negotiation and conflict management research

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Aggression as a Motive for Gossip During Conflict: The Role of Power, Social Value Orientation, and Counterpart's Behavior

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Abstract

Not much is known about the motives behind the use of gossip in conflict situations. We report a laboratory experiment that examined the influence of social value orientation, counterpart's behavior, and power on the motive to use gossip for indirect aggression in a conflict situation. Results showed that when participants had high power, their social value orientation determined whether they were motivated to gossip to indirectly aggress toward their counterpart: Proself participants showed a higher motivation to do so than prosocial participants. In contrast, when participants had low power, the motive to engage in indirect aggression through gossip was influenced by the counterpart's behavior: Participants who encountered a competitive counterpart showed a higher motivation to aggress through gossip than participants who encountered a cooperative counterpart.

A vast number of our daily conversations is spent on the exchange of evaluative information about absent third parties (Foster, 2004). In other words, we gossip, and we gossip a lot (Michelson, Van Iterson, & Waddington, 2010; Wilson, Wilczynski, Wells, & Weiser, 2000). Previous research has shown that gossip can occur in different situations and for different reasons, and the consequences of gossip are in part determined by the motives people have to engage in gossip (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012). Here, we advance that gossip is likely to play an especially important role in conflict situations. Conflict functions as a stressor for the parties involved (Dijkstra, De Dreu, Evers, & Van Dierendonck, 2009; Spector & Jex, 1998) and is, therefore, likely to trigger an array of behaviors that allow people to deal or cope with the stressor. Gossip may be one of these behaviours. In this study, we investigate what motivates people to gossip as a form of indirect aggression (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012) in a conflict situation. This motivation is especially relevant because of its potential effects on conflict escalation. We will demonstrate that this specific motivation to gossip is influenced by the behavior of the conflict counterpart for people with low power and by a person's own social value orientation for people with high power.

Several conflict-related motives have been linked to gossip. First, the emotional strain experienced in a conflict might lead parties to gossip to a third party in order to "let off steam" or vent emotions (Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, Labianca, & Ellwardt, 2012). Second, the opposition encountered in a conflict might motivate parties to gossip to seek coalitions by bonding with third parties (De Backer, Larson, & Cosmides, 2007). Third, experiencing conflict might trigger a search for information about one's counterpart, which may be found through gossiping (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Grosser et al., 2012).

Fourth, gossip might be used to warn others about the counterpart's behavior during the conflict, especially when this behavior is experienced as negative and out of line, in other words, when the behavior contradicts group norms (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011; Feinberg, Willer, Stellar, & Keltner, 2012; Piazza & Bering, 2008; Sommerfeld, Krambeck, Semmann, & Milinski, 2007). Finally, experiencing conflict often elicits anger (Frone, 2000; Warr, 1990) and might, therefore, also bring about indirect aggression by means of gossiping about the counterpart (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Foster, 2004).

The above overview indicates that gossip might have several positive effects in conflict situations. If conflict parties use gossip for emotional venting or bonding with third parties, this might help them cope with conflict, and therefore, it could be conducive to conflict resolution. Likewise, increased information seeking through gossip might help parties to understand their counterpart better, thereby increasing chances for successful conflict resolution. Furthermore, warning others about negative behavior of another person may contribute to the social functioning of the group (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011). Indeed, recent studies on gossip have focused on positive aspects of gossip (see, for example, Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011; Feinberg et al., 2012). In the current study, we instead focus on the negative side of gossip in conflict situations. More specifically, we investigate when gossip occurs for negative reasons in conflict situations. When parties turn to gossip to use it as a means to indirectly aggress toward their counterpart, it is plausible that the conflict will eventually escalate, making constructive conflict resolution less likely. Therefore, it is important to identify what triggers indirect aggression through gossip in conflict situations, and this is what we set out to do in the current study. We will demonstrate that, depending on whether a conflict party has high or low power, either personal goals or environmental factors influence whether he or she will use gossip as a way to indirectly aggress toward the counterpart.

Consequences of Gossip and Motives to Gossip

Gossip has been linked to a number of positive outcomes. Dunbar (2004) argued that gossip serves to bond people together and to maintain social relationships (see also De Backer et al., 2007). Baumeister, Zhang, and Vohs (2004) related gossip to cultural learning, because through gossip, important culture-relevant information can be conveyed. Furthermore, Beersma and Van Kleef (2011) as well as Feinberg et al. (2012) demonstrated that gossip works as an effective deterrent against free-riding behavior. Gossip may also be used as an *emotional valve* allowing gossipers to "blow off steam" (Grosser et al., 2012).

Notwithstanding these positive aspects of gossip, gossip still has a negative connotation in everyday language, and this connotation is mainly due to the fact that it can be motivated by the desire to engage in indirect aggression (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Richardson & Green, 1997). When people use gossip as a means to indirectly aggress, they gossip for their own good and for the disadvantage of others, such as the person being gossiped about. Gossip is then employed to damage someone else's reputation in order to enhance one's own influence or standing in a group. By spreading negative information about the subject, the gossiper tries to gain a certain advantage over the subject because he or she hopes to change the opinion that the person that is being gossiped to holds about the subject, and, as a consequence, eventually this person's behavior toward the subject (Rosnow, 1977). Although individuals infrequently turn to gossip as a means for indirect aggression (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012), it is important not to overlook this dark side of gossip, because malicious gossip can have particularly devastating effects on its victims (Archer & Coyne, 2005).

