers', and mom and dad were considered 'family'.

Experimenter reactivity.

Taking into account the possibility of experimenter reactivity (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Ostrov, Woods, Jansen, Casas, & Crick, 2004), behavioral or verbal indications that gossipers were aware of the experimenters watching them from the camera or blatantly gossiping about the experimenters were noted. Indications of experimenter reactivity included, but were not limited to, looking at the camera when gossiping, lowering voices when gossiping, turning back to the camera purposefully to gossip, and talking about the experimenter(s). The number of instances of experimenter reactivity was collected, but no other information was collected and no further analyses were conducted based on this information.

Training and Reliability.

In order to confirm that the observed gossip and response coding was reliable, a portion (10%) of the observational data was coded by two different trained coders (double-coded). One coder was the master coder (the author of the current dissertation) and the other coder was an undergraduate research assistant[5]. Because the master coder was privy to the hypotheses before the start of coding, initial training of the undergraduate research assistant involved using transcripts of gossip instances to keep the undergraduate blind to possible identifier variables that would be observed in the

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[5] The author of the current dissertation was awarded a SPARC grant from the College of Education. A portion of this grant was used to hire an undergraduate student as a research assistant. The undergraduate research assistant also received internship course credits for hours she worked outside of being paid in monetary funds.

videotapes but not the transcripts. After a satisfactory reliability calculation was observed with the training transcripts, the undergraduate was then trained to code using the videotapes.

Calculations for reliability were conducted based on the double-coded data (20% of the tapes, or 40 tapes). Cohen's Kappa (1960) was used to calculate reliability. Kappas were calculated for gossip quality ($\kappa = .67$), gossip response ($\kappa = .84$), and target ($\kappa = .97$). All discrepancies were discussed and resolved between the master coder and the undergraduate research assistant. This method has been used by a variety of researchers who study gossip (Gottman, 1986; Leaper & Holliday, 1995; McDonald et al., 2007; Wilkinson, 1988) and has been described as an appropriate reliability measure for use with observations (Bakeman & Gottman, 1997).

Observed Dyadic Discussion

In order to take into account how much gossip occurred in relation to the amount of non-gossip related talk that dyads engaged in, information regarding overall talk was also used. The amount of time in *dyadic discussion* was coded as part of an earlier protocol for the NIMH Friendship Project (this coding was completed between 2006 and 2010). Several trained graduate and undergraduate students coded the observational data. Adapted from Simpkins and Parke (2001), dyadic discussion referred to the extent to which the dyad engaged in a reciprocal exchange of information. This was coded on a three-point scale: 1) not at all characteristic; 2) a little-to-somewhat characteristic; and 3) pretty or highly characteristic. Each dyad received three scores, one for Free Play (*M* = 2.70, *SD* = .46), one for Best Times (*M* = 2.93, *SD* = .26), and one for Plan A Weekend (*M* = 2.95, *SD* = .22). Cohen's Kappa (1960) reached .80 for inter-rater reliability.

All gossip variables and dyadic discussion variables were then *standardized*. All gossip variables for Free Play, Best Times, and Plan A Weekend were multiplied by their respective segment scores for Dyadic Discussion (Simpkins & Parke, 2001). For example, Free Play Positive Gossip about Peers was multiplied by Free Play Dyadic Discussion. The product scores were then averaged together such that each individual child had twelve mean scores:

a) *peer* positive gossip, negative gossip, neutral gossip, and encouragement;

b) *family* positive gossip, negative gossip, neutral gossip, and encouragement;

c) *other* positive gossip, negative gossip, neutral gossip, and encouragement.

These scores were representative of gossip behavior *across* the three different tasks (for a breakdown of gossip at the frequency level and split by segment and target, see Appendix D). Chi-square analyses revealed statistics for quality of gossip initiations: experimenters ($\chi^2 = 64.53$, $p < .001$), peers ($\chi^2 = 8.39$, $p = .08$), family members ($\chi^2 = 64.99$, $p < .001$), and others ($\chi^2 = 207.43$, $p < .001$). Chi-square analyses revealed statistics for quality of gossip responses: experimenters ($\chi^2 = 23.33$, $p < .001$), peers ($\chi^2 = 2.61$, $p = .27$), family members ($\chi^2 = 5.08$, $p < .08$), and others ($\chi^2 = 120.60$, $p < .001$). Gossip behavior across contexts was the focus of the current study, and thus distinguishing between gossip behaviors that occurred in Free Play, Best Times, or Plan A Weekend was not needed nor examined.

Observational Coding Software

In order to code the observational data for gossip initiation and response, the computer software Noldus Observer XT for Windows was used. The coding scheme was created, programmed, tested, and debugged within Noldus Observer XT by author of the current dissertation[6]. The author then solidified protocols in order to train the undergraduate research assistant to use the Noldus Observer XT software; modifications in the coding system were implemented as issues arose during coding. However, in order to have two coders coding at the same time, since limited equipment availability and space would only allow Noldus Observer XT to be used by one person at any given time, some of the data was coded in Microsoft Excel[7]. Data from Noldus Observer XT was exported into Microsoft Excel and merged with the Excel coded within Excel. The merged data was then exported into SPSS and used for statistical analyses.

Data Analysis Plan

Hypotheses part 1: Prevalence and forms of gossip.

Means and standard deviations were conducted for all gossip variables, split by target of gossip, gender, and grade (see Table 1). 2-x-2 Factorial ANOVAs (Gender-x-Grade) were then conducted for three different targets (Peers, Family, and Others) to examine the extent to which there were gender and grade differences in the prevalence of gossip quality and response (see Table 2).

Hypotheses part 2: The actor-partner interdependence model.

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[6] Funding for Noldus Observer XT testing was made possible by the Dr. Petty dissertation award granted by the Department of Human Development.

[7] The undergraduate research assistant *only* used the Noldus Observer XT software when coding the data, whereas the author of the current dissertation used both Noldus Observer XT software and Microsoft Excel. Microsoft Excel was only used in the event that the undergraduate research assistant was already using Noldus Observer XT.

Because each member's behaviors or characteristics could make a significant contribution to how each person understands the friendship, and since the current dissertation included friendship quality and observed gossip for each individual in a friendship, the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (*APIM*, Kenny et al., 2006) was used to address actor and partner effects for gossip. APIM was designed specifically for analyses that treat the dyad as a unit of analysis, while also incorporating the individual effects of both partners in the dyad. Importantly, the nature and prevalence of gossip may differ for each individual within a friendship. As a result the relation between Person A's behavior may be differentially associated with Person A's and Person B's perceptions of friendship quality.

Data were analyzed with linear mixed effects modeling in SPSS using the Compound Symmetry, Correlation Metric function within the MIXED command. Since friends within dyads were all same-sex, they were considered indistinguishable (there was not a factor that can distinguish between members). Intraclass correlations (ICC) were computed; ICCs provided an estimate of interdependence in the data (Kenny et al., 2006). Due to the expected interdependence of perceptions of friendship quality between the actor and partner in a friendship, a correlation between the error terms of the actors and the partners was allowed. The indistinguishable nature of the friendship dyad also meant that several associations were considered identical: for example, the relation between *actor*-initiated gossip and *actor*-perceived friendship quality was identical to the relation between *partner*-initiated gossip and *partner*-perceived friendship quality. Likewise, the link between *partner*-initiated gossip and *actor*-perceived friendship quality was the same equation as the link between *actor*-initiated gossip and *partner*-

perceived friendship quality. Similar methods were used by others to examine research

questions that involved actor and partner perceptions of friendship quality and actor and

partner observed conversational behavior (e.g., Banny et al., 2011). Refer to Figure 1 for

a two-dimensional representation of the full model that was tested.

Various main effects and interaction effects were specifically examined. *Separate*

APIM models for Peers, Family, and Others were conducted. Using APIM, direct effects

of gossip by the actor (adolescent) and the partner (friend of the adolescent) were used to

predict actor's reports of friendship quality. Analyses included actor and partner

variables for positive gossip, negative gossip, neutral gossip, encouragement of gossip,

and the interactions between gossip valence and encouragement of gossip predicting to

various dimensions of friendship quality. Variables serving as moderators included

gender and grade. Importantly, relations between actor-initiated gossip and actor-

perceived friendship quality were examined, as well as relations between partner-initiated

gossip and actor-perceived friendship quality. Further information regarding the ordering

of steps entered into the APIM analyses will be presented in the results section dedicated

to the APIM results.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Hypotheses Part I: Prevalence and Quality of Gossip

First, most gossip was about peers, followed by experimenters, others, and family (see Table 1). Most gossip was neutral, followed by negative gossip, then positive gossip. Also most gossip was responded to with encouragement or positive reinforcement. Frequency scores separated by target were calculated (see Table 1). Hypotheses 1.a were supported: gossip was a large part of children's friendships, and neutral, positive, and negative gossip qualities were evident with different proportions. In addition, Hypotheses 1.b were also supported in that most gossip was responded to with encouragement.

Means and standard deviations of children's perceptions of friendship quality were also calculated (see Table 2). A series of 2-x-2 (Gender-x-Grade) Factorial ANOVAs were run to examine gender and grade differences in children's perceptions of friendship quality (Table 3). Main effects for gender emerged for all friendship quality variables, with the exceptions of Companionship and Conflict. Girls had higher levels of perceived Validation ($p = .001$), Help ($p = .001$), Intimate Disclosure ($p = .001$), Conflict Resolution ($p = .03$), and Total Positivity ($p = .001$) than boys. Main effects for grade also emerged, but only for Companionship; children in Grade 6 reported more Companionship than children in Grade 5 ($p = .01$). Lastly, an interaction of Gender-by-Grade emerged for Conflict ($p = .05$), but no significant differences emerged when post-hoc analyses were conducted.

Gossip variables were then *transformed* as a function of general dyadic conversation/discussion (see Observed Dyadic Discussion in the Method section), and

means and standard deviations were calculated (see Table 2). These transformed gossip

scores were then subjected to a set of 2-x-2 (Gender-x-Grade) Factorial ANOVAs to

examine the nature of the gossip (see Table 3). Those results are presented below.

Gossip about peers and family.

No main effects emerged for Gender or Grade. No interaction effects emerged.

Gossip about others.

No main effects emerged for Gender. For Grade, a main effect emerged for

Positive Gossip about others. Children in Grade 5 used more Positive Gossip about

others than children in Grade 6 ($p = .01$). Several interactions of Gender and Grade

emerged for Gossip about others, Positive Gossip about others, Negative Gossip about

others, and Encouragement. For Gossip about others, boys in Grade 5 demonstrated

more gossip than boys in Grade 6 ($p = .001$), and girls in Grade 6 demonstrated more

gossip than boys in Grade 6 ($p = .04$). Boys in Grade 5 demonstrated more Positive

Gossip ($p = .001$), Negative Gossip ($p = .03$) about others and Encouragement ($p = .001$)

than boys in Grade 6. No other effects emerged as significant. Hypotheses 1.c regarding

gender differences and Hypotheses 2.d regarding grade/age differences were partially

supported.

Bivariate correlations were also run between *Actor* perceptions of friendship

quality dimensions (Table 4). Correlations revealed that Actor perceptions of friendship

quality were all significantly interrelated. All correlations were positively significant,

with several exceptions that involved Actor perceptions of Conflict. More specifically,

Actor perceptions of Conflict were negatively related to all forms of Actor perceptions of

friendship quality.

Bivariate correlations were also run between *Actor* perceptions of friendship quality dimensions and *Partner* perceptions of friendship quality dimensions (Table 4). Actor and Partner perceptions of friendship quality were positively correlated, with several exceptions. Actor perceptions of Conflict were (a) negatively related to Partner perceptions of Validation and Conflict Resolution, (b) positively related to Partner perceptions of Conflict, and (c) unrelated to Partner perceptions of Companionship, Help, and Intimate Disclosure.

For gossip about *peers*, all Actor Gossip variables were positively related with Actor Gossip and Partner Gossip variables, with two exceptions (Table 5). Actor Positive Gossip was unrelated to Actor Neutral Gossip and also unrelated to Partner Positive Gossip.

For gossip about *family members*, all Actor Gossip variables were positively related to all Actor Gossip variables (Table 6). Actor Gossip variables also positively correlated with most forms of Partner Gossip, with four exceptions. Partner Positive Gossip was unrelated to Actor Positive Gossip, Actor Negative Gossip, Actor Neutral Gossip, and Partner Encouragement.

For gossip about *others*, all Actor Gossip variables were positively related to all Actor Gossip and Partner Gossip variables, with three exceptions (Table 7). Actor Neutral Gossip was unrelated to Actor Negative Gossip; Actor Negative Gossip was unrelated to Partner Negative Gossip; and Actor Neutral Gossip was unrelated to Partner Negative Gossip.

Hypotheses Part II: The Association of Gossip and Perceived Friendship Quality

Preliminary actor-partner interdependence model.

Preliminary analyses were conducted to examine the extent to which Gender and

Grade were suitable moderators in all APIM analyses. Main effects of Gender emerged

for most perceptions of friendship quality dimensions and thus Gender was retained in

the final model. However, a main effect for Grade was significant *only* for actor

perceptions of Companionship. Subsequently, Grade and all interactions that included

Grade were dropped from the final analyses in order to make the model more

parsimonious. Thus, hypotheses regarding age-related differences in the relation between

gossip behavior and perceptions of friendship quality (one aspect of Hypotheses 2.b)

were not analyzed in the current dissertation. Advantages and disadvantages of dropping

Grade in these analyses will be discussed further in the Discussion section.

The final actor-partner interdependence model.

In dropping Grade and all interactions that included Grade, the final model for all

APIM analyses predicting perceptions of friendship quality had *three* steps[8]. Three

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[8] In addition to including Grade, the original APIM model also included a *Step 4*, where
several three-way interactions were added to the model to predict actor perceptions of
friendship quality. Specifically, six interaction variables were entered: 1) Gender-x-
Actor Positive Gossip-x-Partner Encouragement, 2) Gender-x-Actor Negative Gossip-x-
Partner Encouragement, 3) Gender-x-Actor Neutral Gossip-x-Partner Encouragement, 4)
Gender-x-Partner Positive Gossip-x-Actor Encouragement, 5) Gender-x-Partner Negative
Gossip-x-Actor Encouragement, and 6) Gender-x-Partner Neutral Gossip-x-Actor
Encouragement.
　　　　Cell sizes when examining simple slopes of low and high encouragement were
rather small. Power issues may have been evident in examining the moderating role of
gossip encouragement. For example, the bottom 33% of encouragement of gossip about
peers had only 35 children, the bottom 33% of encouragement of gossip about family had
only 20 children, the bottom 33% of encouragement of gossip about others had only 20
children; each of these groups comprised less than 9% of the total sample of 400 children.
Thus, Step 4 was dropped from the final model, and the simple slopes of one standard

separate hierarchical regressions were run, one for each of the targets (Peers, Family, and Others). Outcome variables were Actor and Partner perceptions of Companionship, Validation, Help, Intimate Disclosure, Conflict Resolution, Conflict, and Total Positivity.

