LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

Gossip Among Women in Lebanon: A Social Perspective
By

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Dedication Page

To my beloved mother

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Gossip among women in Lebanon: A social perspective

Kinda Adra

ABSTRACT

Language in all its elements creates social bonds among people to nurture and nourish our minds and souls. Gossip is regularly identified as a negative element of speech, and people who gossip are considered empty headed and harmful. This mixed-method study explores the effect of gossip on female relationships. It gives a clear meaning of gossip, its various functions, and sheds light on its real purpose and how to use it toward our own and society's benefits. It attempts to find out whether gossip is harmful or not in women's relationships. Three instruments were used to conduct this study: discourse completion tests, observations, and structured questionnaires. Results show that gossip may be viewed as a harmless element in women's relationships and helps them bond together. Further research is suggested on exploring the different types of gossip in different societies and backgrounds to better understand group dynamics and the different effects of gossip on these various societies.

Keywords: Gossip, Language, Lebanon, Females, Social perspective

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 - Overview

Gossip is a stress buster; for example, after a long day when women gather and share their experiences and events, they pour out all the anxiety and stress that is bottled up inside of them. We have all gotten excited over statements like: ‘Did you know that your ex-boyfriend is cheating on his wife?’ or ‘Have you heard about the divorce of X and Y?’ or ‘D had her boobs done, but the right one turned out bigger than the left?’ or ‘Who bought a huge house; where did they get all the money from? I’m sure her father paid coz her husband is worth nothing’, and so on. "Gossip is hardwired into us and is known to help us bond better with others and share common woes" (Shelja, 2011, p.1). As long as gossip is harmless and as long as you maintain yourself and stop yourself from drowning into the harmful effects of gossip, a cup of coffee and a lot of gossip later could serve as a form of tranquillizer and anti-depressant without side effects. There are in fact different forms of gossip, types, and functions, which will be discussed at length, in the next chapter.

1.2 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the effect of gossip on human relationships; female relationships to be more specific. It gives a clear meaning of gossip, its various functions, and sheds light on its real purpose and how to use it toward our own benefits and the benefits of society. It also highlights the facts that make gossip such an interesting topic and points out why we all love to gossip, i.e. what it brings to the gossipers and how it affects the person being gossiped about.

Although everybody gossips, people who are known to gossip are considered bad and superficial. While people in society define gossip as the worst thing one can

do, scholars have written many positive things about it and showed us how important this subject is among friends and in all societies. It is essential to note that gossip has two sides: a negative and a positive one, and a very thin line separates them.

Nicholson (2001) gives a broad definition for gossip:

When it's good it binds people and communities together. As anyone who has lived in a small community knows, gossip is something that people who share collective identity do naturally. But rampant individualism, the fragmentation of our lifestyle and the pervasiveness of competitive striving can drive gossip and rumor down more poisonous channels (p.1).

People are familiar with the latter kind of gossip, where bad-mouthing and false accusations take place, which eventually leads to disaster. But if we stick to the former form, gossip could become a very essential element in our everyday conversations. Fox (2001) argues that it was shown that we gossip all the time and two thirds of our conversations are occupied with gossip: marriages, break-ups, weight gain, weight loss, money, jewelry, etc. Topics that are not related to gossip like politics, culture, world famine, agriculture, and others occupy only two or three percent of the conversation, while gossip occupies more than 10 percent of the total conversation.

Therefore, there is a very good reason or multiple good reasons as to why we gossip. These reasons will be outlined more thoroughly later on, but one of the main reasons why people gossip that much is that it seems to make them happy. Fox (2001) mentions: "Gossip has been shown to stimulate production of endorphins, relieving stress and boosting the immune system"(p.1). So, if it makes you happy, it can't be that bad.

Gossip affects friendships. This study focuses on how gossip affects mainly female relationships. Farley, Timme, and Hart (2010) argue that gossip creates bonds and social ties among people. It helps individuals connect and relate to one another; it can also create some ties and points of interest between females who do not get along very well. For example, there was this lady at school who I could not bear and never talked to, as she seemed snobbish and rude. One day it happened that I sat next to her and she started gossiping about our sons' teacher and how she acts impatiently with the children. I had the same thought, so I approved and we started chatting and gossiping about this teacher and some of the moms that we both disliked. After that conversation, I discovered that she wasn't snobbish but just looked like it because she was not feeling at ease. After we found out that we shared the same views on many people and aspects in the school, we became good friends. So in this case, it was gossip that brought us together and made us find out what kind of person each one was.

1.3 Research Questions

(1) Is gossip harmful or harmless? (2) Why do women gossip? (3) What is the effect of gossip on female friendships in Lebanon? (4) What are the different types of gossip? (5) Do all women gossip? The word gossip is often linked to something negative and is a taboo in all societies. People don't even realize that it is a major subject to discuss and that it affects our lives daily. Where do we draw the line with gossip? There is a thin line between harmful and harmless gossip. Females are competitive by nature and some of them are willing to step over the lives of others just to feel better; hence the harmful gossip. This is not the type of gossip I am discussing in this thesis, but I will defend the harmless type that ties us all together.

Females gather together to share happy moments: to laugh and to reduce their stress. If one has a fight with her husband, for example, she gets furious and sad. Once she sits with her gals and gossips about him, his mother, his sister, or what he has done, she forgets all about the tears and laughs instead. By the end of the meeting, she would be smiling and more powerful than ever. This outcome would make her love her female friends even more, which would also strengthen the bond between them. Moreover, after this meeting, this group of females would become even closer to each other than they were before. When they all gossip together about someone they realize that they have more things in common. Men also gossip; everybody gossips. We all think that men don't gossip, that they just talk about cars and electronics and all the things that interest them. We will find out what men gossip about and how their gossip differs from ours.

1.4 Division of Thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter one introduces the topic, i.e. gossip among women in Lebanon. It states the purpose of the study, the research questions as well as the definition of key terms. Chapter two discusses the review of literature, what the literature says about gossip: its definition, different types, functions, elements virtues, and viciousness. It gives us an overview about gossip, how people view it and how they should view it. It sheds light on the other side of gossip, the good side. Chapter three presents the methodology of this study, what method was used (mixed method), what instruments were used to conduct this study (Questionnaire based on a Likert Scale, Observations, and Discourse Completions Tasks) and a definition for each of these instruments with their advantages and disadvantages. It also explains how the research was conducted: the number of participants, number of questions and type of women observed. Chapter four states the results of the research. In the questionnaire,

results present the attitude of participants for each statement ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. In the observation, results show us how gossip is integrated in every social outing and how it affects women's friendships in Lebanon. Finally, in the Discourse Completion Tasks (DCT) we get to find out how women react when faced with a situation that involves gossip. We find out that every woman gossips or takes part in a gossip session even if she doesn't want to. Chapter five is a discussion of the results we derived from the previous chapter and how these results conform to the literature. In this chapter the research questions are answered and supported by studies and research done by scholars. Chapter six is the final chapter concluding this study with positive notes and outcomes about gossip. It also states its limitations and recommendations for further research and study to better understand the positive effects of gossip in women's friendships.

1.5 Conclusion

This thesis seeks to define gossip in its original sense and remove the negative connotation that people have attached it to throughout the years. It sheds light on the positive side of gossip and shows us how much time and effort it possesses in every woman's outing. It also reveals how gossip can act as a positive element in all our relationships if used wisely and carefully. I also discuss some negative points that gossip can lead us to because at times it could be a double edged sword.

This chapter introduced the topic. The next chapter will review the literature and will give us an insight about gossip and its function.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 – Introduction

If you are sitting in a social outing or any outing that seems to be dull and disoriented, the only thing to say to attract everybody's attention and turn this boring gathering into an interesting quest is the following: "Have you heard the latest gossip?" Suddenly, all ears and eyes gather around and are fixed on you. This is why Farley (2011) states that gossipers are the "movers and shakers of their communication networks" (p. 575). They are the ones who get things spiced up and going on when everyone is bored and uncomfortably silenced. After the gossip is spilled everyone pitches in and the dull outing miraculously turns into a fun, interesting gathering with everyone talking and laughing. Moreover, depressed people become happy because they feed on others' scandals, others who don't know each other become close friends because they turn out to know the same people who are being gossiped about and others who were excruciatingly bored and were about to leave decide to have an extra drink and stay to hear all the juicy details and witness all the excitement.

Therefore, we conclude that gossip brings people together and creates a bond between them (Turner, Mazar, Wendel & Wilson, 2003). Moreover, if you want to attract people's attention you just have to start gossiping about something or someone (Guerin & Miyakazi, 2006). However, not everyone knows how to gossip. In order to get the reactions and the positive results I mentioned above, one should know how to gossip. Gossiping should be entertaining or else it would lose its value (Guerin & Miyazaki, 2006). The most important thing is that you should be the first one to tell the gossip, "Being the first to tell a story has a huge conversational cash value"

(Guerin & Miyazaki, 2006, p. 27). The piece of gossip should also have the following elements to attract the attention and interests of listeners: “has scandalous, novel, humorous, and unexpected elements” (p.27).

It is unusual how the word ‘gossip’ has this negative connotation to it although it brings many positive nuances to the people who practice it and to their listeners. Even the people who are being gossiped about could benefit from the situation if they find out about it; if they don’t well what you don’t know can’t hurt you. So from every angle I look at it, gossip is essential and efficient to human relationships be it with others or with themselves. “Gossip was a form of communication that was really important to increasing the bound of society. Therefore, no people live without gossip!” (Dunbar as cited in Baumeister, Vohs, & Zhang 2004, p.27).

2.2 - The History and Definition of Gossip

Gossip is generally defined as talking about a third person who is absent. A more formal definition would be: "Gossip is functionally defined as conversation about [both] who is doing what with whom, and whether it's a good or bad thing [and] who is in and who is out and why" (Niekerk, 2008, p.104).

Generally the definition of the word gossip has a negative connotation to it, which is true if the gossip is filled with malice and serves to affect the person gossiped about negatively. Niekrek (2008) gives us the definition of gossip when used negatively by stating that "It is possible that an appetite for stories defined by the juicier, more salacious aspects of human experience may cultivate *schadenfreude*, a vicious pleasure taken in the suffering of others (celebrity gossip being exemplary instance)" (p.406). This kind of gossip is more likely the gossip that we are used to

and the juicy information we get from it. In this study, however, I will be discussing the other form of gossip which bonds people together not tears them apart.