A situation in which one would expect the dark side of gossip to take center stage is when gossip can serve as a vehicle for indirect aggression in the event of interpersonal conflict. Indeed, people do not seldomly take conflict personally, i.e., they feel threatened, damaged, devalued, and insulted by it (Epstein & Taylor, 1967; Hample & Dallinger, 1995); one can easily imagine an aggressive reaction to follow.

Research on gossip in conflict situations is scarce. Recently, Dijkstra, Beersma, and Van Leeuwen (2014) demonstrated that employees' gossip is related to supervisors' conflict management. Specifically, the less supervisors demonstrated interactional justice when managing conflicts, the more employees gossiped negatively and the less they gossiped positively about their supervisor. However, this study does not tell us anything about the reasons for gossip in conflict situations, nor do we know of any other studies that have specifically addressed with what goals conflict parties instigate gossip.

This gap is unfortunate, as our understanding of conflict management could benefit from examining the role of gossip. Although current research on conflict management tends to focus on what happens in the focal conflict situation (De Dreu & Beersma, 2005), conflict parties can, of course, choose from a wide array of behaviors that take the conflict beyond the focal situation by involving third parties (see, for example, Giebels & Janssen, 2005). Gossip is one of these behaviors. Past research has given very little attention to gossip in conflict situations in general and even less to the motive to use gossip to indirectly aggress. This dark side of gossip is highly relevant to the conflict literature because of its plausibly devastating role. Gossiping to indirectly aggress will very likely lead to conflict escalation. Therefore, to contribute to the prevention of conflict escalation, we need to examine what causes people to gossip to indirectly aggress. Examining what causes conflict parties to engage in gossip to indirectly aggress would increase our understanding of the role gossip plays in conflicts. This is the goal of the current paper.

Indirect Aggression as a Motive for Gossip

Under what circumstances would conflict parties be motivated to use gossip as indirect aggression, and what personal characteristics do people who are motivated to use gossip as indirect aggression have? In order to answer these questions we draw on the formula composed by Kurt Lewin (*Lewin's equation*; 1951), which describes behavior as a function of person-related and environment-related factors. Person-related factors include everything internal to the person that drives behavior, such as personal goals and values. Environment-related factors include everything around someone; for example, situational factors, institutions, but also other people and their behavior. Here, we examine a person-related and an environment-related factor, both important in conflict situations. Specifically, we focus on the role of social value orientation (the person part of Lewin's equation), and the role of the counterpart's behavior (the situation part of Lewin's equation).

One determinant of behavior in conflict situations is social value orientation (Messick & McClintock, 1968). Conflicts are, by definition, mixed-motive situations in which both competitive and cooperative motives play a role. On the one hand, conflict parties will, to some extent, be motivated to defend their own position or interests (competitive motive), but, on the other hand, they will also be motivated to some extent to cooperate with each other in order to find an agreement and resolve the conflict (Deutsch, 1969). People differ in their tendencies to focus on their own or on joint goals. Social value orientation is an individual difference that captures how much weight a person attaches to the welfare of others in relation to one's own (De Dreu & Van Lange, 1995; Messick & McClintock, 1968). As such, different social value orientations describe different goals in conflict situations: Proself-oriented people value reaching their own goals, while prosocially-oriented people care about joint conflict outcomes (Beersma & De Dreu, 1999; De Dreu, Nijstad, & Van Knippenberg, 2008).

To operationalize the second part of Lewin's equation, the environment, we examined the role of the behavior of the conflict counterpart. One distinction often made in conflict research is the distinction between cooperative and competitive behavior (Beersma & De Dreu, 1999; De Dreu, Weingart, & Kwon, 2000). While competitive behavior involves making large demands, making few concessions, and challenging the counterpart's positions, cooperative behavior involves making larger concessions and more modest demands, and demonstrating more regard for the counterpart's positions (Ten Velden, Beersma, & De Dreu, 2009). Previous work has shown that the tracking of the counterpart's behavior provides a

powerful tool in conflict based settings and can profoundly impact conflict outcomes (Adair & Brett, 2005).

Both person-related and environmental triggers affect motives and behavior in conflicts. Here we postulate that the importance of these two triggers also applies to the indirect aggression motive for gossip. We therefore predict that people with a prosocial motive (who care about the goals of their counterpart as well as about their own) will be motivated to indirectly aggress toward their counterpart by gossiping about him or her to a lesser extent than people with a proself motive (who mainly care about their own goals). Likewise, we expect people to be motivated to indirectly aggress through gossip more when their counterpart behaves competitively, and thus thwarts their goals, than when their counterpart behaves cooperatively. Although the above-mentioned predictions are relatively straightforward, it remains unclear what happens when proself people are confronted with a cooperative counterpart, or likewise, when prosocial people are confronted with a competitive counterpart. Will someone's own goals (social value orientation) or the environment (their counterpart's behavior) prevail in determining whether they turn to the dark side of gossip?

The literature suggests that a third factor, that is, the extent to which a person feels powerful or not, plays a pivotal role here. Previous work demonstrated that power decreases sensitivity to external environmental factors, such as a counterpart's emotions (Van Kleef, De Dreu, Pietroni, & Manstead, 2006) or perspectives (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006), and increases sensitivity to internal states (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Brinol, Petty, Valle, Rucker, & Becerra, 2007). For example, when performing a creative task and then asked to give their opinion, people who felt powerful reacted more in accordance with their own personal preferences rather than environmental demands, whereas the reverse was true for people who felt powerless (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, Magee, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008). Hecht and LaFrance (1998) demonstrated a comparable effect with an experiment in which participants who were assigned to a high power position smiled when they experienced positive affect, whereas positive affect did not predict smiling for participants in a low power position. It appears that people in a low power position felt obligated to smile when their environment required them to do so, whereas people in a high power position smiled when they personally experienced positive affect. In sum, power seems to lead people to be influenced more by individual inclinations, whereas powerlessness seems to lead them to be influenced more by environmental factors.