At *Step 1*, Gender was added to the model. At *Step 2*, Actor and Partner Positive, Negative, and Neutral gossip initiations were added to the model, as were Actor and Partner Encouragement. At *Step 3*, several two-way interactions were added to the model to predict actor perceptions of friendship quality. In terms of gossip initiations, six variables entered: 1) Gender-x-Actor Positive Gossip, 2) Gender-x-Actor Negative Gossip, 3) Gender-x-Actor Neutral Gossip, 4) Gender-x-Partner Positive Gossip, 5) Gender-x-Partner Negative Gossip, 6) Gender-x-Partner Neutral Gossip. In terms of encouragement, eight variables entered: a) Gender-x-Actor Encouragement, b) Gender-x-Partner Encouragement, c) Actor Positive Gossip-x-Partner Encouragement, d) Actor Negative Gossip-x-Partner Encouragement, e) Actor Neutral Gossip-x-Partner Encouragement, f) Partner Positive Gossip-x-Actor Encouragement, g) Partner Negative Gossip-x-Actor Encouragement, and h) Partner Neutral Gossip-x-Actor Encouragement. Hypotheses 2.a and 2.b were partially supported as outlined in the results below.

Gossip about peers.

APIM of Gossip about Peers predicting perceptions of friendship quality were entered in three steps and ICCs were calculated (see Table 8 for ordering of steps and Beta weights).

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deviation above and below on the Encouragement variables (Step 3) were retained in the model but not probed because of similar power and error issues.

Intraclass correlations.

Intraclass Correlations between actor and partner perceptions of friendship quality revealed that actor and partner perceptions of friendship quality were similar for Companionship (ρ = .61, p = .001), Validation (ρ = .25, p = .001), Help (ρ = .31, p = .001), Intimate Disclosure (ρ = .27, p = .001), Conflict (ρ = .36, p = .001), and Total Positivity (ρ = .33, p = .001). However, actor and partner perceptions of Conflict Resolution were not similar (ρ = .09, p = .20).

Main effects: Gender.

At Step 1, Gender was added to the model in the prediction of actor perceptions of friendship quality. Gender predicted actor perceptions of friendship quality for Validation (p = .001), Help (p = .001), Intimate Disclosure (p = .001), Conflict Resolution (p = .04), and Total Positivity (p = .001): Girls reported higher levels of all of these variables than did boys. Gender did not predict actor perceptions of friendship quality for Companionship (p = .06) and Conflict (p = .52).

Main effects: gossip initiation valence and encouraging response.

At Step 2, Actor and Partner Positive, Negative, and Neutral Gossip initiations about peers were added to the model, as was Actor and Partner Encouragement of gossip about peers, in the prediction of actor perceptions of friendship quality.

Actor effects for gossip initiation valence and encouragement.

Actor Negative Gossip about peers was negatively related to actor perceptions of Conflict Resolution (p = .01). Actor Encouragement of gossip about peers was positively related to actor perceptions of Validation (p = .04). No other findings emerged as significant.

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Partner effects for gossip initiation valence and encouragement.

Partner Negative Gossip about peers was positively related to actor perceptions of Conflict ($p = .05$). No other findings emerged as significant.

Two-way interaction effects.

At Step 3, several two-way interactions were added to the model to predict actor perceptions of friendship quality (see Table 8).

Moderating role of gender: Actor effects for gossip initiation valence and encouragement.

Gender significantly moderated the relation between Actor Positive Gossip about peers and actor perceptions of Help (see Figure 2). Actor Positive Gossip about peers was unrelated to actor perceptions of Help for boys ($\beta = 0.03$, $t = 0.13$, $p = .89$), but negatively related to actor perceptions of Help for girls ($\beta = -0.61$, $t = -4.28$, $p = .001$). Gender also significantly moderated the relation between Actor Negative Gossip about peers and actor perceptions of Help (Figure 3). Actor Negative Gossip about peers was unrelated to actor perceptions of Help for boys ($\beta = -0.13$, $t = -0.75$, $p = .45$), but negatively related to actor perceptions of Help for girls ($\beta = -0.54$, $t = -5.48$ $p = .001$).

Lastly, Gender significantly moderated the relation between Actor Neutral Gossip about peers and actor perceptions of Conflict Resolution (Figure 4). Actor Neutral Gossip about peers was unrelated to actor perceptions of Conflict Resolution for boys ($\beta = -0.09$, $t = -0.41$, $p = .68$), but positively related to actor perceptions of Conflict Resolution for girls ($\beta = 0.40$, $t = 3.86$, $p = .001$).

Gender significantly moderated the relation between Actor *Encouragement* of gossip about peers and actor perceptions of Companionship. However, when examining

simple slopes for boys and girls, both slopes were not significantly different from zero (β = -0.34, t = -1.73, p = .08 for boys; β = 0.11, t = 1.07, p = .28 for girls). No other findings emerged as significant.

Moderating role of gender: Partner effects for gossip initiation valence and encouragement.

Gender significantly moderated the relation between Partner Positive Gossip about peers and actor perceptions of Conflict (Figure 5). Partner Positive Gossip was unrelated to actor perceptions of Conflict for boys (β = 0.02, t = 0.09, p = .93), but negatively related to actor perceptions of Conflict for girls (β = -0.53, t = -1.97, p = .05).

Gender significantly moderated the relation between Partner *Encouragement* and actor perceptions of Conflict Resolution (Figure 6). Partner Encouragement was unrelated to actor perceptions of Conflict Resolution for boys (β = 0.10, t = 0.49, p = .62), but negatively related to actor perceptions of Conflict Resolution for girls (β = -0.38, t = -3.53, p = .001). No other findings emerged as significant.

Gossip about family.

Actor Partner Interdependence Models of Gossip about Family members predicting perceptions of friendship quality were entered in three steps (see Table 9 for ordering of steps and Beta weights). For gossip about family members, the intraclass correlations and main effects of gender (Step 1) were the same results as that found for peers (see above).

Main effects: gossip initiation valence and encouraging response.

At Step 2, Actor and Partner Positive, Negative, and Neutral gossip initiations about family members were added to the model, as was Actor and Partner

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Encouragement of gossip about family members, in the prediction of actor perceptions of friendship quality.

Actor and partner effects for gossip initiation valence and encouragement.

Partner Neutral gossip about family members was positively related to actor perceptions of Validation ($p = .03$), Help ($p = .02$), Intimate Disclosure ($p = .001$), Conflict Resolution ($p = .02$), and Total Positivity ($p = .001$). No other findings emerged as significant.

Two-way interaction effects.

At Step 3, several two-way interactions were added to the model to predict actor perceptions of friendship quality (see Table 9).

Moderating role of gender: Actor effects for gossip initiation valence and encouragement.

Gender significantly moderated the relation between Actor Positive Gossip about family members and actor perceptions of Conflict (Figure 7). Simple slope analyses revealed that Actor Positive Gossip about family members was unrelated to actor perceptions of Conflict for boys ($\beta = 0.01$, $t = 0.03$, $p = .97$), but it was negatively related to actor perceptions of Conflict for girls ($\beta = -0.97$, $t = -7.52$, $p = .001$).

Gender also significantly moderated the relation between Actor Negative Gossip about family members and actor perceptions of Conflict (Figure 8). Simple slope analyses revealed that Actor Negative Gossip about family members was unrelated to actor perceptions of Conflict for boys ($\beta = -0.09$, $t = -0.36$, $p = .72$), but negatively related to actor perceptions of Conflict for girls ($\beta = -0.63$, $t = -5.62$, $p = .001$).

Gender significantly moderated the relation between Actor *Encouragement* of

gossip about family members and actor perceptions of Conflict (Figure 9). Simple slope

analyses revealed that Actor Encouragement of gossip about family members was

unrelated to actor perceptions of Conflict for boys ($\beta = 0.09$, $t = 0.64$, $p = .53$), but was

positively related to actor perceptions of Conflict for girls ($\beta = 0.52$, $t = 6.04$, $p = .001$).

No other findings emerged as significant.

Moderating role of gender: Partner effects for gossip initiation valence and

encouragement.

Gender significantly moderated the relation between Partner Negative Gossip

about family members and actor perceptions of Conflict (Figure 10). Simple slope

analyses revealed that Partner Negative Gossip about family members was unrelated to

actor perceptions of Conflict for boys ($\beta = -0.14$, $t = -0.53$, $p = .60$), but was positively

related to actor perceptions of Conflict for girls ($\beta = -0.88$, $t = -7.86$, $p = .001$). No other

findings emerged as significant.

Gossip about others.

Actor Partner Interdependence Models of Gossip about Others predicting

perceptions of friendship quality were entered in three steps (see Table 10 for ordering of

steps and Beta weights). For gossip about others, the intraclass correlations and main

effects of gender (Step 1) were the same results as that found for peers (see above).

Main effects: gossip initiation valence and encouraging response.

At Step 2, Actor and Partner Positive, Negative, and Neutral gossip initiations

about others were added to the model, as was Actor and Partner Encouragement of gossip

about others, in the prediction of actor perceptions of friendship quality.

Actor and partner effects for gossip initiation valence and encouragement.

Partner Negative gossip about others was negatively related to actor perceptions of Conflict ($p = .05$). No other findings emerged as significant.

Two-way interaction effects.

At Step 3, several two-way interactions were added to the model to predict actor perceptions of friendship quality. However, no significant findings emerged.

In the present study, the quality and prevalence of observed gossip behavior was examined in the best friendships of boys and girls in grades five and six. In addition, the relations between observed gossip behavior and perceptions of friendship quality were examined. Theoretically, gossip was proposed to be important for friendships (e.g., Banny, Heilbron, Ames, & Prinstein, 2011): Scholars have argued that gossip allows friends to establish similarities and also to share information about non-group members in order to strengthen the ties between the friends who are gossiping (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). Importantly, theories of friendship have suggested that intimacy and intimate disclosure are key components of a high quality friendship (Selman, 1983; Sullivan, 1953), and gossip, as an indicator of intimate disclosure, are expected to aid in achieving a high quality friendship (Parker & Gottman, 1989).

Alternatively, more recent research has focused on the negative aspects of gossip behaviors in the friendships of youth. For example, social research and theory also have suggested that gossip, particularly in its negative form, could be detrimental for friendships. For example, Banny and colleagues (2011) found that negative gossip was associated with friendships that comprised high levels of dominance, conflict, and criticism.

Hypotheses Part I: Prevalence and Forms of Gossip

It was expected that gossip would be prominent in the friendships of youth; indeed results from the current study supported this notion. Across 200 dyads (100 boy dyads), there were over 2000 instances of gossip, which spanned across multiple targets, such as peers, family, others, and experimenters. It was also expected that there would be

various qualities of gossip that occur during middle childhood and early adolescence (Parker & Gottman, 1989); that neutral, positive, and negative gossip would be evident across the different targets; and that the proportions of neutral, positive, and negative gossip may differ. In general, children in the current study mostly gossiped about *peers* compared to other targets such as family and others. Likewise, children generally gossiped about peers in a derogatory or negative manner as well as in a non-evaluative or neutral manner, which is in line with the writings of Parker and Gottman. Furthermore, best friends predominately encouraged or positively reinforced each other to continue gossiping about peers regardless of the valence of the gossip.

In general, children gossiped about *family* members less than they did about peers; children also were more non-evaluative or neutral in their gossip about family members than they were positive or negative. Lastly, children gossiped about *others* less than they did about peers, but more than they gossiped about family members; children were more non-evaluative or neutral in their gossip about others than they were positive or negative; and there were also more instances of encouragement for neutral gossip about others than there were for other forms of gossip.

It was also expected that *gender differences* might emerge in the nature and prevalence of gossip. According to scholars, there was little empirical support that girls gossiped more than boys, despite claims that such differences existed (Banny et al., 2011; Dunbar, 1994; Eckert, 1990; Foster, 2004; Haviland, 1977; Ginsberg & Gottman, 1986; Levin & Arluke, 1985; Nevo, Nevo, & Derech-Zehavi, 1993). However, there was some support that girls gossiped more about familiar others, such as family and friends, whereas boys gossiped more about unfamiliar individuals (Levin & Arluke, 1985).

Scholars also have noted that boys were less likely than girls to converse with their friends (or rather much of their play tended to be competitive in nature, which may have impeded conversation) (Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Leaper & Smith, 2004; Schneider & Tessier, 2007).

Thus, while the empirical literature was scant, it was still expected that gender differences would emerge with regard to the target of the gossip (friends, family, and others), the valence of gossip (positive, negative, neutral), and the responses to gossip (encouraging, not encouraging), while taking into account non-gossip talk. Indeed some differences were found. No gender differences emerged regarding gossip about peers and family. Girls were found to gossip more than boys about others, though this finding was specific to youth in grade 6. For the most part, work that revealed little gender differences in the nature and prevalence of gossip during middle childhood was supported by the results of the current dissertation (e.g., Wilkinson, 1988).

Another focus of the current dissertation was to address the possibility of *age or grade differences* in the prevalence and nature of gossip behavior in children's best friendships. Researchers have suggested that there are developmental differences in the nature and prevalence of gossip (e.g., Gottman & Mettetal, 1989; Parker & Gottman, 1989; Wilkinson, 1988). Age differences in the nature and prevalence of gossip among fifth graders and sixth graders were rare in the current dissertation; for example, younger children used more positive gossip than older children.

The most interesting findings occurred within the *gender-by-grade* comparisons. For example, in grade 6, girls were found to have gossiped more about others than were boys, as previously discussed. Research on children in the fourth grade and below

support the finding that no gender differences emerged regarding gossip about familiar individuals (e.g., Wilkinson, 1988), however, the same research found that girls gossiped more about unfamiliar others (e.g., celebrities) than did boys. While the *others* category in the current dissertation included celebrities among other individuals like teachers, the focus of the current study was not on making these distinctions (for subcategories that were also coded for, see Appendix C). But when exploring the frequencies of these distinctions, girls generally had more instances of gossip about teachers than other types of "others", whereas boys gossiped more about celebrity athletes than about other types of "others".

Beyond gender differences, little age differences emerged. Perhaps because the focus of the current study was on fifth graders and sixth graders, there may not have been enough distance between ages to capture an age effect; most work on age differences had focused on ages that were two years apart (e.g., Wilkinson, 1988), or compared young adolescents to older adolescents or young adults (e.g., Mettetal, 1982). It would be important for future researchers to examine a wider set of ages in order to understand the developmental differences in the prevalence and nature of gossip for boys and girls.

Hypotheses Part II: The Association of Gossip and Perceived Friendship Quality

As noted above, another overarching goal of the current study was to examine the relation between gossip behavior and friendship quality. But before turning to the relations between gossip and perceived friendship quality, it was important to examine friendship quality per se. The literature has suggested that perceptions of friendships may be congruent or discrepant between friendship partners (Banny et al., 2011; Brendgen et al., 2001; Kenny et al., 2006; Rubin et al., 2006; Simpkins & Parke 2001). Results from

the current study suggested that friends rated their perceptions of friendship quality similarly on most domains, with the exception of conflict resolution. Perhaps this finding is in line with other research that has suggested that youth may not always agree with their friends when they rated friendship experiences that were more subjective, such as conflict resolution (Parker & Asher, 1993), whereas friends were more likely to agree on relatively more objective experiences, such as conflict and companionship (Simpkins et al., 2006).

Beyond examining congruency or discrepancy between friendship partners on perceptions of friendship quality, other contextual factors could alter or change the congruency or discrepancy in perceptions (Little et al., 1999; Simpkins et al., 2006). According to Kenny and colleagues, (2006), each member's behaviors or characteristics make a significant contribution to how each person understands the relationship. This stance has been supported by empirical research (e.g., Brendgen et al., 2000). In research on social withdrawal, scholars have noted, for example, that socially withdrawn youth had less positive perceptions of their friendship than did their friends (Rubin et al., 2006). And in other work, some have suggested that a person's own rating of how important a friendship feature was to them may have affected how they rated their friendship (i.e., personal biases) (Simpkins et al., 2006).