In ancient times, gossip was not related to a negative implication. It didn't mean that it is something bad to practice like it is in our times these days (Szekfu & Szvetelszky, 2005; Capps, 2012). The following definition of 'Gossip' is from the *Encyclopedia Britannica* when this word first entered in ancient times it had a positive connotation to it unlike nowadays:

“From the O.E godsibb, i.e. God and sib, akin, standing in relation to), originally a god parent, i.e., one who by taking a sponsor's vows at a baptism stands in a spiritual relationship to the child baptized. The common modern meaning is of light personal or social conversation, or, with an invidious sense, of idle tale-bearing. 'Gossip' was early used with the sense of a friend or acquaintance, either of the parent of the child baptized or of the other godparents, and thus came to be used, with little reference to the position of sponsor, for women friends of the mother present at birth. Gossip is not an opinion and not a story, but a special mixture of the special stories and special opinions” (p. 309).

The official and ancient definition of this word is somehow a bit complicated to me, but it shows that the original word is not linked to 'bad-mouthing' people as we define it now. It just confers that “Gossip was the primary form of information transmission in the days before writing. Social life was based on communication. Gossip has social value. It is always information regarding social status: a continuous 'contactometric autoregistration'” (Szekfu & Szvetelszky, 2005, p. 309). The *Encyclopedia Britannica* is defining gossip and discussing it as a mere form of communication that was and is still essential in society and in human

relationships. It shows us what gossip really is and how it is a crucial tool for communication. In more recent articles, gossip is viewed nowadays as talking about a third party who is absent (see for instance, Eggins & Slade, 1997).

Practically, it is true, but technically the words infer that it is something negative. What is more demeaning is that nowadays when people say gossip, a picture instantly pops up in their heads where women, and only women, are gathered around the kitchen table with their hands full of onions and zucchini, their hair all messed up and their faces all ugly chatting about the neighbor who is having wild sex with every man in the building while they are getting none. Moreover, people accuse others who gossip by being empty headed and have nothing better to do. Well personally, not only do I gossip but I write about it too; does it make me a dumb person? On the contrary, it makes me a very socially smart person, and I have tons of work to do before I finish this thesis.

As everything else in this life, gossip has evolved from being something positive into being something negative. Fortunately we have many scholars who wrote and conducted many studies to prove the opposite. For example, Niekerk (2008) talks about the virtues of gossip and how a person and a person's mind can benefit from gossip, and how we can develop mentally and socially by gossiping. I will be discussing these virtues thoroughly later on.

Hess and Hagen (2006) define gossip as "a personal conversation on social topics. The information exchanged, truthful or deceptive can benefit the sender, the receiver, or both" (p. 339). They also add that "We agree with other gossip researchers that gossip, broadly construed, probably has many other functions including maintaining the unity, morals, and values of social groups, cultural learning, social bonding, social comparison, and norm learning and enforcement" (p. 339).

Hess and Hagen (2006) as well as many other researchers give the word gossip a new connotation and shed light on the true meaning of gossip.

Why do we gossip? Why do we have this urge to gossip? Is it to harm people? Is it to harm ourselves or deliver a message? Each person gossips according to his/her needs, character, and goals. For instance, I am considered to be a big gossip; I gossip just to entertain people. I like to make people laugh, because it makes me feel good about myself; I like to be loved and people love someone who can make them laugh. “The intent to engage in a pleasurable activity is an inherent feature of gossip” (Cuonzo, 2008, p. 1). By this the researcher means that people gossip because they have the intention to give and receive pleasure, and that gossip gives the gossipers and the listeners this pleasure.

Some people are just like fungus, they feed off other people’s miseries. Those people don’t gossip, they ‘bad-mouth’ others just to feel good about themselves. For example, if a woman realizes that her husband is neglecting her or realizes that she has gained weight and no longer feels good, she makes sure to pick a very sexy woman and tell others that her husband is cheating on her or that she had liposuction but still eats like a cow. Or if a woman has some kind of an asset that others long for, they create false accusations as to where she got it.

For instance, in her article, Guendouzi (2004) presents a conversation between two girls who are eating a lot lately gossiping about another girl who is thin (obviously they’re not). One says that this other girl is naturally thin but the other one snaps out and accuses the latter of being bulimic. This accusation would give the non-skinny girl a sense of relief as to why she isn’t thin as the ‘other’. In another scenario, women with low self esteem choose a queen bee or a social butterfly and start to bad mouth her just to prove to themselves and to others that they are also a

part of the social hierarchy. “We like to know about the scandals and misfortunes of our rivals and of high status people because this information might be valuable in social competition” (McAndrew, 2008, p.37).

These people are using gossip to prove to themselves that they are recognizable in society and that they are just as important as the one they're gossiping about. Other people gossip just to be part of a group. A woman would want to join another clan so she goes up to them and gossips about their worst enemy so she could be accepted. This also can be bad for the person gossiped about, but it is good for the gossipers; she wanted to fit in and gossip helped her belong which is a very main element for survival. Gossip plays an important and essential role in group dynamics and generates belongingness (Clegg & van Iterson, 2009). In order to get my son to be invited to all the birthdays I had to crash a group of women and gossip about other women I didn't like. I didn't do them any harm; I just used the power of harmless gossip to make my son happy. As sad and pathetic as this sounds, this is unfortunately the society we live in and sometimes we have to fake it until we make it. However, one must be ware of what to gossip about, how to gossip and in front of whom. These three elements affect the way the gossipers is viewed which will result in accepting or rejecting him/her depending on what is being said and how. “Results supported the notion that the type of gossip and its manner of presentation affect perceptions of gossipers and gossip targets” (“The relative effect,” 2008, p. 1).

Gossip can be very destructive if done in front of the wrong crowd of people. One has to know exactly who his audience is. For example, I have different groups of lady friends; I only gossip with the ones whom I am totally friends with. New groups however, don't like a gossipers. I find different ways to make them laugh. Some groups like it when you gossip about people from the same group; others

despise people who come and gossip about a member of their group. For that reason, one must know where to gossip and what to say.

2.3 – Elements of Gossip

In order for a conversation or any kind of talk to apply or be defined as a gossip, it should contain certain kind of elements. Layey- Stouhi (2009), Eggins and Slade (1997) identify three major elements of gossip: (1) An absent party, (2) a substantiating behavior, and (3) a pejorative evaluation. Jackie Guendouzi (2001) added two non-essential elements to Eggins and Slade's model: "probe and wrap up" (p.32). The first element denotes that gossiping includes talking about an absent party, a person or people whom is/are not present during the conversation. This party should not know what is being said about him/her so the information that is being said should be kept very secret not only from the person gossiped about but from any other individual who is not within this circle and is not present in the conversation. Gossip travels fast, and it can easily reach the absent target through the grapevine. According to Anthes (2010), "A basic rule in today's world is: Don't say anything that you wouldn't want to end up on Twitter or Facebook" (p. 59). Similarly, McAndrew (2008) states: "Sharing gossip with another person is a sign of deep trust" (p. 3). This means that interlocutors share a great amount of trust and are assertive that all the information that is being said will remain within this circle. Trust is a major element in gossiping; one should only gossip around people he/she truly and thoroughly knows for two main reasons: one so no one leaks any of the gossip to the absent party and second because gossiping with people you don't know will demean the gossiper and will be looked down to and despised (Patel & Turner, 2008). People dislike ones they hardly know to just pop up and start gossiping about others.

The second element is substantiating behavior, women who gossip together share not only friendship and trust but they also share the same norms and values (Guendouzi, 2001). “The second element validates that women friends have a common understanding of the world” (Laycy-Stouhi, 2009, p. 26). Women gossip about people who have deviated from their norms and values; who have behaved, accordingly, in an unacceptable manner like wearing something ugly for their taste or talking in some poor articulated manner. What is normal to some people is deviated from the norm for others. Women also tend to gossip and joke a lot more when they are not with a mixed group (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006). This makes a lot of sense because if they gossip around men, then they would not be gossiping because most of the gossip is about men! After sitting with many and different types of women I realized that subjects of gossip can fluctuate from real silly to real damage all depending on the norms and values of the group of women gossiping. For example, apparently nowadays, within a group of women who come from a high socio-economical background, wearing a headband with a flower on the side is a major faux-pas. One of them actually said: “We cannot continue being seen with her if she doesn’t realize the fashion disasters she always commits”! In another group of women, values and norms are a bit more serious whereby a married lady is going out with a married man and both spouses have no clue about it.

Moreover, through my society research, I realized that there is one element that compliments values and norms and that I haven’t come across in the literature yet and that is shared experiences. For instance, a group of married women who have the same marital problems: their men are not supportive, they don’t show them love and they always feel that they lack emotional and sexual drama in their lives. For this particular group of friends, going out with another man who can give them these

sensations is fine. It is ok because they are not doing it on purpose but because their husbands drove them into it. Therefore, if they find out about a woman betraying her husband they don't gossip about it because apparently they share the same norms as her so it is acceptable; but they do gossip about a women who wears fake bags and shoes because as far as they're concerned: "if you can't afford it don't buy it". So, substantial behavior is related to the norms and values of women groups according to Guendouzi (2001) and Laycy-Stouhi (2009), and women express their thoughts and feelings toward an act that they find deviant from what *they* believe and not from what is normally believed in a certain society. It is also related to shared experiences according to my daily observations of different groups of women.