How power affects the motive to indirectly aggress through gossip has, however, never been examined. How would power affect individuals who have the choice to engage in gossip in a conflict situation? Would they be motivated to indirectly aggress toward their counterpart by gossiping? On the one hand, we might expect to see similar effects of power on the motive to gossip to aggress indirectly as we have seen for other behaviors. As power diminishes the effect of the environment part and increases the effect of the person part of Lewin's equation, we expect that, for people who feel powerful, there will be a relatively strong effect of social value orientation, whereas the counterpart's behavior should play a less important role. In contrast, for people who feel less powerful, there should be a relatively strong effect of the environment, whereas social value orientation should play a less important role.

On the other hand, it is important to note that gossip has one important feature that distinguishes it from many other forms of aggression: The fact that one can aggress *indirectly* via gossip. Whereas many other forms of aggression expose the aggressor, through gossip one can aggress behind the target's back, thereby making gossip a relatively safe way of aggressing in conflicts (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Björkqvist, Österman, & Lagerspetz, 1994). Gossip has been claimed to be triggered by powerlessness (Wert & Salovey, 2004); people who are cut off from formal means of influence because they find themselves in a low power position need to seek an alternative way to reach their goals and may use gossip to aggress against others rather than aggress in more direct – and therefore potentially dangerous – ways. In this sense, it is not obvious at all that power would have the same effects on gossip as it has been shown to have on other behaviors. Rather, because gossip allows relatively powerless aggressors to get away with aggression relatively easily, the motive to aggress indirectly

through gossip might not be affected by power at all, or the effects of power might be different from those demonstrated in earlier studies (e.g., Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Brinol et al., 2007; Galinsky et al., 2006; Van Kleef et al., 2006).

In the current study, we examine whether the extension of Lewin's equation by power also applies to motives underlying gossip in conflict situations. Based on the above-reviewed earlier studies, we predict that the extent to which social value orientation and behavior of the counterpart determine the motive to indirectly aggress via gossip depends on the level of power that a person experiences. This leads to our first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Power, the counterpart's behavior during conflict, and social value orientation have an interactive effect on the motive to aggress indirectly through gossip.

More specifically, we expect that for people who feel powerful, there will be a relatively strong effect of social value orientation, whereas the counterpart's behavior should play a less important role. In contrast, under low power there will be a relatively strong effect of the environment, whereas social value orientation should play a less important role. We therefore predict the following:

Hypothesis 2: High power people with a proself orientation will be more motivated to gossip to indirectly aggress than high power people with a prosocial orientation.

Hypothesis 3: Low power people with a counterpart who behaves competitively will be more motivated to gossip to indirectly aggress than low power people with a counterpart who behaves cooperatively.

We tested these hypotheses in an experiment. Conflict was simulated by having participants negotiate with a counterpart via a computer. The counterpart was actually a preprogrammed fictitious other, which was manipulated to either demonstrate cooperative or competitive behavior. In addition, the counterpart's cooperative or competitive goals were also revealed to participants by showing them questionnaire responses. We measured participants' social value orientation and primed them with high or low power (see Method section for details). We then gave them the option to engage in gossip by sharing information about the conflict counterpart to an alleged group member. The dependent variable we examined was the motive to use gossip to indirectly aggress against the counterpart.

Method

Participants

Undergraduate students ($N = 108$) at a large university in the Netherlands (32 males and 76 females; $M_{age} = 22.97$, $SD = 6.07$ years) participated in the study for course credits or 7 Euros. The experiment had a 2 (counterpart's behavior: cooperative vs. competitive) × 2 (power: high vs. low) × 2 (social value orientation: prosocial vs. proself) full-factorial design, in which we manipulated the former two variables and measured the latter. Participants were randomly assigned to conditions using a double-blind procedure.

Procedure

Participants signed up for a study about how people manage conflict situations when they do not have visual contact with their counterpart. Upon arrival at the laboratory, participants were seated in separate cubicles behind a computer, which prevented them from communicating with each other directly. They were informed that they were part of a two-person group and that they would engage in a negotiation task with a member from another group. After the negotiation task, their group member would engage in a brainstorm task that was related to the negotiation together with the other group's representative

who participated in the negotiation earlier. In reality, there were no groups, and all participants interacted with pre-programmed fictitious others.

We then measured participants' social value orientation using the Decomposed Games Measure (Van Lange, De Bruin, Otten, & Joireman, 1997). The task consists of nine items, each containing three alternative outcome distributions of valuable points between oneself and an anonymous (fictional) interaction partner. An example is the choice between alternative (a) 500 points for oneself and 500 points for the other (cooperative choice), (b) 560 points for oneself and 300 for the other (individualistic choice, i.e., maximum amount of points for oneself regardless of the other), or (c) 500 for oneself 100 for the other (competitive choice, i.e., maximizing the difference between the outcomes). Both B and C are proself choices. Participants were classified as either prosocial or proself when at least six choices are consistent with one of the orientations.