Gossip behavior, and the quality of that behavior, is another behavior that could influence how children perceive their friendships. Gossip behavior has been linked to both positive and negative friendship qualities (e.g., Banny, Heilbron, Ames, & Prinstein, 2011; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). Likewise, positive reinforcement, mutual engagement, and validation were important aspects of high quality friendships (Berndt,

1982; Parker & Gottman, 1989; Selman, 1980, Sullivan, 1953), and these behaviors might be displayed through encouragement of gossip. However, little work has simultaneously examined different forms of gossip, different targets of gossip, responses to gossip, and both genders. The current study addressed these different aspects of gossip under the constraints of an APIM approach.

Gossip about peers.

Beyond the amount of *gossip about peers*, a major aim of the current study was to address the *relation* between gossip behavior about peers and perceptions of friendship quality, using an actor-partner interdependence model approach. Several noted findings emerged. For one, the more children gossiped about their peers in a negative manner and the more girls gossiped about peers in a non-evaluative manner (Figure 4), the higher their perceptions of friendship conflict resolution. For negative gossip about peers, perhaps children are using an "us-versus-them" approach and this approach dominates the conversation. That is, children may negatively talk about their peers and share similar negative opinions; as a result, there is less room for conflict in opinion. In turn, these agreements in attitudes about peers outside of their friendship might be related to exclusivity within their relationship (Parker & Gottman, 1986).

For neutral gossip about peers, perhaps this form of gossip was also related to resolving disagreements and conflict quickly. Since neutral gossip is non-evaluative, there may be even less room for conflict in opinions than negative gossip, since neutral statements themselves do not open the conversation for possible disagreement or conflict; however, this possibility is open to speculation. Regardless, it could be the case that the way that conflict is resolved is more important to examine with relation to gossip and

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friendship quality. For example, there are several ways to mitigate conflict, such as minimizing the severity of the conflict (Bowker, 2004). This idea will be discussed further in the section below on friend's encouragement of gossip and conflict resolution.

It was also the case that the more girls used positive (Figure 2) and negative gossip (Figure 3) about peers, the less likely they were to report help and guidance in their friendship (but these relations were only relevant for girls). Perhaps, as previously discussed, if gossip dominates conversation, whether positive or negative, it may be related to less room in the relationship for action. More specifically, the help and guidance subscale of the Friendship Quality Questionnaire's (Parker & Asher, 1993) referred more to *instrumental* help with finishing tasks and *sharing* tangible objects. But friendships that are dominated by gossiping or conversation in general might prohibit such instrumental behaviors. Furthermore, theory has suggested that social relationships and social acceptance become increasingly important concerns during childhood and early adolescence (Parker & Gottman, 1986; Selman, 1983). Drawing on this theory, perhaps it would be beneficial for researchers to also ask children the extent to which they receive or give social help to their friends, such as helping friends solve peer or friendship problems. Adding items that tap into these constructs may result in different relations between gossip about peers and friendship quality. For example, social or relational help might include talking about how to approach someone that a child likes or how to avoid or decrease peer rejection problems (Rubin, 2003), which is a form of gossip.

Additional results from the current study also suggested that a *friend's* gossip behavior about peers affected a child's perception of the friendship. For example, the

more a child's *friend* negatively gossiped about his or her peers, the more the child felt the friendship had high levels of conflict, regardless of gender. But, consider that conflict or disagreements are argued to occur more between friends than non-friends (for a review, see Laursen & Pursell, 2009). Laursen and Pursell have suggested that conflict is not inherently a negative quality of friendship. Conflict within close relationships generally produced less negative affect than conflict in less close relationships, for example (Murphy & Eisenberg, 2002). Thus, one might argue that good friends who feel positive about their relationship may also disagree and engage in conflict on a regular basis (Selman, 1980). It is likely that interactive processes, such as gossip, are closely tied to feelings of closeness and positive feelings between friends, as well as ample opportunities for conflict as demonstrated in the current study.

One aspect of conflict that might be important to further examine and might explain some of the findings is *betrayal*. For example, there were a number of questions within the conflict subscale in the Friendship Quality Questionnaire that referred to whether a friend often broke promises or talked badly about the informant to other people outside of the friendship. Perhaps gossip, in its negative form, might promote perceptions of betrayal among children because it raises issues of loyalty. For example, a child may have perceived a friend to be less trustworthy if that friend negatively gossiped about peers (Kuttler et al., 2002). Complicating the picture even more, a child may become worried or anxious regarding the possibility that their friend negatively gossiped about him or her to other people. In future research, it might be important to examine conflict and betrayal as separate entities in order to address the speculations above.

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While having friends who negatively gossiped about peers was associated with higher perceptions of conflict, having friends who *positively* gossiped about peers was associated with lower perceptions of conflict, though this was only the case for girls (Figure 5). The results of the current study supported the notion that the interactive discussions of girls have a stronger effect on their own perceptions of their friendships compared to the interactive discussions of boys: in the case of the current dissertation, it was positive gossip about peers and perceptions of conflict, among other relations already discussed or will be discussed later in this dissertation (Foster, 2004; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Leaper & Holliday, 1995).

As previously noted, negative gossip about peers might be related to untrustworthiness of the gossiper. In an inverse manner, positive gossip about peers might be related to trustworthiness of the gossiper. It may be that positive gossip had a larger effect on the friendships of girls due to the motivations and importance of discussion and communication of feelings and emotions as well as the importance of friendships for girls (Benenson, 1993; Benenson et al., 1997). In other words, researchers have suggested that girls are more focused on building close dyadic relationships that involve high levels of disclosure and conversation (Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Leaper & Smith, 2004; Schneider & Tessier, 2007). And gossiping about peers, as a behavior that furthers conversation, discourse, would exemplify the essence of a close dyadic relationship. For boys, gossip and discussion in general were not important for friendships. Researchers have suggested similar relations with respect to general discussion and intimate disclosure (Benenson, 1993; Benenson et al., 1997; Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Leaper & Smith, 2004; Schneider & Tessier, 2007); as a result the null

findings regarding the relations between gossip and perceptions of friendship quality for boys was not surprising. Future work might incorporate assessments of *motivations* to engage in gossip and how important children feel gossip is within friendships, and address these perspectives as a function of gender.

Beyond considering just conflict, it may be that the way conflict was *resolved* that would be more telling of whether conflict in a friendship had negative, neutral, or positive consequences (Bowker, 2004). Thus, to understand whether conflict in friendships is harmful for children who gossip about peers, it is important for researchers to examine both conflict and its resolution (Laursen & Pursell, 2009). Perhaps some insight may be drawn from the current dissertation with regard to the results on *responses to gossip about peers*. Results from the current study suggested that the more a *friend* encouraged a child to gossip about peers, the less perceived conflict resolution the child reported (Figure 6); however, this finding was specific to the friendships of girls.

Scholars have suggested that girls often have conflicts that revolve around relationship or social problems, such as one girl being excluded from a party when their friend was invited (Noakes & Rinaldi, 2006). And girls who used minimizing strategies during conflict were more at risk for friendship dissolution (Bowker, 2004). Laursen (1993) argued that passive or minimizing strategies may be a *quick* way to resolve conflicts or issues of betrayal or a quick way to prevent conflict from occurring, but the repercussions of such strategies could lead children to avoid people, even friends, that they are having conflict with or might have a conflict with, thereby increasing the likelihood of friendship dissolution. Perhaps, encouragement of positive reinforcement of gossiping behavior is a way for girls to avoid or minimize the severity of conflict or

interpersonal problem (Bowker, 2004), thereby decreasing the likelihood of resolving those issues of conflict. For example, a girl might have a problem with another girl outside of the friendship and gossips about it with her friend. In order to reduce the likelihood of conflict, the friend may positively reinforce the girl's gossiping behavior. Unfortunately, I was unable to examine negative gossip about peers that was encouraged due to power issues in the current dissertation; increasing the sample size in order to examine these relations would be a next step in addressing these issues.

Additional results regarding responses to gossip about peers indicated that the more children encouraged their friends to gossip about peers the more they perceived that their friendship was validating. These findings support the notion that encouraging or positively reinforcing behaviors, such as gossip, was related to high levels of positive perceptions of friendships (e.g., Berndt, 2982; Selman, 1980; Sullivan, 1953).

Gossip about family.

Another aim of the current study was to examine the extent to which best friends gossiped about their family members. When examining the relation between gossip behavior about family and perceptions of friendship quality, several findings emerged. For one, the more children gossiped about family members in a positive or a negative manner, the less conflict their perceived in their friendships; though these findings were only for girls. It may be the case that, for example, Girl B interacted with Girl A's family members at a relatively low rate. The risk of information transmission between Girl B and Girl A's family was lessened as a result, and might then be related to aspects of perceived trustworthiness and loyalty of the listener. Girl A then may be more open and willing to talk about her family in this context, compared to talking about peers.

It was also the case that *friend's* gossip behavior about family members affected a child's perception of their friendship. For example, the more a child's *friend* negatively gossiped about their family members, the more conflict the child perceived in the friendship (girls only). Taking into consideration the different relations between actor and partner negative gossip about family members and actor perceptions of friendship conflict, it may be the case that initiating negative gossip about family members decreased perceptions of conflict, but receiving or listening to negative gossip about family members promoted perceptions of conflict. It could be that while girls might love to "dish" and disclose information about themselves and their own family problems, they may not always enjoy or feel comfortable hearing about their friends' family problems. As a result, they may discourage their friend from negative gossip about family members, by ignoring the gossip or suggesting or changing the topic of discussion, which could lead to conflict.

The interaction of friend negative gossip about family members and child encouragement emerged as significant for conflict, conflict resolution, and total positivity. However, I was unable to further examine these interactions due to statistical power limitations; similarly, the current dissertation was unable to ascertain the influence of gender *and* encouragement in the relation between gossip initiation about family members, or other types of targets, and friendship quality. It would be important to extend the current dissertation sample to include additional dyads in order to examine these relations to see how the interactions between gossip initiation and encouragement was associate with perceptions of friendship quality, and how gender might further explain the relations.

Gossip about others.

Another aim of the current study was to examine the extent to which best friends gossiped about others who were not peers or family members. When examining the relation between gossip behavior about others and perceptions of friendship quality, only a few noted findings emerged. Friend's gossip behavior about others was found to affect a child's perception of his or her friendship. For example, the more a child's friend negatively gossiped about others, the more conflict the child perceived in the friendship. Again, this may be related to issues that revolve around conflict and betrayal, and also conflict resolution, as described previously.

Summary.

In summary, the results of the current study supported the notion that the gossip of girls had a stronger concurrent relation to perceptions of friendship quality than the gossip of boys (Foster, 2004; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Leaper & Holliday, 1995). In addition, these relations seemed to vary depending on which friend gossiped and which friend responded to gossip, and also whom the gossip was about. Perhaps gossip was more important for the friendships of girls due to the motivations and importance of highly intimate friendships for girls. In other words, scholars have argued that girls place more importance than boys on intimate self-disclosure and social support in their friendships, whereas boys were expected to engage in more non-verbal activities than girls, such as sports or video games (Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Leaper & Smith, 2004; Schneider & Tessier, 2007).

Strengths and Limitations

Gossip quality.

One strength of the current study was the focus on distinguishing between qualities of gossip. Importantly, researchers have often disagreed as to whether quality is important in understanding how gossip is related to friendship and peer relationships. Results from the current dissertation confirmed the notion that quality was important to distinguish, especially when examining the linkages between gossip behavior and perceptions of friendship quality. The results of the current study suggested high linkages between positive gossip and positive friendship quality, and high linkages between negative gossip and both positive and negative friendship quality.

However, one drawback of the current study with regard to valence was that positive, negative, and neutral valence were mutually exclusive from each other for each initiation of a new gossip episode. In some cases, an initiation of gossip contained both a positive and negative evaluation (Levin & Arluke, 1985; McDonald et al., 2007). For example a child liked and also disliked different aspects of the same thing. Unfortunately, the coding system used in the current study did not examine mixed responses, though care was taken to code responses in terms of what behavior or evaluation was deemed dominant in the initiation. That is, if different forms were evident, coders were instructed to classify gossip instances based on the valence that was most salient or intense.

In addition, another area that could help explain how gossip was related to friendship quality would be to examine the level of intimacy in the gossip. For example, some scholars have suggested that girls, in general, were more likely to talk about others

in a *highly* intimate nature compared to information that was more surface-level or non-intimate (Dolgin & Kim, 1994). Examinations of intimacy levels, and also connections between the intimacy level and the valence of the gossip, may help researchers understand the importance or non-importance of gossip and evaluative talk among childhood friends.

Gossip response.

Another strength of the current study was the focus on responses to gossip. Importantly, theory and research has suggested that socially skilled communicators are those who positively respond to initiations of conversations by saying something relevant to the topic at hand, or in some way encouraging the conversation to continue. Scholars have noted that these behaviors are highly valued in friendships and that these behaviors also can demonstrate the presence of a high quality friendship (Berndt, 1982; Black & Logan, 1995; Selman, 1980; Sullivan, 1953). The work from the current dissertation added to this literature.

Yet, one of the limitations of the current study was the focus on a dichotomous categorization of encouragement or positive reinforcement. Some researchers have argued that there are different levels and forms of responses to gossip. For example, Leaper and Holliday (1995) suggested that there were five levels of responses: discouragement, neutral response, mild encouragement, moderate encouragement, and high encouragement. And Ginsberg and Gottman (1986) argued that responses could either reciprocate gossip or fail to reciprocate gossip. By reciprocation, these scholars meant that a person positively reinforced another person's gossip behavior by *also* gossiping. Further subcategories of Ginsberg and Gottman's suggestions as well as

Leaper and Hollidays' suggestions might be to look at responses to gossip that also included information on negative, neutral, or positive quality. That is, the responder might continue to gossip but the quality of the gossip might differ from the gossip of the initiator (McDonald et al., 2006); this type of gossip exchange was not very common in some work (e.g., McDonald et al., 2006). While the current study did not address these fine-detailed distinctions, future research may find that these distinctions are important in friendships, given that individuals differ in their opinions of other people and often express those opinions. Reinforcing gossip with gossip that contradicts another person's point of view or opinion, in this case, could be associated with aspects of conflict and conflict resolution. These questions deserve examination in the future.

Observational studies.

Another strength of the current study was the use of a mixed-method design that included observations of behavior. Most research on friendships has focused on self-report measures rather than observations (Bakeman & Gottman, 1997). By observing friendship processes, researchers can systematically increase their knowledge of what friendships "look like" for children and what friends do together. When youths' perceptions are also measured, observations can reveal how perceptions and behaviors are inter-related; the degree of consistency between perceptions and behaviors may itself be a variable of considerable interest (Simpkins, Parke, Flyr, & Wild, 2006).

However, while a strength, the environmental conditions of laboratory observations of gossip were highly controlled (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Pepler & Craig, 1995; Ostrov et al., 2004). To be able to tap into naturally occurring gossip at home or school may present a challenge given that gossip is talk or discourse, whereas other

behavior, such as bullying (Pepler & Craig, 1995) is an action and thus can be seen from distances. Regardless, research within lab settings, like the current study, has offered meaningful connections between observed gossip and perceived friendship quality, and future research should draw on these studies and explore gossip within different contexts.

