

Adolescents and Adults Can Consider Perspectives to Appreciate Gossip's Entertainment

Function

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Abstract

Gossip is a common form of social communication that serves several functions, including sharing information, strengthening relationships, influencing behaviour, and providing entertainment (Foster, 2004). The current study examined how communicative perspective influenced adolescents' and adults' interpretations of these social functions. Participants (N = 119; 99 adults, 20 adolescents) viewed video-based social scenarios that varied in statement type (gossip vs. target-present) and communicative perspective (speaker vs. listener). After each video, participants rated the extent to which the statement served these social functions: sharing useful information, strengthening relationships, influencing the listener's behaviour, and entertaining the listener. Participants then completed the Gossip Functions Questionnaire (GFQ; Foster, 2004). Results indicated that participants endorsed gossip's social functions more strongly from the speaker's perspective than from the listener's perspective. Participants rated gossip statements as more relationship-strengthening than target-present statements. They also rated speaker-perspective statements as more useful and influential than listener-perspective statements. Entertainment emerged as the only social function that demonstrated convergence for both measures: participants rated statements as more entertaining from the speaker's perspective than the listener's perspective, and speaker-perspective entertainment ratings were positively associated with GFQ entertainment scores. These findings highlight the roles of perspective-taking and entertainment in the appreciation of gossip among adolescents and adults.

Keywords: communication, social functions, adolescence, perspective-taking, pragmatic development

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Chapter I: Introduction

Consider the following situation. Two high school students are chatting about a classmate, Kai, who was called to the principal's office. Rumours are circulating amongst students about why Kai was in trouble. In this situation, the two adolescents are gossiping about a third person who is absent. Gossip is a powerful social tool with evolutionary purposes; it allows humans to survive by communicating critical social norms and the consequences of violating them (Dunbar, 2004). As exemplified, gossip is the act of sharing evaluative information regarding an absent third party (Cole & Scrivener, 2013; Foster, 2004; Huskey, 2021). People gossip in various contexts and for different reasons, and it occurs across many social settings, such as coworkers sharing information through workplace gossip (Kelly, 1985; Laing, 1993; Sun et al., 2023) and adolescents gossiping in high school (Fine, 1986). Gossip can be perceived negatively and viewed as social aggression (Coyne et al., 2020), but this is not its only function. Gossip can be a social tool that helps people navigate a complex, dynamic social environment and maintain social cohesion. The current study examined whether adopting the speaker's and listener's perspectives could influence adolescents' and adults' appreciation of gossip. The current study further investigated how perspective-taking related to the development of perceptions of gossip's social functions.

The Social Functions of Gossip

Gossip can be utilized as a social tool. Gossip serves the social functions of sharing information (Budhoo et al., 2026; Caivano et al., 2021; Cole & Scrivener, 2013; Dunbar, 2004; Foster, 2004), navigating and strengthening complex social relationships (Bosson et al., 2006; Foster, 2004), and establishing and reinforcing social norms and values (Baumeister et al., 2004; Caivano et al., 2021; Guendouzi, 2020; Wargo Aikins et al., 2017). Several theories explain the

social functions of gossip. For example, Dunbar (2004) proposed the Social Grooming Theory, which explains how gossip executes social bonding between the speaker and the listener. This social connection is strengthened by the speaker sharing helpful information with the listener (Dunbar, 2004). The speaker and the listener can reach a mutual understanding. Gossip is more valuable and attractive when it benefits one's social status (Barkow, 1992); thus, adults share gossip that benefits the listener to improve the speaker's social standing. The speaker can share information about social dynamics; the listener can gather information that benefits their standing in the social group while actively participating and taking in cues relevant to those dynamics.

Baumeister et al. (2004) posited the Cultural Learning Theory which purports that gossip promotes cultural learning by sharing and reinforcing cultural norms, values, and beliefs. Gossip elicits a dynamic exchange between people that allows the sharing of societal expectations, such as appropriate and inappropriate social behaviours. This type of cultural learning produces signals for navigating social dynamics. Consequently, gossip promotes and reinforces cultural norms and acts as a mechanism for social regulation. Individuals can acquire acceptable behaviours that are congruent with group norms (Laing, 1993) and discover the consequences of unacceptable behaviour through gossip (Barkow, 1992; Feinberg et al., 2012), which promotes adherence to group membership and societal expectations (Gottman & Mettetal, 1986; Levin & Arluke, 1987). Thus, the Cultural Learning Theory suggests that gossip is a mechanism for individuals to discover and recognize prosocial cues and behaviours, and for social groups to foster social cohesion and stability through interactions and collective behaviours (Baumeister et al., 2004).

It is evident from the theories advanced by Dunbar (2004) and Baumeister et al. (2004) that gossip plays a role in navigating complex social interactions and relationships. Although Social Grooming Theory (Dunbar, 2004) and Cultural Learning Theory (Baumeister et al., 2004) provide useful frameworks for understanding why gossip occurs, the current study was not designed to test either theory directly. Rather, these theories are presented as conceptual perspectives that help explain the social functions of gossip and inform interpretations of the present findings.

Gossip Appreciation in Adolescents and Adults

Gossiping increases from childhood into adolescence (Mettetal, 1983) and is a part of adolescent development (Caivano & Talwar, 2021; Eder & Enke, 1991). Adolescence is an important developmental period during which individuals learn how gossip can be used for both prosocial and detrimental purposes (Wargo Aikins et al., 2017). Adolescents experience new developments and life transitions as they navigate the process of building their self-identity in high school. Exposure to new social dynamics means that adolescents try to find their place in their social settings and figure out who they are. Gossip plays a role in this. Previous research has found that gossip facilitates the formation and maintenance of social interactions (Gottman & Graziano, 1983; Guendouzi, 2020; Wargo Aikins et al., 2017), particularly in the pursuit of popularity among peers (Eder & Enke, 1991; Wargo Aikins et al., 2017). However, being the target of gossip can negatively impact an adolescent's self-esteem (Cole & Scrivener, 2013) and mental health and lead to social exclusion (Archer & Coyne, 2005).

However, gossip also exposes adolescents to social norms, socially acceptable behaviours amongst peers (Guendouzi, 2020; Wargo Aikins et al., 2017), encourages social comparisons (Caivano & Talwar, 2021), and helps solve interpersonal predicaments (Gottman & Mettetal,

1986). Understanding intentions and motivations for sharing information is essential, especially among adolescents, as distinguishing the purpose behind someone's sharing can be challenging. For example, research by Caivano et al. (2021) found that adolescents may be more naïve when they receive gossip from friends about other friends, due to misplaced trust, even when the intentions are hostile. Social interactions with peers, including gossip, are crucial in developing cognitive and social skills as adolescents enter adulthood (Guendouzi, 2020).