Next, we manipulated power using a priming procedure derived from earlier research (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003). Participants in the high power condition were asked to describe a situation in which they had felt powerful, whereas participants in the low power condition were asked to describe a situation in which they had felt powerless. Specifically, those in the high power condition were asked to describe a situation in which they could either control someone else's access to a valued resource or could evaluate a person. Those in the low power condition, in contrast, were asked to describe a situation in which someone else controlled their access to resources or evaluated them.

Participants were informed that, on behalf of their group, they would negotiate with a representative of the other group in order to solve a conflict. They were asked to imagine that they were co-renters in a student apartment complex and the tasks they would engage in were related to this. They were told that it was important to work together with their counterpart to achieve a good negotiation outcome so that they would be able to live in the apartment complex in a nice, harmonious way in the future. Also, they were told that after the negotiation, their negotiation counterpart would interact with one of their own group members on a brainstorming task that was aimed to solve other conflicts related to the student apartment complex. Before this second task would start, participants were told that they could leave a message for their group member.

The negotiation task was a computer-simulated multi-issue negotiation (Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2004a, 2004b) that captures important characteristics of real-life negotiations (e.g., multiple issues, offer-counteroffer structure; cf. Pruitt, 1981). This negotiation paradigm is useful, not only because computer mediated negotiations are becoming more common (Moore, Kurtzberg, Thompson, & Morris, 1999), but also because experiments with comparable designs, applying different communication media (computer mediated vs. face-to-face), often show comparable results (Derks, Fischer, & Bos, 2008; Sinaceur & Tiedens, 2006; Van Kleef et al., 2004a, 2004b). We used a three-issue negotiation between two apartment renters about how they should distribute gardening chores, how much each of them should pay for apartment maintenance, and the time by which it should be silent in the evenings. The participant's own group's position on each of the three issues was explained to each of the participants (see Table 1). It was emphasized that it was important to solve the negotiation in a cooperative way so as to make it possible for the renters to live together in a pleasant way in the future.

Over six negotiation rounds the counterpart proposed different options for the three issues, depending on the manipulation of counterpart behavior (cooperative vs. competitive; using a preprogrammed concession strategy; Van Kleef et al., 2004a, 2004b). In the cooperative counterpart condition, the counterpart made large concessions, conceding 3 units per round. Here, the opening offer was 14-15-13 (minus 3 units from the maximum of 15-15-15; see Table 1), and the final offer in the sixth and last round was 9-10-8 (minus 18 units; see Ten Velden et al., 2009; for a similar manipulation of counterpart's behavior). In the competitive condition, the counterpart made small concessions, conceding 1 unit per round. Moreover, participants were shown a questionnaire that had allegedly been filled in by their counterpart and that depicted the answers on 5-point scales such as the following: "I want to win the negotiation no

Table 1
Participants' Negotiation Chart

Gardening chores (in hours)			Maintenance contribution (in Euro)			Hour of silence (time)		
Level	Chores	Pay-off	Level	Contribution	Pay-off	Level	Silence	Pay-off
1	37	280	1	€10	280	1	01.00	280
2	39	260	2	€20	260	2	00.45	260
3	41	240	3	€30	240	3	00.30	240
4	43	220	4	€40	220	4	00.15	220
5	45	200	5	€50	200	5	00.00	200
6	47	180	6	€60	180	6	23.45	180
7	49	160	7	€70	160	7	23.30	160
8	51	140	8	€80	140	8	23.15	140
9	53	120	9	€90	120	9	23.00	120
10	55	100	10	€100	100	10	22.45	100
11	57	80	11	€110	80	11	22.30	80
12	59	60	12	€120	60	12	22.15	60
13	61	40	13	€130	40	13	22.00	40
14	63	20	14	€140	20	14	21.45	20
15	65	0	15	€150	0	15	21.30	0

matter what." These items either depicted the counterpart as a cooperative (cooperative condition) or competitive person (competitive condition; for a similar procedure see, e.g., Steinel & De Dreu, 2004).

After round 6, the negotiation was interrupted (cf. Van Kleef et al., 2004a, 2004b) and participants were given the option to leave a written message for their group member who would engage in a brainstorm task with the representative of the other group (their counterpart in the negotiation). They were told that, in this way, they could inform their group member about their impression of the conflict and the person they negotiated with. The message would not be conveyed to the negotiating counterpart. Participants could type in their message if they chose to do so. As such, they were given the option to exchange evaluative information about an absent third party (the negotiation counterpart) to their group member, or, in other words, to send a gossip statement (Foster, 2004). We then measured the motivation to indirectly aggress through gossip using the five items from the Motives to Gossip Questionnaire that measure this specific motive (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Cronbach's alpha = .90). All items started with "I gave information to my group member . . .": ". . . to damage the reputation of the person we talked about,". . . to say negative things about the person we talked about, ". . . to negatively influence the image that the person I was talking with has of the person we talked about, ". . . to put the person we talked about in a negative light, and ". . . to discuss negative characteristics of the person we talked about." Finally, participants were thanked and received their credit points or money. They received a written debriefing of the experiment's goals via email.[1]

[1]The data reported here were collected as part of a larger study. Originally, 178 participants participated in this study. In addition to the two power conditions, the initial dataset also included a control condition. However, we decided to not include this condition in the analyses, because we believe the specific nature of the instructions in this condition was such that it did not serve a true control condition. More specifically, in this condition we asked participants to describe "in detail, what you did yesterday and what you experienced yesterday." We believe that this instruction inadvertently induced construal level (for a theoretical perspective linking time perspective and construal level, see, e.g., Trope & Liberman, 2003) and decided to drop it from the analyses. Besides the data reported here, we also measured other motives to gossip; the original questionnaire contained nine items measuring information gathering and validation (Cronbach's alpha = .94), five items measuring social enjoyment (Cronbach's alpha = .78), and three items measuring group protection; see Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012, for the complete list of items). We added two extra items on group protection (Cronbach's alpha for the total group protection subscale = .80) and seven items on emotion ventilation to the questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha = .90). However, these motives were not of focal interest to the current study and were, therefore, not included in the analyses presented here.

