The influence of valence and relationships on children's evaluations and responses to gossip

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Abstract

The current study examined children's moral evaluations and responses to individuals sharing negative or positive gossip and how this changed depending on their relationship to the gossip sharer and the target. Children (N = 134, ages 8-16) completed vignettes from the perspective of the gossip listener, and morally evaluated the sharer's action and provided a hypothetical response to hearing gossip, a 2 (valence: negative or positive) x 4 (relationship type: friend or unfamiliar classmate of the sharer and target) design. Additionally, the gossip topic was about the target's behaviour with consequences for him/herself or another (vignette type: individual or relational). The main findings revealed that negative gossip in the sharer-classmate, target-friend condition was rated more negatively than all other relationship types, and this was also found in the individual vignettes condition. Furthermore, in the individual vignettes condition, positive gossip in the sharer-friend, target-friend condition was rated more negatively than the sharer-classmate, target-friend condition. Moreover, negative gossip in sharer-classmate, target-friend condition had more discouraging responses than the sharer-friend, target-classmate condition. Finally, positive gossip in the sharer-friend, target-friend condition had less encouraging responses than the sharer-classmate, target-classmate, and the sharer-classmate, target-friend conditions. Gender and developmental differences demonstrated that girls rated negative gossip more negatively than boys and provided more discouraging responses. Additionally, adolescents rated gossip more positively than children and provided more passive responses. Overall, this research will allow us to understand under what circumstances gossip is viewed as acceptable or unacceptable during an important developmental period. This can help school professionals address neutral attitudes towards gossip and prevent engagement in gossip behaviour.

Keywords: children, adolescents, gossip, valence, relationships, friendship

Résumé

Le présent projet de recherche explore les évaluations morales et les réactions des enfants face aux personnes qui partagent un commérage négatif ou positif. L'influence de leur relation avec le partageur et la cible est également explorée. Les participants (N = 134, 8-16 ans) ont complété des vignettes en prenant le point de vue de l'auditeur du commérage. Ils ont donné leur évaluation morale du partageur et leur réaction hypothétique, selon un modèle suivant la formule 2 (valence: négative ou positive) x 4 (relation: un ami ou un camarade de classe avec le partageur et la cible). De plus, le sujet du commérage concernait un comportement de la personne ciblée et avait avec des conséquences pout lui/elle-même ou pour une tierce personne (type de vignette: individuel ou relationnel). Les résultats indiquent que les commérages négatifs dans la condition partageur-camarade de classe, cible-ami ont été évalués plus sévèrement que toutes les autres conditions relationnelles. Les mêmes résultats ont été trouvés dans la condition individuelle. Par ailleurs, dans la condition individuelle, les commérages positifs dans la condition partageur-ami, cible-ami ont été évalués plus sévèrement que la condition partageur-camarade de classe, cible-ami. Aussi, les commérages négatifs dans la condition partageur-camarade de classe, cible-ami ont suscité des réactions plus décourageantes que la condition partageur-ami, cible-camarade de classe. Finalement, les commérages positifs dans la condition partageur-ami, cible-ami, ont suscité des réactions moins encourageantes que les conditions partageur-camarade de classe, cible-camarade de classe et partageur-camarade de classe, cible-ami. Au niveau des différences entre les sexes, les filles ont évalué les commérages négatifs plus sévèrement que les garçons et ont noté des réactions plus décourageantes. Pour ce qui est des différences développementales, les adolescents ont évalué les commérages moins sévèrement que les enfants et ont noté des réactions plus neutres. En somme, cette recherche nous permet de comprendre dans quelles

circonstances les commérages sont considérés comme acceptables ou inacceptables au cours d'une période de développement importante. Cela peut aider les professionnels en milieu scolaire à adresser et prévenir les attitudes neutres envers le commérage.

Mot clés: enfants, adolescents, commérages, valence, relations, amitiés

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Introduction

Gossip is a social activity that many enjoy, yet few wish to be associated with it (Kuttler, Parker, & La Greca, 2002). Gossip is defined as evaluative talk about an absent third party (Eder & Enke, 1991; Foster, 2004). Despite gossip's negative connotation and the impression that it is used with the intention to spread negative information about other people, there is more to gossip than it appears. According to Ben-Ze've (1994), the perception that gossip is bad may be due to the fact that negative gossip is often remembered, tainting an individual's reputation. Moreover, gossip is used to inform and communicate about norm violations and this involves talking about others' deviant behaviours (Peters, Jettan, Radova, & Austin, 2017). Although Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, and Vohs (2001) suggested that pointing out others' bad behaviours is an effective way to inform about the violation of norms, research by Levin and Arluke (1985) showed that there was just as much usage of positive gossip as there was negative gossip. This suggests that there is in fact a purpose for spreading positive gossip. One of these functions may be that talking about others' behaviours in a positive light can strengthen the understanding of norms. Therefore, both positive and negative valence gossip can provide valuable information through the exchange of information.

Furthermore, both positive and negative gossip have additional social functions. According to Baumeister, Zhang, and Vohs (2004), gossip can help establish a relationship between the gossip sharer and the gossip listener. Additionally, gossip can provide new information to the listener about the gossip target. Therefore, gossip contains information about the target that listeners often value and take into account when considering further interactions with them (Baumeister et al., 2004). Moreover, sharing gossip with others fosters intimacy and creates social cohesion (e.g., Baumeister et al., 2004; Foster, 2004; McDonald, Putallaz, Grimes,

Kupersmidt, & Coie, 2007; Wargo Aikins, Collibee, & Cunningham, 2017). However, gossip, which is frequently exchanged between familiar peers (Yerkovich, 1977), is perceived differently depending on who is sharing the information (Farley, 2011; Turner, Mazer, Wendel, & Winslow, 2003). For example, when a stranger shared gossip compared to a friend, gossip was viewed more negatively, as it was odd to share that type of information with someone unknown (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Although gossip is an activity that many engage in regularly (e.g., Dunbar, 2004; Fine, 1977), research showed that sharers can be perceived favourably or negatively depending on the gossip valence and their relationship with the listener (Turner et al., 2003).

The content of gossip (i.e., what the gossip is about) is often centred on a discussion of others' behaviours, which can be both negative and positive (McDonald et al., 2007; Wargo Aikins et al., 2017). When it comes to moral evaluations of gossip, that is, a person's assessment of how good or bad gossip is, gossip is an interesting topic. It is a behaviour that serves both negative and positive functions, and consists of providing comments on negative and positive behaviour. While research showed that individuals believed that spreading negative gossip was wrong (Kuttler et al., 2002; Peters & Kashima, 2015), they also believed that it was wrong to not share information when an individual committed an immoral act (Wilson, Wilczynski, Wells, & Weiser, 2000). It remains unknown as to what types of immoral behaviours (e.g., a negative act that has consequences for oneself versus someone else) are perceived more negatively through gossip, or what types of moral behaviours (in the case of positive gossip) are viewed more favourably. This would provide a more in-depth understanding as to what behaviours are criticized or praised through gossip.

While research showed that negative and positive behaviours were evaluated differently

(e.g., Jackson & Tisak, 2001; Loke, Heyman, Forgie, McCarthy, & Lee, 2011), moral evaluations also differed as a function of the relationship between the individuals involved in gossip behaviour (Slomkowski & Killen, 1992). Therefore, the valence of the behaviour (negative or positive), and the relationships between the sharer, the listener, and the target are two factors that are likely to change how the listener evaluates gossip behaviour.

The listener plays an important role in the transmission of gossip. These individuals can choose to keep the information to themselves or further share it with others. There are a variety of responses to gossip that can be encouraging (e.g., sharing the information), neutral (e.g., not responding or acknowledging the information), or discouraging (e.g., asking the sharer to stop talking about it) (Leaper & Holliday, 1995). Gossip, being a common social activity among friends, is not often challenged (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Leaper & Holliday, 1995). This suggests that whom gossip is shared with is important when understanding how and when gossip is spread. Research on bullying showed that whom the target was also influenced how a bystander reacted to the situation (Bellmore, Ma, You, & Hughes, 2012; DeSmet et al., 2012). Together, these studies highlight that research needs to further explore and understand how these relationships influence how gossip is perceived when it is transmitted, and shed light on the listener's reaction to hearing gossip.

To date, few studies have examined gossip among youth (e.g., Lansford et al., 2006; McGuigan & Cubillo, 2013; Wargo Aikins et al., 2017), even less so exploring gender and developmental differences (e.g., Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Haux, Engelmann, Hermann, & Tomasello, 2016; Kuttler et al., 2002; McGuigan & Cubillo, 2013). Some previous researchers used female-only samples (e.g., Lansford et al., 2006; McDonald et al., 2007), which followed the idea that gossip behaviour occurs more among females. However, research showed mixed

findings about gender differences in gossip behaviour (e.g., Eckhaus & Ben-Hador, 2017; Levin & Arluke, 1985; McGuigan & Cubillo, 2013).

Engaging in gossip is considered a form of relationally aggressive behaviour. Gossiping falls under the category of relational bullying, which includes spreading rumours and participating in the social exclusion of others (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). Developmentally, indirect forms of aggression begin to manifest in pre-adolescence. In fact, research by Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, and Kaukiainen (1992) showed that pre-adolescents displayed more indirect aggression compared to those in middle-childhood. In addition to cognitive development, the authors argued that during adolescence an understanding of social hierarchy and social network develop, both of which are necessary in order to display indirect aggression. However, gossip is an interesting behaviour because it can either be used aggressively (i.e. to purposefully damage a reputation with negative information) or prosocially (i.e., to share information about good behaviour; e.g., McDonald et al., 2007; Wargo Aikins et al., 2017). Developmentally, research showed that children and adolescents differed in the type of gossip they engaged in and for different purposes (Eder & Enke, 1991; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). Therefore, given that it is during this developmental period that gossip is most prevalent (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986), among youth, more research is needed to understand this phenomenon, especially with regards to valence and relationships. The current study will help fill this gap by examining how valence, relationships, and the behaviour type exhibited by the target influence how gossip is perceived. Specifically, this study will explore how these factors influence the moral evaluation of the sharer's behaviour and how the listener would respond to hearing gossip. Finally, differences will be explored developmentally in children and adolescents, and across gender.

Literature Review

The following literature review will give an overview of the gossip phenomenon. Gossiping involves a discussion between two people who are providing an evaluation or opinion about another absent individual (Eder & Enke, 1991; Foster, 2004). This literature review will discuss the major components of gossip and how it has been defined in previous literature. To explain gossip behaviour, the characteristics of gossip and patterns of behaviour will be discussed in both adults and youth. However, the population of interest is children and adolescents, though research is more limited. Therefore, while an objective of the current study is to further understand the development of gossip throughout childhood and adolescence, some research will contain adult samples.