Adults have a comprehensive understanding of gossip. Adults frequently engage in gossip, as it occurs in over 70% of daily discourse (Elmer, 1992). Past research has found factors influencing adults' engagement and interest in gossip. For example, McAndrew and Milenkovic (2002) found that, when gossiping, adults are more involved when the absent third party is similar in age and the same gender. Furthermore, gossip that enhances social status is more likely to capture one's attention and be regarded as advantageous by adults (Barkow, 1992; Peters & Fonseca, 2020). Additionally, adults find gossip more exciting and beneficial when it includes negative information about non-allies outside their social group or positive information about their allies within it (McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002). Developing a deeper understanding of gossip and its valuable applications will promote stronger social connections and social status through communication. Recognizing gossip's role in communication and in shaping and maintaining social hierarchy will enable a person to exercise social power (Noon & Delbridge, 1993) and to engage in informal social control (Komiya et al., 2016).

Moreover, gossip has been theorized to have evolved for adaptive purposes in human social evolution (Pinker, 2002). Gossip helps humans navigate social environments by strengthening social bonds and maintaining relationships. Understanding an individual's thoughts, intentions, and motivations is essential for effective gossip. When sharing information,

it is advantageous to consider one's own intentions and motivations, as well as those of others, including the speaker and listener.

Perspective-Taking

Let us again consider the example of the high school students discussing Kai, who was called to the principal's office. What initially appears to be a casual conversation between teens gossiping actually demonstrates perspective-taking skills in a social context. Each adolescent must consider their own perspective and how the listener might react to the shared information, highlighting the role of social understanding and potential bias in interpreting others' information. Effective appreciation of gossip requires perspective-taking to assess the motivation behind the communication (Righi & Takács, 2022). Perspective-taking involves first considering your own perspective and then adjusting it to account for another person's viewpoint (Epley et al., 2004a). Understanding an individual's thoughts, intentions, and motivations is essential for effective communication, including gossip. When sharing information, it is advantageous to consider your intentions and motivations, as well as those of others, including the listener and the speaker. Previous research has examined the role of perspective-taking in understanding intentions and motivations during social interactions and highlighted how distinct cognitive mechanisms support these processes across contexts. Ryskin et al. (2015) examine perspective-taking skills using domain-specific processes, such as language comprehension, language production, and memory tasks. Ryskin et al. (2015) found that perspective-taking relies on distinct cognitive mechanisms across contexts, meaning the strategies and brain systems involved vary with context, current task, and available cognitive resources.

This cognitive ability and variability emphasize the broader cognitive framework of the Theory of Mind (ToM). When individuals can adopt another's viewpoint to infer knowledge,

intentions, or emotions, thereby understanding others' mental states, they acquire a ToM (Glenwright et al., 2017; Miller, 2009; Ryskin et al., 2015). First-order ToM is the recognition of what someone else is thinking or feeling (Miller, 2009). Second-order ToM is the ability to recognize and understand what one individual thinks or feels about another individual's thoughts or beliefs (Miller, 2009). First-order ToM is helpful for simple social interactions such as understanding someone's intentions. Second-order ToM benefits more complex social behaviours (Miller, 2009). Further, ToM and perspective-taking help reduce miscommunication by enabling individuals to understand the intentions behind vague or emotionally charged messages (Edwards et al., 2017). ToM is a critical basis for social cognition, allowing individuals to navigate social interactions of varying complexity. This cognitive skill used in social situations develops throughout life, influencing perspective-taking abilities in adolescence and adulthood.

Perspective-taking may also be influenced by cognitive load and the availability of cognitive resources. Cognitive load refers to the mental effort required by the cognitive system to complete a task and is closely related to the demands of working memory and executive functioning (Sweller et al., 1998). Perspective-taking is not always automatic and often requires effortful cognitive processing, particularly when individuals must inhibit their own perspective to consider another person's viewpoint (Horton & Keysar, 1996; Roßnagel, 2000). Under increased cognitive load, individuals are more likely to rely on egocentric interpretations and experience greater difficulty adjusting to another person's perspective (Cane et al., 2017; Navarro et al., 2020). This is especially relevant in communicative situations involving gossip, which can be cognitively demanding because they require individuals to simultaneously interpret and process social cues and information, infer interpersonal intentions, and evaluate relationships among

multiple individuals and their perspectives. Perspective-taking may therefore place greater demands on executive functioning and working memory when adopting the listener's perspective than when adopting the speaker's perspective, as listeners must infer the speaker's intentions while suppressing their own immediate interpretation of the interaction.

Further, adolescence is associated with ongoing development of executive functioning, social cognition, and prefrontal brain systems involved in cognitive control and perspective-taking (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006). As a result, adolescents may experience greater cognitive demands than adults when interpreting socially complex interactions such as gossip. Developmental research further suggests that adolescents are more susceptible to performance decrements under conditions of increased cognitive load because executive functioning and working memory systems continue to mature throughout adolescence (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006). Consequently, adolescents may have fewer cognitive resources to simultaneously process multiple social perspectives, potentially making the appreciation of gossip more cognitively demanding than for adults.

Adults' and Adolescents' Understanding of Perspective-Taking

Understanding others' perspectives is a critical aspect of social cognition (Epley et al., 2004a), and both adolescents and adults exhibit distinct patterns in how they adopt and interpret others' viewpoints, reflecting developmental changes in their social reasoning and communication skills. Ryskin et al. (2015) explained that perspective-taking is strengthened as more cognitive resources develop. Adolescents and young adults are in a critical developmental phase for refining perspective-taking abilities (Edwards et al., 2017; Ryskin et al., 2015). These pragmatic communication and social skills mature as executive functioning and working

memory improve, supporting appreciation of nuanced social communication (Ferguson et al., 2021; Ryskin et al., 2015; Wardlow, 2013).

Glenwright et al. (2017) found that perspective-taking plays a vital role in how adolescents and adults interpret sarcasm and gossip. Adolescents and adults could modify their interpretations of social interactions depending on perspective (Glenwright et al., 2017). When adolescents and adults interpreted criticism directed at an addressee, they tended to believe that the addressee felt worse or viewed the criticism more negatively than someone simply observing the interaction (Glenwright et al., 2017). However, adolescents were more likely than adults to identify with speakers for sarcastic gossip because they focused more on interpreting the speaker's intent than on fully considering the addressee's emotional impact (Glenwright et al., 2017). These findings suggest that perspective-taking skills may play an important role in how individuals interpret gossip (Righi & Takács, 2022).

However, even in adulthood, perspective-taking skills are not perfect, as egocentric biases and misinterpretations can still occur (Epley et al., 2004a). Adults may revert to their perceptions, especially under greater cognitive demands, which can impede their ability to accurately infer others' thoughts, intentions, or emotions due to their own biases (Epley et al., 2004a). This can lead to misunderstandings and misperceptions in social interactions. While ToM and perspective-taking abilities typically improve over time and with experience, they remain susceptible to cognitive constraints and emotional influences (Epley et al., 2004a).

Gossip and Perspective-Taking

Because gossip involves interpreting the intentions, motivations, and social dynamics among multiple individuals, effective appreciation of gossip relies heavily on perspective-taking abilities and broader social-cognitive processing skills (Righi & Takács, 2022). Experimental

research has examined how individuals evaluate the social functions of gossip using video-based gossip scenarios and ratings of the intended social functions of gossip (Budhoo et al., 2026).