The third element is the Pejorative Evaluations, which are all the opinions and further explanations that each member of the group participates in expressing their feelings, views and beliefs of a particular deviant behavior. It is with this element that the gossip is elaborated, analyzed and extended. When each participant chips in with a different evaluation of the situation and gives a different opinion, many subjects are raised and sometimes even more gossips emerge. Pejorative evaluations are responsible for the timing of the gathering and discussions. The more they evaluate the absent party, the more time they sit together and the more people they talk about. According to Guendouzi (2001), if another gossip or subject emerges, women friends must first finalize the subject at hand and make sure that each evaluation and opinion has been attended to and taken into consideration. If they jump to a new subject or new gossip without the acceptance of each member then a clash will emerge among the group because it will be considered that they have disrespected the desire and wish to express unfinished evaluations or opinions. Laycy-Stouhi (2009) continues and mentions that Guendouzi (2001) adds two more elements of gossip: Probe and Wrap

up. The following and according to Laycy-Stouhi (2009) are all definitions of these elements. These are based on Eggins and Slade (1997) and Guendouzi's (2001) elements:

“An absent party:

A person who is carrying out a behavior which is evaluated by interlocutor(s) as deviant from the norm

Substantiating behavior:

The supporting information the speaker uses to prove that she is right and to elicit agreement from the other interlocutors in the conversation that the absent party's behavior is deviant

Pejorative evaluations:

Other examples provided by the initial speaker or other interlocutors to further illustrate how the absent party's behavior was deviant

Probe(s):

Questions that are asked to further investigate the situation and evaluate the behavior of the absent party

Wrap-up:

A final comment or judgment which briefly summarizes the situation and its evaluation” (P. 26)

2.4 – Types of Gossip

There are different types of gossip; I am going to review the following types:

Negative gossip, Positive, Humorous, and Micro and Macro gossip. We are all familiar with the first one because there is a misconception that claims that gossip is negative. People consider the word gossip as negative automatically. Negative gossip is the harmful type, which harms others in the process; positive gossip is the harmless type whereby we only state facts about someone and no one gets harmed in the process. Patel and Turner (2008), stated that:

Positive gossip is information about socially approved behavior. Such gossip acts as a sanction ... Negative gossip, which deals with socially disapproved behavior, acts as a negative edict, ... gossip is a dangerous and malicious act, given that those gossiped about do not have the opportunity to defend themselves. (p. 4)

An example of positive gossip would be just stating facts or informing people about an absent party i.e. praising her:

Anne: Sara passed her exams today; she looked stunning in her red dress.

Sama: Yes I've noticed she was so happy and shining; I'm really happy for her.

These two girls seem to be nice and are happy for their friend. This same conversation can turn into negative gossip if a third malicious person joined them:

Anne: Sara passed her exams today; she looked stunning in her red dress.

Sama: Yes I've noticed she was so happy and shining; I'm really happy for her.

Tala: Well yes good thing she passed but the red color doesn't suit her she looked like she borrowed it from someone cause it didn't fit her well; honestly I don't think she can afford such a dress. Her hair was a hot mess too!

Another two types proposed by Morrow (1981) is Macro and Micro gossip.

Macro gossip is about global gossip, mainly famous people and actors. "Macro-gossip tends to be exemplary, cautionary, ceremonial and merely entertaining- like public hangings" (p. 2). Microgossip on the other hand is the type of gossip that we are discussing in this thesis. "The kind of gossip that may perform a social mission. Microgossip keeps tumbling in like the surf, a Pepysian lounge act: routines about Sylvia, about to be fired, and Karl, who can't get a divorce, and Dorothy's Valium" (p. 2).

Laycy-Stouhi (2009) cites "Guendouzi (2001) identifies two types of gossip: harmless peer news exchange or update and harmful malicious comments which she labels

“bitching”-- a “tool for social control” (p. 34) and which Jones (1981) labels as “scandal” (p. 197)” (p. 27).

Guendouzi (2001), claims that these two types of gossip differ in function. Where one is harmless and brings a group together to share information about an absent party in a harmless way, the other is a social tool to show control and considers the third party’s actions as deviant to their norms. Peer view exchange gives women a chance to bond and strengthen their ties by discussing news about a third party whom they consider acceptable even if she’s different. Bitching on the other hand is practiced to show power and who has the upper hand in the group while exchanging information about a third party who is considered different and unacceptable. The following are examples and the analysis of peer view exchange and bitching extracted from Laycy-Stouhi and based on Guendouzi’s rule:

Example 1: Gossip/Peer News Exchange

Ann:

did I tell you about Sally [third absent party] (breathless voice) did I tell you she’s been away all week right. So I give her a ring now. And I didn’t get any answer [substantiating behaviour]. And I thought well maybe she’s gone on holiday or something. There’s me been at the student union all weekend. Well I did make friends so it was good.

Carol: I didn’t know you had a union.

Ann: night but I run her the next night and I said are you ill or something. She said no. what it is is I am gonna give it a couple more weeks see if I can get a job an if I can’t come back so she’s

Linda: it’s stupid innit. She’s gonna get a shitty job [pejorative evaluation]

(Guendouzi 2001, 38).

Analysis of Example 1: Gossip/ Peer news exchange

Elements of Gossip

An absent party

Susie (common friend between the speakers)

Substantiating behavior

She is out of touch and not answering calls

Ann is worried about her

Pejorative evaluations

She is not staying home as she is trying to find a job

She looks ill

Example 2: Gossip/ Bitching

Linda: you know thing right. Well I was saying to thing right. You know I didn't like him [third absent party 1] before. Cause when his girlfriend [third absent party 2] was working there he said to about. Cause we all had size sixteen uniforms you know they gave us size sixteen but hers was really big on her cause she's so skinny [substantiating behavior]. When she was saying this to her boyfriend she said I am not bothering to even wear it you know theirs don't look too bad on. An her boyfriend goes yeah that's cause they're fat [substantiating behavior] man I just thought...

Carol: well look at it I hate yeah proves he's an idiot [pejorative evaluation/ wrap up]

Linda: and then when he was fighting with john I thought he's an idiot [pejorative evaluation] he needs to sort it out but then lately I've been talking to him an I thought he's not that bad he's alright and I was walking past him right the other day an I went hi ya an he went nice ones (remark

directed at her breasts) an he says I was only joking and I thought well how was that funny you know

Carol: yeah

Linda: if you're talking about it an they called you . you know like Michael sometimes does . I find that funny but as I am walking off that's not funny at all [pejorative evaluation] ...she's a bimbo anyway [pejorative evaluation]

Carol: oh she looks greasy lately [pejorative evaluation] have you seen her? [probe] She do come in sometimes with her slippers on [pejorative evaluation] ...she looks...

Linda: she's pregnant, she is

Carol: is she? [probe] She de she looks like death warmed up [pejorative evaluation]. She looks really bad [pejorative evaluation]

Linda: she's an idiot [wrap up]

(Guendouzi 2001, 38).

Analysis of Example 2: Gossip/ Bitching

Elements of Gossip

An absent party

Man (colleague)

his girlfriend (colleague)

substantiating behavior

Man calls other women fat

His girlfriend is too skinny for her work uniform

Pejorative evaluations

Man makes explicit and inappropriate comments about the speaker's breasts

His girlfriend is greasy and comes to work in slippers

Probe (s)

The possibility that the man's comment about the speaker's breasts would be funnier and more acceptable in another context

Speculations about the girlfriend's possible pregnancy

wrap-up

The man and his girlfriend are idiots

2.5– Virtues of Gossip

“If gossip has negative potential, how did it survive? From this point, gossip was considered to be useful in society. Various opinions appeared about the usefulness of gossip, such as society communication, conversation about social role, aggression, and even punishment reinforcement” (Meinarno & Suwartono, 2011, p. 302). According to some people, the word virtue doesn't go hand in hand with the word gossip. Gossip has no virtues; especially when it comes to religions. Some people consider gossip as an element that tears people apart and stabs a person's privacy and gossipers are those nosy vain people who just want to talk about things and people they are not entitled to. On the contrary, gossip has a lot of virtues and if not all, many people have created bonds and cut through the boundaries of society through gossiping. “What is actually gossip? Its existence for centuries must be evidence for its expressing a deep human need. Two people gossiping together are partners in an eager exchange: each is needy; each is communicating; each is engaged in a process of learning” (Medini & Rosenberg, 1976, p. 452). Conein (2011) talks about how language is a social tool that creates a “social bonding and group formation” (p. 117). This implies that individuals can only create ties between them through language. This makes perfect sense; the only tool that could make or break a

relation is communication. “What makes language a social tool is related to two distinct bonding processes. Creating a conversational group and building a projected group through gossip” (Conein, 2011, p. 117).

When a group of friends, or even any group of people, gathers around to talk about issues, if the subjects are broad and general with no indication of any sort of ‘news’, the gathering will turn out as rather boring. The only element in conversation that could attract people’s attention and sustain a certain conversation while creating ties among each other is gossip, especially if it is humorous gossip or negative gossip. Most of the time gossip is humorous, even if people don’t laugh from the outside they are surely laughing from the inside. Similar to gossip, “Anyone who makes other people laugh has, as Coser (1960) states, momentary control of the situation” (Kotthoff, 2006, p. 8). Moreover, Turner, Payne and Han, 2008 state the following virtues of gossip: “Gossip can serve as a constructive social activity, serving to bring people together and build cohesion. Studies indicate that gossip strengthens group bonds ... creates stronger group identification, clarifies group boundaries ..., provides social comparison tools ..., raises perceived status of self, and is entertaining.” (p. 3-4).

Surely gossip can be destructive and the thin line between constructive and destructive gossip lies within the gossipier and her intentions. If a person’s intention is to destroy someone else’s life or reputation then she could do it through many ways and forms other than gossip. If a malicious person uses gossip as a negative tool then it’s not ‘gossip’ that did the damage, it’s the person. We can utilize any tool we want and put it into good or bad use. It is thought of that positive gossip may create the social bonding we are talking about but negative gossip will surely have a negative effect on the gossipier and the target as well. Anthes (2010) on the other hand states

“The practice of gossiping, regardless of whether the content is positive or negative, can create some bonding” (p. 59). Other virtues of gossip do not only include benefits for groups whereby Farley, Timme and Hart (2010) state that “Dunbar (1996, 2004) maintained that gossip replaced grooming as the primary mechanism for social bonding” (p. 575). Farley et al. (2010) also speak about the benefits of gossip on an individual level and how it helps people with their self-esteem and personal needs:

“Other functions of gossip serve more selfish within-group needs. Within groups, individuals are motivated to maintain and enhance their self-esteem ... Individuals are especially interested in gossip about their friends, family members, and rivals ..., but they are selective about the information they choose to relay to others” (p. 575).

People nowadays are all hitting rock bottom for some weird reason; every time I sit with friends I find them depressed, unhappy and with very low self esteem. I try to shift their attention by talking about causal things like the latest movie in the theatre, or about clothing, shoes, hair, etc. None of these subjects or other subjects could lift them up or change their moods. Once I start gossiping about the neighbor next door or about the father of a child we know who is cheating on his wife; or about the rich famous doctor who turned out to be gay, suddenly you see the smile lit up their faces and all their grey colors turned into rainbow! How great of an effect is that? Where once their responses were: “I don’t know I’m not really going to the movies, it suffocates me” or “I’m not buying any clothes because I have no interesting places to go to”, with a sad face of course. After gossiping their answers would be, with their eyes wide open and a big smile: “Oh really? Then she is not that happy after all”, or “Wow I thought he loved his wife, I thought I was the only one who’s husband is an a*****. Good to know there are people living the same experience”, or

“He’s GAY??? I used to envy his wife for having it all. Turns out she has nothing at all”! And when we finish this gossip session, people would leave with a smile on their faces feeling much better knowing that it’s not greener on the other side after all. Therefore gossip in this situation and in many other situations serves as lifting and cheering people up who feel that they live alone in the dark side.

