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The Public Sharing And Private Consumption Of Celebrity Gossip Through The Motherhood Role

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THE PUBLIC SHARING AND PRIVATE CONSUMPTION OF CELEBRITY GOSSIP:
A MULTIFUNCTIONAL, SIMULATNEOUS AND INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCE

by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Actress Reese Witherspoon and her husband Jim Toth made international headlines in 2014 after police officers pulled them over for drinking and driving (Reese Witherspoon releases a statement after her arrest, 2014). Witherspoon was booked for disorderly conduct and a few days later made a public apology on *Good Morning America*. In 2011, Kim Kardashian dominated headlines when she filed for divorce after only 72 days of marriage to basketball star Kris Humphries ("Kris Humphries taunted with 'Kanye' chant ... during NBA game", 2014), and in 2006, global media were displaying photos of popular recording artist Britney Spears driving with her five-month-old son, holding him with one arm as he sat on her lap instead of using a baby car seat ("Spears baby car photo is revealed", 2006, para. 1). These celebrity actions prompted a wave of negative media coverage as well as outraged fan gossip heard across the world ("Bill Cosby", n.d.; Proud, 2011; "Britney defends driving with baby in lap - Fox News", 2006, para. 2). The impact of media scandals such as these, are socially significant and some identify them as possible signs of cultural moral decay (Holmes, 2005; Lull & Hinerman, 1997).

These particular instances of media coverage of the activities of celebrities, termed *celebrity gossip*, led to conversations about drinking and driving, marriage and even parenting skills. The media commonly make judgments in regards to celebrities and their skill (or lack thereof) on a number of socially important topics such as body image, appropriate social and sexual behavior, and parenting, that then similarly become part of the celebrity gossip discourse as they are spread and repeated. Celebrity gossip, through both the public sharing via fan gossip conversations as well as private consumption via an individual activity, is common in contemporary American culture (De Backer, 2012; De Backer & Fisher, 2012; Hatfield, 2011; Wert & Salovey, 2004).

Gossip in general is a common activity; the topic of other people's private lives is universally fascinating. However, it was not until 1945 that scholars began to see gossip as a phenomenon worthy of academic study. In that year, James West proposed that gossip works as a system to connect and unite people, performing far more important functions than merely idle talk or inconsequential chatter. Scholarly work today places celebrity gossip as a subset of broader gossip research, although most of this work has been narrowly focused on worship fandom and parasocial relationships (Feasey, 2008; Giles, 2000). This narrow focus has overshadowed other important social and individual functions of celebrity gossip.

Gossip research at the broad level shows that the phenomenon serves many functions, including social bonding, group inclusion or exclusion, the adherence to group norms; entertainment, status enhancement, stress reduction, information seeking, uncertainty management, and the development of a personal and social identity (Ayim, 1994; Dunbar, 2004; Feasey, 2008; Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell & Labianca, 2010; Noon & Delbridge, 1993; Wert & Salovey, 2004). Social bonding, for instance, occurs during gossip through the shared participation between the teller and listener (Baumeister, Zhang & Vohs, 2004; Yoo, 2009). As these social bonds deepen, groups of insiders and outsiders are formed, helping to reinforce social boundaries (Ayim, 1994; Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003; Wert & Salovey, 2004). Gossip also functions to enforce group norms as participants engage in debates of moral issues (Feasey, 2008). At the same time, gossip offers an entertainment value by providing a needed break from daily routines (Dunbar, 2004; Fox, 2001) and increases a person's status by being "in the know" (Feasey, 2008). Gossip further functions as a tool for information seeking while also lowering stress and uncertainty (Dunbar, 2004; Foster, 2004; Levin & Arluke, 1985). When people feel uncertain or anxious about a situation, they tend to engage in gossip when talking with others

who may be in the same predicament in order to gather important information to manage both the situation and the uncomfortable feelings of uncertainty (Wert & Salovey, 2004). For example, when someone discovers she has cancer, she may gossip with another who is facing the disease; they share similar concerns together, then talk about another individual's alleged treatment in an attempt to lower their stress and uncertainty. Because the world is fundamentally unpredictable, people are driven to cope with unexpected developments, and gossip can help to explain the world through information gathering while also functioning to release doubt and create predictability (Bradac, 2001). This drive for predictability is also seen in gossip's identity formation function (Hatfield, 2011; Ochs & Capps, 1996). When audiences read or watch media celebrity gossip and share the gossip interpersonally, they are often seeking a reinforcement of their identity and social values by contrasting them with the celebrity's behavior (Wert & Salovey, 2004). For example, in a study of 34 magazine articles related to the divorce of recording artist Paul McCartney and his wife Heather Mills, Brewer (2009) found that the media celebrity gossip embedded in celebrity magazines affects identities as well as cultural attitudes and moral judgments. In this case, readers who identified with Heather Mills (i.e. married wealthy but divorced) may have consumed gossip that indicated Heather simply fell out of love. In contrast, those who closely aligned with Paul McCartney may have consumed gossip that characterized Heather as a greedy woman out for his money. In both cases, readers shared and consumed the gossip supporting their own identity and social values (Hatfield, 2011; Ochs & Capps, 1996).