However, previous research has focused primarily on adults and has not directly examined how adopting the speaker's versus the listener's perspective may influence the appreciation of gossip across development. As adolescents continue to refine these social-cognitive abilities, they may differ from adults in how they interpret and evaluate the social functions underlying gossip interactions. Despite growing research examining gossip appreciation in adults (e.g., Budhoo et al., 2026) and perspective-taking in social communication, little research has directly examined how perspective-taking influences gossip appreciation across development. To my knowledge, the current study is the first known examination of how speaker- and listener-perspective taking may influence adolescents' and adults' interpretations of gossip's social functions.

The Current Study

In response to a helpful suggestion from my committee to improve the project's feasibility, my thesis included a primary sample of adult participants and a smaller sample of adolescents. This design enabled assessment of whether the methods would be suitable for adolescent participants in future research in my lab. Understanding how individuals of different ages interpret social interactions containing gossip provides valuable insight into developmental changes in perspective-taking and social skills. In the current study, adolescents aged 16 to 17 years and adult participants were presented with videos, half of which depicted a gossip scenario in which a speaker and a listener discussed an absent third party or target. The other half of the videos portrayed target-present statements (i.e., non-gossip) in which the target was present along with the speaker and the listener. In addition to the gossip/target-present statements portrayed in the videos, each video described either the speaker's or the listener's perspective.

The current study adapted a video-based gossip-rating paradigm devised by Budhoo et al. (2026) in which participants evaluated gossip interactions according to the four social functions of gossip (i.e., useful information, relationship-strengthening, influence, and entertainment) identified by Foster (2004). This allowed us to determine whether adolescents and adults appreciated that the speaker's intentions can be perceived differently by the speaker and the listener.

Design

To compare participants' ratings across conditions, separate 2 (perspective: speaker, listener) $\times$ 2 (statement type: gossip, target present) mixed repeated-measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted for each social function rating. Perspective and statement type were within-participant factors, whereas age group (i.e., adolescents, adults) was a between-participant factor. This design allowed for the examination of the effects of perspective, statement type, and age group on participants' mean ratings of the four social functions of gossip (i.e., useful information, relationship strengthening, influence, and entertainment).

The primary objective of the current study was to examine how taking the perspective of the speaker versus the listener influenced gossip function ratings for adolescents and adults across four different conditions: 1) speaker perspective/gossip, in which participants took the perspective of the speaker who was sharing gossip to the listener about an absent third party; 2) listener perspective/gossip, in which participants took the perspective of the listener hearing gossip from the speaker about an absent third party; 3) speaker perspective/target present, in which participants took the perspective of the speaker sharing gossip with a listener about a present target; and 4) listener perspective/target present, in which participants adopted the perspective of the listener hearing the speaker gossip about a present target. Participants rated the

extent to which each interaction served the social functions of sharing useful information, strengthening relationships, influencing the listener's behaviour, and entertaining the listener. This design allowed for the examination of how perspective-taking and target presence influenced interpretations of gossip's social functions across development.

For Hypothesis 1, I predicted that participants would rate the social functions of gossip higher in the speaker-perspective condition than in the listener-perspective condition. Reasoning from a first-person perspective may be cognitively easier than reasoning from a second-person perspective because individuals must inhibit their own interpretation while inferring another person's thoughts, intentions, and motivations (Deliens et al., 2017; Epley et al., 2004a; Miller, 2009). Thus, participants were expected to demonstrate stronger endorsement of gossip's social functions when evaluating interactions from the speaker's perspective than from the listener's perspective.

Hypothesis 2 examined potential developmental differences in the appreciation of gossip and perspective-taking. I predicted that adults would demonstrate stronger endorsement of gossip's social functions than adolescents across conditions. Previous research suggests that executive functioning, working memory, Theory of Mind (ToM), and perspective-taking abilities continue to develop throughout adolescence and into adulthood (Ferguson et al., 2021; Ryskin et al., 2015). Adults generally demonstrate more stable and efficient social-cognitive processing abilities (Ryskin et al., 2015), which may support stronger or more consistent interpretations of the social functions underlying gossip interactions. However, given the exploratory nature and the smaller size of the adolescent sample, analyses by age group were exploratory.

Finally, Hypothesis 3 examined the relationship between participants' perspective-taking ratings during the video task and their self-reported endorsement of gossip's social functions on

the Gossip Functions Questionnaire (GFQ; Foster, 2004). Importantly, these measures assessed related but distinct aspects of gossip appreciation. Moreover, the video task was an experimental measure that required participants to interpret the social functions of gossip in specific social interactions. The GFQ is a self-report measure that assessed participants' generalized beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge regarding the functions of gossip. Despite these methodological differences, positive associations between the measures were expected because both assessed perceptions of gossip's social functions. I predicted that participants who more strongly endorsed the speaker's intended social functions during the speaker perspective/gossip condition would also report greater endorsement of the corresponding GFQ social function domains. Specifically, higher ratings of useful information, relationship strengthening, influence, and entertainment during the video task were expected to be positively associated with higher scores on the corresponding GFQ subscales.

Chapter II: Methods

Participants

Adults served as the primary sample, and a smaller sample of adolescents was included to assess the methods' suitability for future developmental research. I performed an a priori power analysis using G*Power version 3.1 (Faul et al., 2009). To reach 80% power and detect a moderate to large effect at a significance level of $p = .05$ for a mixed repeated-measures ANOVA, a minimum sample size of $N = 76$ adults was needed.

The sample consisted of 119 individuals, including 99 adults and 20 adolescents aged 16 to 17 years. Adult participants ranged in age from 19 to 62 years ($M = 22.10$, $SD = 6.18$), whereas adolescent participants ranged in age from 16 to 17 years ($M = 17.30$, $SD = 0.66$). The adult sample included 74 females, 22 males, two nonbinary participants, and one participant who

preferred not to disclose their gender identity. Among adults, 47 participants identified as White/European, 30 as African, 17 as Asian, 11 as Indigenous, four as Arab/Middle Eastern, one as Latin American, and four as Other/Mixed. The adolescent sample included 16 females and four males. Among adolescents, 14 participants identified as White/European, three as Asian, three as Indigenous, and two as African. Most participants reported speaking English at home ($n = 100$), including 82 adults and 18 adolescents. Thirteen participants reported speaking both English and another language (12 adults and one adolescent), whereas six participants reported speaking a language other than English at home (five adults and one adolescent).

All participants were required to speak English fluently to ensure comprehension of the video stimuli, task instructions, and response questions. Adult participants were recruited through the University of Manitoba's introductory psychology participant pool and completed the study from October 31, 2025, to December 5, 2025. Adolescent participants were recruited through word of mouth and completed the study from February 19, 2026, to April 25, 2026. All participants provided informed consent or assent before participation. The research procedure was approved by the University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board 1 (Protocol #HE2025-0125). The inclusion criteria required that adolescents be aged 16 or 17 years, and that adults be aged 18 years or older.