The actor-partner interdependence model.

Much of the extant research on friendship quality has focused on the characteristics of the individual, without consideration of friend characteristics. The findings described herein extend those of previous studies (e.g., Rubin et al., 2006; Schneider, 1999) by distinguishing the unique contributions of the children (actor) and their friends (partner) on the focal young adolescent's (actor) perceptions of friendship quality by using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (*APIM*, Kenny et al., 2006). Scholars have suggested that it is important to study perceptions of both members in a social relationship (Kenny et al., 2006). For example, several scholars have noted that friendship partners often have different views of their relationship's quality (Banny et al., 2011; Brendgen, Markiewicz, Doyle, & Bukowski, 2001; Simpkins & Parke 2001). Furthermore, other factors that are actor or partner specific may alter the perceptions of friendship quality.

The current dissertation was one of few to examine the link between communication behavior and perceptions of friendship quality among children using an actor-partner interdependence approach. Indeed, the results from the current study supported the notion that actor-partner interdependence models were important in understanding how the behavior of one child can affect their own perceptions of friendship quality as well as their friends' perceptions of friendship quality. Furthermore,

there were several actor-by-partner effects, whereby encouragement by one partner was related to how the quality of the gossip was associated with perceptions of friendship quality; but given the small sample size it was not possible to extract any meaningful interpretations of these interactions.

As previously noted, there were also several aspects of actor and partner effects that were not addressed in the current study. For example, discrepancies in the number of gossip initiations may be important in understanding perceptions of friendship quality. For example, the current study used an indistinguishable design, where by actors and partners were deemed equals. However, it is possible that actors and partners could have been distinguished, for example, by how much each person gossiped in the relationship. In others words, one might ask in future research whether one partner *dominated* the conversation with gossip, and if so, how does the friend respond, and subsequently, how does the friend view the friendship? In other words, where one partner dominates the other in gossip talk, how does it affect the perceptions of the friendship via the perspective of both the actor and the partner?

Another aspect of the actor-partner model that was not addressed in the current study was to examine children with multiple partners. If Child A gossips consistently across partners, one might begin to think about an actor-based, trait like phenomenon. If Child A's gossip is inconsistent across partners, then there may be a partner or a situational effect (Perlman, Ross, & Garfinkel, 2009). In another respect, it is also possible that actors and partners are fairly similar to each other on personality or clinical measures; for example negativity within a dyad might be related to more negative gossip and more relationship problems. Examinations of other forms of homophily may further

inform the nature and function of gossip in children's friendships. It would be interesting to examine these possibilities in future research.

Focus on gender and age.

An important strength of the current study was the focus on gender. As found in previous studies, girls tended to report higher positive friendships in their friendships (De Goede et al., 2009; Parker & Asher, 1993; Simpkins & Parke, 2001), and thus relationship-related factors may strongly affect the friendships of girls, more so than boys. Furthermore, the current dissertation also debunked the myth or popular notion that girls gossiped more than boys. This work sets the groundwork for more research on the possibility that girls and boys are part of different worlds or the same world (Maccoby, 1998).

Unfortunately, however, the focus on *age* or developmental differences was largely a limitation rather than a strength. For one, the current study was *cross-sectional*. Therefore, we could not examine causal relations among variables. Gossip was a hypothesized marker of closeness and positive friendship qualities and support for this notion was provided in the current study. However, the current study presented was neither longitudinal nor experimental, and many questions remain regarding the causal direction between gossip and friendship quality. It was plausible that gossip precedes perceptions of positive friendship quality (Parker & Gottman, 1989), but the reverse was plausible as well. In other words, acts of gossip may lead children to feel that their friendships were stronger, closer, and more intimate. It was also possible that feeling that friendships are stronger, closer, and more intimate may lead children to gossip. In a short-term longitudinal study, Banny and colleagues (2011) found that negative gossip

was associated with increases in both positive and negative friendship features over time; however, they did not examine whether increases in positive and negative friendship features led to increases in gossip behavior.

It may also be the case that gossip can lead to friendship stability or dissolution. For example, the nature of the gossip within friendships could be a strong predictor of whether friendships are more or less stable. To answer these longitudinal questions could uncover whether gossip can lead to *strong* social relationships, *rip* social relationships apart, or *both*. Additionally, it would be important to distinguish between friendship dissolution and friendship downgrade, whereby dissolution referred to a complete separation of friends, whereas a downgrade referred to best friends who become only good friends (Bowker, 2011). It will be important to address such causal questions with longitudinal data.

As previously noted, research has also indicated differences in age effects for children in middle childhood compared to adolescents in middle adolescence (Gottman & Mettetal, 1989), and also that there were age effects for children in middle childhood compared to children in early childhood (Wilkinson, 1988). But another limitation with respect to developmental differences was that the current study focused on age differences between groups of children who were only one year apart (grade five and grade six). Age-related differences were largely not present, perhaps because the groups were too close in age to capture an age effect. Future research should expand the length of time between age groups in order to address developmental differences in the prevalence of gossip as well as the relation of gossip to perceptions of friendship quality (Gottman & Mettetal, 1989; Wilkinson, 1988).

Focus on targets.

An additional strength of the current study was that it addressed the prevalence of gossip and the relations of gossip to perceptions of friendship quality as a function of the content of the gossip, in this case, the target of the gossip or whom the gossip was about. Indeed, results of the current study suggested that there were differences in the nature of the gossip depending on the target, and that the relations between gossip and friendship quality also differ depending on the target of the gossip. Because the aims of the current study were to address gossip valence and gossip about peers, family, and others in a broader sense, the several subcategories within each group were not addressed. For example, gossip about peers could have been about same-sex peers or opposite-sex peers. Based on frequency counts within the current dataset, more than 57% of gossip about peers was about same-sex peers, whereas 31% of gossip about peers were about opposite-sex peers, and the remaining 12% percent were gossip about peers that were unidentified by gender or were about mixed-gendered groups of peers. Developmentally, the gender of the target of gossip would be important to take into consideration. Theoretically, researchers and scholars have suggested that gossip about opposite-sex peers increases with age as children and adolescents become interested in romantic relationships and cross-sex platonic relationships (Parker & Gottman, 1989).

Gossip about family members could have been further categorized as gossip about mothers, fathers, siblings, or other family members as well. Frequency counts of the current dissertation dataset suggested that mothers were more gossiped about than fathers, siblings, or other family members. And lastly, gossip about others could have been about teachers, celebrities, and others who are neither friends nor family members;

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frequency counts of these subcategories suggest that celebrity athletes were the most gossiped about within the other category, followed by teachers. In terms of gender differences, this may be particularly important since research has suggested that boys and males were more likely to talk about celebrity athletes or sports teams compared to the gossip by girls (Levin & Arluke, 1985). Further examination of these subgroups would shed additional light on the role and function of gossip in friendships.

Additional Future Directions

Gossip and peer status.

As the current study has suggested, gossip was an activity that often occurred within the friendship context: that is, friends gossiped with each other. However, one area that may be important to examine in the future is the extent to which the prevalence and nature of gossip differs in the friendships of youth who vary in peer acceptance and rejection. Theoretically and empirically, scholars have noted that gossip was related to peer acceptance (Foster, 2004; Gottman & Parker, 1986; Selman, 1983). For example, gossip was an easy and indirect technique that can be used to gather information about others, and also to learn about whether the behaviors of those that are gossiped about adhere to social norms of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors (Wilkinson, 1988). A child may learn what *not* to do in order to avoid being bullied by others. Yet, to gossip too much or to not gossip at all was associated with rejection from the peer group (Bergmann, 1993; Gilmore, 1978; Kurland & Pelled, 2000; Foster, 2004; Yerkovich, 1977). Following the notion that too much or too little gossip could have negative consequences for peer relationships, Kurland and Pelled (2000) hypothesized that a curvilinear relationship existed, such that moderate gossip was more acceptable in social

situations than no gossip or frequent gossip; however, their study was limited to the workplace or industrial-organizational settings.

Kurland and Pelled (2000) also did not differentiate between forms of gossip. Fine (1977) argued that negative gossip, in particular, could be used as a way to elevate a person's own perception of superiority or status. Fine also speculated that gossip, in its positive forms, could be associated with sophisticated cognitive ability in recalling information, and sophisticated linguistic and conversational skills (Wilkinson, 1988). Thus the ability to gossip may demonstrate social competence. Sociometrically popular girls have been found to display more evaluative gossip compared to rejected girls (Lansford et al., 2006; McDonald et al., 2007). Lansford and colleagues speculated that the behaviors of rejected girls were more likely to elicit *negative reactions* from friends. McDonald and colleagues (2007) also found that sociometrically popular girls were more likely to gossip about peers, talk about a larger number of different peers, talk about boys, and used more positive and negative gossip than rejected girls, perhaps because they are more socially connected (Jaeger et al., 1994).

Also, it might be the case that children used negative gossip because they were experiencing problems with their peers (e.g., victimization; exclusion). For some, talking about interpersonal problems could escalate into co-rumination, wherein young adolescents cyclically discuss peer problems (Rose, 2002). These processes have been associated with anxiety and depression, as well as high positive friendship quality (Rose, 2002). However, in work that has focused on *spontaneous* co-rumination within observed laboratory setting, researchers have found little to no prevalence of co-rumination (Buskirk-Cohen, 2008).

In addition to examining the association of gossip and acceptance, it would also be important to test whether gossip moderates the relation between peer status and perceptions of friendship quality. Brendgen, Little, and Krappman (2000) as well as Phillipsen (1999) and Lansford and colleagues (2006), studied children of various sociometric statuses (e.g., rejected, popular, and average) and found that rejected children were more likely to report low quality friendships compared to average and popular children (Brendgen et al., 2000; Parker & Asher, 1993).

Few researchers have explored the prevalence and nature of gossip in the friendships of victimized youth specifically. If it is the case that sociometrically popular girls used more evaluative gossip than disliked girls (McDonald et al., 2007), do victimized, though not necessarily disliked, youth also use less evaluative gossip and more neutral gossip? In general, positive gossip may not be associated with victimization; negative gossip, on the other hand, may place someone *at risk* for victimization (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996). Further, the use of negative gossip within the confines of friendships might be an artifact of the gossiper's own status in the peer group: children who are rejected or victimized might talk about the people who do not like them or the people who bully and victimize them. And talking about peer problems may be associated with heightened levels of positive friendship quality.

Gossip and aggression.

It also may be important to example individual differences in social characteristics, for example, aggressiveness. Some gossip includes negative evaluations of others, which can be used to bully, manipulate, exclude, and negatively influence others, even friends. Using gossip to bully, manipulate, exclude, and negatively

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influence others has been termed relational or social aggression (Grotpeter & Crick, 1996). Furthermore, spreading rumors or *false* gossip was also included in the definition of relational or social aggression, and was negatively correlated with liking, expertise, and trust (Turner, Mazur, Wendel, & Winslow, 2003). While Parker and Seal (1996) suggested that knowing gossip information about other peers could make someone an attractive friendship partner, they also found that those who had reputations as frequent gossipers had relatively unstable friendships. Others have suggested that peers may judge gossiping as an unattractive behavior (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Kuttler, Parker, & La Greca, 2002).

Recently, researchers have suggested that a distinction should be made between those who were accepted and likeable (and thus "popular") and those who were viewed by the peer group as socially dominant and popular (and not necessarily liked or accepted by peers). In this latter group were individuals who were more likely to be relationally aggressive and who used negative gossip (Bowker et al., 2010; Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Grotpeter & Crick, 1996; McDonald et al., 2007). Relational aggression between friends has been associated with both positive (e.g., intimacy, validation, loyalty) and negative aspects of friendship quality (e.g., conflict and criticism) (Banny et al., 2011).

In the current study, the *function* of the gossip was not examined. However, it would be important to follow up the current study by examining relational aggression within the context of friendships: that is does, one friend gossip in such a way to persuade or influence the other friend to act in a specific way; and how do these domineering behaviors relate to perceptions of friendship quality? It would be important for researchers to examine gossip that is specifically used to be socially and relationally

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aggressive towards friends who are interacting with the gossiper or towards friends and peers who are outside of the relationship in question. These research questions may shed like on findings from the current study with regard to conflict and betrayal.

Gossip and anxious withdrawal.

Another individual difference that might be important to examine is anxious withdrawal, which has been argued to increase a young adolescent's risk for friendship difficulties (Rubin, Wojslawowicz, Rose-Krasnor, Booth-LaForce, & Burgess, 2006). Researchers have found that anxiously withdrawn youth were less competent and responsive to others than were their more sociable peers (e.g., Evans, 2010). Despite these difficulties, anxiously withdrawn young adolescents were involved in friendships and were likely to have generally positive perceptions of their friendships; however, these perceptions were less positive than those of non-anxiously withdrawn young adolescents (Rubin et al., 2006). Anxiously withdrawn young adolescents might have found it more difficult, therefore, to maintain a sense of closeness with their friends than did their non-anxiously withdrawn peers (Rubin et al., 2006; Schneider, 1999).

Indeed, gossiping with friends might be a way for anxiously withdrawn young adolescents to feel closer to their friends (Menzer et al., revise-resubmit). Moreover, affiliation with more sociable peers has been argued to be important for popularity, as well as friendship closeness (Eder, 1985). Gossiping effectively may be especially challenging for anxiously withdrawn youth, given their communication difficulties (Evans, 2010). For example, anxiously withdrawn youth were less able to pick up on social cues that indicated the acceptability or unacceptability of certain behaviors (Evans, 2010).

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Conclusions

Taken together, the findings indicate that the quality of gossip between child friends were important for friendships (Sullivan, 1953), and were especially more important for the friendships of girls than the friendships of boys. Specifically, gossip was associated with positive aspects of friendship quality, but also associated with negative aspects of friendship quality, such as conflict. As previously noted, it may be that conflict resulted from greater engagement and higher frequencies of interaction within the friendship and thus may not necessarily indicate relationship difficulties. Furthermore, the associations between gossip and friendship quality varied depending on the quality of the gossip. Positive gossip was associated with various forms of positive friendship quality; and negative gossip was associated with various forms of both positive and negative friendship quality. The results of the current dissertation highlight the various ways in which gossip and perceptions of friendship quality in the friendships of children were related, as well as providing direction for further investigations of the general functions of gossip.