Women friends live for outings and gossiping sessions over a cup of coffee and a cupcake. It’s their stress buster, their way to blow off the steam of daily lives with husbands, children and other annoying friends. My friends and I drop everything when one of us suggests meeting for a coffee. We gather and gossip about husbands, in-laws, colleagues, and one day will come when we run out of people to gossip about we will then gossip about people who are yet to come. We don’t do that to hurt anyone but after trying many other things, these gossip sessions are our only way to get through any day. Gossip reduces stress and by belonging to a certain group, gathering around and gossiping makes us feel better and give us a feeling of belonging. Fox (2001) concludes that “By gossiping, we may effectively be giving ourselves the natural equivalent of small doses of morphine and Prozac” (p. 7).

Gossip also gives people who gossip the higher hand in society or in groups, (Farley et al., 2010). People who gossip are considered the leaders of the group, especially if it’s humorous gossip. Outings without these people are worth nothing and very boring. I know that because I am a big gossip, not the bad type but the humorous type. Without any intentions I always end up the leader of any group. My friends start smiling the minute I step in because they know that it’s time to laugh and have fun. I do that by using humorous gossip; I gossip about everything and everyone but I never do any damages in the process. Farley et al. (2010) state: “Gossipers have been portrayed as the gatekeepers of information, choosing to relay or withhold

information about others” (p. 575). Guerin and Miyazaki (2006) added that the first person who says important gossip to another earns huge capital in terms of social influence. Farely et al. (2010) continue: “It can also be inferred from Dunbar’s writings (Dunbar, 1996, 2004) that those who gossip frequently are more influential than those who gossip less, as gossip is the mechanism for keeping abreast of changes in one’s social network. Researchers determined that sorority girls who gossiped the most emerged as the most influential clique in the sorority” (p. 575).

Moreover, Feinberg, Willer, Stellar and Keltne (2012) state “Ethnographic evidence attests to the benefits of some gossip, which led scholars to introduce the term good gossip” (p. 1016). They argue that gossip can be a tool for “solving social dilemmas”. “Gossip may serve as a means by which reputational information is shared, thus helping solve social dilemmas” (p. 1016).

“Gossip is the human equivalent of ‘social grooming’ among primates, which has been shown to stimulate production of endorphins, relieving stress and boosting the immune system” (Fox, 2001, p.1). Gossip therefore can serve as a pill of Prozac, instead of swallowing such pills that could have an adverse effect to your body, why not just ring up a friend and gossip the night away?

As we witnessed, gossip not only has virtues on a group level but also on an individual level. Some people just don’t have what it takes to be doctors or lawyers in order to have this kind of self esteem, but they do have the language skills and the ability to entertain others and be recognized socially with the help of this so undermined word “gossip”.

2.6 – Functions of Gossip: Why We Gossip

Guendouzi (2001) reviewed various studies related to gossip. He summed up his search with the following typical examples of why people gossip:

To pass information;
Interest in other people's lies;
It's human nature to discuss the lives of others;
People are nosy;
To show you are part of the group;
To make them feel good (p. 33).

The most important thing in a human's life is the feeling of belonging; we need to fit in, we need to belong to a certain group, to belong to anything or anyone. The famous story of the *Ugly Duckling* is all based on the concept of belonging and the concept to "fit in". When all the ducks realize that that particular bird or so called duck doesn't look like them they disown it, refuse it, and the black duckling gets sad and depressed until it finds its own breed and belongs to a particular group. This feeling of belonging doesn't only apply to being a part of a family, but it also applies to being part of society, a certain group in society. As children, in school if we end up playing alone at recess or eating alone at lunch we'd go home crying everyday. In order for a person to belong to a group in society, one must have some kind of social control. In our society, especially among women, social control tools are money and gossip. If you're rich and have the means to spend lots of money and invite people to luscious parties in your lavishing homes, you're considered the "in" person and everyone wants to be your friend. Just like the story in the *Great Gatsby*; people go to his extravaganzas even before meeting him. Another powerful tool that could give you social control and allows you to belong to any group you wish to join is Gossip. Meinarno and Suwartono (2011) state that:

Gossip can serve as a social control of one's behavior. Part of that social control grows our safety feeling, which fulfills the basic needs of human being This

safety feeling in the process makes the individual personality fit with his/her group. Gossip can serve as source of information, creating or maintaining friendship, influencing things, and for entertainment purpose (p. 300).

When my son started his first year at school, I found out that six months later he was not being invited to all the birthdays and I was not being invited to any of the women's gatherings. When I snooped around, I was told that all the women were filthy rich and they are inviting each other to their yachts and villas. I got furious and upset because first, my son is being ditched, and it's only his first year at school, and second, I have severe FOMO syndrome (Fear Of Missing Out). Bearing in mind that I don't have any yachts and villas, which means I lack the first social control tool, I decided to work on my favorite skill in order to belong to this group of women and push my son into their group of children. It took me three sessions of gossiping about another group of women in the same class and I was fully IN.

When I gossiped about certain women, everyone supported me and loved me. By nature, women support each other during a conversation. "Women tend to be supportive in their conversational style" (Hay, 2000, p.710). Some women support you by agreeing on what you say and others only laugh or smile. Apparently, laughter is a universal sign of approval and being supportive of what one is saying (Hunt, 2005). Suddenly I was the favorite most important element in the group and their exact words are: "We won't have fun if you don't come."

Gossip gives us the upper hand in the group, when you gossip, people are always all ears listening to what you have to say, they will then consider you part of their group because you have the news they want to listen to. For that reason, people are always prone to gossiping to take control, to attract attention, to entertain people so they can be liked and accepted. Try sitting with a bunch of women where no one is

looking at you and you throw the question: “Do you know who this lady is? She’s the wife of a Dr. Y, and she’s cheating on him with X’s husband”. Only then will everyone turn their heads to you, ask more questions and wait if you have more juicy details about other people maybe.

Dunbar (as cited in Baumeister et al., 2004) believed that “gossip was a form of communication that was really important to increasing the bound of society. Therefore, no people live without gossip!” (p. 301). Gossip also is a source of entertainment and fun in any outing, especially if it’s humorous (Meinarno & Suwartono, 2011). I realized that gossip-less outings are very boring. Last night I went out with women who talked about what they had for dinner and what they’re cooking for the next day. I was going to kill myself so I turned around and found two old women in their 60s trying to look like young girls in their 20s so I started gossiping about them and how ridiculous they look and then of course everyone pitched in and we all had a good 15 min of laughter. Boredom can also be an element of why we gossip; girls just want to have fun! Larocca (2008) reports on a similar experience as mine.

“At a recent dinner with a coworker, I found myself kind of bored, a little detached. Until, that is, we started discussing mutual acquaintance” (Larocca, 2008, p. 3). This means that they had nothing to talk about until they found a mutual third party to discuss thus creating a bond or some kind of social attachment. Some women just gossip because they are built that way, and they are known in their societies as “Dames des Fours” which literally means that they are the ‘Women of the Bakery’. The same saying is used in Arabic, but not in English though. ‘Women of the Bakery’ refers to a bunch of women just laying around baking with their hands full of flour and dough and their mouths full of other people’s lives. When people want to

refer to a woman who is uneducated, uncultured and has nothing to do in her life but gossip to and about people, they call her that. I think this is a culture thing, if we go back to the history and the background of these women we would probably find that their ancestors did the same thing. These women gossip because they have nothing better to do. They are bored! They did not have the chance to engage in any other activity or the luxury to acquire any education and a career path. So what if they gossip about the neighbor who is cheap and isn't inviting them in for coffee? I don't see any harm in that because obviously no one believes them. In his book '*Woman's Talk?*' Tebbut (1995) portrays the workless gossip in an interesting verse:

*A gossiping wife's gadding about,
Click clacking, never at home,
Everyone's business minding abroad,
And never minding her own (p.24).*

These are the 'women of the bakery' mentioned above. They're always away from their houses to go fetch and spread gossip throughout their societies. They could be physically welcoming other gossipers to their houses, but still they have no interests of what is going in their families because they're busy snooping around other families. How many of us know of such women? We all know at least one specimen whom we hook up with from time to time to chew on some fat and feed on others' ups and downs. I personally don't find such women offending, ignorant or malicious.

On the contrary, I think they are the breeze of fresh air that help us pause for some time, slow down and take a break from the daily stressful race that we venture to at the break of each dawn. Does the mind have to be forever in a whirlpool analyzing, planning, thinking, solving, and organizing? Should we always talk about education, politics, world peace, finance, careers, children, world economics, and

many other useful subjects? Do we always have to read *Readers Digest*, *New York Times*, and the likes of them? Can't we just stop being the serious, educated and cultured people whom the world expects us to be and just free our minds and engage in trivial, foolish and funny nothingness? Like reading 'Cosmo', 'Vanity Fair' or sit with the 'women of the bakery' and lose yourself in their oh so simple and vain world for a while? According to Tebbut, in ancient times when a married woman left her house she was considered bad and had a bad reputation. So in times when women were not given the chance to education nor business, they were expected to just sit around the house be boring and get bored. Only then would everyone else be happy (Tebbut, 1995).

The wife that expects to have a good name

Is always at home as if she were lame

And the maid that is honest, her chiefest delight

Is still to be doing from morning to night (p.24).

It's funny how the world expects you to live up to other people's expectations. When you're unmarried you shouldn't go out with random men but you should marry a very good one by the age of 29 max; and when you marry you should either stay home and work or go to work and work. God forbid you go out meet some friends to chat, gossip and laugh over a cup of coffee; then you'd be called lame and worthless.

Nicholson (2001) talks about three essential elements as to why we gossip. First is networking: which is the importance of one's social dynamics and relationship building. The second is influence in which he also calls 'self promotion'. "We are all confronted with the task of selling ourselves and making sure other people have a positive impression of us" (Nicholson, 2001, p. 2). So in order to influence people you have to promote yourself in order to be accepted. Just as I did with the group of

women in my son's school just to get in. I had to promote myself through gossip, and it worked.