This literature review will provide an overview of two important factors related to gossip for the current study's objectives. First, previous research on positive and negative valence gossip will be presented. Second, the importance of friendship and relationships, and gossip behaviour will be discussed. Next, there will be a summary of the current research on the development of gossip in children and the changes with age into adolescence. This will be followed by gender differences in gossip behaviour. Finally, research on moral evaluations of good and bad behaviour, and children's responses to transgressions and prosocial behaviour will be presented.

Gossip Valence

The evaluative component of gossip, known as valence, is an important part of the gossip definition (Fine, 1977; Foster, 2004). However, the concept of valence with respect to the definition of gossip has been debated in the past (e.g., Foster, 2004; Tannen, 1990). Foster (2004) argued that gossip with no evaluative component was simply disseminating information.

Conversely, other researchers have continued to support the inclusion of neutral gossip, arguing that gossip did not require an evaluation but passing on information about others (e.g., Bergmann, 1993; Tannen, 1990). Despite the debate, most researchers have used the evaluation definition of gossip (e.g., Bergmann, 1993; Eder & Enke, 1991; Engelmann, Hermann, & Tomasello, 2016; Farley, 2011; Fernandes, Kapoor, & Karandikar, 2017; Fine, 1977; Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, & Labianca, 2010; Kuttler et al., 2002; Martinescu, Jansen, & Nijstad, 2014; Robinson, 2016; Turner et al., 2003).

Several researchers have examined the extent to which individuals engaged in different types of gossip (e.g., Leaper & Holliday, 1995; Levin & Arluke, 1985; McDonald et al., 2007; Wargo Aikins et al., 2017). Levin and Arluke (1985) observed gossip episodes of college students to examine if gossip was more often positive, negative, or mixed. The authors found that 27% of gossip was positive, 25% was negative, and there were no differences across gender. Overall, this showed that adults engaged in approximately the same amount of positive and negative gossip, but most often, gossip contained both positive and negative comments. Leaper and Holliday's (1995) research examined valence across same- and mixed-gender dyads. Their results showed that female dyads were more likely to use negative gossip compared to male and mixed-gender dyads. However, it should be noted that when interpreting past literature, it is important to take into consideration how gossip was operationalized. For example, in one case, researchers coded conversations as gossip whether the target was present or not, contradicting one of the fundamental parts of the gossip definition, which states that the target is noticeably absent (e.g., Engelmann et al., 2016; Farley, 2011; Foster, 2004; Grosser et al., 2010; Kuttler et al., 2002; Levin & Arluke, 1985; Robinson, 2016; Wargo Aikins et al., 2017). The absence of the target is what differentiates gossip from verbal bullying, where the hurtful acts are overtly

directed to the target and to their knowledge (Atlas & Pelper, 1998; Foster, 2004). In another case, positive and negative statements about familiar third parties only were coded as gossip (Leaper & Holliday, 1995). Therefore, the extent to which individuals engage in different forms of gossip varies as a function of how it is defined. Overall, the definition of gossip needs to be carefully operationalized moving forward with future research.

Given how there have been inconsistencies with how gossip has been defined in previous literature, past researchers have included positive, negative, and sometimes neutral gossip in their studies (e.g., Anderson, Seigel, Bliss-Moreau, & Barrett, 2011; Hill, 2007; Lansford et al., 2006; McDonald et al., 2007; Sommerfeld, Krambeck, & Milinsky, 2008; Wargo Aikins et al., 2017). Developmentally, children and adolescents engage in different forms of gossip (e.g., Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; McDonald et al., 2007). McDonald et al. (2007) examined gossip among fourth-grade girls and found that they used more neutral gossip overall, followed by negative gossip, then positive gossip. Among adolescents, Wargo Aikins et al. (2017) found that popular adolescents engaged most often in mixed valence gossip, followed by neutral gossip, negative gossip, then positive gossip. Similarly, Gottman and Mettetal (1986) found that adolescent gossip included both positive and negative evaluations (i.e., mixed gossip) of a target, while younger children used negative gossip only. Overall, research has demonstrated that children and adolescents engage in evaluative gossip and there are in fact developmental changes. However, research has not yet examined how children and adolescents perceive positive and negative gossip when they hear it. This could provide further insight into the developmental changes of youth's communication patterns.

Sharing Gossip With Others

Friends are different from non-friends in that friendships are long-term and stable, and are characterized by mutual interest in having a relationship and liking towards each other (Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996). Developmental and gender differences exist in children and adolescents' friendships. During adolescence, more time is devoted to spending time with friends (Crosnoe, 2000). With age, their relationships with their friends become increasingly intimate, during which there is a build-up of trust (Buhrmester, 1992). Komolova and Wainryb (2011) found that younger children were more insecure about their friendships and believed that their relationships were more sensitive to disputes. Conversely, Buhrmester (1992) found that adolescents believed that their friendships had strong foundations that could overcome disagreements and conflict. Overall, throughout childhood and adolescence, youth worry about peer-group norms, and friendship intimacy and trust (Parker & Gottman, 1989), all of which are relevant to gossip.

Moreover, according to Watson (2012), gender differences in friendships may contribute to differences in gossip behaviour and friendship quality. Watson (2012) examined gender differences in gossip and friendship among adults. Gender differences in male and female friendships included higher agency in male friendships and higher communion in female friendships. The results showed that gossip behaviour was related to friendship quality for males. However, there was little relationship for females. Given these differences, it is important to further explore the relationship between gender, friendship, and gossip in children and adolescents, where gossip behaviour occurs frequently (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986).

According to Social Penetration Theory by Altman and Taylor (1973), gossip is considered a rather intimate social activity. Social Penetration Theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) explains communication development in interpersonal relationships. This theory suggests that

personal information is shared among individuals who have developed a meaningful relationship. At the beginning stages of relationships and friendships, information is shared among these individuals and reactions to the information are tested. When the information is received well by the conversation partner, individuals will eventually choose to share more personal information and opinions, strengthening their relationship.

Related to gossip, individuals often share this type of personal information in the form of evaluations and opinions with someone with whom they have developed a relationship (Yerkovich, 1977). Gossip is even more common among good friends and this is because sharing comments about others is viewed as more socially acceptable with people that you know well (Leaper & Holliday, 1995). Furthermore, research demonstrated that there are differences in how friends and strangers communicate with each other. Specifically, Ayres (1979) found that friends freely provided evaluative comments throughout a conversation, whereas among strangers, it took more time before evaluative comments were made. Moreover, friends engaged in evaluative talk more often than strangers. This might suggest that gossip among friends and strangers is received differently.

While Social Penetration Theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) has emphasized the importance of the relationship between the sharer and the listener, research has neglected the relationship with the target. Although gossip involves the target being absent, who the target is remains essential to consider, and this could provide information about whom it is acceptable and not acceptable to talk about. Therefore, the relationship among the sharer, the listener, and the target may be crucial in understanding how gossip is perceived and provide insight for what individuals think are socially acceptable behaviours.

The Development of Gossip in Children

Gossip is a common social activity among children and adolescents that they openly admit to engaging in (Fine, 1977). Fine (1977) suggested that children's gossip has four important components. First, the content is appropriate, given the situation. This implies that children gossip about what and who is around them, which is why gossip about friends or peers at school is such a common occurrence (Crick et al., 2001). Second, when engaging in gossip about others, an opinion or evaluation on the matter is provided. Although gossip is commonly stereotyped as malicious, evaluations about the target can actually be positive or negative (Eder & Enke, 1991; Foster, 2004). Third, the gossip target is usually selected based on their social status or reputation. While the targets of gossip can be friends or peers (McDonald et al., 2007), low status members are more likely to be targets of gossip. Finally, the fourth component is an important developmental aspect and it is the ability to spread gossip orally and effectively. In order to understand gossip and its functions, children need to be able to communicate with others (Hill, 2007). In addition, throughout development, memory ability improves and children are increasingly able to remember details of events that are passed on to others (Fine, 1977). Overall, this suggests that gossip is a complex social behaviour. In fact, although signs of gossip behaviour emerge during preschool (Engelmann et al., 2016; Fine, 1977; Low, Frey, & Brockman, 2010), gossip does not frequently occur until middle childhood and remains a common social activity into adolescence (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986).

Developmentally, gossip may serve different functions and purposes (Eder & Enke, 1991; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). Research showed that it served to unify groups among children (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986), whereas during adolescence, gossip was used to establish norms (Eder & Enke, 1991). Children and adolescents often discuss those who are familiar and frequently around them (Fine, 1977). Common targets of gossip among children and adolescents

include peers, friends, family, and sometimes teachers. Often others' behaviours and actions stimulate gossip conversations (Lansford et al., 2006; McDonald et al., 2007; Wargo Aikins et al., 2017), although peer associations, personal and physical characteristics, and sexuality have also been of interest among adolescent gossip (Wargo Aikins et al., 2017). Overall, gossip is an important social activity among both children and adolescents that is crucial for peer relations and understanding norms.

Gender Differences in Gossip Behaviour

Gossip has largely been considered a female phenomenon and some past research has examined gossip in female-only samples (e.g., Lansford et al., 2006; McDonald et al., 2007). However, more recent gossip research has integrated boys and males, and examined gender differences (e.g., Banny, Heilbron, Ames, & Prinstein, 2011; Eckhaus & Ben-Hador, 2017; McGuigan & Cubillo, 2013; Menzer et al., 2012; Wang, Iannotti, & Luk, 2012). In adults, there have been mixed findings (Agneswaran & Javeri, 2005; Eckhaus & Ben-Hador, 2017; Levin & Arluke, 1985; Watson, 2012). One study demonstrated that males engaged in more gossip behaviour (Agneswaran & Javeri, 2005), while another showed that females did (Watson, 2012). Other research showed no gender differences in gossip frequency (Eckhaus & Ben-Hador, 2017; Levin & Arluke, 1985). Among youth, research also yielded mixed results (McGuigan & Cubillo, 2013; Wang et al., 2012). McGuigan and Cubillo (2013) found that when given a positive gossip statement, boys were more likely to share the information with a higher number of individuals compared to girls. Similarly, boys were perceived to be spreading more rumours, as they transitioned from seventh grade to eighth grade (Juvonen, Wang, & Espinoza, 2012). Conversely, research by Wang et al. (2012) showed that there were little gender differences in gossip behaviour among children. The authors found that boys spent 13.1% of their bullying

behaviour spreading rumours, whereas girls spent 10.8%. When grouped together with verbal bullying and social exclusion, there were no significant gender differences.

Overall, research is inconclusive about gender differences in gossip behaviour. However, little is known about gender differences that exist in how children and adolescents morally evaluate and respond to gossip. This is worth exploring because an understanding any gender patterns could provide valuable information on how to approach gossip behaviour issues in boys and girls.