Table 1

Frequency of Gossip Instances

	Total (*n* = 2508)	Peers (*n* = 878)	Family (*n* = 392)	Others (*n* = 568)
Positive Gossip	401	187	46	168
Negative Gossip	502	303	87	112
Neutral Gossip	935	388	259	288
Encouraging Response	1265	642	245	378
Positive Gossip and Encouragement	277	130	30	117
Negative Gossip and Encouragement	366	233	53	80
Neutral Gossip and Encouragement	622	279	162	181

Note. Gossip about Experimenters *n* = 670. Instances of Experimenter gossip were not coded for valence and response. Most gossip episodes had two turns (61.6% of the time), followed by three turns (16.7); and the maximum number of turns per episode was 24.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Gossip and Perceptions of Friendship Qualities

	Boys Grade 5		Girls Grade 5		Boys Grade 6		Girls Grade 6	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
FQQ Companionship	3.70	0.76	3.92	0.78	3.92	0.73	4.07	0.73
FQQ Validation	4.12	0.67	4.37	0.51	4.00	0.64	4.28	0.57
FQQ Help	3.66	0.81	3.89	0.75	3.70	0.71	4.00	0.72
FQQ Intimate Disclosure	3.31	1.03	3.95	0.77	3.30	0.90	4.06	0.82
FQQ Conflict Resolution	4.17	0.82	4.29	0.67	4.11	0.80	4.33	0.75
FQQ Conflict	-4.21	0.60	-4.38	0.56	-4.36	0.55	-4.28	0.71
FQQ Total Positivity	3.79	0.70	4.08	0.52	3.81	0.61	4.15	0.56
Total Peer Gossip	0.12	0.85	0.19	1.72	0.09	1.13	-0.40	3.73
Positive Gossip	0.04	0.23	0.06	0.57	0.01	0.29	-0.12	1.42
Negative Gossip	0.10	0.31	0.09	0.70	0.04	0.67	-0.22	1.80
Neutral Gossip	-0.02	0.69	0.03	1.11	0.04	0.55	-0.05	1.87
Encouragement	0.08	0.78	0.21	1.22	0.09	0.91	-0.38	2.97
Total Family Gossip	-0.03	0.45	0.02	1.32	-0.02	0.90	0.02	1.56
Positive Gossip	0.00	0.08	0.00	0.46	0.02	0.13	-0.02	0.21
Negative Gossip	-0.01	0.16	0.01	0.48	0.00	0.39	0.00	0.63
Neutral Gossip	-0.02	0.39	0.01	0.78	-0.04	0.81	0.05	1.04
Encouragement	-0.01	0.37	0.01	0.93	-0.05	0.79	0.06	0.94
Total Others Gossip	0.25	1.43	0.01	0.88	-0.53	3.24	0.27	0.93
Positive Gossip	0.14	0.43	0.02	0.25	-0.17	1.07	0.00	0.42
Negative Gossip	0.07	0.33	-0.03	0.41	-0.06	0.53	0.01	0.34
Neutral Gossip	0.04	1.34	0.02	0.70	-0.31	2.66	0.25	0.64
Encouragement	0.17	0.93	0.05	0.63	-0.33	1.89	0.11	0.76

Table 3

Gender by Grade Factorial ANOVA

Source	Dependent Variable	df	F	p
(A) Gender	FQQ Companionship	1	6.020	.015
	FQQ Validation	1	19.820	.000***
	FQQ Help	1	12.615	.000***
	FQQ Intimate Disclosure	1	62.629	.000***
	FQQ Conflict Resolution	1	4.710	.031*
	FQQ Conflict	1	0.559	.455
	FQQ Total Positivity	1	27.550	.000***
	Overall Gossip about Peers	1	0.930	.335
	Overall Gossip about Family	1	0.143	.706
	Overall Gossip about Others	1	2.239	.135
	Positive Gossip about Peers	1	0.575	.449
	Positive Gossip about Family	1	0.726	.395
	Positive Gossip about Others	1	0.148	.701
	Negative Gossip about Peers	1	1.612	.205
	Negative Gossip about Family	1	0.033	.856
	Negative Gossip about Others	1	0.106	.745
	Neutral Gossip about Peers	1	0.025	.874
	Neutral Gossip about Family	1	0.520	.471
	Neutral Gossip about Others	1	3.002	.084
	Encouragement of Gossip about Peers	1	1.039	.309
	Encouragement of Gossip about Family	1	0.661	.417
	Encouragement of Gossip about Others	1	2.061	.152
(B) Grade	FQQ Companionship	1	6.135	.014*
	FQQ Validation	1	2.941	.087
	FQQ Help	1	1.009	.316
	FQQ Intimate Disclosure	1	0.269	.605
	FQQ Conflict Resolution	1	0.010	.919

	FQQ Conflict	1	0.175	.676
	FQQ Total Positivity	1	0.423	.516
	Overall Gossip about Peers	1	2.057	.152
	Overall Gossip about Family	1	0.003	.954
	Overall Gossip about Others	1	1.962	.162
	Positive Gossip about Peers	1	1.901	.169
	Positive Gossip about Family	1	0.035	.852
	Positive Gossip about Others	1	6.911	.009**
	Negative Gossip about Peers	1	3.361	.068
	Negative Gossip about Family	1	0.001	.974
	Negative Gossip about Others	1	1.187	.277
	Neutral Gossip about Peers	1	0.014	.907
	Neutral Gossip about Family	1	0.016	.900
	Neutral Gossip about Others	1	0.121	.728
	Encouragement of Gossip about Peers	1	2.882	.090
	Encouragement of Gossip about Family	1	0.002	.966
	Encouragement of Gossip about Others	1	3.562	.060
A x B (interaction)	FQQ Companionship	1	0.200	.655
	FQQ Validation	1	0.061	.805
	FQQ Help	1	0.152	.697
	FQQ Intimate Disclosure	1	0.449	.503
	FQQ Conflict Resolution	1	0.394	.531
	FQQ Conflict	1	3.728	.054*
	FQQ Total Positivity	1	0.152	.697
	Overall Gossip about Peers	1	1.677	.196
	Overall Gossip about Family	1	0.000	.982
	Overall Gossip about Others	1	7.506	.006**
	Positive Gossip about Peers	1	0.988	.321
	Positive Gossip about Family	1	0.660	.417
	Positive Gossip about Others	1	5.329	.021*
	Negative Gossip about Peers	1	1.561	.212

Negative Gossip about Family	1	0.067	.796
Negative Gossip about Others	1	4.063	.044*
Neutral Gossip about Peers	1	0.398	.528
Neutral Gossip about Family	1	0.148	.701
Neutral Gossip about Others	1	3.411	.066
Encouragement of Gossip about Peers	1	2.978	.085
Encouragement of Gossip about Family	1	0.349	.555
Encouragement of Gossip about Others	1	5.939	.017*
Error (within)	396		

Table 4

Correlations Between and Within Actor and Partner Perceptions of Friendship Qualities

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Actor Perceptions							
1. Companionship	--	.45***	.55***	.48***	.32***	-.11*	.69***
2. Validation		--	.70***	.69***	.68***	-.40***	.86***
3. Help			--	.69***	.56***	-.26***	.86***
4. Intimate Disclosure				--	.55***	-.17***	.86***
5. Conflict Resolution					--	-.32***	.76***
6. Conflict						--	-.30***
7. Total Positivity							--
Partner Perceptions							
8. Companionship	.62***	.17***	.31***	.27***	.11***	.01	.37***
9. Validation		.28***	.26***	.24***	.17***	-.17***	.27***
10. Help			.33***	.32***	.19***	-.10	.35***
11. Intimate Disclosure				.37***	.13***	-.06	.33***
12. Conflict Resolution					.10*	-.18***	.17***
13. Conflict						.36***	-.12*
14. Total Positivity							.37***

Note. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

Table 5

Correlations Between and Within Actor and Partner Gossip about Peers

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Actor Peer Gossip	--	.647***	.815***	.703***	.963***
2. Actor Positive Gossip		--	.510***	.080	.647***
3. Actor Negative Gossip			--	.285***	.795***
4. Actor Neutral Gossip				--	.652***
5. Partner Encouragement of Peer Gossip					--
6. Partner Peer Gossip	.71***	.43***	.53***	.60***	.65***
7. Partner Positive Gossip	--	-.02	.30***	.55***	.34***
8. Partner Negative Gossip		--	.39***	.43***	.46***
9. Partner Neutral Gossip			--	.37***	.58***
10. Actor Encouragement of Peer Gossip				--	.58***

Note. $* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001$.

Table 6

Correlations Between and Within Actor and Partner Gossip about Family

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Actor Family Gossip	--	.45***	.68***	.90***	.76***
2. Actor Positive Gossip		--	.10*	.26***	.12*
3. Actor Negative Gossip			--	.37***	.63***
4. Actor Neutral Gossip				--	.70***
5. Partner Encouragement of Family Gossip					--
6. Partner Family Gossip	.26***	.07	.21***	.22***	.25***
7. Partner Positive Gossip	--	.05	.07	.04	.09
8. Partner Negative Gossip		--	.13*	.21***	.22***
9. Partner Neutral Gossip			--	.19***	.21***
10. Actor Encouragement of Family Gossip				--	.27***

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 7

Correlations Between and Within Actor and Partner Gossip about Others

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Actor Other Gossip	--	.58***	.30***	.90***	.83***
2. Actor Positive Gossip		--	.28***	.22***	.70***
3. Actor Negative Gossip			--	.00	.31***
4. Actor Neutral Gossip				--	.64***
5. Partner Encouragement of Others Gossip					--
6. Partner Other Gossip	.70***	.30***	.18***	.68***	.52***
7. Partner Positive Gossip	--	.38***	.38***	.11*	.33***
8. Partner Negative Gossip		--	-.05	.08	.31***
9. Partner Neutral Gossip			--	.76***	.41***
10. Actor Encouragement of Others Gossip				--	.42***

Note. $*p < .05$; $**p < .01$; $***p < .001$.

Table 8

Standardized Estimates for Actor and Partner Effects for Gossip about Peers on Actor Perceptions of Friendship Qualities

		Comp. Act. β	Valid. Act. β	Help Act. β	Int. Disc. Act. β	Con. Res. Act. β	Conflict Act. β	Tot. Pos. Act. β
Steps	*ICCs*	.61***	.25***	.31***	.27***	.09	.36***	.33***
1	1. Gender	0.18	0.27***	0.27**	0.70***	0.17*	-0.05	0.32***
2	2. Positive Gossip A	0.14	0.08	0.03	0.07	0.00	-0.06	0.06
	3. Negative Gossip A	0.04	-0.11	-0.13	-0.09	-0.24**	0.08	-0.11
	4. Neutral Gossip A	0.10	0.02	-0.07	0.04	-0.09	-0.04	0.00
	5. Encouragement of Gossip P	-0.09	0.02	0.06	0.00	0.10	-0.04	0.02
	6. Positive Gossip P	0.02	-0.06	0.12	-0.04	0.13	0.02	0.03
	7. Negative Gossip P	0.00	-0.12	-0.08	-0.03	-0.03	0.13*	-0.05
	8. Neutral Gossip P	-0.02	-0.08	-0.05	-0.03	0.09	0.02	-0.02
	9. Encouragement of Gossip A	0.04	0.14*	0.09	0.06	-0.01	-0.11	0.07
3	10. Gender-x-Positive Gossip A	-0.19	-0.27	-0.64*	-0.09	0.12	-0.06	-0.21
	11. Gender-x-Negative Gossip A	-0.01	0.00	-0.41*	-0.05	0.30	0.25	-0.03
	12. Gender-x-Neutral Gossip A	-0.08	0.07	-0.28	0.15	0.49*	-0.18	0.07
	13. Gender-x-Encouragement of Gossip P	0.17	-0.06	0.39	0.08	-0.49*	0.02	0.02
	14. Gender-x-Positive Gossip P	-0.52	-0.38	-0.26	-0.45	-0.40	-0.55*	-0.40
	15. Gender-x-Negative Gossip P	-0.20	-0.07	-0.07	-0.04	-0.13	-0.11	-0.10
	16. Gender-x-Neutral Gossip P	-0.31	-0.23	-0.23	-0.23	-0.36	-0.05	-0.27
	17. Gender-x-Encouragement of Gossip A	0.45*	0.23	0.22	0.11	0.33	0.25	0.27
	18. Positive Gossip A-x-Encouragement P	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00	-0.01	-0.03*	0.00
	19. Negative Gossip A-x-Encouragement P	-0.01	-0.01	0.00	0.01	0.01	0.034*	0.00
	20. Neutral Gossip A-x-Encouragement P	-0.02*	-0.01	-0.02	-0.01	-0.02*	0.02*	-0.02*
	21. Positive Gossip P-x-Encouragement A	0.02	0.05***	0.02	0.04	0.04*	-0.04***	0.03*
	22. Negative Gossip P-x-Encouragement A	-0.02	-0.05**	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	0.04**	-0.03
	23. Neutral Gossip P-x-Encouragement A	-0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00

Note. $^* p < .05$; $^{**} p < .01$; $^{***} p < .001$.

Table 9

Standardized Estimates for Actor and Partner Effects for Gossip about Family on Actor Perceptions of Friendship Qualities

		Comp. Act. β	Valid. Act. β	Help Act. β	Int. Disc. Act. β	Con. Res. Act. β	Conflict Act. β	Tot. Pos. Act. β
Steps	ICCs	.61***	.25***	.31***	.27***	.09	.36***	.33***
1	1. Gender	0.18	0.27***	0.27**	0.70***	0.17*	-0.05	0.32***
2	2. Positive Gossip A	0.14	0.02	0.26	0.06	-0.01	0.01	0.10
	3. Negative Gossip A	0.03	-0.03	-0.11	-0.19	0.12	-0.09	-0.04
	4. Neutral Gossip A	0.02	-0.05	-0.01	0.08	0.00	0.01	0.01
	5. Encouragement of Gossip P	-0.10	-0.06	-0.07	-0.05	-0.14	0.04	-0.08
	6. Positive Gossip P	0.10	0.17	0.12	-0.01	0.14	-0.22	0.10
	7. Negative Gossip P	0.13	0.01	0.00	-0.17	0.11	-0.14	0.02
	8. Neutral Gossip P	0.10	0.12*	0.16*	0.26***	0.16*	-0.11	0.16**
	9. Encouragement of Gossip A	-0.13	0.02	-0.09	-0.07	-0.08	0.09	-0.07
3	10. Gender-x-Positive Gossip A	-0.34	-0.52	0.05	-0.73	0.53	-0.99*	-0.20
	11. Gender-x-Negative Gossip A	-0.43	-0.04	-0.23	-0.09	0.21	-0.54*	-0.12
	12. Gender-x-Neutral Gossip A	0.17	-0.14	-0.26	-0.13	-0.18	-0.13	-0.11
	13. Gender-x-Encouragement of Gossip P	0.03	0.25	0.22	0.25	0.26	0.17	0.20
	14. Gender-x-Positive Gossip P	-0.60	-0.39	-0.73	-1.19	-0.76	-0.03	-0.73
	15. Gender-x-Negative Gossip P	-0.62	-0.13	-0.41	-0.54	-0.34	-0.75**	-0.41
	16. Gender-x-Neutral Gossip P	0.07	0.08	0.14	-0.01	-0.02	-0.22	0.05
	17. Gender-x-Encouragement of Gossip A	-0.04	-0.23	-0.18	-0.04	-0.10	0.42**	-0.12
	18. Positive Gossip A-x-Encouragement P	-0.20	-0.04	-0.10	-0.21	-0.03	-0.01	-0.12
	19. Negative Gossip A-x-Encouragement P	-0.04	0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.02	0.01	0.00
	20. Neutral Gossip A-x-Encouragement P	-0.07*	-0.03	-0.05	-0.05	-0.05	0.05	-0.05*
	21. Positive Gossip P-x-Encouragement A	0.06	-0.02	-0.24	-0.15	-0.06	-0.02	-0.08
	22. Negative Gossip P-x-Encouragement A	-0.05	-0.05	-0.07	-0.09	-0.08*	0.07*	-0.07*
	23. Neutral Gossip P-x-Encouragement A	-0.06	-0.04	-0.01	0.00	-0.04	0.02	-0.03

Note. * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001.