Results

We analyzed the data with a 2 (counterpart's behavior: cooperative vs. competitive) × 2 (social value orientation: prosocial vs. proself) × 2 (power: high vs. low) analysis of variance (ANOVA). We report directional tests of our hypotheses. Significant interaction effects were decomposed using simple-effects analysis, specifically by testing the effects of counterpart's behavior and social value orientation within high and low power (see Winer, 1981, for an elaborate explanation of this approach).

The ANOVA on the motivation to indirectly aggress through gossip revealed a significant main effect of counterpart's behavior ($F[1, 107] = 12.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$), indicating that the motivation to indirectly aggress through gossip was stronger when the counterpart behaved competitively ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.36$) than when the counterpart behaved cooperatively ($M = 2.02$, $SD = 1.09$). We also found a significant main effect of power ($F[1, 107] = 3.74$, $p = .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$), indicating that the motivation to indirectly aggress through gossip was stronger in the high power ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.33$) than in the low power condition ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 1.23$). We did not find a significant main effect of social value orientation ($F[1, 107] = 0.37$, $p = .54$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$).

These main effects were qualified by two-two-way interactions; between counterpart's behavior and social value orientation ($F[1, 107] = 3.02$, $p = .04$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$) and between power and social value orientation ($F[1, 107] = 4.59$, $p = .02$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$). Finally, the analysis revealed a significant three-way interaction between counterpart's behavior, social value orientation and power as predicted in Hypothesis 1, $F(1, 107) = 3.88$, $p = .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. Because the three-way interaction was significant, we did not interpret the above-described two-way interactions and, instead, decomposed the three-way interaction using simple effects analysis (Winer, 1981) to examine the effects of social value orientation, counterpart's behavior, and their interaction, within the high and low power condition separately. Results revealed that under high power, there was a significant simple main effect of social value orientation, $F(1, 107) = 3.57$, $p = .03$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$; participants with a proself orientation had a higher motivation to indirectly aggress through gossip ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.52$) than participants with a prosocial orientation ($M = 2.34$, $SD = 1.07$), see Figure 1. Under high power, the simple main effect of the counterpart's behavior was not significant, $F(1, 107) = 2.24$, $p = .07$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. These results support Hypothesis 2. Under low power, the simple main effect of the counterpart's behavior was significant, $F(1, 107) = 12.64$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$, indicating that participants with a counterpart who behaved competitively had a higher motivation to indirectly aggress through gossip ($M = 2.79$, $SD = 1.27$) than participants with a counterpart who behaved cooperatively ($M = 1.68$, $SD = .92$), see Figure 2. Under low power, the simple main effect of social value orientation was not significant, $F(1, 107) = 1.25$, $p = .26$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. These results support Hypothesis 3. In summary, our results show that, for powerful people, social value orientation determined their motivation to indirectly aggress. In contrast, for powerless people, the counterpart's behavior determined their motivation to indirectly aggress. These results shows that under high power, the motivation to gossip for indirect aggression derives from personal goals, whereas under low power, it derives from environmental factors. Together, these findings support Hypotheses 1–3.

Finally, we found a significant simple interaction effect of the counterpart's behavior and social value orientation under high power ($F[1, 107] = 6.48$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$) but not under low power ($F[1, 107] = 0.03$, $p = .87$, $\eta_p^2 = <.001$). As can be seen in Figure 3, this interaction, although not hypothesized, provides further support for our general prediction. Under high power, prosocially motivated participants were not affected by the counterpart's behavior. Inspection of means revealed that they did not increase their motivation to aggress through gossip when they were confronted with a competitive counterpart ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 0.75$) compared to when they were confronted with a cooperative counterpart ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 1.39$), see Figure 3. However, under low power, prosocially motivated participants were affected by their counterpart's behavior. Inspection of means revealed that they had a higher motivation to indirectly aggress when their counterpart behaved

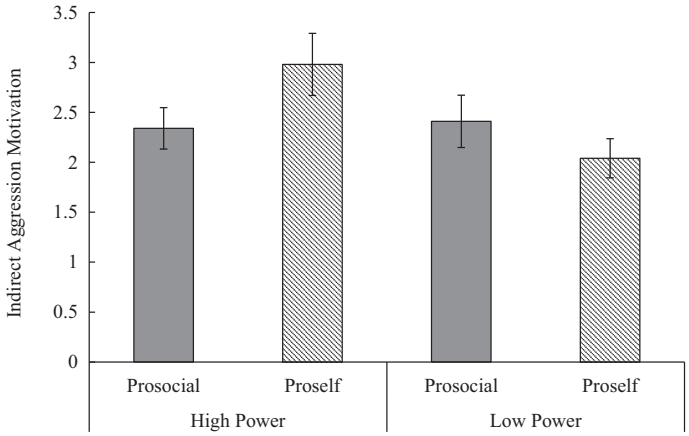

Figure 1. Simple main effect of social value orientation (proself vs. prosocial) on the motive to indirectly aggress through gossip in the high versus low power condition; displayed Means ± SE.