Moral Evaluations of Positive and Negative Behaviour

Moral evaluations are important for understanding what children think are moral versus immoral types of behaviours (e.g., Loke et al., 2011; Talwar, Gomez-Garibello, & Shariff, 2014). Concerning moral evaluations of negative gossip behaviour, research showed that elementary-age children, both girls and boys equally, disapproved of it (Kuttler et al., 2002). While Kuttler et al. (2002) examined negative gossip, less is known about how negative compared to positive gossip is perceived morally and how this changes developmentally. Gossip is different in that it can take a positive and negative form, and there may be differences in how positive and negative gossip are evaluated. In fact, among adults, research showed that valence influenced moral evaluations (Peters & Kashima, 2015). Peters and Kashima (2015) examined how positive and negative gossip about an individual's capabilities, known as competence gossip, influenced how moral the sharer was perceived. The authors found that individuals who shared positive gossip were rated as more moral than those who shared negative gossip. This suggests that valence is in fact an important influencing factor to consider when it comes to moral evaluations of gossip sharers' behaviour. However, this has yet to be examined among children and adolescents.

With regards to children's moral evaluations, there are developmental differences in how younger and older children evaluate negative and positive behaviour (e.g., Jackson & Tisak, 2001; Loke et al., 2011). When younger and older children were asked to evaluate transgressions of different severities, there were differences in how they viewed the situations. Younger children evaluated minor and major transgressions similarly and said they would report both types of behaviour, whereas older children considered only major transgressions to be problematic and worth reporting (Loke et al., 2011). For prosocial behaviour, compared to younger children, older children believed that it was wrong to not comfort a friend (Jackson & Tisak, 2001). Together, this suggests that developmentally, youth have different understandings of moral and immoral behaviour.

Furthermore, research has indicated that transgressions are evaluated differently depending on who commits the transgressions and toward whom it is addressed. Friendships are very important for children and adolescents (Parker, Rubin, Erath, Wojslawowicz, & Buskirk, 2006), and the relationship between the gossip sharer, listener, and target may be an essential factor to consider. In one study, preschool-age children believed that it was wrong for a non-friend to take a toy away from another but it was acceptable for a friend to take a toy away. Moreover, when evaluating a transgression that was towards a friend, children reported that it was wrong when their friend was the target but it was acceptable when the target was a non-friend (Slomkowski & Killen, 1992). This suggests that friends versus non-friends are especially important differentiations that are made when judging moral behaviour.

Engaging in gossip about friends is a risky behaviour and listening to gossip about a friend may provoke negative feelings about the sharer. While research has yet to shed light on this, one study demonstrated that regardless of valence, sharing gossip about a friend decreased

one's self-esteem (Cole & Scrivener, 2013). This may be attributed to the awareness that the act of sharing gossip is morally wrong and that one is violating the social norm of privacy (Barkow, 1992; Taylor, 1994). Research has not yet examined if listening to gossip about a friend provokes similar negative feelings but towards the sharer. Who is sharing the information and whom it is about may influence what children and adolescents think about the sharer's actions. Knowing what children and adolescents consider good and bad behaviour will help us understand under what circumstances gossip is viewed as acceptable or unacceptable.

Responding to Gossip

How one morally evaluates an event can potentially influence their response to the event. Related to gossip, one's reaction to hearing the information will determine if it will continue to be transmitted. There are various ways one can respond to gossip. This may include passing on the information to someone else, remaining passive when hearing the information, defending the target or challenging the comment the sharer made, or asking the sharer to stop spreading the information (e.g., Leaper & Holliday, 1995; McGuigan & Cubillo, 2013). However, research has yet to explore the listener's reporting behaviour to the target as a response to hearing gossip about them. The reporting of a peer's transgression to other peers is a rather unexplored area of research. In general, tattling about another's transgression among children is viewed negatively (e.g., Talwar, Williams, Renaud, Arruda, & Saykaly, 2016). Talwar et al. (2016) found that older children viewed tattling more negatively compared to younger children, as they started to realize the consequences for the person who committed the transgression. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, Lok et al. (2011) found that younger and older children had different opinions when it came to reporting minor and major transgressions. Research with preschool-age children showed that they tended to report transgressions towards themselves more than

when it happened to another person (Ingram & Bering, 2010). However, among children in middle childhood and adolescence, friendships are increasingly important (Buhrmester, 1992). Therefore, it is important to understand how transgressions that are directed towards a friend influences children and adolescents' reporting behaviour.

Who is sharing gossip can also influence the listener's reaction (e.g., Eder & Enke, 1991; Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). For example, gossip was often received more favourably when it was heard from a friend compared to a stranger (Farley, 2011; Turner et al., 2003). In one study with adults, researchers listened for gossip among friends and coded the listener's response (Leaper & Holliday, 1995). The authors found that encouraging responses, such as asking more questions and elaborating on the statement, were more common than neutral or discouraging responses, regardless of valence. Highly encouraging responses were found more often in female dyads. Similar findings regarding encouraging responses were demonstrated among adolescents (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). Overall, this suggests that gossip among friends is often supported in both adults and children.

Less research has examined how the relationship to the target influences how gossip is received among children and adolescents. However, research among adults has explored what type of information heard about friends and non-friends is kept versus shared (McAndrew, Bell, & Garcia, 2007; McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002). In McAndrew and Milenkovic's study (2002), participants read a series of gossip stories and were asked to rate how likely they would pass on the information. The results indicated that participants reported they would share positive information about friends but would keep negative information about friends to themselves. If the target were not a friend, participants reported they would continue to share the negative information they heard (McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002). Similarly, adults reported

that they would be willing to share negative information about a rival (McAndrew et al., 2007). Together, these studies highlight the importance of valence and relationships when deciding whether or not to transmit gossip.

Although research on gossip among children is lacking, bullying research demonstrated that relationships were important for child and adolescent bystanders (e.g., Bellmore et al., 2012; DeSmet et al., 2012; Lodge & Frydenberg, 2005; Oh & Hazler, 2009). DeSmet et al. (2012) examined bystander-defending behaviour while manipulating the relationship between the individuals involved. The authors found that children said they would always defend their friend. However, if the victim were not a friend, they would take into consideration the bully's popularity and other circumstances of the situation. If the victim were a loner, children reported they would remain passive across various situations. Bellmore et al. (2012) also found that children were more likely to help their friend who was being bullied, while there were no differences in helping behaviour for a classmate or an unknown student. Shockingly, research showed that adults reported being less likely to intervene if they were friends with the bully (Oh & Hazler, 2009). Similarly, other research showed that children reported being more likely to actually support a bully (i.e., laugh and cheer) if they were friends with the bully (Lodge & Frydenberg, 2005).

Together, these studies emphasize the importance of whom the sharer and target are separately in deciding how to respond to hearing gossip about others. However, how the listener reacts to gossip as a function of valence and their relationship to both the sharer and the target still remains unknown. Given that with age children begin distinguishing their peers as friends versus non-friends (Berndt & Perry, 1986), this research is important because it would help us understand under what circumstances gossip is transmitted in childhood versus adolescence.

The Current Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how valence and the listener's relationship to the sharer and the target influence children and adolescents' perceptions of gossip situations. According to Foster (2004), gossip can be of positive or negative valence. Therefore, the current study will present children and adolescents with scenarios depicting gossip with positive or negative evaluations of a target. Furthermore, the relationship between the sharer, the listener, and the target will be manipulated to examine the way this affects how gossip is perceived. The gossip sharer will be the listener's friend or an unfamiliar classmate and the gossip target will be the listener's friend or an unfamiliar classmate. Furthermore, the type of behaviour displayed by the target (an individual act having consequences for the self versus a relational act with consequences for another) will also be examined. Given how research showed that characteristics of friendship changed with age, and with the transition to high school (e.g., Hardy, Bukowski, & Sippola, 2002), developmental differences will be examined according to school group (elementary/high school). Lastly, gender differences in gossip behaviour have been debated in the past (e.g., McGuigan & Cubillo, 2013; Wang et al., 2012) however, less is known about gender differences in how gossip is evaluated and received. Therefore, this study will address two research questions: (1) how do valence, relationship type, and the target's behaviour type influence the moral evaluation of the sharer's behaviour? and (2) how do valence, relationship type, and the target's behaviour type influence the response to the gossip event? Developmental and gender differences will also be examined for both research questions.

For the moral evaluations of the sharer, it was hypothesized that there would be a valence x relationship type interaction. It was expected that negative gossip in the sharer-classmate, target-friend condition would be rated more negatively than the other relationship type

conditions (H_{1a}). This was expected because research showed that negative gossip was rated more negatively than positive gossip (Peters & Kashima, 2015). Furthermore, Slomkowski and Killen (1992) showed that it was acceptable for a friend to commit transgressions, but not a peer, and that it was acceptable for a peer to be a target of transgressions, but not a friend. Next, it was hypothesized that a valence x vignette type interaction would show that participants would rate negative gossip more negatively when the target's act had consequences for another (i.e., relational vignettes) than when the behaviour had consequences for only the target (i.e., individual act; H_{1b}). It was also hypothesized that there would be a valence x school group interaction. It was expected that both elementary and high school participants would evaluate negative gossip negatively but there would be differences in how elementary school children and high school adolescents evaluated positive gossip. It was expected that adolescents would rate positive gossip more positively because Gottman and Mettetal (1986) showed that they frequently used both positive and negative gossip unlike children who used negative gossip only (H_{1c}). Lastly, it was hypothesized that a valence x gender interaction would reveal that girls would rate negative gossip more positively than boys, given the research by Leaper and Holliday (1995), and McDonald et al. (2007), which demonstrated that females used more negative gossip (H_{1d}).

For the listener's response, it was hypothesized that there would be a valence x relationship type interaction. It was expected that participants who heard negative gossip in the sharer-classmate, target-friend condition would be more likely to provide a discouraging response compared to the other relationship type conditions (H_{2a}). This was based on research that showed that gossip among friends was received more favourably but this was not the case with information shared by a stranger (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Turner et al., 2003).

Furthermore, individuals did not like to share negative information about their friends (McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002). Next, it was expected that a valence x gender interaction would show that in negative gossip situations, girls would provide more discouraging responses, given the research by Oh and Hazler (2009), which showed that females were more likely to help victims of bullying (H_{2b}). It was also hypothesized that a main effect of vignette type would show that the information in the relational vignettes condition would be more interesting to talk about and thus have more encouraging responses compared to the individual vignettes condition (H_{2c}). Lastly, it was expected that a main effect of school group would show that adolescents would provide more neutral responses because they rated tattling negatively (Loke et al., 2011; H_{2d}). Overall, this study would be the first to examine development and gender differences in children and adolescents' perceptions of gossip across valence, relationship type, and behaviour type.