Materials

Videos

Each participant watched 18 videos: two practice videos, including one from the speaker's perspective and one from the listener's perspective, and four videos from each of the four experimental conditions: gossip/speaker perspective, gossip/listener perspective, target present/speaker perspective, and target present/listener perspective. To control for statement type

and video order, 16 distinct scenarios were created, with each story representing all four conditions, resulting in a total of 64 videos. The scenarios were developed in accordance with Baumeister et al.'s (2004) Cultural Learning Theory, which posits that gossip serves to communicate and reinforce social norms. Accordingly, each scenario depicted a violation of social norms within a high school context (e.g., cheating, dishonesty, exclusionary behaviour, or other socially inappropriate actions) and was designed to reflect situations in which gossip might be used to communicate socially relevant information. These types of scenarios provided participants with opportunities to evaluate the social functions of gossip in situations involving norm-relevant information. To control for order effects and statement presentation, four versions of the video task were created. Each version contained the same 16 scenarios presented across the four experimental conditions, but in a different randomized order. Scenarios were counterbalanced so that each appeared equally across conditions and participants. Participants were assigned to one of the four versions, with approximately equal numbers of participants completing each.

In the gossip scenario videos, the speaker gossiped to the listener about an absent target. In contrast, in the target-present scenario videos, the speaker discussed a target who was present with the listener. The videos featured gossip interactions between two characters when the target was absent and target-present interactions among three characters when the target was present. Characters were introduced by name to identify the speaker, listener, and the absent or present target (see Table 1). Subtitles displaying the full narration of the interaction were included throughout the videos to help participants follow the conversation and identify the characters.

Response Booklets

Adult participants were given a response booklet consisting of seven questions adapted from Budhoo et al. (2026), which they completed after viewing each video, as well as the Gossip Functions Questionnaire (Foster, 2004). One adult participant completed a modified response booklet with enlarged print to accommodate their visual impairment. All study materials and procedures remained otherwise identical. Adolescent participants completed the same measures virtually through Zoom polls, and the experimenter manually wrote down participants' responses during testing. After each video, participants responded to the following questions. The following example questions apply to the speaker's perspective/gossip condition.

1. *Target Presence/Manipulation Check*: This question assessed whether participants recognized the presence or absence of the target. For example, "Did Kai hear what was said about them? Circle your answer." Participants selected either "Yes" or "No".
2. *Useful Information*: This question assessed the usefulness of the information. Participants rated the usefulness of a statement on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*very useless*) to 6 (*very useful*). For example, "How useful would Jamie find this information? Circle a number."
3. *Relationship Strengthening*: This question assessed the extent to which the statement strengthened or weakened the speaker-listener relationship. Participants responded on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*weaken a lot*) to 6 (*strengthen a lot*). For example, "How much does this conversation strengthen or weaken your relationship with Jamie? Circle a number."
4. *Influencing the Listener's Behaviour*: This question assessed the extent to which the statement was likely to influence the listener's future behaviour. Participants responded on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 6 (*very likely*). For example, "How likely would this conversation influence Jamie's behaviour in the future? Circle a number."

5. *Entertaining the Listener*: This question assessed how entertaining the statement was perceived to be. Participants responded on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*very boring*) to 6 (*very entertaining*). For example, “How entertaining would Jamie find this conversation? Circle a number.”
6. *Speaker Attitude*: This question assessed perceptions of the speaker’s attitude. Participants responded on a 6-point scale, ranging from 1 (*very mean*) to 6 (*very nice*). For example, “How mean or nice would Jamie think you were for telling them this information? Circle a number.”

Participants were also asked to provide basic demographic information.

Gossip Functions Questionnaire (GFQ; Foster, 2004)

The 24-item Gossip Functions Questionnaire (GFQ) measures the functions of gossip across four subscales: useful information, friendship, influence, and entertainment (Foster, 2004). Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The *useful information* subscale included six items (e.g., “Generally, I try to figure out what is going on in the lives of people around me.”) and assessed the degree to which an individual engages in gossip to exchange or gather social information from others. The *friendship* subscale included six items (e.g., “Talking about the personal lives of other people makes me feel in touch with my social circle.”) and measured the extent to which an individual engages in and perceives gossip as fostering and maintaining social relationships within their social network. The *influence* subscale included six items (e.g., “When I hear gossip, it can change my behavior toward someone, for better or for worse.”) and assessed the degree to which an individual perceives gossip as influencing their behaviour, attitudes, and perceptions of others, and reinforcement of social norms. Finally, the *entertainment* subscale included six items

(e.g., “I don’t have to know whether talk about people is true or not to enjoy the activity.”) and measured the degree to which an individual engages in gossip as a form of entertainment. Eight of the items (Items 2, 4, 6, 12, 17, 21, 22, and 24) were negatively worded and reverse-scored before analyses. Foster (2004) reported a test-retest reliability coefficient of .64 for the measure. The GFQ has also demonstrated good internal consistency across subscales, including useful information ($\alpha = .80$), friendship ($\alpha = .81$), influence ($\alpha = .64$), and entertainment ($\alpha = .80$).

Procedure

Adult participants were tested in groups so that multiple participants could be tested simultaneously, with efforts to maintain approximately equal numbers across the four response booklet versions. As a result, group sizes varied across testing sessions but never exceeded 25 participants. I tested adult participants in a classroom at the University of Manitoba, Fort Garry campus. Adolescent participants were tested individually virtually over Zoom.

Adult participants were provided with a response booklet in which they recorded their age, birth date, gender identity, language spoken at home, and ethnic/cultural background. Each participant viewed 18 videos depicting different scenarios, starting with two sample videos (one for each perspective condition: speaker and listener) to become familiar with the procedure. Participants then completed the gossip perspective-taking task, which consisted of videos presented across conditions. In the speaker’s perspective/gossip condition, participants adopted the speaker’s viewpoint and gossiped to a listener about an absent third party. In the listener’s perspective/gossip condition, participants adopted the listener’s viewpoint as the speaker gossiped to them about an absent third party. In the speaker’s perspective/target present condition, participants took the viewpoint of the speaker addressing a listener about a present third party. In the listener’s perspective/target present condition, participants adopted the

listener's viewpoint as the speaker spoke to them about a present third party. For each condition, participants rated the speaker's intentions for each social function of gossip (i.e., information, friendship, influence, and entertainment). For the speaker's perspective condition, participants rated the speaker's intentions. For the listener's perspective condition, participants rated the listener's perception of the speaker's intentions.

Participants then completed the self-report Gossip Functions Questionnaire (GFQ; Foster, 2004) to examine their attitudes towards gossip and their motivations for gossiping or not across four social domains: useful information, friendship, influence, and entertainment. The testing sessions lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. Adult participants received two research credits through the SONA system following participation and were provided with a debriefing form following the session. Before leaving the testing session, all participants were verbally debriefed.

Adolescent participants were tested individually over Zoom, with sessions lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes. At the beginning of each session, participants provided verbal assent with their cameras on. Following the assent procedures, participants were given the option to turn off their cameras for the remainder of the session. All adolescent participants completed the study individually with the experimenter present throughout the session. To adapt the procedure for the virtual administration, the response booklet questions were formatted using Zoom polls. Polls were administered to collect demographic information, post-video rating responses, and responses to the Gossip Functions Questionnaire (GFQ). Participants responded to each poll by selecting or typing their responses directly into Zoom. Because Zoom poll responses were not saved and sessions were not recorded, the experimenter manually wrote down participant responses during testing.