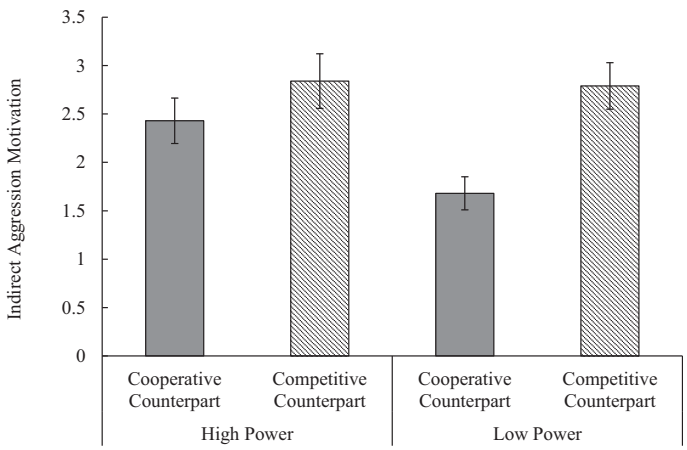

Figure 2. Simple main effect of counterpart's behavior (cooperative vs. competitive) on the motive to indirectly aggress through gossip in the high versus low power condition; displayed Means ± SE.

competitively (M = 2.99, SD = 1.40) than when their counterpart behaved cooperatively (M = 1.83, SD = 1.14), see Figure 4. This result again suggests that, under high power, the motivation to gossip derives from personal goals, whereas under low power it derives from environmental factors, and, therefore, supports what we predicted in Hypotheses 1–3.

Although we had no hypotheses regarding effects of demographic variables (gender and age) in our study, explorative analyses showed that participants' age was positively correlated with the motive to use gossip to indirectly aggress, $r(106) = .25$, $p = .01$. Thus, older participants were more motivated to engage in gossip to indirectly aggress. We also found a significant effect for gender, showing that men (M = 2.84, SD = 1.70) were more motivated to use gossip to indirectly aggress than women (M = 2.24, SD = 1.04), $F(1, 106) = 4.92$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2 = .04$. We do not report interactions between gender and the variables of interest in our study here, because these would be difficult to interpret due to the asymmetrical distribution of the (relatively few) male participants across experimental cells (in some cells as low as two participants). Importantly though, when controlled for gender and age, the three-way interaction

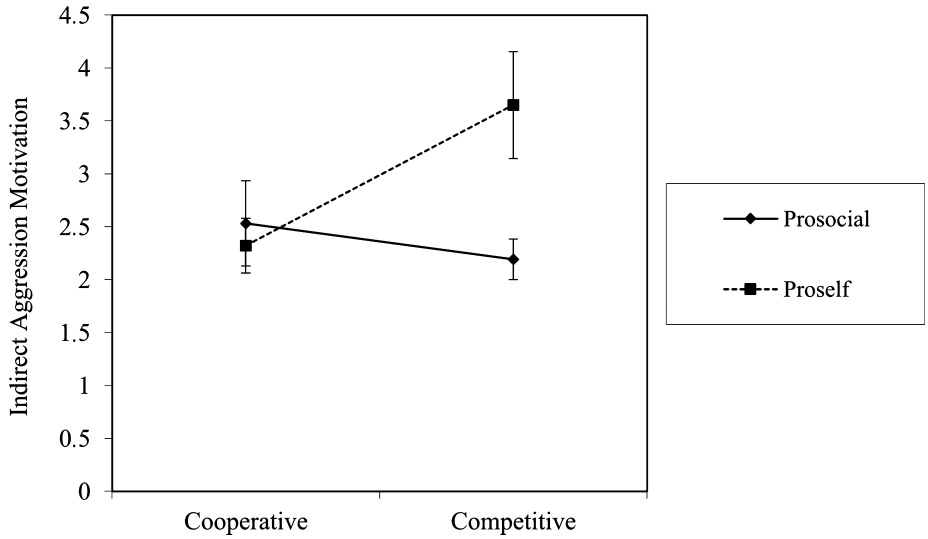

Figure 3. Simple interaction of social value orientation (proself vs. prosocial) and counterpart's behavior (cooperative vs. competitive) on the motive to indirectly aggress through gossip in the high power condition; displayed Means ± SE.

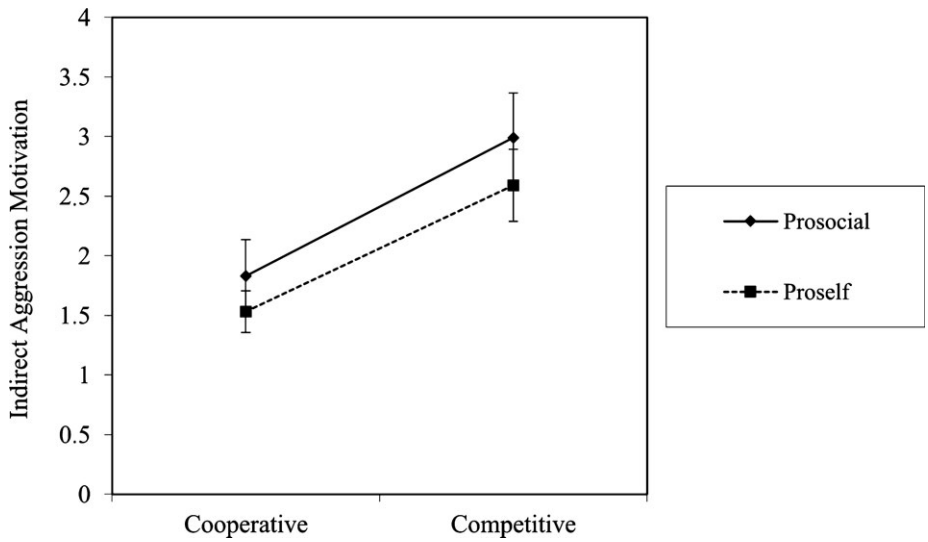

Figure 4. Simple interaction of social value orientation (proself vs. prosocial) and counterpart's behavior (cooperative vs. competitive) on the motive to indirectly aggress through gossip in the low power condition; displayed Means ± SE.