Gossip also functions as social learning (Baumeister et al., 2004) whereby informal cultural codes of conduct and moral rules are threaded throughout gossip discourse and thus learned and reinforced (Brewer, 2009). For example, parenting issues, particularly those

involving mothers, are extremely regimented by cultural codes of conduct (Collette, 2005), and they are pervasive in celebrity gossip headlines. From movie actors Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt's travels with their six children (Finn, 2012, para. 2), to Kate Gosselin's escapades while parenting eight children including sextuplets (Schwartz, 2012, para. 4), to the infamous photo of Michael Jackson dangling his son over a hotel balcony, millions of people pay close attention to celebrity parenting actions ("Jackson: Baby stunt was 'mistake'", 2002, para. 1). While celebrities may be discussed as people who share the common experiences of parenthood (Hatfield, 2011), the public may be experiencing gossip about these celebrities as a way to learn (or avoid) behavior deemed acceptable or unacceptable through cultural codes of conduct (Feasey, 2008).

Because gossip can function as a regulator for social norms and acceptable behavior (Dunbar, 2004; Emler, 1994; Wert & Salovey, 2004), the moral rules and codes that are communicated through gossip discourse could provide people with a mirror by which they could judge their own actions. Both the engagement in interpersonal celebrity gossip with others (public sharing) and the intrapersonal consumption of celebrity gossip (private consumption) might therefore directly influence people's experiences and perceptions of their personal and social roles. In other words the process of the public sharing of celebrity gossip with others (typically labeled interpersonal celebrity gossip) and defined here as the actual verbal sharing, in person or online, of gossip about celebrities among individuals, and the private consumption of celebrity gossip (typically labeled as intrapersonal celebrity gossip) and defined here as the personal reading and viewing of gossip in the media about celebrities via magazines, newspapers, television shows and internet helps people to reinforce, understand, or revise their values and beliefs (Dunbar, 2004; Emler, 1994; Wert & Salovey, 2004).

Despite the fact that there is a growing body of gossip research within the context of gossip's functions, few studies have explored how gossip, and particularly celebrity gossip, may

serve different functions. With the development of multiple delivery media platforms, private consumption of celebrity gossip is more prevalent than ever, as can be seen in the growth of celebrity outlets such as blogs, websites, television shows, and magazines. Celebrity gossip websites are enormously popular. In 2015, OMG! by Yahoo averaged 50 million monthly readers, TMZ.com drew 25 million website viewers per month, E Online received 23.5 million monthly visitors and *People Magazine* reached an average of 23 million monthly viewers, all of which have been steadily increasing in the last decade ("Top 15 most popular celebrity gossip websites | November 2015", n.d.). With the success of the private consumption of celebrity gossip and the vast variety of options available, gossip—both public sharing and private consumption—could emerge to be meeting specific needs both socially and individually as people cope with life's unpredictability as well as help explain the world, as Bradac (2001) points out.

The Purpose of This Study

A small but growing body of research examines gossip's social and individual functions, though few have studied the functions of celebrity gossip. Additionally, many scholars have defined differing and often contradictory functions (Bosson, Johnson, Nikederhoffer & Swann, 2006; Foster, 2004; McAndrew et al., 2007; Sabini & Silver, 1982; Yerkovich, 1977). According to Noon and Delbridge (1993), anthropologist Peter Wilson first raised the issue of exploring the relationship between social and individual gossip functions in 1974. Building on Wilson's assertions, Noon and Delbridge pointed out the importance of the two levels, concluding that the gossip process has multiple motivations taking place at both the social and individual levels and should not be ignored. This researcher incorporates the structure set forth by Nevo and Nevo (1993), a commonly cited reference in gossip literature, which approaches gossip functions

according to two overarching explanations: the sociological-anthropological and the psychological. Specifically, this research extends the literature by examining the socioligical-anthropological and psychological functions when engaging in *celebrity* gossip.