Method

Participants

The current study examined 134 children and adolescents (M = 11.690, SD = 2.159). Children between the ages of 8 and 16 were selected as the age group, given how gossip is most prevalent throughout middle childhood and adolescence (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). Participants were also divided based on their school group: elementary (approximately 8-12 years old) and high school (approximately 13-16 years old), given the important transition period for friendships (Hardy et al., 2002). Descriptive statistics of participants' age and gender are presented in Table 1.

Families reported their primary ethnicity/cultural background. Twenty-seven percent identified as Caucasian, 30% Canadian, 10.4% European, 9.6% Jewish, 4.8% Asian, 4% Arab, 3.2% Black, 3.2% Indian, and .8% Iranian.

Measures

Demographics. Parents completed a brief demographics questionnaire that asked them about their ethnic/cultural background.

Vignettes. Gossip scenarios related to school events were presented across eight vignettes. The vignettes were designed to manipulate the following: the gossip valence, and the listener's relationship to the sharer and the target. As such, the conditions followed a 2 (valence: positive or negative gossip) x 4 (relationship type of gossip sharer and target: friend or unfamiliar classmate) experimental design. In addition, the gossip topic was about the target's behaviour that had consequences for him/herself or another (vignette type: individual or relational; see Appendix), as a between-subjects factor (individual act: e.g., getting the lead role in a play, forgetting to do homework; relational act: e.g., sharing a sandwich with someone in

need, interrupting someone's class presentation). The participants were randomly assigned to either the individual or relational vignette type condition.

Participants answered two questions from the perspective of the gossip listener. First, participants morally evaluated the gossip sharer's behaviour (1 = *very bad* and 5 = *very good*). Second, they were asked about how they would respond to hearing the gossip. Participants were asked if they would report the behaviour by telling the target someone was talking about them *(tell the target),* express displeasure to the sharer about the information being shared *(tell the gossip sharer to stop)*, continue to share the gossip *(spread the information*), not engage in gossip behaviour *(do nothing),* or something else *(other, please specify)*.

Coding of listener responses. The listener's response scores ranged from 0 (discouraging) to 2 (encouraging) per vignette. This coding was based on Leaper and Holliday's (1995) study. Listeners who provided a discouraging response were given a score of 0 (e.g., tell the target, tell the sharer to stop), and those who provided an encouraging response were given a score of 2 (e.g., spread the information). Neutral responses were given a score of 1 (e.g., do nothing).

Procedure

McGill University's research ethics board approved this study. Parents who agreed to partake in this study with their child were invited to the Talwar Child Development Lab to participate. Upon arrival, parents were asked to read and sign the consent form on behalf of their child. Parents then completed a demographics questionnaire, while a researcher took the child to a nearby room to complete the vignettes.

Participants were given a brief introduction to the study and were asked to give verbal assent before the story activity began. Participants were made aware that their answers were

confidential, they could skip over any questions that made them feel uncomfortable, and they could stop the study at any time. The researcher presented the story activity in the form of vignettes (either the individual or relational vignettes). After reading a story, participants were asked to answer questions from the perspective of the gossip listener. All vignettes were gender-matched and vignette orders were counterbalanced (four different versions). Lastly, participants were debriefed about the study. The researcher spoke to the participant about the risks of gossiping, explained the difference between negative and positive gossip, and answered any questions they had.

Results

The following results section will describe the findings from the two over-arching research questions. The first section will describe children's moral evaluations of the sharer's behaviour. The results of a three-way interaction will be described first, followed by two-way interactions, and main effects. The second section will describe children's reported responses to the gossip scenarios. The results of two-way interactions will be presented first, followed by main effects.

Moral Evaluation of the Sharer's Behaviour

A five-way mixed repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to understand how children and adolescents, taking the listener's perspective, evaluated the sharer's behaviour. Valence (2 levels: positive/negative) and relationship type (4 levels: sharer-friend, target-friend; sharer-friend, target-classmate; sharer-classmate, target-classmate; sharer-classmate, target-friend) were entered as the within-subjects factors, and vignette type (2 levels: individual/relational), school group (2 levels: elementary/high school), and gender (2 levels: boy/girl) were entered as the between-subjects factors. Bonferroni corrections at the 0.5 level were used in all post-hoc analyses. Moreover, Mauchly's Test of Sphericity was run on the within-subjects factor of relationship type, $\chi^2(5) = 6.250$, $p = .283$, and for the interaction between the levels of the within-subjects factors of valence and relationship type , $\chi^2(5) = 9.072$, $p = .106$. It should be noted that Mauchly's Test of Sphericity was not run on the within-subjects factor of valence for all analyses, as it only consisted of two levels. Therefore, sphericity was assumed. Table 2 shows the mean moral evaluation scores as a function of valence and relationship type.

Three-way interactions. There was a significant three-way interaction between valence, school group, and gender, $F(1, 126) = 4.866$, $p = .029$, $\eta_p^2 = .037$. Simple two-way interactions were conducted to identify the significant differences. With the Bonferroni correction, there were no significant simple two-way interactions.

Next, there was a significant three-way interaction between valence, relationship type, and vignette type, $F(3, 126) = 6.665$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .050$. Simple two-way interactions were conducted to identify the significant differences and the results are presented directly below.

Individual vignettes. In the individual vignettes condition, participants read stories with the sharer talking about the target's behaviour that had consequences for the target. Mauchly's Test of Sphericity was run on the within-subjects factor of relationship type, $\chi^2(5) = 4.231$, $p = .517$, and for the interaction between the levels of the within-subjects factors of valence and relationship type, $\chi^2(5) = 2.974$, $p = .704$. Sphericity was assumed.

In the individual vignettes condition, there was a significant simple two-way interaction between valence and relationship type, $F(3, 62) = 13.021$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .174$ (Figure 1). Simple simple main effects revealed that in the relationship type condition, there were differences across the levels of the valence condition. More specifically, negative gossip was rated more negatively than positive gossip in all relationship type conditions (Table 3). Next, in the valence condition, there were differences across the levels of the relationship type condition. There was a significant simple simple main effect of relationship type for positive gossip, $F(3, 62) = 5.299$, $p = .002$ $\eta_p^2 = .079$, and sphericity assumed was assumed, $\chi^2(5) = 4.913$, $p = .427$. Positive gossip in the sharer-classmate, target-friend condition ($M = 4.043$, $SE = .103$) was rated more positively compared to the sharer-friend, target-friend condition ($M = 3.624$, $SE = .104$). Furthermore, there was a simple simple main effect of relationship type for negative gossip, $F(3,$

62) = 14.868, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .193$, and sphericity assumed was assumed, $\chi^2(5) = 7.460$, $p = .188$. Negative gossip in the sharer-classmate, target-friend condition ($M = 1.919$, $SE = .063$) was rated more negatively compared to all other relationship types: the sharer-friend, target-friend ($M = 2.366$, $SE = .085$), the sharer-friend, target-classmate ($M = 2.443$, $SE = .073$), and the sharer-classmate, target-classmate conditions ($M = 2.508$, $SE = .092$).

There was also a significant simple main effect of valence, $F(1, 62) = 324.624$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .838$. Pairwise comparisons revealed that in the individual vignettes condition, negative gossip ($M = 2.309$, $SE = .051$) was rated more negatively than positive gossip ($M = 3.882$, $SE = .072$).

Finally, there was a significant simple main effect of relationship type, $F(3, 62) = 5.834$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .086$. Pairwise comparisons revealed that in the individual vignettes condition, the sharer-classmate, target-friend condition ($M = 2.981$, $SE = .061$) was rated more negatively than the sharer-friend, target-classmate ($M = 3.190$, $SE = .059$), and the sharer-classmate, target-classmate conditions ($M = 3.215$, $SE = .066$).

Relational vignettes. In the relational vignettes condition, participants read stories with the sharer talking about the target's behaviour that had consequences for a fourth unnamed person. Mauchly's Test of Sphericity was run on the within-subjects factor of relationship type, $\chi^2(5) = 14.204$, $p = .014$, and for the interaction between the levels of the within-subjects factors of valence and relationship type, $\chi^2(5) = 8.289$, $p = .141$. Given that the assumption of sphericity was not met for the relationship type within-subjects factor, the more conservative Greenhouse-Geisser is reported in the subsequent analyses pertaining to the relational vignettes simple two-way interactions and simple main effects.

In the relational vignettes condition, there was a significant simple two-way interaction between valence and relationship type, $F(3, 64) = 4.429$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = .065$. Simple simple main effects revealed that in the relationship type condition, there were differences across the levels of the valence condition. More specifically, negative gossip was rated more negatively than positive gossip in all relationship type conditions (Table 4). Next, with the Bonferroni correction, there were no significant differences in the valence condition across the levels of the relationship type condition.

Lastly, there was a significant simple main effect of valence, $F(1, 64) = 193.891$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .752$. Pairwise comparisons revealed that in the relational vignettes condition, negative gossip ($M = 2.457$, $SE = .056$) was rated more negatively than positive gossip ($M = 3.643$, $SE = .071$).

Two-way interactions. There was a significant interaction between valence and relationship type, $F(3, 126) = 11.687$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .085$. Follow-up simple main effects were conducted to identify the significant differences. In the relationship type condition, there were differences across the levels of the valence condition. There was a significant simple main effect of valence in all the relationship type conditions, wherein negative gossip was rated more negatively than positive gossip (Table 5). Furthermore, in the valence condition, there were differences across the levels of the relationship type condition. There was a significant simple main effect of relationship type for negative gossip, $F(3, 131) = 15.025$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .256$. Supporting H_{1a}, negative gossip in the sharer-classmate, target-friend condition had ratings that significantly differed from all other relationship type conditions. The sharer-classmate, target-friend condition ($M = 2.199$, $SE = .055$) was rated more negatively than the sharer-friend, target-

friend (M = 2.373, SE = .064), the sharer-friend, target-classmate (M = 2.493, SE = .057), and the sharer-classmate, target-classmate conditions (M = 2.537, SE = .059).

Furthermore, there was a significant interaction between valence and vignette type, $F(1, 126) = 9.999$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .074$. Follow-up simple main effects were conducted to identify the significant differences. In the vignette type condition, there were differences across the levels of the valence condition. There was a significant simple main effect of valence in both the individual and relational vignette conditions, wherein negative gossip was rated more negatively than positive gossip (Table 6). Additionally, in the valence condition, there were differences across the levels of the vignette type condition. There was a significant simple main effect of vignette type for positive gossip, $F(1, 126) = 5.599$, $p = .019$, $\eta_p^2 = .043$. Participants rated positive gossip in the individual vignettes condition (M = 3.882, SE = .072) more positively than participants in the relational vignettes condition (M = 3.643, SE = .071). This did not support H_{1b}.