between power, counterpart's behavior, and social value orientation we predicted in Hypothesis 1, remained significant, $F(1, 91) = 11.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$.

Together, these results support the general idea of this manuscript, that power determines whether personal inclinations (social value orientation in our study) or environmental factors (the counterpart's behavior in our study) influence the motivation for which people gossip in conflict situations. Under high power, a person's social value orientation plays a decisive role, whereas under low power, environmental demands exert a stronger influence.

Discussion

Gossip as a means to cope with or manage conflict has been almost completely ignored in the conflict literature. Given that recent insights show that gossip may serve important functions for individuals (Anderson, Siegel, Bliss-Moreau, & Barrett, 2011; Sommerfeld et al., 2007) and groups (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011; Feinberg et al., 2012), it is important to examine the role of gossip in conflict situations. In this article, we focused on the dark side of gossip–gossip motivated by the desire to indirectly aggress toward a counterpart–because it is plausible that when conflict parties engage in gossip based on the motive to indirectly aggress, it will have a negative influence on conflict resolution.

In line with earlier research on power (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Brinol et al., 2007; Galinsky et al., 2006; Van Kleef et al., 2006), we predicted that both personal values and environmental factors play a role in determining why people gossip in conflict situations counterpart–because and that power determines which factor exerts the strongest influence. Supporting this prediction, we found that the motivation for indirect aggression through gossip in low power individuals is driven mainly by the counterpart's behavior (with participants being more inclined to aggress toward a competitive than toward a cooperative counterpart), but it is driven by social value orientation for high power individuals (with proself participants being more inclined to aggress through gossip than prosocial participants).

Apparently, with regards to why people gossip about their counterpart in a conflict, power can either make people more self-interested or make them behave in a more social, moral way. The finding that power can both trigger self-interested behavior as well as socially responsible behavior is in line with earlier findings by Chen, Chai, and Bargh (2001). They found that when primed with power, exchange-oriented people (who focus on giving a benefit in return for a received benefit; Clark & Mills, 1979) acted more in line with their own interests than exchange-oriented people who were primed with a neutral stimulus. In contrast, communally-oriented people (who see giving a benefit to someone in need of a benefit as appropriate; Clark & Mills, 1979) acted more prosocially under high power than when primed with a neutral stimulus.

Regarding the role that gossip plays in conflict, it is clear that the current findings are only a start. They add to the research on gossip in conflict situations of Dijkstra et al. (2014), which demonstrated that people engage in more negative gossip when their counterpart demonstrates conflict management behavior that is perceived as interactionally unjust. Our results qualify these earlier findings by looking into the reasons why conflict parties gossip. By focusing on indirect aggression as a motive for gossip, we found that the motive to use gossip for destructive means is moderated by social value orientation and power. Although current research and theorizing on gossip tends to focus on the positive aspects of gossip (Feinberg et al., 2012), our results show that the motive to engage in indirect aggression through gossip should not be overlooked.

The current study's focus was on individuals' motive to indirectly aggress through gossip, rather than on gossip behavior itself. An advantage of measuring motives instead of behavior is that this allowed us to discriminate between motivations which might have similar behavioral expressions. For example, stating in a gossip statement that one's counterpart is behaving rudely might be motivated by the desire to protect one's group, but might just as well be done to damage the reputation of the counterpart. This example illustrates examining behavior, or even content analyses of what is being expressed in gossip statements, does not allow us to differentiate between motivations, whereas measuring motivation to gossip using the Motives to Gossip Questionnaire does.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Because our hypotheses specified causal relationships, we needed an experimental study to test these hypotheses. However, the artificial context of our laboratory experiment potentially limits the generalizability of our findings. Specifically, in our experiment, people were given the opportunity to gossip

without their identity being disclosed. In real life, people are typically more exposed when they instigate gossip (at least toward the person to whom the gossip is directed) and need to actively decide whether the potential benefits of engaging in gossip outweigh the potential risks (e.g., being known as a gossip or having the information being disclosed to the gossip target by the gossip recipient). Also, real life conflicts are likely to have more far-reaching consequences than the simple computer-mediated negotiation that we simulated in the context of our experiment. Although this might actually imply that the effects we found in the current study would be larger rather than smaller in more realistic settings, in any case, to examine the boundary conditions of our findings, we encourage field research on gossip motivations in conflict situations.