The practice trials included the character names within the questions to familiarize participants with the task structure. Participants were also offered the option for the experimenter to verbally read each question and insert the appropriate names during testing; however, no participants requested this accommodation. Participants were verbally instructed throughout the task to adopt either the speaker's or the listener's perspective, depending on the assigned condition. They were reminded when the task transitioned between perspective conditions. Written instructions indicating the relevant perspective condition were also displayed on the video screen throughout the task. At the end of the adolescent testing sessions, participants confirmed their preferred email address to receive the honorarium recipient form, debriefing form, and Amazon gift card appreciation compensation.

Chapter III: Results

No participants were excluded from the final analyses because all participants answered the manipulation check item correctly. There were no substantial missing data across study measures. Before analyses, mean ratings were calculated for each participant across the four experimental conditions for each social function (i.e., useful information, relationship strengthening, influence, and entertainment). Hypothesis 1 predicted that participants would rate the social functions of gossip more highly in the speaker-perspective condition than in the listener-perspective condition. Hypothesis 2 predicted that adults would rate gossip's social functions higher than adolescents in the speaker-perspective condition. To test Hypotheses 1 and 2 for each rating scale, a 2 (perspective: speaker, listener) $\times$ 2 (statement type: gossip, target present) ANOVA was conducted on mean ratings, with perspective and statement type as within-subjects factors and age group as a between-subjects factor (hereafter referred to as the mixed model ANOVA).

Useful Information

After each video, participants rated how useful they perceived the information shared, from the perspective of the speaker and the listener, on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very useless*) to 6 (*very useful*). In support of Hypothesis 1, the mixed model ANOVA produced a significant main effect of perspective, $F(1, 117) = 5.00$, $MSE = 2.60$, $p = .027$, $\eta_p^2 = .041$, such that participants rated statements from the speaker's perspective ($M = 2.43$, $SD = 0.11$, 95% CI [2.22, 2.64]) as significantly more useful than statements from the listener's perspective ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 0.10$, 95% CI [2.03, 2.43]). The main effect of statement type was not significant, $F(1, 117) = 2.45$, $MSE = 0.61$, $p = .120$, $\eta_p^2 = .020$. The interaction between perspective and statement type was also not significant, $F(1, 117) = 1.34$, $MSE = 0.34$, $p = .250$, $\eta_p^2 = .011$. Failing to support Hypothesis 2, the main effect of age group was not significant, $F(1, 117) = 2.06$, $MSE = 4.68$, $p = .154$, $\eta_p^2 = .017$. Additionally, the interactions were not significant, all F s < 1 . Thus, participants rated statements from the speaker's perspective as more useful than statements from the listener's perspective, regardless of statement type or age group (see Figure 1).

Relationship Strengthening

Participants rated the extent to which the statement strengthened the relationship between the speaker and listener on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*weaken a lot*) to 6 (*strengthen a lot*). Contrary to Hypothesis 1, the mixed-model ANOVA did not yield a significant main effect of perspective, $F < 1$. However, there was a significant main effect of statement type, $F(1, 117) = 10.72$, $MSE = 2.18$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .084$, such that participants rated gossip statements ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 0.09$, 95% CI [2.89, 3.20]) as more relationship strengthening than target-present statements ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 0.08$, 95% CI [2.70, 3.03]). Participants' relationship-strengthening

ratings did not differ as a function of the interaction between perspective and statement type, $F < 1$. Further, failing to support Hypothesis 2, the main effect of age group was not significant, $F < 1$. Additionally, all interactions were not significant, all F s < 1 . Thus, participants rated gossip statements as more relationship-strengthening than target-present statements, regardless of perspective or age group.

Influencing the Listener's Behaviour

Participants rated how likely the statement was to influence the listener's behaviour on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 6 (*very likely*). In support of Hypothesis 1, the mixed model showed a significant main effect of perspective, $F(1, 117) = 28.06$, $MSE = 16.94$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .193$, such that participants rated statements from the speaker's perspective ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 0.11$, 95% CI [2.59, 3.03]) as significantly more likely to influence the listener's behaviour than statements from the listener's perspective ($M = 2.30$, $SD = 0.12$, 95% CI [2.08, 2.53]). The main effect of statement type was not significant, $F < 1$. The interaction between perspective and statement type was also not significant, $F < 1$. Providing partial support for Hypothesis 2, there was a significant main effect of age group, $F(1, 117) = 5.21$, $MSE = 14.89$, $p = .024$, $\eta_p^2 = .043$, such that adults ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 0.09$, 95% CI [2.62, 2.96]) rated statements as more influential than adolescents ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 0.19$, 95% CI [1.94, 2.69]). Participants demonstrated similar patterns of influence ratings across age groups, perspectives, and statement types, as the interactions between age group and perspective, $F(1, 117) = 1.00$, $MSE = 0.61$, $p = .318$, $\eta_p^2 = .009$, age group and statement type, $F < 1$, and the three-way interaction, $F < 1$, were not significant. Thus, participants rated statements from the speaker's perspective as more likely to influence the listener's behaviour than statements from the listener's perspective, and adults assigned higher influence ratings than adolescents, regardless of statement type.

Entertaining the Listener

Participants rated entertainment on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very boring*) to 6 (*very entertaining*). In support of Hypothesis 1, there was a significant main effect of perspective, $F(1, 117) = 16.18$, $MSE = 11.44$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .121$, such that participants rated statements from the speaker's perspective as significantly more entertaining ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.11$, 95% CI [3.06, 3.49]) than statements from the listener's perspective ($M = 2.86$, $SD = 0.12$, 95% CI [2.63, 3.09]). The main effect of statement type was not significant, $F < 1$. The interaction between perspective and statement type was also not significant, $F(1, 117) = 1.25$, $MSE = 0.38$, $p = .266$, $\eta_p^2 = .011$. Failing to support Hypothesis 2, the main effect of age group was not significant, $F(1, 117) = 2.46$, $MSE = 6.65$, $p = .120$, $\eta_p^2 = .021$. Additionally, none of the interactions were significant, all F s < 1 . Thus, participants rated statements from the speaker's perspective as more entertaining than statements from the listener's perspective, regardless of statement type or age group.

Correlations Between Speaker-Gossip Ratings and GFQ Scores

GFQ scores were calculated by reverse-scoring the negatively worded items and averaging each participant's responses for each of the four GFQ subscales: useful information, friendship, influence, and entertainment. Higher scores reflected stronger endorsement of the corresponding social functions of gossip. Hypothesis 3 predicted that participants who more strongly endorsed the speaker's intended social functions of gossip in the video task would also report greater endorsement of corresponding gossip functions on the Gossip Functions Questionnaire (GFQ; Foster, 2004). To test this hypothesis, Pearson correlations were conducted between mean speaker-gossip ratings for each social function and corresponding GFQ social function scores (see Table 3). Contrary to Hypothesis 3, speaker-gossip useful information

ratings were not significantly correlated with GFQ information-sharing scores, $r(117) = .09, p = .319$. Similarly, speaker-gossip relationship-strengthening ratings were not significantly correlated with GFQ friendship scores, $r(117) = .17, p = .058$. Speaker-gossip influence ratings were also not significantly correlated with GFQ influence scores, $r(117) = -.02, p = .792$. However, in support of Hypothesis 3, speaker-gossip entertainment ratings were significantly positively correlated with GFQ entertainment scores, $r(117) = .28, p = .002$. Participants who more strongly endorsed entertainment as a social function of gossip from the speaker's perspective during the video task also reported greater endorsement of entertainment-related gossip functions on the GFQ.