Moreover, there was a significant interaction between valence and school group, $F(1, 126) = 5.528$, $p = .020$, $\eta_p^2 = .042$. Follow-up simple main effects were conducted to identify the significant differences. In the school group condition, there were differences across the levels of the valence condition. There was a significant simple main effect of valence in both the elementary and high school participants, wherein negative gossip was rated more negatively than positive gossip (Table 7). Furthermore, in the valence condition, there were differences across the levels of the school group condition. There was a significant simple main effect of school group for positive gossip, $F(1, 126) = 7.984$, $p = .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .060$. High school adolescents (M = 3.905, SE = .075) rated positive gossip more positively than elementary school children (M = 3.620, SE = .068), supporting H_{1c}.

Next, there was a significant interaction between valence and gender, $F(1, 126) = 20.915$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .142$. Follow-up simple main effects were conducted to identify the significant differences. In the gender condition, there were differences across the levels of the valence condition. There was a significant simple main effect of valence among both girls and boys, wherein negative gossip was rated more negatively than positive gossip (Table 8). Additionally, in the valence condition, there were differences across the levels of the gender condition. There was a significant simple main effect of gender for negative gossip, $F(1, 126) = 25.523$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .157$. Girls ($M = 2.198$, $SE = .053$) rated negative gossip more negatively than boys ($M = 2.568$, $SE = .054$), not supporting H_{1d}.

There was also a significant interaction between relationship type and vignette type, $F(3, 126) = 2.668$, $p = .047$, $\eta_p^2 = .021$. Follow-up simple main effects were conducted to identify the significant differences. In the vignette type condition, there were differences across the levels of the relationship type condition. Specifically, there was a significant simple main effect of relationship type in the individual vignettes condition, $F(1, 124) = 5.988$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .127$. The sharer-classmate, target-friend condition ($M = 2.981$, $SE = .066$) was rated more negatively than the sharer-friend, target-classmate ($M = 3.190$, $SE = .060$), and the sharer-classmate, target-classmate conditions ($M = 3.215$, $SE = .058$). Next, simple main effects revealed that with the Bonferroni correction, there were no differences in the relationship type condition across the levels of the vignette type condition.

Lastly, there was a significant interaction between gender and school group, $F(1, 126) = 4.274$, $p = .041$, $\eta_p^2 = .033$. Follow-up simple main effects were conducted to identify the significant differences. In the school group condition, there were differences across the levels of the gender condition. There was a significant simple main effect of school group among girls,

$F(1, 126) = 9.117$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .067$. Girls in elementary school ($M = 2.890$, $SE = .062$) rated gossip more negatively than girls in high school ($M = 3.166$, $SE = .068$).

Main effects. There was a significant main effect of valence, $F(1, 126) = 508.567$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .801$. Follow-up pairwise comparisons revealed that negative gossip ($M = 2.383$, $SE = .038$) was rated more negatively than positive gossip ($M = 3.762$, $SE = .050$).

Furthermore, there was a significant main effect of relationship type, $F(3, 126) = 4.377$, $p = .005$, $\eta_p^2 = .034$. Follow-up pairwise comparisons revealed that the sharer-classmate, target-friend condition ($M = 2.990$, $SE = .047$) was rated more negatively than the sharer-friend, target-classmate ($M = 3.138$, $SE = .042$), and the sharer-classmate, target-classmate conditions ($M = 3.129$, $SE = .041$).

Finally, there was a significant main effect of school group, $F(1, 126) = 4.707$, $p = .032$, $\eta_p^2 = .036$. Follow-up pairwise comparisons revealed that elementary school children ($M = 3.002$, $SE = .044$) rated gossip more negatively than high school adolescents ($M = 3.143$, $SE = .048$).

Listener's Response

Next, another analysis was conducted to examine children's reported responses to the gossip scenarios, coded on a scale from discouraging to encouraging responses. Another five-way mixed repeated measures ANOVA was conducted. Valence (2 levels: positive/negative) and relationship type (4 levels: sharer-friend, target-friend; sharer-friend, target-classmate; sharer-classmate, target-classmate; sharer-classmate, target-friend) were entered as the within-subjects factors, and vignette type (2 levels: individual/relational), school group (2 levels: elementary/high school), and gender (2 levels: boy/girl) were entered as the between-subjects factors. Bonferroni corrections at the 0.5 level were used in all post-hoc analyses. Moreover,

Mauchly's Test of Sphericity was run on the within-subjects factor of relationship type, $\chi^2(5) = 4.643$, $p = .461$, and for the interaction between the levels of the within-subjects factors of valence and relationship type, $\chi^2(5) = 5.494$, $p = .359$. It should be noted that Mauchly's Test of Sphericity was not run on the within-subjects factor of valence, as it only consisted of two levels. Therefore, sphericity was assumed. Table 9 shows the mean listener response scores as a function of valence and relationship type.

Two-way interactions. There was a significant interaction between valence and relationship type, $F(3, 126) = 4.806$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .037$. Follow-up simple main effects were conducted to identify the significant differences. In the relationship type condition, there were differences across the levels of the valence condition. There was a significant simple main effect of valence in all the relationship type conditions, wherein negative gossip had more discouraging responses than positive gossip (Table 10). Moreover, in the valence condition, there were differences across the levels of the relationship type condition. Specifically, there was a significant simple main effect of relationship type for positive gossip, $F(3, 124) = 4.719$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .102$. Positive gossip in the sharer-friend, target-friend condition ($M = 1.121$, $SE = .065$) had responses that were more discouraging compared to the sharer-classmate, target-classmate ($M = 1.385$, $SE = .056$), and the sharer-classmate, target-friend conditions ($M = 1.354$, $SE = .064$). Furthermore, there was a significant simple main effect of relationship type for negative gossip, $F(3, 124) = 4.269$, $p = .007$, $\eta_p^2 = .094$. Negative gossip in sharer-classmate, target-friend condition ($M = .346$, $SE = .056$) had responses that were more discouraging compared to the sharer-friend, target-classmate condition ($M = .604$, $SE = .061$). This only partially supported H_{2a}.

There was also a significant interaction between valence and gender, $F(1, 126) = 6.711$, $p = .011$, $\eta_p^2 = .051$. Follow-up simple main effects were conducted to identify the significant differences. In the gender condition, there were differences across the levels of the valence condition. There was a significant simple main effect of valence among both girls and boys, wherein negative gossip had more discouraging responses than positive gossip (Table 11). Furthermore, in the valence condition, there were differences across the levels of the gender condition. There was a significant simple main effect of gender for negative gossip, $F(1, 126) = 9.001$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .067$. Girls ($M = .334$, $SE = .055$) provided more discouraging responses than boys ($M = .567$, $SE = .055$) in negative gossip scenarios, supporting H_{2b}.

Main effects. There was a significant main effect of valence, $F(1, 126) = 216.167$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .632$. Follow-up pairwise comparisons revealed that negative gossip ($M = .451$, $SE = .039$) had more discouraging responses than positive gossip ($M = 1.300$, $SE = .042$).

Furthermore, there was a significant main effect of relationship type, $F(3, 126) = 5.622$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .043$. Follow-up pairwise comparisons revealed that in the sharer-friend, target-friend condition ($M = .772$, $SE = .041$) participants provided more discouraging responses compared to the sharer-friend, target-classmate ($M = .972$, $SE = .042$), and the sharer-classmate, target-classmate conditions ($M = .907$, $SE = .041$).

Lastly, there was a significant main effect of school group, $F(3, 126) = 4.434$, $p = .037$, $\eta_p^2 = .034$. Follow-up pairwise comparisons revealed that high school adolescents ($M = .935$, $SE = .042$) provided more neutral responses compared to elementary school children ($M = .816$, $SE = .038$), supporting H_{2d}.

Discussion

The aim of the current study was to explore how valence, relationship type, and the target's behaviour type influenced children and adolescences' moral evaluations and responses to gossip. Developmental and gender differences were also examined. We found that valence, relationship type, behaviour type, age, and gender were all important factors that contributed to differences in how the sharer's actions were evaluated. Furthermore, we found that valence, relationship type, age, and gender contributed to differences in the listener's response.

Moral Evaluation of the Sharer's Behaviour

The results revealed that there was a three-way interaction between valence, relationship type, and vignette type. In both the individual and relational vignette conditions, the simple two-way valence x relationship type interaction revealed that negative gossip was rated more negatively than positive gossip in all relationship type conditions. The simple main effect of valence in both vignette types revealed the same findings, as did the main effect of valence from the five-way mixed repeated measures ANOVA. These results are supported by previous research that showed differences in how negative and positive gossip were rated (Peters & Kashima, 2015) and that negative gossip was viewed as inappropriate among children (Kuttler et al., 2002).

Interestingly, in the individual vignettes condition, the simple two-way valence x relationship type interaction also revealed that positive gossip in the sharer-classmate, target-friend condition was rated more positively than the sharer-friend, target-friend condition. Although in the current study positive gossip in the sharer-friend, target-friend condition was still rated quite positively overall, participants may have still felt that there was a standard social rule among friends that was not being met. Previous research showed that trust decreased slightly

when a friend shared positive gossip to another friend about the study's experimenter (Turner et al., 2003). Therefore, given that the sharer and listener were talking about one of their own friends, listeners may have been more sceptical about this behaviour. Surprisingly, the current study's results suggest that participants actually preferred hearing a classmate gossip positively about their friend. Contrary to the adult sample in the study by Turner et al. (2003), the present study's research with children and adolescents might suggest that hearing positive information about their friend shared by a classmate came as a pleasant surprise to listeners and this was viewed as good behaviour. Therefore, in this circumstance, the sharer was seen as a good person for talking nicely about someone unfamiliar.

Furthermore, in the individual vignettes condition, negative gossip in the sharer-classmate, target-friend condition was rated more negatively than all other relationship type conditions. This is supported by previous research by Slomkowski and Killen (1992), which indicated that it was not acceptable for peers to commit transgressions and that it was not acceptable for friends to be targets of transgressions. Therefore, when the sharer spread negative information about the listener's friend, listeners did not think highly of the sharer's behaviour. Together, the results from the simple two-way valence x relationship type interaction in the individual vignettes condition might suggest that when the sharer-classmate was talking about a friend, listeners may have been particularly sensitive to the gossip valence.

Furthermore, unlike the relational vignettes condition, there was a simple main effect of relationship type in the individual vignettes condition. Gossip in the sharer-friend, target-classmate, and the sharer-classmate, target-classmate conditions were both rated more positively than the sharer-classmate, target-friend condition. The same results were found in the relationship type x vignette type interaction from the five-way mixed repeated measures

ANOVA. The main effect of relationship type from the five-way mixed repeated measures ANOVA also revealed the same findings but across all vignettes. The results suggest that participants thought that it was more acceptable to hear gossip about a classmate regardless of the source than hear gossip about a friend shared by a classmate. Interestingly, despite the fact that participants rated positive gossip in the sharer-classmate, target-friend condition positively, this condition overall was rated quite negatively and was rated most negatively in the negative gossip condition compared to the other relationship types. Overall, these results might suggest that participants believed it was more acceptable to gossip both positively and negatively about classmates. However, concerning gossip about their friends, there may have been more uncertainty about the social rules of talking about them. This may be due to the fact that their friendships could be at stake if the target-friend were unhappy about the information being shared, whereas that may not have been as important among classmates.