Table 10

Standardized Estimates for Actor and Partner Effects for Gossip about Others on Actor Perceptions of Friendship Qualities

		Comp. Act. β	Valid. Act. β	Help Act. β	Int. Disc. Act. β	Con. Res. Act. β	Conflict Act. β	Tot. Pos. Act. β
Steps	*ICCs*	.61***	.25***	.31***	.27***	.09	.36***	.33***
1	1. Gender	0.18	0.27***	0.27**	0.70***	0.17*	-0.05	0.32***
2	2. Positive Gossip A	-0.02	0.03	0.08	-0.02	-0.03	-0.03	0.01
	3. Negative Gossip A	0.09	-0.04	-0.03	0.13	0.12	-0.12	0.06
	4. Neutral Gossip A	0.01	-0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00	-0.05	0.00
	5. Encouragement of Gossip P	-0.02	-0.02	-0.03	-0.03	-0.02	0.08	-0.02
	6. Positive Gossip P	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.07	0.00	0.08	0.03
	7. Negative Gossip P	0.13	0.12	0.02	0.15	0.17	-0.18*	0.12
	8. Neutral Gossip P	0.03	0.02	-0.01	0.06	0.01	-0.02	0.02
	9. Encouragement of Gossip A	0.02	0.01	0.04	-0.07	-0.03	0.03	-0.01
3	10. Gender-x-Positive Gossip A	0.15	-0.22	-0.04	0.13	0.29	0.16	0.06
	11. Gender-x-Negative Gossip A	0.16	0.22	-0.05	0.40	0.29	0.21	0.20
	12. Gender-x-Neutral Gossip A	-0.12	0.02	0.07	0.33	0.23	-0.02	0.11
	13. Gender-x-Encouragement of Gossip P	-0.05	-0.01	-0.01	-0.36	-0.35	-0.01	-0.16
	14. Gender-x-Positive Gossip P	0.26	0.13	-0.04	-0.14	0.15	-0.07	0.07
	15. Gender-x-Negative Gossip P	0.42	0.39	0.35	0.36	0.37	-0.39	0.38
	16. Gender-x-Neutral Gossip P	-0.02	0.10	-0.13	-0.25	0.06	-0.18	-0.05
	17. Gender-x-Encouragement of Gossip A	-0.11	-0.29	-0.17	0.11	-0.29	0.27	-0.15
	18. Positive Gossip A-x-Encouragement P	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.05*	0.03	0.01	0.02
	19. Negative Gossip A-x-Encouragement P	0.05	-0.01	0.02	0.01	0.04	0.01	0.02
	20. Neutral Gossip A-x-Encouragement P	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	-0.02	-0.01	0.00
	21. Positive Gossip P-x-Encouragement A	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.00	-0.02	0.01
	22. Negative Gossip P-x-Encouragement A	0.04	-0.08*	-0.03	-0.08	-0.03	0.03	-0.04
	23. Neutral Gossip P-x-Encouragement A	-0.01	0.00	-0.01	0.00	0.00	0.01	-0.01

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.
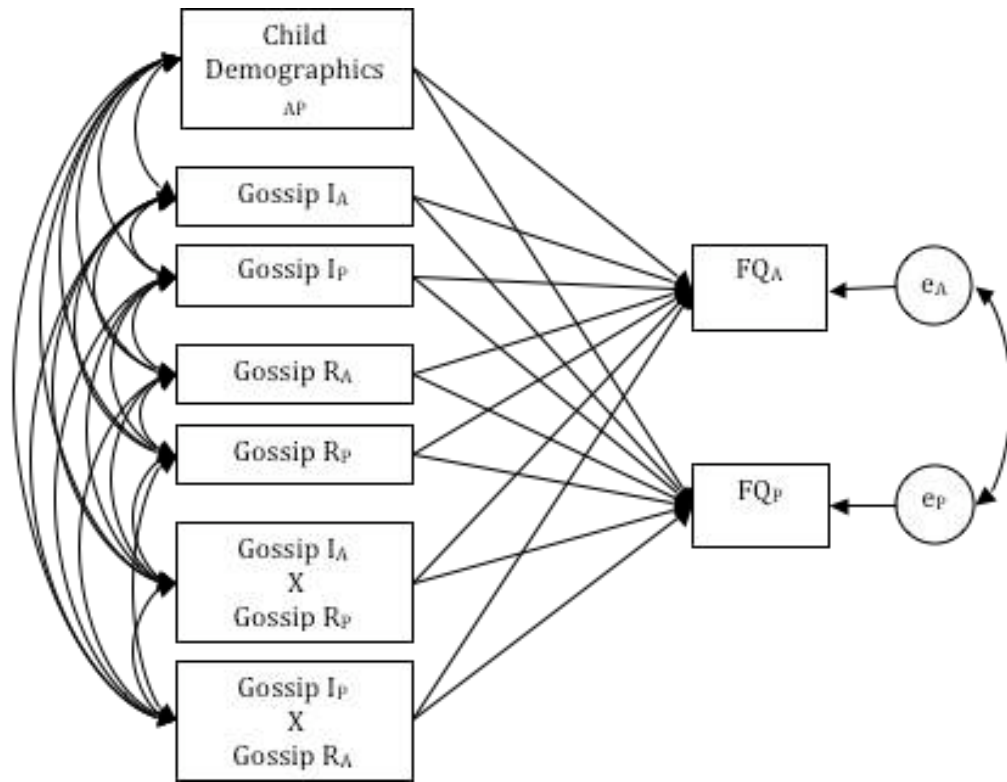
Figure 1. Actor-Partner Interdependence Model used for the current dissertation.
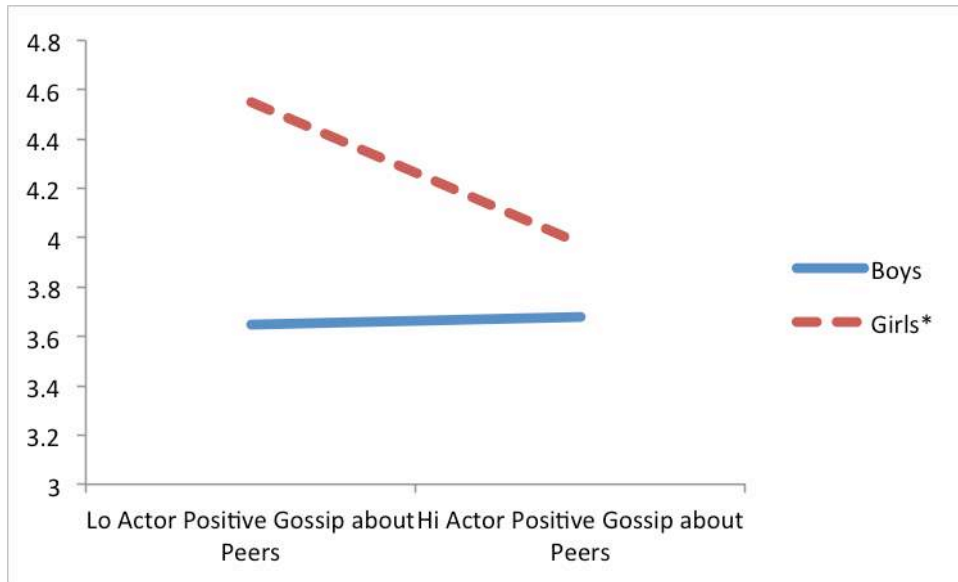
Figure 2. Gender as a moderator between actor positive gossip about peers and actor perceptions of help.
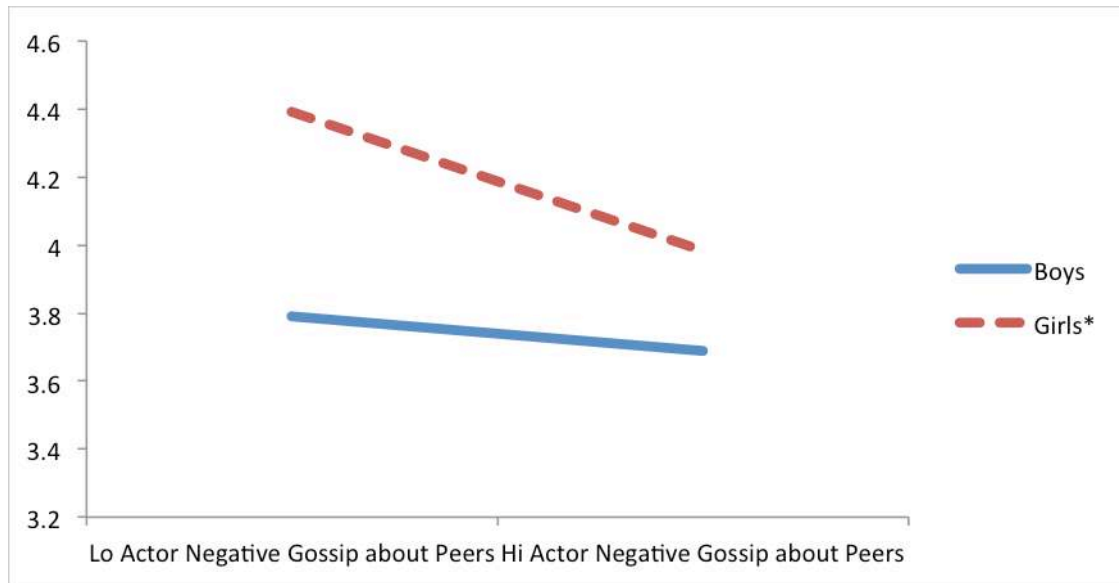
Figure 3. Gender as a moderator between actor negative gossip about peers and actor perceptions of help.
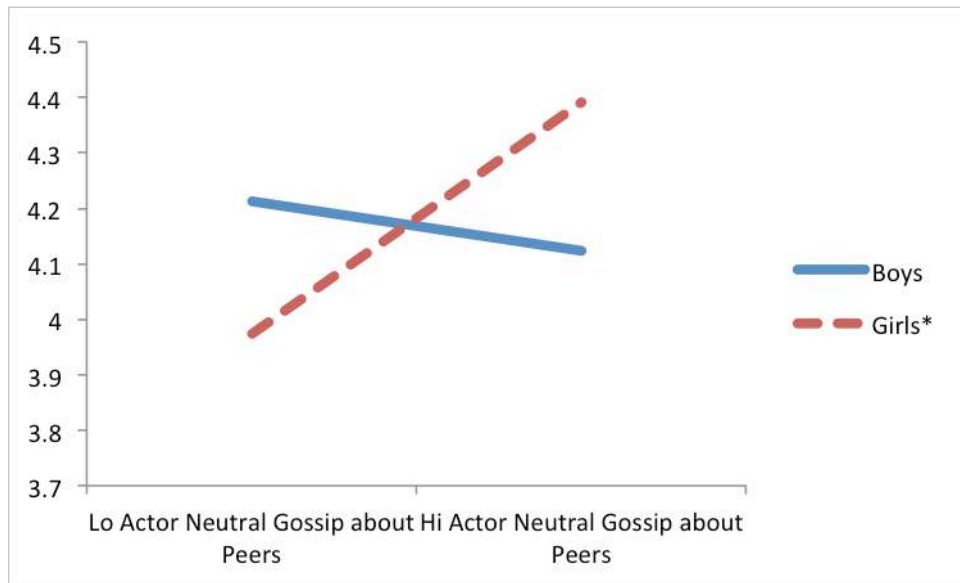
Figure 4. Gender as a moderator between actor neutral gossip about peers and actor perceptions of conflict resolution.
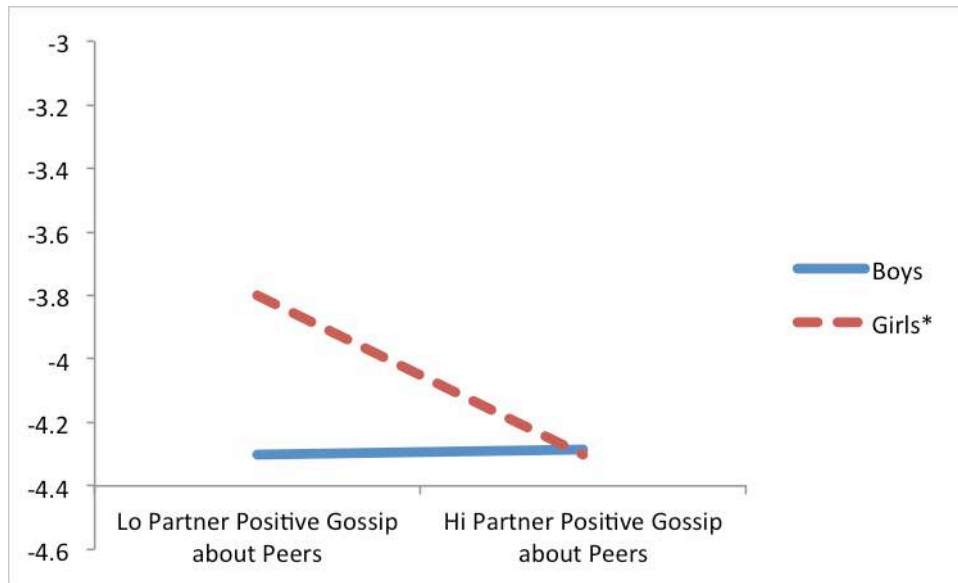
Figure 5. Gender as a moderator between partner positive gossip about peers and actor perceptions of conflict.
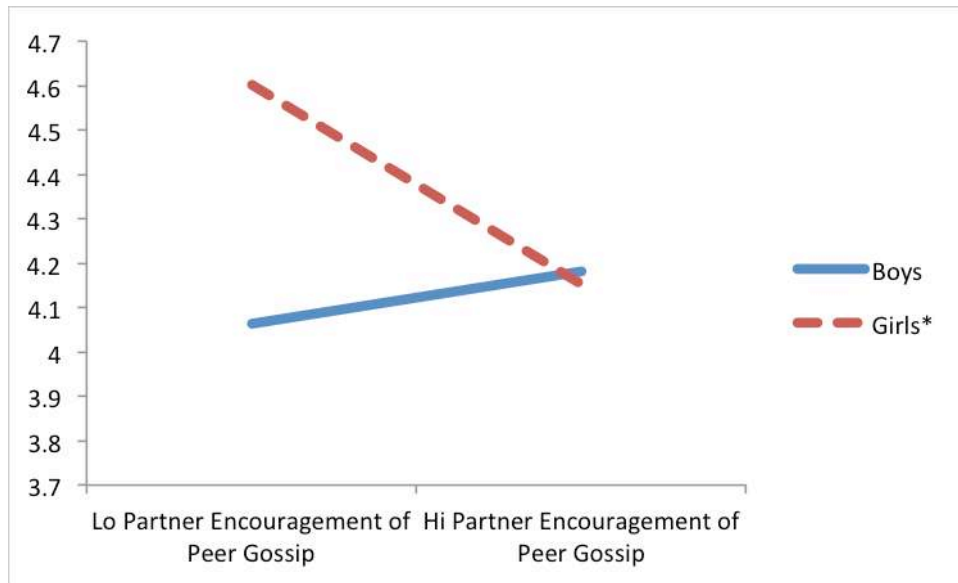
Figure 6. Gender as a moderator between partner encouragement of gossip about peers and actor perceptions of conflict resolution.
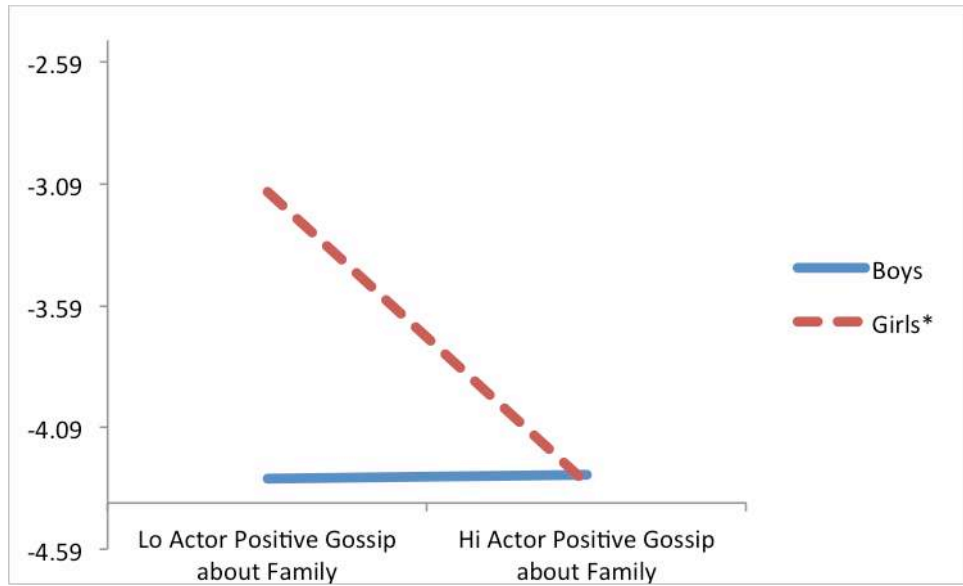
Figure 7. Gender as a moderator between actor positive gossip about family and actor perceptions of conflict.
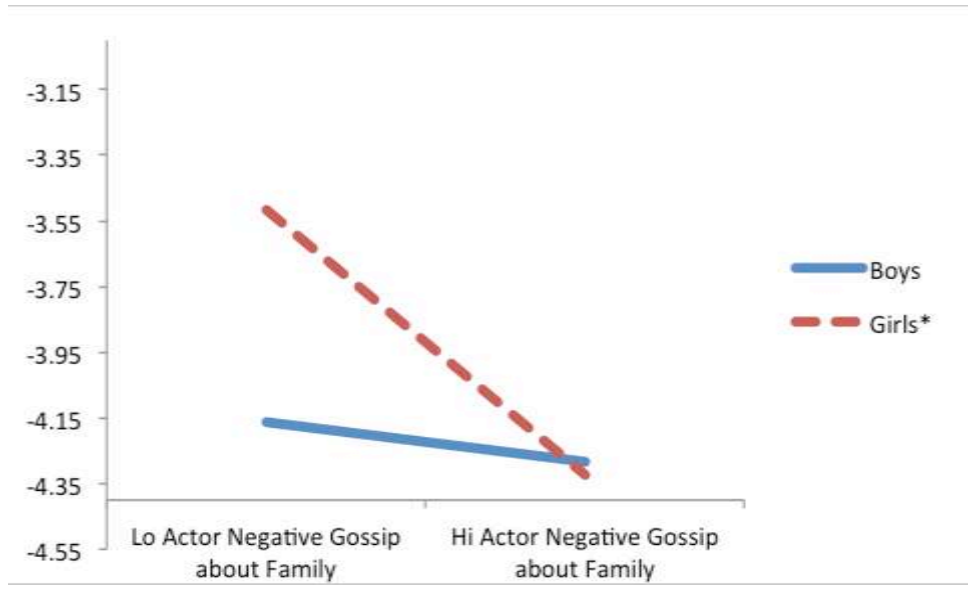
Figure 8. Gender as a moderator between actor negative gossip about family and actor perceptions of conflict.
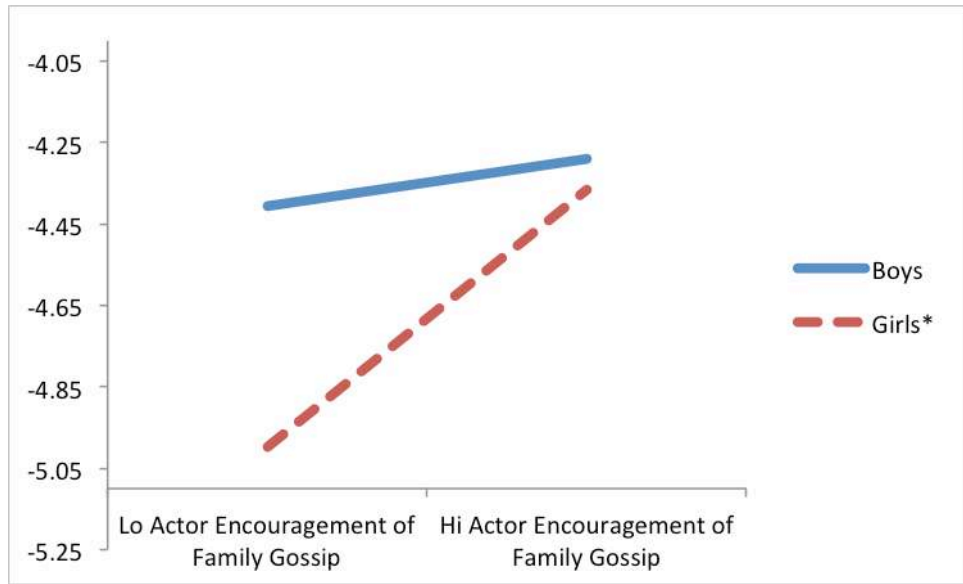
Figure 9. Gender as a moderator between actor encouragement of family gossip and actor perceptions of conflict.
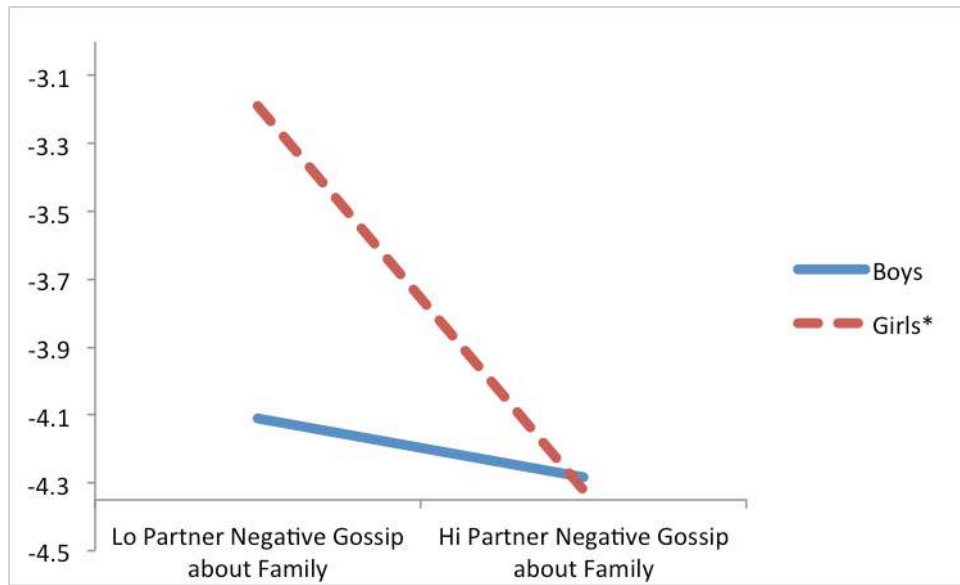
Figure 10. Gender as a moderator between actor positive gossip about family and actor perceptions of conflict.