Chapter IV: Discussion

The current study investigated whether participants interpreted the social functions of gossip differently when adopting the speaker's perspective versus the listener's perspective, whether age differences emerged across conditions, and whether participants' video task ratings were associated with self-reported endorsement of gossip's social functions on the Gossip Functions Questionnaire (GFQ; Foster, 2004). Participants assigned higher usefulness, influence, and entertainment ratings when adopting the speaker's perspective than when adopting the listener's perspective, and perceived gossip statements as more relationship-strengthening than target-present statements. Importantly, however, entertainment emerged as the most consistent finding across analyses. Whereas usefulness and influence were primarily associated with the communicative perspective and relationship strengthening was associated with statement type, entertainment was the only social function that showed converging evidence across multiple analyses. Participants rated interactions as more entertaining from the speaker's perspective than from the listener's perspective, and speaker-perspective entertainment ratings were positively

associated with self-reported endorsement of entertainment-related gossip functions on the GFQ (Foster, 2004). Thus, although participants recognized multiple social functions for both statement types, entertainment emerged as the most consistently supported social function in the current study. These findings extend previous theoretical accounts of gossip as a socially rewarding form of communication (Dunbar, 2004; Foster, 2004) and suggest that entertainment may be a particularly important mechanism by which individuals use and appreciate gossip.

A deeper consideration of the current findings suggests that entertainment may represent a uniquely salient function of gossip. Although Foster (2004) proposed that gossip serves information-sharing, relationship-strengthening, influence, and entertainment functions, entertainment was the only function that demonstrated consistent support across analyses. One possible explanation is that entertainment may be more inherently tied to the act of gossiping than the other proposed functions. Whereas information sharing, social influence, and relationship strengthening often depend on subsequent social consequences, such as whether information is later used, behaviour is modified, or relationships become closer, entertainment can be experienced directly during the interaction itself. Thus, participants may have been better able to recognize entertainment as a function of gossip because it was immediately observable within the interaction.

This interpretation aligns with research suggesting that gossip primarily serves entertainment purposes and may be distinct from broader social information-seeking motives (Hartung & Renner, 2013). Further, gossip has been described as providing recreational value and social stimulation, making enjoyment a particularly accessible outcome of gossip interactions (Foster, 2004; Hartung et al., 2019). Consequently, entertainment may have emerged as the strongest finding because it reflects an immediate and intrinsically rewarding aspect of

gossip. In contrast, the informational, relational, and influence functions may be more dependent on contextual factors and longer-term social consequences.

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, participants more strongly endorsed the social functions of gossip when adopting the speaker's perspective than when adopting the listener's perspective. These findings suggest that participants recognized that speakers and listeners may have different perspectives on why information is shared. This finding is consistent with previous research demonstrating that perspective-taking influences how individuals interpret social interactions and communicative intentions for gossip and sarcasm (Edwards et al., 2017; Glenwright et al., 2017; Righi & Takács, 2022). The findings also align with previous research suggesting that reasoning from one's own perspective is cognitively easier than inferring another individual's interpretation of a social interaction (Epley et al., 2004a; Horton & Keysar, 1996). When adopting the listener's perspective, participants were required to infer how the listener interpreted the speaker's intentions rather than evaluating the speaker's intentions directly. This type of reasoning likely involved more complex second-order Theory of Mind processing, in which individuals must consider what one person thinks or feels about another individual's thoughts or intentions (Miller, 2009). Further, perspective-taking is not always automatic and may become increasingly difficult under greater cognitive demands (Cane et al., 2017; Navarro et al., 2020). The additional perspective-taking demands associated with the listener-perspective condition may help explain why participants generally assigned higher ratings when adopting the speaker's perspective.

Participants perceived gossip as more entertaining when adopting the speaker's perspective than when adopting the listener's perspective. Additionally, participants who reported stronger endorsement of entertainment-related gossip functions on the GFQ were also

more likely to interpret gossip interactions as serving entertainment-related purposes during the video task. Previous research has identified entertainment as one of gossip's primary social functions (Foster, 2004; Stirling, 1956). However, the current findings extend this literature by suggesting that perceptions of entertainment may be particularly sensitive to demands for perspective-taking. Participants may have found gossip more entertaining from the speaker's perspective because they were asked to evaluate the speaker's intended purpose for sharing the information. In contrast, when adopting the listener's perspective, participants were required to infer the speaker's intentions from the listener's interpretation of the interaction, which may have introduced greater ambiguity about the statement's social function.

Although age-related findings in the current study were limited and exploratory, it is noteworthy that adolescents and adults demonstrated similar response patterns across conditions. Contrary to Hypothesis 2, adolescents and adults did not differ significantly in the extent to which they endorsed the useful information, relationship-strengthening, or entertainment functions of gossip, and no significant interactions involving age group emerged. The only age-related difference observed was in influence ratings, with adults more likely than adolescents to perceive the statements as socially influential. However, no interactions involving age groups were observed, suggesting that adolescents and adults exhibited similar response patterns across perspectives and statement types. These findings suggest that older adolescents may interpret the social functions of gossip similarly to adults, which is consistent with research indicating that perspective-taking, Theory of Mind, and social-cognitive communication skills become increasingly sophisticated throughout adolescence and approach adult-like levels by late adolescence (Glenwright et al., 2017; NASEM, 2019; Ryskin et al., 2015). The absence of age differences may also suggest that the cognitive demands of the current task were manageable for

both groups, despite theoretical expectations that adolescents may experience greater cognitive load during complex perspective-taking tasks.

The positive associations between participants' interpretations of gossip as entertaining during the video task and their GFQ entertainment subscale scores further suggest that individuals who generally perceived gossip as entertaining were more likely to recognize entertainment-related intentions during specific social interactions. This finding supports Hypothesis 3 and suggests consistency between participants' attitudes toward gossip and their interpretations of experimentally presented gossip interactions. It is important to recognize that the video task and GFQ assessed different aspects of gossip appreciation. Whereas the video task required participants to apply their understanding of gossip's social functions for each specific statement, the GFQ assessed participants' broader self-reported beliefs and attitudes regarding gossip. Given these methodological differences, strong correspondence between the measures may not necessarily be expected, which may help explain why only the entertainment function demonstrated convergence across both measures. Overall, these findings support Foster's (2004) argument that gossip serves socially rewarding functions beyond simply sharing information and further highlight the importance of perspective-taking in understanding how individuals interpret the social purposes underlying gossip interactions.