In the relational vignettes condition, such differences in positive and negative gossip across relationship type were not found. Positive and negative relational acts, which were directed towards a fourth unknown person, were all rated the same across relationship type. This might suggest that it did not matter who shared and committed the positive or negative behaviour in the relational vignettes condition; sharing positive information was seen as good and sharing negative information was seen as bad. Peters and Kashima (2015) found that spreading extreme morality gossip, which informed about the target's positive social intentions, was rated more positively than mild morality gossip. While negative gossip was not examined, this might indicate that spreading an even more positive gossip statement about a target's social behaviour towards others was viewed as more acceptable than a less positive gossip statement. Therefore, relationships may not have been as important for relational behaviours because this type of

gossip provided valuable information about the target's social behaviour towards others. Thus, in the relational vignettes condition, regardless of relationship type, it was more acceptable to hear that someone did a good deed towards another but participants did not think it was as appropriate to share information about a bad deed. This is consistent with our other results, which showed that positive gossip was more acceptable than negative gossip. However, this study was the first to investigate the target's behaviour type as the gossip topic and future research should continue to explore this. Overall, this information on the target's behaviour type has shown what types of behaviour topics are appropriate and inappropriate to gossip about. This has also provided insight as to what are acceptable and unacceptable behaviours, contributing to the understanding of social norms in school settings.

The valence x relationship type interaction revealed that negative gossip was rated more negatively than positive gossip in all four relationship type conditions and again this is consistent with previous research by Peters and Kashima (2015). Furthermore, as hypothesized ($H1_a$) and consistent with previous findings (Slomkowski & Killen, 1992), negative gossip in the sharer-classmate, target-friend condition was rated most negatively compared to all other relationship type conditions. Given these findings, it is possible that potential conflicts could arise between peers, especially when hearing gossip about a friend from a classmate. School professionals now aware of this can implement preventative and conflict solutions strategies.

The valence x vignette type interaction showed that in both vignette type conditions participants differentiated between positive and negative gossip, wherein negative gossip was rated more negatively than positive gossip (Peters & Kashima, 2015). Surprisingly, participants in the individual vignettes condition rated positive gossip more positively than participants in the relational vignettes condition. Participants may have felt that it was more acceptable to talk

about the target's personal accomplishments or achievements than good deeds that involved another person. It is possible that participants did not think it was right to share information involving that fourth unknown person who was in a vulnerable position, which violated their privacy by sharing that information (Barkow, 1992; Taylor, 1994). Moreover, it was hypothesized ($H1_b$) that participants would rate negative gossip more negatively in the relational vignettes condition than in the individual vignettes condition. This hypothesis was not supported, given that negative gossip was rated similarly in both vignette type conditions. This suggests that no matter what kind of act or behaviour the target did, negative gossip was always rated negatively. Given that participants may have shown empathy towards the fourth individual in positive gossip relational situations, school professionals might want to teach children that they need to also consider how any target would feel about the information being shared in all gossip situations.

The valence x school group interaction revealed that both school groups rated negative gossip more negatively than positive gossip. Furthermore, elementary school children rated positive gossip more negatively than high school adolescents, confirming H_{1c}. Research by Gottman and Mettetal (1986) found that older children used both positive and negative gossip, whereas younger children used just negative gossip. This might suggest that younger children did not understand the function of positive gossip. Moreover, Peters and Kashima (2015) found that adults differentiated between positive and negative gossip and the current study's findings suggest that adolescents made this differentiation as well. While the current study showed that children also rated positive and negative gossip differently, the results might indicate that elementary-age children were more ambivalent about the acceptability of using positive gossip, similar to Gottman and Mettetal's findings.

The valence x gender interaction demonstrated that both boys and girls rated negative gossip more negatively than positive gossip (Peters & Kashima, 2015). Contrary to what was expected ($H1_d$), girls rated negative gossip more negatively than boys. Previous research by Leaper and Holliday (1995), and Watson (2012) showed that females engaged in negative gossip more than males, which is why it was expected that they would be less likely to evaluate negative gossip negatively. However, it should be noted that the current study's sample was with children and adolescents, and not adults. Furthermore, some of the previous research with children has included samples with girls only (e.g., Lansford et al., 2006; McDonald et al., 2007). This has limited research in gender differences, while other research has found no gender differences (e.g., Wang et al., 2012). Finally, none of these studies examined moral evaluations of hearing positive and negative gossip in children across gender. Previous research showed that compared to girls, boys were perceived to spread more rumours (Juvonen et al., 2012), and the current study's results might suggest that boys were less sensitive to negative gossip. However, more research is needed to understand gossip and gender differences during childhood and adolescence.

The gender x school group interaction showed that girls in elementary school rated gossip more negatively than girls in high school. There is limited research that exists on children's moral evaluations of gossip behaviour developmentally and across gender. However, Eder and Sanford (1986) found that adolescent girls relied on gossip to communicate about acceptable social behaviour. Therefore, girls might start to believe that gossip is more acceptable with age. Gossip can serve social functions such as being able to fit in and being liked, which according to Brown, Teufel, Birch, and Kancherla, (2006) was especially important for adolescent girls. Elementary school children rated gossip more negatively than high school adolescents, as

demonstrated by the main effect of age. This suggests that with age, gossip was seen as more acceptable. This may be because during adolescence, gossip is used to establish norms among peers (Eder & Enke, 1991; Wargo Aikins et al., 2017). Therefore, gossip is a crucial activity that contributes to the understanding of what is socially acceptable behaviour. Wargo Aikins et al. (2017) found that during adolescence gossip can be used to establish and maintain popularity. Together, this suggests that during adolescence, gossip is an important social tool. The current study's findings demonstrate that more research is needed to further understand both gender and developmental trends in gossip. Overall, research on age and gender differences in gossip behaviour will allow school professionals to adapt relational aggression programs according to how children view gossip behaviour. The current study was the first to examine evaluations of both positive and negative gossip developmentally and across gender.

Listener's Response

The valence x relationship type interaction revealed that negative gossip had more discouraging responses than positive gossip in all four relationship type conditions. The main effect of valence supports this finding. While previous research showed that children evaluated negative gossip poorly (Kuttler et al., 2002), they also acknowledged their participation in gossip (Fine, 1977). It was surprising that participants did not often provide encouraging responses, as previous research showed that children and adolescents frequently engaged in and shared positive and negative gossip (e.g., Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). This also differs from previous research with adults that showed that there were no differences in responses to gossip across valence (Leaper & Holliday, 1995). However, the current study was the first to explore how children and adolescents would respond to both positive and negative gossip. The current study's results might suggest that participants believed that compared to negative gossip, which

can have negative consequences for the target's reputation (Hill & Pillow, 2006), positive gossip was not worth interfering with.

Furthermore, the valence x relationship type interaction showed that positive gossip in the sharer-friend, target-friend condition had responses that were less encouraging than the sharer-classmate, target-classmate, and the sharer-classmate, target-friend conditions. Interestingly, this suggests that although friends were talking positively amongst themselves, they still felt somewhat uncomfortable further sharing the information if it was about their friend. This is contradictory to previous findings by McAndrew and Milenkovic (2002), which showed that friends were more likely to report sharing positive information about their friends. However, it should be noted that McAndrew and Milenkovic's study did not take into consideration who the gossip sharer was. We previously reported that listeners might have been sceptical about positive gossip shared by their friend about another friend. Therefore, listeners may not have wanted to continue sharing that information. Cole and Scrivener (2013) found that sharing even positive gossip lead to self-criticism, arguing that there was a sense of guilt that the target's privacy was being violated. Although Cole and Scrivener's study also did not examine who the sharer was, that additional factor in the current study may have evoked similar feelings for the listener in the sharer-friend, target-friend condition. Knowing that two friends were discussing another friend likely brought on a feeling of guilt, perhaps being unsure if their friend was okay with the information being shared, and thus, listeners were less likely to encourage gossip in that situation. Moreover, the results showed that negative gossip in the sharer-classmate, target-friend condition had more discouraging responses compared to the sharer-friend, target-classmate condition. This only partially confirmed H_{2a}, which stated that negative gossip in the sharer-classmate, target-friend condition would have the most discouraging

responses compared to all other relationship types. Research by McAndrew and Milenkovic (2002) demonstrated that individuals would not spread negative information about their friends, although they would share negative information about a non-friend or rival (McAndrew et al., 2007; McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002). In the current study, this might indicate that in the sharer-friend, target-classmate condition, participants did not give the target-classmate the same consideration they gave the target-friend in the sharer-classmate, target-friend condition. This is in line with previous research that demonstrated that gossip shared among friends was received more favourably (e.g., Gottman & Mettetal, 1986). Bullying research also showed that victims who were non-friends of the bystander, such as classmates and unfamiliar peers, were less likely to be helped (e.g., Bellmore et al., 2012).

Across all gossip scenarios, the results indicated that in the sharer-friend, target-friend condition, participants were more likely to provide discouraging responses compared to the sharer-classmate, target-classmate, and the sharer-friend, target-classmate condition, as demonstrated by the main effect of relationship. This suggests that when the listener had no relationship with the target, the listener felt that it was not necessary to discourage the information. This is consistent with research that showed that children were less likely to intervene when classmates were victimized (e.g., Bellmore et al., 2012). The current study has been helpful in identifying non-friends as targets who might be more vulnerable to gossip. Overall, this research has demonstrated the importance of valence and relationships in responding to gossip, and it has provided insight as to under what conditions gossip is most commonly spread.

Next, the valence x gender interaction revealed that among boys and girls, positive gossip had more encouraging responses than negative gossip. While this adds to our earlier results and

those of Peters and Kashima (2015), which showed that positive gossip was rated more positively than negative gossip, other research with adults showed that both males and females engaged more often in negative gossip (Leaper & Holliday, 1995). Leaper and Holliday's (1995) study involved natural conversations, while the current study used vignettes with hypothetical situations and participants were asked to report their behaviour. This may have led to more socially desirable responses and this is addressed in the limitations. However, the current study was the first to examine responses across valence among children and adolescents, and more research is needed to further contribute to the understanding of these results. In negative gossip scenarios, girls provided more discouraging responses, confirming our hypothesis (H_{2b}). Previous research showed that girls were more likely to help victims in bullying situations, demonstrating that they were more likely to intervene (Oh & Hazler, 2009). However, other research by Leaper and Holliday (1995), and Watson (2012) showed that females engaged in gossip more than males. However, both of these studies were conducted with an older population than the current sample. Moreover, research among boys revealed that they were perceived to spread rumours more than girls (Juvonen et al., 2012). Gender differences in gossip behaviour have shown mixed results across many studies (e.g., Eckhaus & Ben-Hador, 2017; Juvonen et al., 2012; Levin & Arluke, 1985; McGuigan & Cubillo, 2013; Watson, 2012), and moving forward, these patterns across childhood and adolescence should be explored further. Understanding gender differences in youth's gossip behaviour will allow school professionals to better tailor relational aggression intervention programs, and based on the current study's results, passive or encouraging behaviour would have to be addressed in boys.