The third element that he mentions is alliance. When you gossip with someone it means you are confiding in them and forming a kind of alliance that you haven't formed with anybody else. Similarly, you expect the other party to appreciate this trust and exchange similar interests. "We use information to form adventurous alliances that we hope will provide some stability, and ideally an upper hand, to our place in the social hierarchy" (Nicholson, 2001, p. 3). It's all about reserving a place for oneself in society, a place to belong to, and a place to be recognized.

We also gossip for mere entertainment. Some people are natural born entertainers and gossip is a great tool to entertain people. Cuonzo (2008) states: "Gossip is partly motivated by the intention to produce pleasure in the speaker and/or hearer. While the intent to produce pleasure is unnecessary to deceive, the intent to engage in a pleasurable activity is an inherent feature of gossip" (p.131).

Ratledge (2008) gives us a simple answer of why we gossip: "to figure each other out" (p. 1). She argues that we don't know what goes on in other people's heads nor do we know what they're thinking or what they stand for. Gossiping with them and exchanging information gives us a glimpse of what they're about. It helps you know if you both think alike, if you agree or disagree. "Gossiping is part of our DNA. Think of it as a survival instinct" (p.1).

2.7 – Viciousness of Gossip

As everything else in this life, gossip has its positive side as well as its dark side. We just have to be ware of what to say, to whom and how. Nicholson (2001) defines both sides of gossip briefly:

We've all seen both sides of gossip. One side is the warm feeling you get from spending time with a friend and sharing stories about mutual acquaintances.

The other side is the stomach-churning anger, shame and frustration you feel when you realize someone is spreading bad news about you. We want to be on the right side of gossip, but sometimes it illuminates while other times it just burns (p.41).

Gossip can definitely be malicious if the gossiper is malice and means to harm the absent party. For example, when Sylvia is bitter because her husband is poor she finds peace and satisfaction by gossiping about Sara to Lamia that Sara's husband is only rich because of money laundering.

"What is told in the ear of a man is often heard one hundred miles away"

- *Chinese proverb* (Chapman, 2009, p.1)

In that case Sylvia's gossip could make a man lose his credibility in society especially if Lamia decides to spread the news. "Although gossip can strengthen the bonds within a community, sometimes it becomes a covert contest between winners and losers" (Nicholson, 2001, p. 44). This is defined as a negative gossip because the third party is not present to defend oneself and such kind of gossip may just bounce back to the gossiper. If Sara knows that Sylvia is badmouthing her husband she will surely strike back. Some women don't strike back; they just give the gossiper the silent treatment and never talk to her again without telling her why. How many times have we heard the statement "I don't know why she stopped talking to me, we were great friends". "Uhhh maybe because you've been talking about her behind her back, as in gossiping???" In order to eliminate such and other repercussions you have to have certain skills and study the content of the gossip before letting it out.

“To be good at malicious gossip requires a high degree of subtlety and skill. The trick is to appear to be sympathetic to the victim while holding him below the waterline with implicit denigration” (Nicholson, 2001, p. 44). In our case for example, while Sylvia is gossiping about Sara’s husband she should mention, “they say” that he is into money laundering. Which means that she is just “repeating” what she heard and not accusing him of anything. To gossip about a certain group is one thing but to maliciously target one particular girl in science class for example, can ruin her whole life at school and in society. (White, 2008).

Turner et al. (2003) talk about gossip as “Relational Ruin” (p. 130). They also use the same example that I used above from Nicholson (2001) and how one should have certain skills to gossip so it doesn’t backfire. Weston (1996) states the following:

According to McCorskey (1996) credible communicators are persons who are not only experts on the topic, but also send this knowledge in a truthful and honest manner. Hence, gossipers might be viewed as noncredible communicators. Additionally, although gossip can function both to compliment and derogate another, “gossip” is often perceived as a dangerous weapon, one that can ruin reputations, poison relationships and halt careers. A gossip can be referred to eruditely as a quindnunc or colloquially-and disdainfully-as a yenta (p. 46).

In his book *The No-Gossip Zone* (2009), Chapman argues about the several positive definitions of gossip found in the literature and hence gives us the real definition of gossip 'in his opinion' is “an exchange of negative information between two or more people about someone who isn’t present. So unless what you are saying is complimentary, it is best to be avoided. Pretty simple-if it is negative, it is gossip” (p. 6). I beg to differ, Mr. Chapman. The No-Gossip Zone? Where is that, outer

space? I'm sorry to say that but there is no such thing because this is how God created us and this is how the universe functions. "What God has created can never be destroyed by man"; I don't remember where I read this proverb but we all know it is true. Gossip is a form of language and it is part of human nature; you cannot just create a No-Gossip zone, it's not something you smoke.

Moreover, clearly Mr. Chapman has never gossiped, because if he had he would know that gossip includes but is not limited to the exchange of negative information. It could be positive between two friends like "Did you see Sally's new hair cut? It really suits her". And it could be negative but not harmful yet useful to strangers who became friends:

Jen: Hi, my name is Jen I'm Sam's mother.

Elaine: Hi, I'm Elaine Dan's mother.

Jen: Did you meet the new teacher? I feel she's strict and mean, I hope I'm mistaken.

Elaine: Yeah, I got that vibe too. I was wondering if anyone felt the same. LOL.

Jen: Don't worry you're not alone. We'll have to wait and see. Here's my number by the way maybe we can hook up someday and take the kids to the park.

Elaine: Yes sure it'll be great.

What's so negative about that? Later on, they will gossip even more about this teacher and maybe about other mothers. Who cares? Jen made a friend today and found a friend for her son to play with. I think it's a good thing even if she had to give out her opinion about her son's teacher. Also, she didn't gossip just because she didn't like the woman but because she was worried for her son's wellbeing. Who wants a strict and mean teacher?

Everyone gossips, even the people who say they don't, they gossip. By gossip I mean the mere fact of talking about a person who is absent; be it positive or

negative. Many words have negative connotations to it in society and the word Gossip is one of them. This chapter reviewed the literature. The next chapter will introduce the methodology used to investigate the topic.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Overview

This study is based on a mixed method approach, which includes qualitative and quantitative method of research (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Using both methods is important to cover all aspects of gossip and its effect on women's relationships "the goal of mixed methods research is not to replace either of these approaches but rather to draw from the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of both in single research studies and across studies" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.14-15). Moreover, according to Hoepfl (1997), "qualitative analysis results in different type of knowledge than quantitative inquiry" (p.48). Quantitative results reveal how women view gossip and give us the percentage of women who gossip and others who don't. Qualitative data on the other hand shows us women how and what women gossip about. Both data are essential to use to check if gossip is harmful or harmless and how it affects women's relationships.

The three research instruments I used to conduct this study are a questionnaire, Discourse Completion Tests, and observation. The quantitative method sought to find out the women's attitude towards gossip: are they with or against it, do they like to gossip and how often do they do it. I observed Lebanese women in their social contexts and found out how much they gossiped in every outing and what they gossiped mostly about. In the Discourse Completion Tests (DCT) women were asked about their reactions in specific gossip situations. The results have shown how women viewed gossip and how they would react to certain gossip sessions or episodes.

In the DCT, 10 situations were asked to 10 different women of the same category and results showed how women think and what really leads them to gossip about something or someone. Lastly, in the observations, groups of women were observed socializing in their natural habitat. There were ten observations conducted on 36 women showing us that gossip is what they mostly did in all their outings.

3.2 Questionnaires

A sample of 108 questionnaires for women in Lebanon within the ages of 30 and 45 was obtained. These women came from a high socio-economical background and most of them are mothers of children in three of the most prestigious schools in Beirut. The questionnaire contained 20 statements. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000), "the questionnaire is a widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey information, providing structured, often numerical data, being able to be administered without the presence of the researcher, often being comparatively straightforward to analyze" (p. 245). The questionnaires were based on Likert Scale, which was named after Rensis Likert (Cohen et al., 2000; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). This scale is referred to as the attitude scale because it reveals the attitudes of participants toward a certain topic; it consists of series of statements whereby participants should mark their answers as positive (strongly Agree) through negative (strongly Disagree) (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

The limitations of the Likert Scale (for me it's a limitation for any survey) are that participants may not tell the truth. Many, if not all women deny that they gossip. Also, this type of questionnaire is objective and participants can't add any comments to it to elaborate their response or even to specify some examples in order to be fully judged or seen as extremists (Cohen et al., 2000).

3.2.1 Procedure

Based on a pilot study I conducted in a graduate class in a higher education institute in Lebanon whereby students gave their opinions about the statements mentioned in the questionnaire, I was able to determine and amend these statements to validate my research. The statements were based on how much women gossip and what is their attitude towards gossip. The questionnaire (Appendix I) consisted of 20 statements, of which women checked in the box based on their attitude toward the statement [strongly agree; agree; disagree; strongly disagree]. I chose only four attitudes; I omitted the “Somehow agree” and “Somehow disagree” because I wanted clear and definite opinions about gossip. I didn't want people to have the option to step into the grey area, so they don't reveal themselves as gossipers.

After I constructed my questionnaire on computer software ‘Kiwiksurvey’ I emailed the link to 108 participants. I mass mailed the link to all contacts that I have and that I know fit the category of my research. They just had to open the link, fill in the questionnaire and press ‘Next’. Samples were then automatically calculated and analyzed by calculating the number of participants who chose a certain attitude toward a statement. “Advantages of questionnaires are that they can be mailed or given to large number of people at the same time” (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 123).

3.3 Observation

This third instrument is my favorite. I've been observing women for years now, to the extent that I have garnered a lot of knowledge about their psychology and the reason behind why each woman gossips. Observation is a qualitative instrument that is very effective because it reveals people's behavior while they are acting in their natural context. “Phenomenological inquiry or qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context specific settings” (Hoepfl,

1997, P.47). There are different types of observations like participant observations, non-participant behavior, complete observation and naturalist observation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Cohen et al., 2000).

I chose the naturalist observation, which “observes individuals in their natural settings. The researcher makes no effort whatsoever to manipulate variables or to control the activities of individuals, but simply observes and records what happens as things naturally occur” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p.442). Women didn't know that I was observing them, as I wanted to witness how they naturally behaved and interacted. When I began observing women, I had an interest in knowing what they are really like on the inside: what ticks them off, how they function in society, on what basis does each one choose her friends, her partner, the school for her children, the gym she is a member of, the clothes she wears, her values and morals, the supermarket she goes to, the language she uses when she talks to people and so on and so forth. This helped me a lot and gave me the talent and the blessing to figure out people just by speaking to them once.