Novel Contributions

The current study contributes to the growing literature examining gossip as a socially functional form of communication rather than solely a negative or antisocial behaviour. Consistent with previous theoretical accounts of gossip (Baumeister et al., 2004; Dunbar, 2004; Foster, 2004), the findings demonstrate that participants recognized informational, relational, influential, and entertainment-related functions in gossip within social interactions. Because the

video scenarios were designed around social norm violations occurring within a high school context, the findings also provide preliminary support for the idea that individuals recognized multiple social functions of gossip when evaluating norm-relevant social information. Although the current study was not designed to test Cultural Learning Theory (Baumeister et al., 2004) directly, the findings are consistent with the view that gossip may serve as a mechanism through which individuals interpret and communicate information about socially relevant behaviour. Importantly, the current study extends previous research by examining how perspective-taking processes influence these social functions.

One important contribution of the current study was the inclusion of both adolescents and adults within the same experimental paradigm. Although the adolescent sample was exploratory and included primarily to evaluate the feasibility of the methods for future developmental research, its inclusion enabled a preliminary examination of developmental differences in gossip appreciation and perspective-taking across adolescence and adulthood.

Additionally, the current study contributes methodologically to the gossip literature by combining a video-based gossip task with the Gossip Functions Questionnaire (GFQ; Foster, 2004). By examining associations between participants' task-based social function ratings and their self-reported endorsement of gossip's social functions, the current study supports the idea that these measures capture underlying constructs related to gossip appreciation and social communication. Although the video task and GFQ assess distinct aspects of gossip appreciation, applied interpretation of specific statements versus generalized beliefs and attitudes toward gossip, the positive association observed for entertainment suggests that these measures capture overlapping aspects of how individuals understand gossip. This convergence may provide

preliminary evidence that the experimental task taps constructs related to the appreciation of real-world gossip.

Strengths and Limitations

The current study has several strengths. First, the use of video-based scenarios enhanced the ecological validity of the task by presenting participants with dynamic, socially realistic interactions, compared with the self-report questionnaires and hypothetical scenarios commonly used in previous gossip research (e.g., Caivano & Talwar, 2021; Foster, 2004). Another strength was the inclusion of both participants' interpretations of social functions during the video task and their self-reported endorsement of gossip functions on the GFQ measures, which enabled examination of associations between experimentally measured gossip appreciation and participants' generalized attitudes toward gossip. Finally, although the adolescent sample was exploratory, including both adolescents and adults provided preliminary insight into the feasibility of examining developmental differences in gossip appreciation and perspective-taking within this experimental paradigm.

The current study also had several limitations. One limitation was that adolescent participants completed the study virtually via Zoom, whereas adult participants completed it in person in a classroom setting. Differences in the administration format may have influenced participants' engagement, attention, comfort, and responses across age groups. Further, the adolescent sample was exploratory and substantially smaller than the adult sample, limiting the ability to meaningfully examine developmental differences across age groups and reducing statistical power to detect smaller age-related effects. Nevertheless, adolescents demonstrated response patterns similar to adults, suggesting that the task was suitable for use with older adolescents. Adolescents were also recruited through word of mouth, which may have limited

the diversity and representativeness of the adolescent sample. Additionally, because the adolescent sample included only older adolescents aged 16 to 17 years, the findings may not generalize to younger adolescents whose perspective-taking and social-cognitive abilities are still developing. The adult sample also consisted of university students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader adult populations. Participation requirements may have further limited accessibility across groups, as adult participants were required to access the university campus to participate in person. In contrast, adolescent participants required access to a reliable device, a stable internet connection, and a quiet environment to complete the virtual testing session.

Additionally, although video-based scenarios increased ecological validity relative to traditional vignette methods, they may not have fully captured the complexity and spontaneity of real-world gossip interactions. Further, all the video scenarios were set in a high school. Although these situations were selected to be relevant to adolescent participants, they may not have reflected the lived experiences of all participants. Given that the majority of the sample was adult, some participants may have had difficulty relating to the scenarios or relied on recollections of past experiences when evaluating the interactions. This may have influenced how the social functions of gossip were interpreted across conditions. Finally, the current study relied heavily on participants' self-reported evaluations of gossip interactions, which may have been influenced by social desirability bias or individual differences in how participants interpreted the rating scales.

Implications

The current findings have several important implications for understanding gossip and social communication across development. The current findings also contribute to the growing

literature suggesting that gossip should not be viewed solely as a maladaptive or antisocial behaviour. Rather, gossip may function as a socially meaningful form of communication that facilitates entertaining, information sharing, relationship development, social bonding, and interpersonal engagement. More broadly, the findings suggest that perspective-taking plays an important role in how individuals evaluate social information, infer communicative intentions, and navigate complex peer interactions across adolescence and adulthood.

Future Research Directions

Future research should continue examining how perspective-taking influences the appreciation of gossip and social communication across development. Given that the inclusion of adolescents in the current study was exploratory, future studies should include larger, more balanced samples of adolescents further to examine developmental differences in gossip appreciation and perspective-taking. Future research may also benefit from including younger adolescents to better understand how these social-cognitive processes develop across adolescence, as well as using longitudinal designs to examine changes in gossip appreciation over time. Given the promising findings obtained with adolescents, my lab will continue to recruit adolescents for this study to better examine developmental changes in gossip appreciation and perspective-taking. Future studies may also benefit from directly measuring executive functioning or cognitive load to better understand the cognitive processes underlying perspective-taking during gossip interpretation. Finally, future research should examine additional factors that may influence the appreciation of gossip, including gender differences, the emotional valence of gossip content (e.g., positive, negative, or neutral), and cultural differences in how gossip is appreciated.

Practical Applications

The current findings may also have several practical applications within school and peer contexts. Although inclusion of the adolescent sample was exploratory, the findings suggest that adolescents were able to engage in perspective-taking and evaluate the underlying social functions of gossip interactions. This is important because adolescence represents a developmental period in which peer relationships, social communication, and social-cognitive skills become increasingly complex and socially significant. The findings therefore support the broader social-emotional learning literature, which emphasizes the importance of perspective-taking, empathy, emotion regulation, and social understanding in promoting positive peer relationships and psychosocial development within school settings (Sandilos et al., 2021; Schneider & Taylor, 2021). More specifically, the findings suggest that perspective-taking may influence how adolescents interpret communicative intentions and social information within peer interactions. As a result, school-based interventions targeting perspective-taking skills, social reasoning, and understanding others' perspectives may support adaptive peer communication and interpersonal problem-solving.

The findings also suggest that gossip should not be conceptualized solely as maladaptive behaviour, as it may also serve socially functional purposes related to relationship development, entertainment, and information sharing. Understanding these social functions may help educators and school professionals better distinguish between harmful relational aggression and more normative forms of peer communication. More broadly, these findings help inform school-based programs focused on peer relationships, social communication, and bullying prevention by highlighting the importance of considering communicative perspective and social intentions within adolescent peer interactions.