Friendship Nominations

NAME_____ BOY or GIRL GRADE_____

TASK #1

Instructions: In the first space below, write the name of your very best friend who is in grade 5 at your school. Please write their first name and last name.

Very Best Friend:_____ (If you're a girl, name a girl.)

 (If you're a boy, name a boy.)

Next, write the name of your second best friend in grade 5 at your school. Write their first and last name.

Second Best Friend:_____ (If you're a girl, name a girl.)

 (If you're a boy, name a boy.)

 TASK #2

Instructions: In the spaces below, write the names of three of your other good friends

in fifth grade at your school. For this part, you can name boys or girls.

Remember to write out their full names.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

General Instructions

On these questionnaires you are going to fill out, we want to know what you really think about each question; so answer as honestly as possible. There are no right or wrong answers. All this information will be kept private and confidential, which means that your name will not be on any of the forms, and nobody will know how you answered any of the questions. Read carefully and try to answer every question. If you have any questions as you go along, please ask me – I'll be in the next room.

Directions for the Friendship Questionnaire

With this questionnaire, we are going to ask you to circle the choice which describes you best. These questions are about you and your friend. Please write in your friend's name for every numbered sentence. Let's look at the example.

Example A: "_____ and I are the same height."

If this statement is "Not at all true for you," then mark "Not at all True"

If this statement is "A little true for you," then mark "A little True"

If this statement is "Somewhat true for you," then mark "Somewhat True"

If this statement is "Pretty true for you," then mark "Pretty true"

If this statement is " Really true for you, " then mark "Really true"

** Please mark only ONE answer per question.

   A. _____ and I are the same height.

Not at all true	A little true	Somewhat true	Pretty true	Really true
1	2	3	. 4	5

Think about your relationship with _____. Please answer all of these questions about you and _____.

1. _____ and I live really close to each other.

> Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true
>
> 1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

2. _____ and I always sit together at lunch.

> Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true
>
> 1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

3. _____ and I get mad at each other a lot.

> Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true
>
> 1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

4. _____ tells me I'm good at things.

> Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true
>
> 1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

5. If the other kids were talking behind my back, _____ would always stick up for me.

> Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true
>
> 1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

6. _____ and I make each other feel important and special.

    Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

    1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

7. _____ and I always pick each other as partners.

    Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

    1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

8. If _____ hurts my feelings, _____ says "I'm sorry."

    Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

    1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

9. I can think of some times when _____ has said mean things about me to

   other kids.

    Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

    1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

10. I can always count on _____ for good ideas about games to play.

    Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

    1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

11. If _____ and I get mad at each other, we always talk about how

   to get over it.

    Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

    1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

12. _____ would still like me even if all the other kids didn't like me.

    Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true
    1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

13. _____ tells me I'm pretty smart.

    Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true
    1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

14. _____ and I are always telling each other about our problems.

    Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true
    1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

15. _____ makes me feel good about my ideas.

    Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true
    1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

16. When I'm mad about something that happened to me, I can always talk

    to _____ about it.

    Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true
    1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

17. _____ and I help each other with chores or other things a lot.

    Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true
    1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

18. _____ and I do special favors for each other.

       Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

         1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

19. _____ and I do fun things together a lot.

       Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

         1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

20. _____ and I argue a lot.

       Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

         1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

21. I can always count on _____ to keep promises.

       Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

         1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

22. _____ and I go to each other's homes after school and on weekends.

       Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

         1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

23. _____ and I always play together at recess.

       Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

         1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

24. When I'm having trouble figuring out something, I usually ask _____ for

    help and advice.

      Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

           1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

25. _____ and I talk about the things that make us sad.

      Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

           1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

26. _____ and I always make up easily when we have a fight.

      Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

           1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

27. _____ and I fight.

      Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

           1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

28. _____ and I always share things like stickers, toys, and games

    with each other.

      Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

           1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

29. If _____ and I are mad at each other, we always talk about what would

    help to make us feel better.

        Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true Pretty true   Really true

            1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

30. If I told _____ a secret, I could trust _____ not to tell anyone else.

        Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true Pretty true   Really true

            1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

31. _____ and I bug each other.

        Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true Pretty true   Really true

            1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

32. _____ and I always come up with good ideas on ways to do things.

        Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true Pretty true   Really true

            1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

33. _____ and I loan each other things all the time.

        Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true Pretty true   Really true

            1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

34. _____ often helps me with things so I can get done quicker.

        Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true Pretty true   Really true

            1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

35. _____ and I always get over our arguments really quickly.

        Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

            1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

36. _____ and I always count on each other for ideas on how to get things

done.

        Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

            1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

37. _____ doesn't listen to me.

        Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

            1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

38. _____ and I tell each other private thoughts a lot.

        Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

             1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

39. _____ and I help each other with schoolwork a lot.

        Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

             1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

40. I can think of lots of secrets _____ and I have told each other.

        Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

             1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

41.   _____ cares about my feelings.

          Not at all true   A little true   Somewhat true   Pretty true   Really true

            1 . . . . 2 . . . . 3 . . . . 4 5

APPENDIX C: GOSSIP CODING

1. First open the checklist. There is a shortcut folder on the desktop called "Menzer Gossip". Open it and then open the excel file called "gossip checklist".

    a. In this document, you will see status updates of which files are available to code with and which files need to be converted and uploaded to the computer.

    b. From here you will have several options.

        i. Option A: do conversions.

        ii. Option B: do coding.

2. Option A: Converting DVDs.

    a. First check the gossip checklist to see which files need to be converted (column H).

    b. Then go get the binders for the dvds you will be converting. If you leave this room, they will be located on the bookcases on your left, right outside of this room. There are four big black binders on the second shelf from the top, on the bookshelf farthest from the door for this room. These binders are divided by cohort (see column E in the gossip checklist)

        i. Inside each binder, the dvds are also divided by type (friendship or mom-child) and then also by grade (5 or 6). You will be focusing ONLY on the friendship dvds, but be certain to make sure you are converting the correct dvd for the grade and tape.

        ii. All of the dvds are ordered by dvd number.

    c. On the desktop, there is a program called DVDx 4.0 Open Edition. Open this program.

i. Put the dvd you want to convert into the bottom dvd drive of the computer (it should have three logos on it: dvd r/rw, rw dvd+rewritable, and compact disc rewritable.

ii. Click File > Open DVD. Make certain that the E: drive is selected, and click ok.

iii. After the dvd information loads, the "start encoding" button should light up.

1. Make sure that under the target section, the first row says "MPEG-2 MPEG PS (SVCD-DVD)

2. The second row should says "MPEG-2/DVD-SVCD-CVCD", "MPEG Audio Layer 2", and "No subtitle"

3. The Path should be "/…My Documents/Menzer Gossip"

4. And the File should be DVD_VIDEO.mpg

5. After checking the above, click 'start encoding'

iv. A window should pop up called 'Job manager' and it will tell you the status of the dvd conversion. When it is done, go to the 'Menzer Gossip' folder that the gossip checklist is in.

1. Here you need to RENAME the file you just converted. It should be renamed as follows: tape # c#g#. So if you are working with tape 1 from cohort 1, grade 5, the title of the file should be renamed to dvd 1 c1g5.

2. After this check the sex of the dvd, and move the file into the correct grade and sex.

3. Then in the gossip checklist, change Column H to 'yes' for that particular dyad and dvd.

d. If you need to convert more files, just put in another disc and start the process again.

e. Troubleshooting: if the DVDx program tells you that something cannot be cleared. Just close the program and re-open it.

3. Option B: Coding

a. Open Observer XT 10.1

b. Open recently used project titled 'Gossip'

c. To start a new observation

   i. Right click on 'Observations' in the left column window, then click 'New Observation'

   ii. In the new observation window, titled the observation…

      1. T#c#g#_sex—coder initials

      2. E.g., if I am coding tape 1 from cohort 1, grade 5, and the sex of the dyad is female…the title of the observation would be T1c1g5_F—MMM

   iii. Click okay.

   iv. Then, the program will ask you to find the media

      1. Go to 'My documents' > 'Menzer Gossip'. Find the file that you need to use, click it and click 'Open'

   v. Now you are ready to code!

d. To begin coding, click the green circle!

i. After this, an 'independent variable values' window should pop up. Enter the sex (M or F), the tape number, the cohort (1, 1b, 2, or 3), and the grade (5 or 6). And then select ok. You can't begin to code until these values are entered.

ii. The green circle that you selected before should now be red, and it should say "recording" underneath it.