One issue that such research might specifically examine is the extent to which the medium via which conflict behaviors or gossip are exchanged plays a role. In line with previous research, we used a computer-simulated multi-issue negotiation in our study (see, for example, Pruitt, 1981; Van Kleef et al., 2004a, 2004b). In our method section we explained that, because experiments comparing different communication media often found comparable results (see, e.g., Sinaceur & Tiedens, 2006), we are confident that our findings will to some extent be generalizable to the context of face-to-face interactions. However, the specific extent to which our findings generalize to a face-to-face context remains an empirical question that can only be answered by follow-up studies in such a face-to-face context. Whereas studies have demonstrated that conflicts are more likely to escalate in a virtual context (see research on flaming in email conversations, for example, Dubrovsky, Kiesler, & Sethna, 1991), a more recent review of the literature suggests that emotional communication in general is very comparable between face-to-face and virtual communication (Derks et al., 2008). We believe studies into this question are worthwhile.

Another question for future research is how individual differences in the tendency to gossip would affect the motivation to engage in gossip to indirectly aggress in a conflict situation. People vary in the extent to which they are likely to engage in gossip in general, which can be measured by the Tendency to Gossip Questionnaire (Nevo, Nevo, & Derech Zehavi, 1993). Because we randomly assigned participants to conditions in our study, it is unlikely that differences in the tendency to gossip can account for our findings, but future studies could examine whether individual differences in this tendency affect gossip-related reactions to conflict.

Yet another interesting question for future research is how different operationalizations of power could affect the motivation to indirectly aggress through gossip. Gossip is different from other forms of aggression because of its indirect nature. Most forms of aggression are direct and expose the aggressor. Gossip, however, largely allows an aggressor to operate behind the target's back. As argued by Wert and Salovey (2004), gossip might be triggered by powerlessness. When people lack formal mechanisms of influence and therefore power, they may need to look for alternative ways of reaching their goals, and gossip might be precisely such a mechanism. Therefore, as we argued in our introduction, predictions regarding the effects of power on the motive to indirectly aggress through gossip might take different forms.

Our results were in line with earlier studies that showed that power increases individuals' action orientation (Galinsky et al., 2003, 2008). Specifically, we found a main effect of power, demonstrating that, under high power, people are more motivated to gossip to indirectly aggress than under low power. This goes against Wert and Salovey's reasoning that powerlessness rather than power might trigger gossip. Perhaps this contradiction can be explained by differentiating between power indicators and sense of power. On the one hand, people can experience indicators of power, such as a social or formal position, for example in the form of control over others' resources as a manager. On the other hand, power is also a psychological state; people can have a sense of power, which is distinct from power based on social or formal positions (Anderson, John, & Keltner, 2012). Having a sense of power could be positively related to gossip, because of heightening the action orientation, while formal power could be negatively related to gossip, because people with high formal power have formal means to reach goals and, therefore, do not have the need to gossip. In our study, we used a priming procedure to manipulate power. By asking people to describe a situation in which they felt either powerful or powerless we manipulated their sense

of power. We encourage researchers to also use manipulations of formal power in future gossip research, for example, by assigning people to roles with relatively more control over resources or to positions of authority (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Galinsky et al., 2003), to look into the distinct effects of sense of power and formal or social indicators of power.

Another limitation of the current study that relates to future research questions that we note here is that we did not examine other ways to aggress than gossip in our study. In real life, gossip is of course not the only way individuals can engage in aggressive behavior. For example, physically or verbally attacking someone or destroying or damaging someone's property are other ways (see Buss, 1961). Different types of aggressive behaviors differ in the extent in which they are more direct (and therefore expose the perpetrator) or indirect. Even though both gossiping and destroying someone's property can be ways of indirectly aggressing, differences exist, which make gossip a safer and more effective way of manipulating other people's behaviors and opinions for own good. Damaging or destroying someone's property is illegal, while gossiping is not. Therefore, gossip seems to be a safer way of aggressing, at least from a legal perspective. Both gossiping and damaging someone's property can be a form of emotional relief and a way of punishing someone, but only gossip can be used to involve third parties, who can be manipulated to the disadvantage of the person being gossiped about. In a sense, gossip can be very subtle and requires thought, while damaging someone's property appears more emotional and impulsive. It seems likely that gossip as a form of indirect aggression might occur in the earlier stages of conflict, while damaging someone's property might happen when conflicts are in a more extreme state of escalation. To our knowledge, research has not examined the parallels and differences between different forms of aggression in conflicts. Research on indirect ways of aggressing in conflict situations in general is lacking, we therefore believe that comparing differences between gossip and other forms of indirect aggression and what motivates these behaviors in conflict situations is an interesting avenue for future research.

Whereas the current study focused on gossip motivated by the desire to indirectly aggress against a counterpart, future research could also examine other motives that conflict parties can have to engage in gossip, such as information exchange and validation, emotional venting, and group protection (see Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012). Although we only looked at one specific motivation to gossip in this study, it is possible that power increases or decreases other motives to gossip as well. When people already experience power, their motive to gossip might be related to retaining power, while the motivation to gossip for low power people might be more related to establishing allies and gaining power (Kurland & Pelled, 2000).

Moreover, future studies should examine the consequences of the different motives to gossip and the occurrence of actual gossip in conflict situations. Under which circumstances does gossip positively affect the conflict process, and under which circumstances does it lead to conflict escalation, decreasing the chances of conflict resolution? Moreover, under which circumstances does gossip lead to the gossiper being perceived as trustworthy or not trustworthy?

It is clear that the current article cannot answer all of these important questions. However, it shows that motives to gossip to indirectly aggress can be triggered both by intrapersonal and environmental factors and that the influence that prevails is determined by the power level conflict parties experience. We think this is an exciting first step on the path to including more behaviors, like gossip, in the way in which we examine conflict management.

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