Conclusion

The current study demonstrated that appreciation of gossip was influenced by communicative perspective, such that participants more strongly endorsed the social functions of gossip when adopting the speaker's perspective than when adopting the listener's perspective. These findings highlight the importance of communicative perspectives in how individuals interpret the social functions of gossip. Although participants recognized informational, relational, and influence-related aspects of the statements, entertainment emerged as the most consistent finding across analyses and the only social function that demonstrated convergence between experimental ratings and self-reported attitudes toward gossip. This finding suggests that the enjoyment derived from discussing socially relevant information may represent one of the most immediate and readily identifiable functions of gossip. Although the developmental findings were exploratory, adolescents and adults demonstrated broadly similar patterns of responding across conditions, suggesting that older adolescents can engage in perspective-taking and evaluate the social functions underlying gossip interactions in ways that resemble adults. Overall, the findings support the role of perspective-taking in social communication and suggest that entertainment represents a uniquely salient and socially rewarding function of gossip.

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Table 1*Example Scenario for Each Perspective by Statement Type Condition*

Perspective by Statement Type	Example Scenario
Speaker Perspective/ Gossip	This is Jamie. You go to school with Jamie. You and Jamie are talking before class. You tell Jamie something you heard about Kai, who is in your class. You tell Jamie that you heard that Kai got caught cheating on a test. Kai is not around to hear you say this about them to Jamie.
Listener Perspective/ Gossip	This is Jamie. You go to school with Jamie. You and Jamie are talking before class. Jamie tells you something they heard about Kai, who is in your class. Jamie tells you they heard Kai got caught cheating on a test. Kai is not around to hear Jamie say this about them.
Speaker Perspective/ Target Present	This is Jamie. You go to school with Jamie. You and Jamie are talking before class. You tell Jamie something you heard about Kai, who is in your class. You tell Jamie that you heard Kai got caught cheating on a test. Kai is there to hear what you said about them.
Listener Perspective/ Target Present	This is Jamie. You go to school with Jamie. You and Jamie are talking before class. Jamie tells you something they heard about Kai, who is in your class. Jamie tells you they heard Kai got caught cheating on a test. Kai is there to hear what you said about them.

Table 2*Mean Social Function Ratings by Age Group*

Social Function	Adolescents <i>M (SD)</i>	Adults <i>M (SD)</i>
Useful Information	2.20 (0.17)	2.46 (0.08)
Relationship Strengthening	2.95 (0.14)	2.96 (0.06)
Influence	2.32 (0.19)	2.79 (0.09)
Entertainment	2.91 (0.18)	3.22 (0.08)

Note. The adolescent group included $n = 20$ participants, and the adult group included $n = 99$ participants.

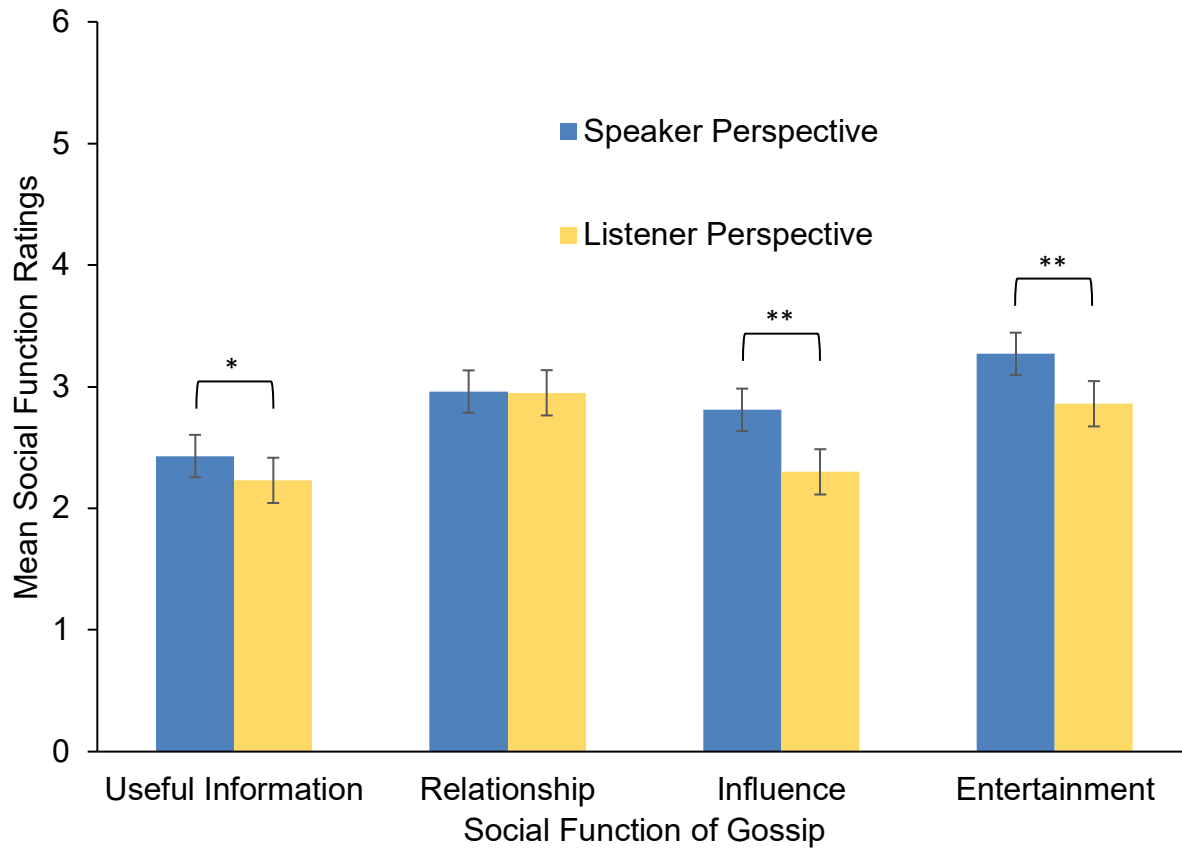
Table 3*Correlations Between Speaker-Perspective Gossip Video Task Ratings and GFQ Scores*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Useful Information (Video Task)	—							
2. Useful Information (GFQ)	.09	—						
3. Relationship Strengthening (Video Task)	.57**	.15	—					
4. Relationship Strengthening (GFQ)	.12	.52**	.17	—				
5. Influence (Video Task)	.48**	-.04	.26**	-.088	—			
6. Influence (GFQ)	.18*	.37**	.24**	.49**	-.02	—		
7. Entertainment (Video Task)	.65**	.22*	.51**	.16	.44**	.27**	—	
8. Entertainment (GFQ)	.19*	.56**	.27**	.56**	.01	.37**	.28**	—

Note. Correlations reflect associations between speaker-perspective gossip task ratings and corresponding GFQ subscale scores for the total sample ($N = 119$). GFQ = Gossip Function Questionnaire (Foster, 2004).

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

Figure 1*Mean Social Function Ratings by Perspective*

Note. Values represent mean ratings collapsed across statement type and age group. Higher scores indicate higher ratings for each social function. Significant differences between speaker and listener perspective ratings were observed for useful information, influence, and entertainment.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .001$.

$N = 119$.