However, this thesis concentrates on gossip and its effects on women's relationships. I observed Lebanese women from the ages of 25-40 on social outings with their female friends. I observed where they go and gossip (cafes, restaurants, houses, etc.), what they gossiped about the most, whether their gossip was harmful or harmless, what initiated gossip in an outing, if there is usually one person who started it all (the queen gossip) or they are all equally responsible, how much time gossip covers from the whole conversation? Is it 50% or 90%? I already know these women and I know most of their characters. Is character associated with the gossip at hand? For example, do mean, arrogant, bitter woman engage in harmful gossip and are kindhearted, sweet women engaged in only harmless gossip or even not at all? Or do

women of all kind gossip about everything and anything be it harmful or harmless? I will dig deeper into that. Based on my previous observations, I can tell that character and life experiences, are definitely linked to the kind and type of gossip.

3.4 Discourse Completion Task (DCT)

According to Pavaresh and Tavakoli (2009):

Initially used by Blum Kulka (1982), a DCT is a data gathering device specifically designed in order to elicit responses to problematic, contextually-specific prompts” ... There are different types of DCTs. I chose the “Discourse Role-Play Task (DRPT), which provides a description of a situation and asks participants to play a particular role with another person in that situation (p. 366).

Discourse Completion Test (DCT) is also a kind of role-play. According to Cohen, et al., (2000), “the individual may be asked simply to imagine a situation or actually to perform it” (p. 370).

I presented 10 situations to 10 women for each situation (Appendix III). Questions were based on events that promote gossip and women were asked to answer how they would react in a situation. Some questions would include information about someone's personal life (a divorce, a marriage, cheating, etc.). The good thing about DCT is that it is fun for the women doing it because it gives them the freedom to think and answer freely and honestly as they are not really associated with that event, it is just role-playing. Moreover, the answers they give out could give us a clear view about how women think and what really leads them to gossip about something or someone.

However, the disadvantages of these tests are their artificiality. Women may just

consider their answers as only role-playing and not reveal what they would really do in real life situations (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

3.5 Data Analysis

When counting the responses, one should be very meticulous and very careful in order to come up with valid and accurate numbers. The figures collected should be "scored accurately and consistently. If they are not, conclusions a researcher draws from the data may be erroneous or misleading" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 142). The answers of the questionnaire I conducted were automatically calculated by computer software. Each statement had the number and the percentage of participants that chose it. For example, for the statement "I like to gossip" the answers were: 42/41.8% (Agree) and 40/39.22% disagree. For the 20 statements I divided every four statements and analyzed them accordingly. The Likert scaling method used in the questionnaire gave me insights about women's feelings, perceptions and opinions towards gossip. Such wide and varied insights cannot be revealed in a regular dichotomous questionnaire (Cohen, et al., 2000).

After I collected all DCTs, I evaluated all the responses of women and found out how each would act in a given situation giving me answers of how gossip affects female friendships. After analyzing all the answers, I divided actions and reactions alike and categorized women and types of gossip accordingly. DCTs are a kind of role play, hence giving the participants room for imagination and amusement, which in my opinion makes the responses valid. It also helps me track actual facial expressions and body language that can help me figure out if their responses are true or if they are just replying to get it over with.

Through my observations I noted the places that are most gossiped in, the types of gossip that are mostly discussed, and the several subjects and elements of

gossip. I timed the conversations and noted how much time gossip consumes out of the whole conversation (which was almost all the conversation). I then divided the information accordingly and came out with answers as to how much gossip controls our outings, what tone of voice we use when we gossip, how women feel after they gossip and how often others get harmed in the process. I was a complete observer, not participating in the observation so participants behave normally. This kind of observation gives us the truest picture what is really happening as interlocutors proceed normally through their conversation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

The data was collected using three different instruments to insure validity and reliability. To avoid any discrepancies in the results, I used triangulation, which is the use of two or more instruments, so we can retrieve similar results that correspond to each other, or help validate statements introduced by the hypothesis (Olsen, 2004). “Triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity, particular in qualitative research” (Cohen et al., 2000, p.112). The results from all three methods (Questionnaire, Observation and DCT) were correlated to present a link to the hypothesis, thus insuring validity of the study.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

Signed consent forms from the participants were not needed, as I didn't mention any of their names nor the names of the institutions they belonged to. During my observations, I haven't informed them that I was observing them for the purpose of my research but that didn't affect their privacy because I didn't specify any names throughout my study. I was obliged to do so in order to validate my study and extract reliable results. I had to witness women in their natural habitat in order to get clear answers for my research questions and the only way to do so was to hide the fact that I was conducting a study. As for the questionnaires and DCTs, participants were

informed that they were taking part in a research study about gossip and they were promised to remain anonymous.

This chapter introduced the methodology used to conduct the research. The next chapter will report the findings.

Chapter Four

Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of each of the method used in this study: a questionnaire, DCT and observations. I will be stating and analyzing these findings to come up with a broad and clear picture of how women in Lebanon view gossip.

4.1 - Student Questionnaire Results

The first method I used for my research was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to women ages 30-40 from middle to upper-middle classes. The questions mainly focused on their beliefs towards gossip and how they think it affects women friendships and relationships in general. Are they with or against? Is gossip, in general, harmful or harmless? I used a likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree (see Appendix I). The results of the questionnaire are as follows:

Question	Agree	Strongly Disagree
Friends gossip about each other	62	19
Women gossip for social bonding	62	30
Gossip can strengthen the bond among women	56	17
Women gossip for power	53	18

The above questions have resulted in approximately 80% approval out of 103 participants. I initially emailed the questionnaire to 108 participants, but not all of them answered all statements written. Some statements came out with 100 responses, others were 104 or 103. Everyone filled in the questionnaire but none of them filled it all. 81 participants agreed that friends do gossip about each other, 93 gossip for social bonding, and 85 agree that gossip give women power. These results show us that gossip has a positive impact on women and that most of them agree that gossip is harmless.

Question	Agree	Strongly Disagree
Some women gossip to fit in a certain circle or group	67	29
Women gossip for fun	58	28
There are some benefits to gossip	48	6
Women gossip mostly about other women	42	9

In these questions the results turned positive in favor of the different reasons as to why women gossip. There are several reasons but the goal is the same. Whether it is for fun, power or fitting in, women use gossip as a tool for several social objectives.

Questions	Agree	Strongly Agree
Gossip is not always harmful	65	7
I gossip	76	9
Gossip adds spice and fun to an outing	66	9
Strangers can become friends by gossiping about a person they know common	70	7

In these questions, 80% of women agreed on the positive elements of gossip: that it adds spice to an outing, which means that without it, the outing would be boring. And how gossip could turn strangers into friends. 85 women confessed that they do gossip although most of them prefer not to reveal this to others.

Questions	Agree	Strongly Agree
People like to listen to gossip	83	0- --
People find gossipers fun and interesting	44	12--
Most of women gossip	66	27
arGossipers are popul	48	18

Through these questions we see that more than 80% of women agreed on the fact that most, if not all, women like to gossip, listen to gossip and even like people who gossip. Gossipers are popular because people like to listen to them and most of the time imitate them.

Questions	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I never gossip	40	12- --
I like to gossip	56	14--
Women gossip in coffee shops and restaurants only	68	31
Gossip ruins relations, always	59	10

These are the only four questions out of twenty whereby most women disagreed upon, but these replies were also in favor of gossip. The first two were a bit puzzling. 52 women replied that they NEVER gossip while 70 women replied that they don't LIKE to gossip. This shows us that some women STILL gossip even if they don't like it. In a prior question, 85 women replied that they DO gossip. This shows us that what they 'feel' about gossip or what they 'think', has nothing to do with that they actually do because the results of the questionnaire show that more than 80% of women gossip, whether they like it or not. Some maybe have claimed that they never do but they actually do! Women also revealed the fact that they don't only gossip in some places but in many other places too. This means that women don't limit themselves to specific places only; they gossip everywhere.

4.2 - Observation

The second instrument I used was observation (Appendix II). I observed over 50 women in over 20 gatherings and chose 10 to report about. The observations were very interesting to watch and even more interesting to analyze. After the 10th observation, women started to look and sound alike. There are some words that were repeated on every occasion. Words like "maa'oul" "Is it possible", "mish ma'boul"

“it is not possible”, “please ma t’ouleh lahadan” “Please don’t tell anyone”; “baynetna” “between us”, “ana ma bhib ihkeh bas enno” “I don’t like to gossip but”, “ma mbayyan alaya” “it does not show”, “nouveau riche” “new rich people”, “Chanel el jdeed” “the new Chanel”, “ti’leed” “fake”, and several other expressions were repeated at almost every gathering. It’s funny how all women share the same lexical terms to express their opinion about others. The common thing was that most, if not all, gatherings began with innocent encounters and friendly expressions. For the first 15 to 30 minutes there would be no gossiping; they just exchange general information about daily lives, kids, gym, diets, etc. The term “shou akhbarik” which means, “what’s your news”, was always the opening statement to any conversation. The ironical part was that the woman asked about her news would recite the news of everyone but her own; I found it very funny. For the first 30 minutes, the women seemed relaxed with their backs on the chair and their hands rested somewhere between their laps and the arm chair; exchanging information about themselves and comparing everything! “La ana bfaddil el Genesis la’an el courat ahla” or “Ana wledeh ma bihibbo el bemyeh” (Apparently all children hate Okra). Bit by bit, 30 min and a half a cup of coffee later, the conversation takes a turn and gossip just lurks in from nowhere. Suddenly, they arch their backs, bulge their eyes and use their hands to add to their excitement and gestures.

At the end of all the gatherings and after all the gossiping, women leave confident, happy and satisfied. Women who seem distant at first become best friends by the end of the conversation, for they find peace and serenity gossiping about the same person whom they both hate. Best friends come even closer and get a sense of belonging when they agree upon many points concerning their “other” friend. There is always a specific person to gossip about; they seem more interested and more excited

when they gossip about a particular person than when they gossip about a group or an institution. Some subjects get more effort and energy than others. For example, subjects of betrayal or money laundering get them jumping in their seats. “Yiiii ma 3rifteh enno Samar Bahloul* 3am tidhar 3a jawza” or “hayda kill misriyeto tibyeed 3imleh”. These kinds of statements set the whole encounter on FIRE! They also give the interlocutors a peace of mind that others are not living happily as they thought they were. I was shocked about the fact that many women live on the misery of others. Some women get a sense of satisfaction when they find out that a particular person is miserable or sick. You could see the twinkle in their eyes when they hear statements like “Haram jawza 3am yidhar 3laya” or “mareeda kteer”. They surely reply with “Haram Allah yse3ida” but what she really means is “Thank God someone has more problems than I do” or “I’m so happy now that I know that she isn’t”.