4. The Coding System

   a. You will be coding for three different segments:

      i. *Freeplay*: the dyad is asked to do whatever they want in the room

      ii. *Best Time*: the dyad is asked to talk about their best times together

      iii. *Plan a Weekend*: the dyad is asked to plan a weekend together

      iv. Freeplay is the first task on the tape where the dyad is *together*. After Freeplay, there is Best Times. Then there are two tasks that you will not be coding (Moral Dilemma and Co-Construction), and then there is Plan A Weekend. There are also two individual interviews on the dvd that you will not be coding for. I will show you what these tasks look like; but generally they are easy to spot.

   b. At the start of each segment, wait for the experimenter to leave the room and close the door. Coding should begin at that point. And coding for a particular segment should end when the experimenter re-enters the room.

   c. Listen to their conversation and once you hear someone say something about another person or persons, you will mark an instance of gossip. This will be in the right most window of the Observer program (its entitled 'Codes'). You

will be marking it by clicking the corresponding Gossip Episode, and then the

corresponding Initiator, Initiation, Target, Response, and Number of Turns.

  i. *Initiator:* who begins the gossip? Check the gossip checklist to see

     who is child 1 or child 2.

 ii. *Initiation:* what kind of gossip did the initiator use? Take into

     consideration the content of the gossip as well as the nonverbal

     behavior and intonations/tone of the speech; think about what the

     gossip sounds most like.

      1. *Positive:* says something nice about someone else; this can

         include complimenting someone, saying that they like

         someone; implicitly implying positive evaluations such as

         wanting to invite friends or liking to do things for others

          a. *E.*g., "what is your favorite football team"; "I wish X

             was here"; "I like giving things to my mom"

      2. *Negative:* says something mean about someone else; this can

         include belittling someone, making fun of them, saying

         something that suggests negative emotions or affect

          a. *E.*g., "I worry about my friends sometimes, but not all

             of them especially X…she's rude"; "everyone was

             making fun of you"; "I don't like X"

      3. *Neutral:* says something non-evaluative about someone else;

         this can include just mentioning another person in the context

         of doing something

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      a. *E*.g., "I'm going to ask my dad because he took me last time"; "I wonder what my friend/my mom/my dad is doing"

   4. *Experimenter (not coded for valence):* code if the gossip is about the experimenter or about the cameras

iii. *Target:*

   1. *Celebrity: Athlete*: this can include an athlete or a group of athletes, such as a football team

   2. *Celebrity: Musician*: this can include a musician or a group of musicians, such as a band

   3. *Celebrity: Actor/Actress*: this can include an actor/actress or a group of actors/actresses

   4. *Celebrity: Other*: any other celebrity that does not fall under the above options, such as politicians

   5. *Peer: Same-Sex*: this can include a same-sex peer or a group of same-sex peers

   6. *Peer: Opposite-Sex*: this can include an opposite-sex peer or a group of opposite-sex peers

   7. *Peer: Other*: this can include a mixed-sex group of peers or a peer where the sex is not clear

   8. *Family: Mother*

   9. *Family: Father*

   10. *Family: Sibling*

11. *Family: Other*: e.g., aunts, uncles, grandmothers, etc.

12. *Teacher*: teachers at school or elsewhere. Write down the name of the teacher if you can

13. *Experimenter*

14. *Fictional Characters in Books, Movies, etc.*

15. *Other*: any person or persons that does not fall under one of the above categories

iv. *Response (Initiation):* you will only be coding the FIRST response in a gossip episode.

1. *Encouraging Minimal:* minimal responses that acknowledge the other's gossip; e.g., only laughing, saying "yeah", nodding head

2. *Encouraging Moderate-to-High*: reciprocating gossip, starting a new gossip; asking questions to encourage the initiator to continue

3. *Discouraging*: stopping the gossip or clearly indicating that the gossip is not appropriate. E.g., "Can we not talk about X", changing topics completely

4. *Non-response*: ignoring the initiation, not hearing the initiation, silence; watch body language to see if there is any indication that the listener heard the initiation

5. *Not Applicable (experimenter)*: we will not be coding the response to gossip about experimenters.

v. *Number of Turns*: automatically all gossip episodes have at least 2 turns: the initiation and the response (regardless of if the response is classified as a non-response). Count how many times there is a change in speaker.

    1. ****Gossip episodes START when there is a new target of gossip*

    2. ****Gossip episodes END when there is a change in the target of the gossip.*

        a. *E*.g., Child A: 'I really like my mom'; Child B: "I really like my mom too". Child A: 'I like your mom too'.

            i. This example is TWO different episodes.

            ii. Episode 1: Child A's first turn and Child B's turn (number of turns is 2)

            iii. Episode 2: Child B's turn and Child A's second turn (number of turns is 2)

    3. To enter this number, double click on the code in the Codes window; then look at the window underneath the video. The slot for Number of Turns should say "0" and be in black ink

vi. *Comments*: in the comment section, add in some information about the episode.

    1. First start by loosely transcribing the episode…divide each turn by using semi-colons between each turn

2. Use parentheses to add in notes about nonverbal behaviors or speech intonations. E.g., (implicit positive evaluation) or (nasty tone) or (making funny voices or faces) or (non-response)

3. When entering comments be sure to hit the enter key after you type in your comments; otherwise the program will just delete everything you wrote.

d. Helpful Hints

  i. When you first mark when a gossip episode starts (when you click Best Times, Freeplay, or Plan A Weekend in the codes window), the video will pause and ask you to input additional information about the gossip. An easy way to bypass this so that you can listen to the conversation before marking any other codes is to just hit the play button (on the right side of the pause button). Just remember to go back and enter your codes!

  ii. Try to get the start time of the gossip episode a second or two before they actually start talking.

   1. In the window underneath the video, you will see four columns: Time, Action, Action Modifier, and Comment

   2. In the Time section, if you double click the numbers, you can change them. You can enter new numbers or use your up/down arrow buttons to change the numbers. Changing these

numbers will help you mark the most accurate start time for the

episode.

Frequency of Gossip Instances by Target and by Session

			Quality of Gossip				Quality of Gossip Response		Total
			Experimenter Initiation	Neutral Initiation	Negative Initiation	Positive Initiation	Encourage Response	Discourage/Non-Response	
Experimenter	Best Times	Count	201						201
		Expected Count	201						201
		% within Session	100.00%						100.00%
		% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response	30.00%						30.00%
		% of Total	30.00%						30.00%
	FreePlay	Count	336						336
		Expected Count	336						336
		% within Session	100.00%						100.00%
		% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response	50.10%						50.10%
		% of Total	50.10%						50.10%

Plan A Weekend	Count	133						133
	Expected Count	133						133
	% within Session	100.00%						100.00%
	% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response	19.90%						19.90%
	% of Total	19.90%						19.90%
Total	Count	670						670
	Expected Count	670						670
	% within Session	100.00%						100.00%
	% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response	100.00%						100.00%
	% of Total	100.00%						100.00%
Peers	Best Times	Count		183	191	97	370	101	471
		Expected Count		208.1	162.5	100.3	344.4	126.6	471
		% within Session		38.90%	40.60%	20.60%	78.60%	21.40%	100.00%

	% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response	47.20%	63.00%	51.90%	57.60%	42.80%	53.60%
	% of Total	20.80%	21.80%	11.00%	42.10%	11.50%	53.60%
FreePlay	Count	125	76	21	161	61	222
	Expected Count	98.1	76.6	47.3	162.3	59.7	222
	% within Session	56.30%	34.20%	9.50%	72.50%	27.50%	100.00%
	% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response	32.20%	25.10%	11.20%	25.10%	25.80%	25.30%
	% of Total	14.20%	8.70%	2.40%	18.30%	6.90%	25.30%
Plan A Weekend	Count	80	36	69	111	74	185
	Expected Count	81.8	63.8	39.4	135.3	49.7	185
	% within Session	43.20%	19.50%	37.30%	60.00%	40.00%	100.00%
	% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response	20.60%	11.90%	36.90%	17.30%	31.40%	21.10%
	% of Total	9.10%	4.10%	7.90%	12.60%	8.40%	21.10%
Total	Count	388	303	187	642	236	878

		Expected Count	388	303	187	642	236	878
		% within Session	44.20%	34.50%	21.30%	73.10%	26.90%	100.00%
		% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
		% of Total	44.20%	34.50%	21.30%	73.10%	26.90%	100.00%
Family Members	Best Times	Count	100	31	26	105	52	157
		Expected Count	103.7	34.8	18.4	98.1	58.9	157
		% within Session	63.70%	19.70%	16.60%	66.90%	33.10%	100.00%
		% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response	38.60%	35.60%	56.50%	42.90%	35.40%	40.10%
		% of Total	25.50%	7.90%	6.60%	26.80%	13.30%	40.10%
	FreePlay	Count	90	26	9	77	48	125
		Expected Count	82.6	27.7	14.7	78.1	46.9	125
		% within Session	72.00%	20.80%	7.20%	61.60%	38.40%	100.00%

		% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response	34.70%	29.90%	19.60%	31.40%	32.70%	31.90%
		% of Total	23.00%	6.60%	2.30%	19.60%	12.20%	31.90%
	Plan A Weekend	Count	69	30	11	63	47	110
		Expected Count	72.7	24.4	12.9	68.8	41.3	110
		% within Session	62.70%	27.30%	10.00%	57.30%	42.70%	100.00%
		% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response	26.60%	34.50%	23.90%	25.70%	32.00%	28.10%
		% of Total	17.60%	7.70%	2.80%	16.10%	12.00%	28.10%
	Total	Count	259	87	46	245	147	392
		Expected Count	259	87	46	245	147	392
		% within Session	66.10%	22.20%	11.70%	62.50%	37.50%	100.00%
		% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
		% of Total	66.10%	22.20%	11.70%	62.50%	37.50%	100.00%
Others	Best	Count	105	65	56	156	70	226

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Times	Expected Count	114.6	44.6	66.8	150.4	75.6	226
	% within Session	46.50%	28.80%	24.80%	69.00%	31.00%	100.00%
	% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response	36.50%	58.00%	33.30%	41.30%	36.80%	39.80%
	% of Total	18.50%	11.40%	9.90%	27.50%	12.30%	39.80%
FreePlay	Count	126	26	34	112	74	186
	Expected Count	94.3	36.7	55	123.8	62.2	186
	% within Session	67.70%	14.00%	18.30%	60.20%	39.80%	100.00%
	% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response	43.80%	23.20%	20.20%	29.60%	38.90%	32.70%
	% of Total	22.20%	4.60%	6.00%	19.70%	13.00%	32.70%
Plan A Weekend	Count	57	21	78	110	46	156
	Expected Count	79.1	30.8	46.1	103.8	52.2	156
	% within Session	36.50%	13.50%	50.00%	70.50%	29.50%	100.00%

		% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response		19.80%	18.80%	46.40%	29.10%	24.20%	27.50%
		% of Total		10.00%	3.70%	13.70%	19.40%	8.10%	27.50%
	Total	Count		288	112	168	378	190	568
		Expected Count		288	112	168	378	190	568
		% within Session		50.70%	19.70%	29.60%	66.50%	33.50%	100.00%
		% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response		100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
		% of Total		50.70%	19.70%	29.60%	66.50%	33.50%	100.00%
Total	Best Times	Count	201	388	287	179	631	223	1055
		Expected Count	281.8	393.3	211.2	168.7	532.1	241	1055
		% within Session	19.10%	36.80%	27.20%	17.00%	59.80%	21.10%	100.00%
		% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response	30.00%	41.50%	57.20%	44.60%	49.90%	38.90%	42.10%
		% of Total	8.00%	15.50%	11.40%	7.10%	25.20%	8.90%	42.10%
	FreePlay	Count	336	341	128	64	350	183	869

	Expected Count	232.1	324	173.9	138.9	438.3	198.5	869
	% within Session	38.70%	39.20%	14.70%	7.40%	40.30%	21.10%	100.00%
	% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response	50.10%	36.50%	25.50%	16.00%	27.70%	31.90%	34.60%
	% of Total	13.40%	13.60%	5.10%	2.60%	14.00%	7.30%	34.60%
Plan A Weekend	Count	133	206	87	158	284	167	584
	Expected Count	156	217.7	116.9	93.4	294.6	133.4	584
	% within Session	22.80%	35.30%	14.90%	27.10%	48.60%	28.60%	100.00%
	% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response	19.90%	22.00%	17.30%	39.40%	22.50%	29.10%	23.30%
	% of Total	5.30%	8.20%	3.50%	6.30%	11.30%	6.70%	23.30%
Total	Count	670	935	502	401	1265	573	2508
	Expected Count	670	935	502	401	1265	573	2508
	% within Session	26.70%	37.30%	20.00%	16.00%	50.40%	22.80%	100.00%

% within Quality of Gossip or Gossip Response	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%		100.00%	100.00%
% of Total	26.70%	37.30%	20.00%	16.00%	50.40%		22.80%	100.00%

APPENDIX E: IRB INITIAL APPLICATION APPROVAL

Initial Application Approval

DO NOT REPLY TO THIS EMAIL ADDRESS AS IT IS UNMONITORED

To: Principal Investigator, Dr. Kenneth H. Rubin, Human Development

Student, Melissa Menzer, Human Development

From: James M. Hagberg

IRB Co-Chair

University of Maryland College Park

Re: IRB Protocol: 11-0770 - Gossip Among Best Friends: A Normative

Cross-Sectional Development Study[9]

Approval December 14, 2011

Date:

Expiration December 14, 2014

Date:

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[9] An Addendum to change the title of the dissertation to "Group Norms And Intimacy Among Best Friends: A Normative Cross-Sectional Developmental Study" was approved on June 29, 2012.

Application: Initial

Review Path: Exempt

The University of Maryland, College Park Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office

approved your Initial IRB Application. This transaction was approved in accordance

with the University's IRB policies and procedures and 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for

the Protection of Human Subjects. Please reference the above-cited IRB Protocol

number in any future communications with our office regarding this research.

Recruitment/Consent: For research requiring written informed consent, the IRB-

approved and stamped informed consent document will be sent via mail. The IRB

approval expiration date has been stamped on the informed consent document. Please

note that research participants must sign a stamped version of the informed consent form

and receive a copy.

Continuing Review: If you intend to continue to collect data from human subjects or to

analyze private, identifiable data collected from human subjects, beyond the expiration

date of this protocol, you must submit a Renewal Application to the IRB Office 45 days

prior to the expiration date. If IRB Approval of your protocol expires, all human subject

research activities including enrollment of new subjects, data collection and analysis of

identifiable, private information must cease until the Renewal Application is approved. If

work on the human subject portion of your project is complete and you wish to close the

protocol, please submit a Closure Report to irb@umd.edu.

Modifications: Any changes to the approved protocol must be approved by the IRB

before the change is implemented, except when a change is necessary to eliminate an

apparent immediate hazard to the subjects. If you would like to modify an approved

protocol, please submit an Addendum request to the IRB Office.

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks: You must promptly report any unanticipated

problems involving risks to subjects or others to the IRB Manager at 301-405-0678 or

jsmith@umresearch.umd.edu

Additional Information: Please contact the IRB Office at 301-405-4212 if you have any

IRB-related questions or concerns. Email: irb@umd.edu

The UMCP IRB is organized and operated according to guidelines of the United States

Office for Human Research Protections and the United States Code of Federal

Regulations and operates under Federal Wide Assurance No. FWA00005856.

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