There were no differences in responses across vignette type, contradicting H_{2c}. This study was the first to examine behaviour type and more research is needed to understand how this influences the way gossip is received.

Lastly, confirming our hypothesis (H_{2d}), adolescents provided more neutral responses compared to children and this is consistent with research that showed that adolescents did not often report engaging in reporting behaviour (Lok et al., 2011). Further supporting our findings, other research showed that compared to younger children, adolescents were more likely to remain passive in bullying situations (e.g., Trach, Hymel, Waterhouse, & Neale, 2010). Overall, this might indicate that adolescents did not think it was necessary to discourage gossip behaviour, although moving forward, developmental patterns should be explored longitudinally. Knowing what developmental differences exist in youths' responses to gossip will be helpful when addressing problematic relationally aggressive behaviour. This research can contribute to gossip prevention programs that would address the passive behaviour adolescents may exhibit.

Limitations and Future Directions

In considering the current study's findings, certain limitations should be noted. The current study showed that participants had different moral evaluations of positive and negative gossip. While in this study participants took the perspective of the gossip listener, and evaluated the sharer's behaviour and how they would react to it, the perspectives of the other individuals involved in gossip remains unknown. Although there has been research that has shown that spreading both positive and negative gossip decreased the sharer's self-esteem (Cole & Scrivener, 2013), relationship types were not examined in Cole and Scrivener's (2013) study. Moreover, the perspective of the gossip target has yet to be investigated and would also be interesting to explore, as this could contribute to the understanding of the current study's

findings and the gossip literature. Future research should consider getting the perspective of the target, and getting their perceptions of the acceptability of who shares positive and negative gossip about them. This information could help explain why gossip listeners were reluctant to share gossip, compared to what other research has shown (e.g., Leaper & Holliday, 1995; McDonald et al., 2007; Wargo Aikins et al., 2017). Furthermore, it could provide some clarity on any assumptions that gossip listeners may have made about how the targets would feel about the information being shared.

Similar to the current study, many previous research studies have used vignettes as a way to understand children's moral evaluations (e.g., Cameron, Lau, Fu, & Lee, 2012; Fu et al., 2016; Lok et al., 2011; Popliger, Talwar, & Crossman, 2011; Shohoudi Mojdehi, Leduc, Shohoudi Mojdehi, & Talwar, 2019; Talwar et al., 2014). This has also been the case when examining hypothetical behavioural responses (e.g., Bellmore et al., 2012; Jones, Manstead, & Livingstone, 2009; Lodge & Frydenberg, 2005). However, using vignettes can cause concern for participants using socially desirable responses and examining their real-life behaviours would increase external validity. In the current study, participants were asked to report their behaviour in hypothetical scenarios. Future research should consider following children's actual gossip behaviour in situations with peers to determine under what circumstances they engage in gossip. This could provide more insight into children and adolescents' reactions as listeners, similar to Leaper and Holliday's (1995) study. Furthermore, while the current study used a cross-sectional design, future research should also consider longitudinal designs to examine developmental changes. Our findings, those of McGuigan and Cubillo's (2013), and Juvonen et al. (2012), showed that boys were more likely to spread gossip. However, Watson's (2012) study with adults showed that it was females who shared gossip more. Therefore, longitudinal designs may

shed light on where there is a developmental shift in gossip behaviour across gender. Lastly, although the current study had a fairly even number of girl (n = 68) and boy (n = 66) participants, and elementary (n = 73) and high school (n = 61) children, a larger sample overall would be necessary in order to make firm conclusions about youth's evaluations and responses to gossip.

Implications

The findings from the current study provide an understanding of children and adolescents' perceptions and reactions to various gossip scenarios that they likely experience in a school setting among their friends and peers. Furthermore, this study provides insight as to how gossip valence and the listener's relationship to the sharer and target affect whether gossip is viewed as acceptable or unacceptable. While research has examined the relationship between the perpetrator, the victim, and the bystander in bullying situations (e.g., Bellmore et al., 2012; DeSmet et al., 2012), less is known about how these relationships impact children and adolescents' perceptions and responses to positive versus negative gossip. This information is practical for school professionals who handle relational aggression problems in schools, as this study contributes to an understanding of friendships and social relationships between students. More specifically, this study provides insight as to how children socialize with their friends compared to classmates and what they consider to be appropriate or inappropriate gossip conversations. Finally, as boys and girls get older, their perception of friendship evolves and this study examined how these changes affect their evaluations and reactions to gossip. Therefore, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how children evaluate gossip involving their peers and can help educators further comprehend and address relational aggression in schools. Beyond aggressive behaviour, gossip is a communication tool that is a part of every day

social life. This study has helped us gain a better understanding of how this social influence tool is used among friends and peers during middle childhood and adolescence.

Conclusions

The current study has provided valuable insight on how children and adolescents evaluate and react to different gossip scenarios. This study fills an important gap in the literature by examining the combination of valence and the relationship between the sharer, listener, and target. Previous gossip research on valence and relationships have often examined only negative or positive gossip (e.g., Kuttler et al., 2002; McGuigan & Cubillo, 2013) and the relationship between only two of the three individuals involved (e.g., Hill, 2007; Turner et al., 2003).

Regarding valence, the current study found that participants differentiated between positive and negative gossip for moral evaluations and responses. The results showed that participants rated negative gossip more negatively and were more likely to discourage it. Furthermore, the results demonstrated that participants evaluated and reacted differently to negative gossip depending on who was involved, where gossip in the sharer-classmate, target-friend condition was rated poorly and often discouraged. However, positive gossip in the sharer-friend, target-friend condition was evaluated less positively (in the individual vignettes condition only) and had more discouraging responses overall, perhaps because listeners felt unsure and guilty about spreading the information without their friend's permission.

Next, the current study found that the target's behaviour type contributed to differences in moral evaluations but not responses to gossip. Furthermore, while in both vignette type conditions negative gossip was rated more negatively than positive gossip, and relationship type was only of importance for the individual vignettes condition. Therefore, for the relational acts, relationship type was not an influencing factor on moral evaluations. Interestingly, differences

in the ratings of positive gossip across relationship type were evident only in the individual vignettes condition.

Lastly, our results showed some important developmental and gender differences. In general, adolescents evaluated gossip less negatively in addition to acting more passive. Adolescent girls, in particular, rated gossip less negatively than younger girls but girls in general discouraged negative gossip more than boys. Therefore, attitudes about gossip and gossip behaviour among adolescents seems to be somewhat of a concern and needs to be addressed in order to prevent problematic gossip behaviour. Overall, the current study has contributed to the existing gossip literature and has provided further insight into the understanding of children and adolescent's gossip behaviour among peers.

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Table 1

Participant Descriptive Statistics

Gender	School group	Individual vignettes		Relational vignettes		Total	
		n	*Mage(SD)*	*n*	*Mage(SD)*	*n*	*Mage(SD)*
Boy	Elementary school	17	10.06(1.298)	19	10.16(1.385)	36	10.11(1.326)
	High school	15	13.33(1.047)	15	13.87(1.302)	39	13.60(1.192)
Girl	Elementary school	18	9.72(1.406)	19	10.58(1.071)	37	10.16(1.302)
	High school	16	13.60(1.121)	15	13.85(1.405)	31	13.71(1.243)
Total	Elementary school	35	10.00(1.345)	38	10.37(1.239)	73	10.14(1.302)
	High school	31	13.47(1.074)	30	13.86(1.356)	61	13.66(1.207)
	Total	66	11.54(2.173)	68	11.85(2.150)	134	11.69(2.159)

Table 2

Mean Moral Evaluation Scores as a Function of Valence and Relationship Type

Valence and relationship type condition	*M*(*SD*)
Positive; sharer-friend, target-friend	3.68(.791)
Positive; sharer-friend, target-classmate	3.76(.777)
Positive; sharer-classmate, target-classmate	3.71(.774)
Positive; sharer-classmate, target-friend	3.84(.866)
Negative; sharer-friend, target-friend	2.37(.743)
Negative; sharer-friend, target-classmate	2.49(.657)
Negative; sharer-classmate, target-classmate	2.54(.679)
Negative; sharer-classmate, target-friend	2.12(.638)

Table 3

Negative Versus Positive Gossip Mean Moral Evaluation Scores Across Relationship Type for the Individual Vignettes Condition

	Negative gossip	Positive gossip		
Relationship type condition	*M(SE)*	*M(SE)*	*p*	η_p^2
Sharer-friend, target-friend	2.366(.085)	3.624(.104)	.000*	.585
Sharer-friend, target-classmate	2.443(.073)	3.937(.093)	.000*	.719
Sharer-classmate, target-classmate	2.508(.092)	3.923(.095)	.000*	.645
Sharer-classmate, target-friend	1.919(.063)	4.043(.103)	.000*	.836

*$p < .001$

Table 4

Negative Versus Positive Gossip Mean Moral Evaluation Scores Across Relationship Type for the Relational Vignettes Condition

	Negative gossip	Positive gossip		
Relationship type condition	*M(SE)*	*M(SE)*	*p*	η_p^2
Sharer-friend, target-friend	2.391(.097)	3.753(.089)	.000*	.642
Sharer-friend, target-classmate	2.539(.082)	3.631(.087)	.000*	.571
Sharer-classmate, target-classmate	2.569(.068)	3.518(.083)	.000*	.515
Sharer-classmate, target-friend	2.328(.080)	3.670(.100)	.000*	.686

*$p < .001$

Table 5

Negative Versus Positive Gossip Mean Moral Evaluation Scores Across Relationship Type

	Negative gossip	Positive gossip		
Relationship type condition	*M(SE)*	*M(SE)*	*p*	η_p^2
Sharer-friend, target-friend	2.379(.064)	3.689(.068)	.000*	.614
Sharer-friend, target-classmate	2.491(.055)	3.784(.063)	.000*	.654
Sharer-classmate, target-classmate	2.539(.057)	3.720(.057)	.000*	.589
Sharer-classmate, target-friend	2.124(.051)	3.856(.072)	.000*	.779

*$p < .001$

Table 6

Negative Versus Positive Gossip Mean Moral Evaluation Scores Across Vignette Type