I don't know what the link is, I'll try to look for it in the literature but I'm positive that there is a very special link between gossip and a cup of coffee. Women really associate these two together. I'm not saying they don't gossip when there's food but through my observations I found out that they gossip more over a cup of coffee. Is it because they have more space in their mouth? I don't think so; I really think that the scene of a small table and cup of coffee always gets the party starting!

4.3 – Discourse Completion Test

The third instrument I used is the Discourse Completion Test (DCT). Women were asked to put themselves in a certain situation and figure out what they would do or how would they react in such situation. In the questions where they were asked if they were to gossip in certain situations to fulfill a certain need or to reach a target, eight out of ten on average replied that they would. I realized that women who don't usually gossip or who don't like to gossip (which are very few), in some

circumstances they find themselves forced to gossip in order to win or just to get by. If you ask them the question directly they say no immediately but once you ask them to imagine themselves in the midst of it all, they come clean and confess that they do. Other questions required women to explain how they would react to gossip they hear, be it about them or others. I asked the same questions informally and the answers were very defensive like in “I would never talk to my friend if she gossips about me” or “if someone gossips about you then they’re not your friend”. However, when I told people that I was doing a research to find out how gossip affects women in our society, their answers were much more diplomatic. “I will confront her and ask her if she really gossiped about me”, “It depends on the situation”. This shows us that gossip doesn't ruin relationships like everyone assumes because when it really happens, people dig deeper into one another and can become even closer. I also found out that people like gossipers, whether they like to gossip or not. They like to be part of their group, part of their conversation because they have fun listening to them even if they don't want to take part in the chat.

This chapter stated the results of the study and gave us an overview on how women viewed gossip. In the next chapter we will discuss these results and explore the answers of the research questions.

Chapter Five

Discussion

This chapter discusses the results and links them to the literature review.

5.1 – Discussion

This study explored the gossip among all female groups in Lebanon. The research questions were the following:

- Is gossip harmful or harmless?
- Why do women gossip?
- What is the effect of gossip on female friendships in Lebanon?
- What are the different types of gossip?
- Do all women gossip?

One of these research questions is to find out whether gossip is harmful or harmless in women's relationships. The results of the questionnaire show us that more than 50% of women find that gossip isn't harmful and that there are benefits to gossip. This conquers with the finding of Patel and Turner (2008) who stated that one of the benefits of gossip is bonding and strengthening group ties. Most of the questions were in favor of gossip. The questionnaire mostly revealed why women gossip and it showed us that the reasons were not only for negative reasons as people claim. In my research, participants agreed that women gossip for social reasons: bonding, fun, to fit in and for power. In their research, Farley et al. (2010) stated similar findings: "For women, gossip can become an agency of control, allowing them to reaffirm their own power within the organization" (p.365). Moreover, results have revealed that gossipers are popular and that people like to be around them to get connected as they are. This hypothesis also conforms to the literature. "Observers may fail to view

gossipers as needing inclusion or affection because they are already socially connected” (Farely et al., 2010, p.366).

Throughout my observations I witnessed how the dynamics of women groups functioned and how gossip took part in every encounter. Through these observations I wanted to prove that women always end up gossiping even if they don't have the intention to. Close friends, acquaintances and family members all gossip. They all gather around and exchange pieces of information that get them even closer to one another. I wonder why women become closer when they gossip and how they decide to whom they gossip. After I asked some women, they told me that they choose women they trust and women they want to be aligned with. Sharing a gossip about someone with a particular person means that you want to befriend this person and you confide in her. This hypothesis conforms to the literature whereby Nicholson (2001) states: “People supply information to whom they are attracted and with whom they wish to align themselves. When I give you a tidbit of gossip-“remember, it's a secret”- I am also telling you that you are valuable enough to be a recipient-and that you are valuable enough to be a recipient- and that you should think well of me for doing so” (p.44). This is all part of “fitting-in” and strengthening the bond discussed earlier in the questionnaire. Observations help a lot, not only because you hear what they are saying but also you see how they are reacting. Body gestures related to gossip are very interesting. Before gossiping women sit relaxed on the chair sipping their coffee; when they begin gossiping everything changes. Suddenly their posture changes, their eyes twinkle, they start smiling and they receive a great adrenaline rush. You can see that just by looking at any two women or any group of women gossiping. This shows us one of the virtues of gossip and how it is not only harmless but effective too. It's a stress buster and helps interlocutors feel better and happier (Fox, 2010).

Moreover, Larocca (2008) discusses the several positive sides of gossip. She mentions that “Eric K. Foster, a social psychologist in Philadelphia and a study director has completed a comprehensive review of the existing research on gossip. He found out that exchanging gossip can cement the social network” (p.2). She also mentions that Dunbar stated: “Gossip is a tool for cohesion” (p.2). This is true and you can only realize it when you witness different clans in one society gathering in small groups and forming allies through gossiping. When you observe an number of women gossiping, you understand that gossip isn’t something negative or dangerous as some people say. It is just a group of people giving their opinions about someone or something. “Gossip is not an opinion and not a story, but a special mixture of special stories and special opinions (about the stories)” (Szekfu & Szvetelszky, 2005, p.309).

Women were asked if they would join in a gossiping session and 70% answered that they would for fun. Why they jump in doesn't matter but what matters is that they do; because everyone likes to gossip even if they think it's wrong. Some people don't admit it because they are afraid they'd be judged. “To gossip is to be human-studies prove it. Almost everybody has engaged in some form of gossip” (White, 2008, p.2). This conforms the hypothesis that most women gossip if not all. The few women who claimed that they don't gossip consider themselves the pure elements of society. However, none of them said that they would refrain from any gossip session but they just don't pitch-in in the conversation.

Therefore, they like gossiping sessions and they do take part of it; which boils down to the fact that they like gossip just as much as the people who do it. Capps (2012) calls such people the “Gossipy Ears”. Capps divides gossipers in two groups the “Gossipy tongue, who tells malicious stories about other persons, and the other

with the gossipy ears, who is only too eager to listen to these tales” (p.101). This is very interesting as it gives the few people who are in denial that they are far from “Gossiptown”. Cuonzo (2008) also states: “the intent to engage in a pleasurable activity is an inherent feature of gossip” (p.131). This explains why some women choose to join a group of gossipers even though they don't like to gossip.

Data analyses show that women become better friends and closer friends when they complete a gossiping session together. Meinarno and Suwartono (2011) conducted research about the effect of gossip and its functions in adolescents. Results have shown the positive effects that gossip has on an entire society. It also showed the positive effects it has on women in particular and friendship in general. “The existence of gossip is also a part of keeping harmony in social life, which keeps the interpersonal relationship. Women also need closeness to their friends that can give her entertainment. Gossip gives them all the needs” (p.306).

Similarly, Feinberg et al. (2012), conducted a study about “whether prosocial gossip can effectively solve social dilemmas by deterring selfishness and promoting cooperation” (p. 1024). This study provided evidence that “prosocial gossip can promote cooperation and deter antisocial behavior in a social dilemma situation” (p.1025).

The literature talks a lot about the virtues of gossip and the reasons as to why we gossip. All the points stated answer the research questions which state that gossip is harmless, that it has many virtues contrary to what people say and the reasons behind it are not malicious nor just “empty-minded” women. One of the limitations however is that there might be a probability that some women lied in the questionnaire or/and the DCT. We can't expect the results to be 100% accurate but

I'm positive that the general picture about gossip is formed. Observations, on the other hand, helped a lot and caught women in their original habitats.

In this chapter I discussed the results of my findings and I answered the research questions. It has been shown that gossip is more harmless than harmful, that it helps relationships and brings women together rather than breaking them apart. As everything else in this world, gossip has its pros and cons. It is a double-edged sword and it will hurt you if you don't know how to use it. We can't just say that it is bad and pretend that it should not exist because results show that it exists in every outing and it is a major element in bringing women closer. In the next final chapter, I will be discussing the limitations of this study and its recommendations.

Chapter Six

Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

Gossip is a word that is understated because of what it represents. The word gossip is usually related to a bunch of bored, uneducated, malicious, bitter, and stupid women, who gather around in their kitchen to bad mouth others. When in fact, gossip is social glue that holds us all together; a tool not for causing destruction to one another but to care for one another enough to discuss our lives and how we can enhance it. Think of gossip logically, and if you don't care about a person and if this person has no effect on your life, you won't spend the time or energy to gossip about him/her (be it harmful or harmless gossip).

Gossiping about someone means that you care, that you are aligning yourself with him/her, which is the basis of our social life. By reading this study, people will now have an idea of how to use gossip efficiently and how it could affect us positively rather than negatively. People who read this thesis will always be aware of what they say when they gossip and acknowledge the fact that we all gossip and it is not a bad thing to do if we do it right and with the right people. It's worth mentioning that interlocutors should beware of what they say about whom and make sure they're up to it and if they're apt to bear the consequences. Farley et al.(2010) state the following:

Stereotypical female social roles portray women as warm nurturing, and relationship oriented ... Gossiping (specifically negative gossip), on the other hand, requires a strong personality and the willingness to take several risks: the possibility of ruining relationships, hurting someone's feelings, or being seen as vindictive. Consequently, female gossipers sharing negative gossip with others may suffer from a loss of likeability (p. 366).

Personally, when I gossip about someone, be it negatively or positively, I gossip about people I don't care about so if word of mouth happens, it won't cost me my friendship.

In conclusion, this study has freed the word 'gossip' from the negative connotation that people have linked it to. I hope that by now people would have changed their perception about gossip and understood how positively it could affect our relationships, if used wisely.

6.2 Recommendations

There aren't enough studies on women's gossip; there are studies about people's gossip in general. I think that more studies should be conducted on specific groups of women: specific ages and backgrounds. All women gossip and the literature has provided us with positive insights about gossip and its effects on friendships and relationships but it was hard to find particular studies about certain societies in general and certain groups of middle aged women in particular. Exploring the different types of gossip in different societies and backgrounds would help us better understand group dynamics and the different effects of gossip on these various societies.