	Negative gossip	Positive gossip		
Vignette type condition	*M(SE)*	*M(SE)*	*p*	η_p^2
Individual vignettes	2.309(.054)	3.882(.072)	.000*	.722
Relational vignettes	2.457(.054)	3.643(.071)	.000*	.601

*$p < .001$

Table 7

Negative Versus Positive Gossip Mean Moral Evaluation Scores Across School Group

	Negative gossip	Positive gossip		
School group	*M(SE)*	*M(SE)*	*p*	η_p^2
Elementary school	2.384(.051)	3.620(.068)	.000*	.640
High school	2.382(.056)	3.905(.075)	.000*	.693

*$p < .001$

Table 8

Negative Versus Positive Gossip Mean Moral Evaluation Scores Across Gender

	Negative gossip	Positive gossip		
Gender	*M(SE)*	*M(SE)*	*p*	η_p^2
Boy	2.568(.054)	3.667(.072)	.000*	.558
Girl	2.198(.053)	3.857(.071)	.000*	.748

*$p < .001$

Table 9

Mean Listener Response Scores as a Function of Valence and Relationship Type

Valence and relationship type condition	*M(SD)*
Positive; sharer-friend, target-friend	1.14(.747)
Positive; sharer-friend, target-classmate	1.410(.663)
Positive; sharer-classmate, target-classmate	1.388(.648)
Positive; sharer-classmate, target-friend	1.350(.728)
Negative; sharer-friend, target-friend	.400(.637)
Negative; sharer-friend, target-classmate	.605(.715)
Negative; sharer-classmate, target-classmate	.460(.656)
Negative; sharer-classmate, target-friend	.340(.662)

Table 10

Negative Versus Positive Gossip Mean Response Scores Across Relationship Type

	Negative gossip	Positive gossip		
Relationship type condition	*M(SE)*	*M(SE)*	*p*	η_p^2
Sharer-friend, target-friend	.423(.056)	1.121(.065)	.000*	.324
Sharer-friend, target-classmate	.604(.061)	1.340(.061)	.000*	.360
Sharer-classmate, target-classmate	.429(.056)	1.385(.056)	.000*	.549
Sharer-classmate, target-friend	.346(.056)	1.354(.064)	.000*	.545

*$p < .001$

Table 11

Negative Versus Positive Gossip Mean Response Scores Across Gender

	Negative gossip	Positive gossip		
Gender	*M(SE)*	*M(SE)*	*p*	η_p^2
Boy	.567(.055)	1.267(.060)	.000*	.364
Girl	.344(.055)	1.333(.059)	.000*	.547

*$p < .001$

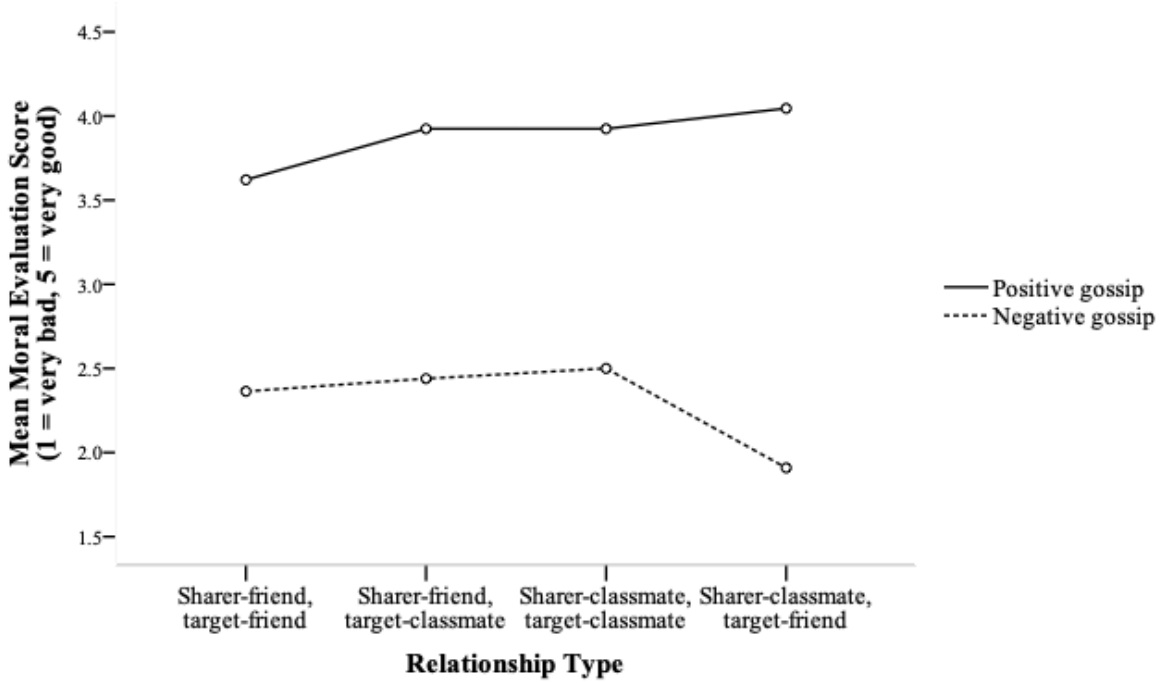

Figure 1. Simple two-way interaction between valence and relationship type for the individual vignettes condition

Appendix

Vignette Scenarios

Individual Vignettes (girl version)

1- *Positive; sharer-friend, target-friend*

Pia, Chloe, and Yasmin are all friends. One day, Pia starts talking to Chloe about Yasmin, while Yasmin is not there. Pia says to Chloe, "Did you hear that Yasmin got the highest grade out of everyone in the class on the science test? Yasmin is good at science and studies really hard."

2- *Positive; sharer-friend, target-classmate*

Leyla and Mina are friends. Zoe is in their class but they do not hang out together. One day, Leyla starts talking to Mina about Zoe, while Zoe is not there. Leyla says to Mina, "Did you hear that Zoe got the lead role in the school musical? Zoe sounded great at her audition and sang a very difficult song."

3- *Positive; sharer-classmate, target-classmate*

Jasmine, Celia, and Estelle are all in the same class but they do not hang out together. One day, Jasmine starts talking to Celia about Estelle, while Estelle is not there. Jasmine says to Celia, "Did you hear that Estelle made captain of the soccer team? Estelle is the best player and scored the most goals last season."

4- *Positive; sharer-classmate, target-friend*

Louisa and Jayda are in the same class but they do not hang out together. Jayda and Paulina are friends. One day, Louisa starts talking to Jayda about Paulina, while Paulina is not there. Louisa says to Jayda, "Did you hear that Paulina helped paint the school mural? Paulina is an amazing artist and worked on it after school for two weeks."

5- *Negative; sharer-friend, target-friend*

Gina, Elle, and Carrie are all friends. One day, Gina starts talking to Elle about Carrie, while Carrie is not there. Gina says to Elle, "Did you hear that Carrie did not do her math homework again? Carrie is bad at remembering to do her homework and never writes it down in her agenda."

6- *Negative; sharer-friend, target-classmate*

Miriam and Iris are friends. Sydney is in their class but they do not hang out together. One day, Miriam starts talking to Iris about Sydney, while Sydney is not there. Miriam says to Iris, "Did you hear the Sydney kicked the garbage bin? Sydney just did it for the attention and left the garbage everywhere in the hallway."

7- *Negative; sharer-classmate, target-classmate*

Raven, Nadia, and Juliana are all in the same class but they do not hang out together. One day, Raven starts talking to Nadia about Juliana, while Juliana is not there. Raven says to Nadia, "Did you hear that Juliana wrote graffiti on the lockers? Juliana is a troublemaker and had to scrub off all of the graffiti."

8- *Negative; sharer-classmate, target-friend*

Natalia and Anya are in the same class but they do not hang out together. Anya and Savannah are friends. One day, Natalia starts talking to Anya about Savannah, while Savannah is not there. Natalia says to Anya, "Did you hear that Savannah got kicked out of the school band? Savannah is not a good a band member and was late to every rehearsal."

Relational Vignettes (boy version)

1- *Positive; sharer-friend, target-friend*

Collin, Andy, and Matthew are all friends. One day, Collin starts talking to Andy about Matthew, while Matthew is not there. Collin says to Andy, "Did you hear that Matthew took

care of another kid who fell and hurt their knee during gym class? Matthew was helpful and brought the kid to the nurse's office to get a band-aid."

2- *Positive; sharer-friend, target-classmate*

Justin and Tyler are friends. Adrian is in their class but they do not hang out together. One day, Justin starts talking to Tyler about Adrian, while Adrian is not there. Justin says to Tyler, "Did you hear that Adrian shared his lunch with another kid who had forgotten their lunch at home? Adrian was generous and gave the kid half of his sandwich."

3- *Positive; sharer-classmate, target-classmate*

Joey, Alexander, and Blaine are all in the same class but they do not hang out together. One day, Joey starts talking to Alexander about Blaine, while Blaine is not there. Joey says to Alexander, "Did you hear that Blaine lent a sweater to another kid during recess who had forgotten their sweater at home? Blaine was thoughtful and grabbed an extra sweater from his locker and gave it to the kid."

4- *Positive; sharer-classmate, target-friend*

Sam and Mitchell are in the same class but they do not hang out together. Mitchell and Jesse are friends. One day, Sam starts talking to Mitchell about Jesse, while Jesse is not there. Sam says to Mitchell, "Did you hear that Jesse found another kid's watch outside? Jesse did the right thing and returned it to the kid right away."

5- *Negative; sharer-friend, target-friend*

Mark, Joaquin, and Philip are all friends. One day, Mark starts talking to Joaquin about Philip, while Philip is not there. Mark says to Joaquin, "Did you hear that Philip kept interrupting another kid's presentation? Philip was being impolite and kept talking during the kid's entire presentation."

6- *Negative; sharer-friend, target-classmate*

Wes and Jamie are friends. Charlie is in their class but they do not hang out together. One day, Wes starts talking to Jamie about Charlie, while Charlie is not there. Wes says to Jamie, "Did you hear that Charlie did not let another kid who had been waiting all of recess time to join the basketball game? Charlie was rude and told the kid it was not their turn to play."

7- *Negative; sharer-classmate, target-classmate*

Kyle, Elliot, and Dillon are all in the same class but they do not hang out together. One day, Kyle starts talking to Elliot about Dillon, while Dillon is not there. Kyle says to Elliot, "Did you hear that Dillon told another kid he did not want them to sit next to him on the school bus? Dillon was unfriendly and told the kid to change seat and find someone else to sit with."

8- *Negative; sharer-classmate, target-friend*

Zach and Travis are in the same class but they do not hang out together. Travis and Derek are friends. One day, Zach starts talking to Travis about Derek, while Derek is not there. Zach says to Travis, "Did you hear that Derek giggled at another kid who dropped all of their books and papers in the hallway and had to pick them up by themself? Derek was mean and did not help."