6.3 Limitations

The results of this study cannot be generalized. It is an attempt to explore gossip in all female groups in Lebanon. The number of participants is limited and though triangulations was used, there is always doubt whether the females were filling in the questionnaire and answering the DCT honestly.

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Appendix One

Dear participants,

The following Questionnaire is designed to help me in my MA thesis. It's about how you view Gossip.

Normally, the word "Gossip" has a negative connotation to it but it's actually defined as: "talking about a third party in their absence; be it negatively or positively". The answers vary from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Please tick the box that reveals your honest and objective opinion.

All the information will remain anonymous and confidential. If you wish to know the results, I will be more than happy to share them with you after the work is completed.

Thank you for your cooperation

Kinda Adra Mugharbel

Questionnaire: Women's gossip in social outings.

1. I like to gossip	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2. I never gossip				
3. Friends gossip about each other				
4. Women gossip for social bonding				
5. Gossip can strengthen the bond among women				
6. Women gossip for power (to get the upper hand in a group)				
7. Women gossip for fun				
8. Women gossip in coffee shops and restaurants only				
9. Some women gossip to "fit in" a certain circle or group				
10. There are some benefits to gossip				
11. Women gossip mostly about other women				
12. Gossip is not always harmful				
13. Gossip ruins relations Always				
13. Gossip adds spice and fun to an outing				
14. Strangers can become friends by gossiping about a common person they know				
15. I gossip (Be it a bit or a lot)				
16. People like to listen to gossip (Even if they don't gossip)				
17. People find gossipers fun and interesting				
18. Most of women gossip				
19. Gossipers are popular				

Appendix Two

Observations

Time: 11:15 am

Place: Paul Café

Participants: 4 women (homogenous)

- Gossiping on other women and their lunches
- Brands – Clothes bags shoes
- Security issues
- Children – annoying children
- Men
- There was a focus on one particular woman.

Time: 6:15 pm

Place: House

Participants: Mother with 2 daughters

- Family issues
- Exchange recipes
- Daughters gossip about their In-laws
- Men

Time: 10:00 am

Place: House

Participants: 2 close friends

- Gossiping about different uncommon friends: who got married and who got divorced
- Women who cheat on their husbands
- Women who are good mothers and others who are bad

Time: 12:00 noon

Place: Starbucks

Participants: 5 women (homogenous)

- Gossip about women who moved to new houses. How nice the house is, or how ugly. How much it cost and who decorated it.
- Diamonds that other women wore at a wedding. How big the wedding was and how rich the groom apparently is.
- Bad teachers, good teachers who teach their kids.

Time: 3:00 pm

Place: Cafe

Participants: 2 women (homogenous)

- Gossiping about a certain woman who gained weight. Figuring out why and judging why isn't she dieting.
- Gossiping about a woman whom they think is stupid and only cares about money and outer appearances.
- Another woman who is trying hard to fit in but isn't succeeding.

Time: 3:15 pm

Place: Casper Café

Participants: 6 women (homogenous)

- Gossiping about women in other schools.
- Focus on one woman in particular.
- School's tuition
- Dieting
- New trends in fashion
- Summer houses

Time: 11:00 am

Place: ABC

Participants: 3 women

- Gossiping about a common friend and why people don't generally like her.
- Gossiping about a group of women sitting on a table next to them.
- Gossiping about women they met at the movies the night before.
- Gossiping about a pregnant lady and the weight she's rapidly gaining.
- Talked a bit about the high school tuitions.

Time: 4:00 pm

Place: Café Hamra

Participants: 4 women

- Talking about problems at work and gossiping about some colleagues.
- Discussing an incident that happened with their children at school and gossiping about the other parties.
- Exchanging recipes and discussing what will they cook the next day.
- Gossiping about how bad the food is when they eat at their mother-in-law.
- Gossiping about men and how bad their mothers raised them.

Time: 10:00 am

Place: ABC

Participants: 3 women

- Talking about a friend who cut her hair and apparently looks ridiculous. The discussion expanded to gossip about all the haircuts and hair colors of most of the women they know.
- Talking about good schools in Beirut and which is better than which.
- Discussing jewelry and different jewelers in town. How one of the mothers always wears her 7-carat diamond to kids birthdays.

Appendix Three

Discourse Completion Test

- 1- If you heard that your best friend's husband is cheating on her would you tell her?
 - Yes of course, she has the right to know.
 - Yes, I can't hide such info.
 - Yes she should know and leave him.
 - No, what you don't know can't hurt you.
 - Yes this is a kind of gossip that I can't keep.
 - Yes, this is not called gossip it's just stating facts.
 - Yes she has the right to know.
 - If I love her then yes I'd surely tell her.
 - Every gossip I hear about a friend I care for I'd directly tell her.
 - Yes because if the same happened to me, I would want to know.

- 2- If you knew that your best friend is gossiping about you what would you do?
 - I would confront her and find out what she really said.
 - I will stop talking to her until she figures out what she did and comes and tells me herself.
 - If she really means to me, I will confront her.
 - Friends don't gossip about each other so if one did then she's not my friend.
 - I will confront her to see what she exactly said. I will then act accordingly.
 - It depends on what she said. If it's serious I'll stop talking to her; if not then I'll just let it go.
 - I will confront her but I'll then be a bit distant.
 - I'll confront her, maybe fight but then time will heal everything.
 - Friendships should stand the test of time. Nothing should affect friendships, not even gossip. So I'll just ignore the situation like nothing happened.
 - I'll confront her and patch things up.

- 3- If you were socializing with a group of women gossiping about people you know, would you engage with the gossip?
 - Yes why not?
 - If it's not harmful gossip then yes.
 - No I'll just mind my own business.
 - I'll be happy to listen but no I won't engage.

- Yes especially if I know what they're gossiping about.
 - I don't like to gossip or even talk much but I don't mind listening.
 - Yes especially if I'm bored.

 - Yes I would engage and add some information to it too!
- 4- If you were given a choice to join one of two groups to lunch, whom would you choose: gossipers or non-gossipers? Why?
- I choose the people I like.
 - Gossipers are more fun. I'd choose them.
 - Gossipers, I believe they'd be more fun.
 - I'd choose the gossipers; I'll have fun and find out new information.
 - Gossipers are more fun. I'd stick to them.
 - It's interesting to sit with people who know things that you don't.
 - I'll choose the gossipers and gossip with them.
 - I'd join the people I like more. I don't care if they gossip or not.
 - Who doesn't like a good laugh? Of course I'd join the gossipers.
 - I don't like to gossip normally but I don't mind being entertained by other people who do.
- 5- If you meet a woman who gossips about others would you want to befriend her or you'd rather stay away?
- It depends on how nice she is or if we click.
 - Women who gossip are funny in general, so I don't mind befriending them.
 - I'll be friends with her if I like other aspects in her character.
 - Gossip has nothing to do with whether I befriend a person or not. It depends on other things like chemistry and how much we get along.
 - If she's nice why not?
 - If I like her in general yes I would but I'll be cautious of what I say in front of her.
 - If I like her, yes. If I don't then no.
 - Why should I stay away? Its not like she has the plague if she gossips! We all gossip.
 - Well whoever tells you that she doesn't gossip, she's lying. I'll befriend her and we'll gossip together.
 - It depends on how she is in general.
- 6- If you want to join a certain group would you gossip about someone they really hate just to fit in?
- If I need something from them yes I would.
 - No I wont. If they don't like me for who I am then I wont do anything to make them.
 - We all need to fit in. So if I have to gossip to do it then I will.
 - Although it wasn't pleasant but once yes I had to do it so my son would get invited to their children's parties.

- The society we live in forces you to do things just to fit in even you don't like to do it.
- It depends on how badly I want to be in this group. If I'm desperate for some reason or another then yes I would.
- No I won't gossip just to fit in anywhere. I only gossip for fun.
- I'd gossip for the fun of it, not to fit in.
- I don't like group gossipers.
- I'd gossip to join the fun.

7- You're sitting with a group of people and no one is talking; you got bored. Would you invent a gossip just to entertain them?

- I don't know how to invent gossip.
- I have never done it but now you gave me an idea.
- No I'll just think about an incident that really happened. Maybe I'll add a bit to it to make it more interesting.
- No I won't lie just to make other people happy.
- No I won't invent a gossip but I'll think about a gossip that I was told once.
- I won't invent a gossip but I'll gossip about people around me.
- One can gossip about anyone anytime so I'd think of one and say it.
- I can't imagine inventing anything now but I'm sure I'd come up with something if I'm faced with it.
- I don't like to gossip at all, let alone inventing one.

8- Would you use gossip to break uncomfortable silences or to break the ice?

- I would maybe crack a joke.
- Yes I have done several times. It really helps.
- I may gossip about someone passing by or talk about the weather.
- Yes it's the easiest thing when you're trapped.
- I usually talk about a new movie or a new fashion trend.
- I've never tried it but it's a good idea.
- I would gossip on someone we both know; it'll surely break the ice.
- If there's nothing else to talk about, yes maybe.
- Talking about a third party always helps in opening up a conversation.
- Yes I would gossip about my neighbor and how rude she is.

9- If you want to befriend your boss, would you gossip about your colleagues to get closer to her/him? Tell her what everyone says about her/him behind her/his back?

- It depends on how close I am with my colleagues.
- It depends if I'm friends with my boss.
- No I would never do such a thing.
- If I'm friends with my boss then yes. But I wouldn't say anything really serious.
- I wouldn't tell her/him what they're saying but maybe just give her/him hints about who likes her/him and who doesn't.
- If I'm good friends with my boss then yes I would.
- Depends whom I'm friends with.

- If my boss gave me the job to begin with then yes.
- No, never.
- That's a hard question, depends on the situation. I don't really know!

10- Would you gossip with your mother about your sister?

- Yes she's my mother I tell her anything.
- When it's family it's ok to gossip. We won't harm each other.
- I wouldn't call it gossiping. Just sharing information.
- Yes. There is no harm in gossiping with your mom.
- Depends on what I want to tell her.
- No I don't gossip about anyone.
- Yes, it's harmless gossip.
- Well I usually gossip about my mother with my sister, hahaha.
- Yes I talk about my siblings with my mother but I wouldn't call it gossiping.
- My mother and I talk about everything and everyone.