Within the genre of celebrity gossip research, Hatfield (2011) was one of the first to investigate the influence or, arguably, the experience of private consumption of celebrity gossip. She found that new mothers as readers of celebrity magazines interpret and use information about celebrities to critically examine their own parenting as they seek to develop a "good mother" identity. Hatfield selected the functions of individual identity as parent and social norms for parenting when studying the experience of private consumption of celebrity gossip by new mothers. She did not, however, include public sharing as part of the celebrity gossip experience. Building on the work of Nevo and Nevo (1993) and Hatfield (2011), this study's goal was to extend celebrity gossip research by incorporating the more traditional interpersonal-based public sharing gossip research with the identity-based private consumption gossip research, to examine a more complete lived experience. This research extends the understanding of the celebrity gossip experience by conceptualizing celebrity gossip as public sharing and private consumption, separate yet related practices of the celebrity gossip experience. There are two assumptions guiding this study. First is the belief that gossip is inherently motivated by fulfilling some type of function, such as personal attention-seeking or self-promotion, discrediting others in order to appear more powerful, or lowering stress and uncertainty in unknown territory (Ben-Ze'ev, 1994; Hatfield, 2011; Michelson, van Iterson & Waddington, 2010; Rosnow, 1977; Suls, 1977). Second, the separate but important processes of the public sharing and the private consumption of gossip takes center stage so as to better understand the separate functions that these modes of

gossip serve. These separate processes can provide important insights into how gossip may function differently at the social and individual level.

Whereas gossip meets many individual and social needs, this project focuses on understanding the social and individual functions independently, while simultaneously understanding the lived experiences of people as they publicly share and privately consume celebrity gossip. As such, the researcher examines celebrity gossip to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the functions of celebrity gossip when publicly sharing?

RQ2: What are the functions of celebrity gossip when privately consuming?

RQ3: What is the lived experience when publicly sharing celebrity gossip?

RQ4: What is the lived experience when privately consuming celebrity gossip?

In addition, as discussed in the research results in Chapter Four, a revised question emerged that highlights the limitations of posing RQs 3 and 4 as separate phenomena.

Q5: What is the lived experience when publicly sharing and privately consuming celebrity gossip?

Chapter 1 of the dissertation outlines the context of celebrity gossip as it pertains to the processes of public sharing and private consumption. Chapter 2 provides an in-depth accounting of the scholarly literature to build the argument that celebrity gossip serves separate functions and is both a public and private process. Chapter 3 presents the qualitative approach utilized for this exploratory study through focus groups and individual interviews. Chapter 4 details the findings of the analysis utilizing a grounded theory approach. Finally, Chapter 5 offers a discussion of the findings in relation to the five research questions outlined, including limitations and future directions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Prominent gossip researchers in anthropology, sociology, psychology, history and communication have debated the definition, functions, motivations and impact of gossip, as well as why it is so prevalent and how it affects social and individual relationships (Dunbar, 1996; Emler, 1994; Wert & Salovey, 2004). This section reviews a broad range of scholarly work by discussing several salient issues in the gossip field: the definition of gossip, an overview of celebrity gossip, and an examination of the functional approaches to gossip. This section also includes a discussion of public sharing and private consumption as separate processes. And finally, the study's purpose and research questions are reviewed.

Gossip: An Overview

Definition of gossip. Anywhere from 60% to 90% of all conversations are filled with gossip talk (Emler, 1994; Levin & Arluke, 1985). Because gossip permeates culture and is quite complex, much scholarly debate has centered on defining the phenomenon (Foster, 2004). Some scholars claim it is synonymous to "women's talk" (Coates, 1988), others describe it as "chit chat" (Dunbar 2004), whereas others suggest it is simply talk about absent persons (Besnier, 1989). In addition, some scholars use it interchangeably with rumor, but other scholars claim that this is inaccurate (Mills, 2010; Rosnow & Fine, 1976). Foundational work by Rosnow and Fine (1976) clarified the distinction between the two by describing rumor as being only in the public sphere rather than the private sphere; rumor discourse is primarily motivated by fear, anxiety, uncertainty and ambiguity. Gossip, on the other hand, is considered a process of evaluation in both public and private conversations with several types of motivators and functions (De Backer & Gurven, 2006; Dunbar, 2004; Wert & Salovey, 2004). For example, speculation about the downsizing of a company would be considered fear-based rumor, whereas talking about a co-

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worker cursing about a possible downsizing would be considered evaluative gossip. Although some discrepancies remain, scholars seem to have reached a measure of consensus centered around Eder and Enke's (1991) definition of gossip as evaluative talk about a third party not present.

This evaluative talk has a distinct linguistic structure that is similar to narrative storytelling processes (Eggins & Slade, 1997; Guendouzi, 2001). Stories are a way to make sense of the world (Fisher, 1987), and one of gossip's key components is its storytelling framework (Baumeister et al., 2004; Dunbar, 2004, Wert & Salovey, 2004). Whereas narrative is usually structured with a beginning, middle, and end to a story, the structure of gossip is flexible and does not require a complicated conflict or resolution in its story-telling process (Eder & Enke, 1991; Eggins & Slade, 1997). According to Bergmann (1993), gossip is structured with opening phrases, the gossip itself, and ending phrases similar to narrative. As Eggins and Slade suggest, the main difference lies in the interactivity of gossip: it requires those engaged in the story to "co-construct the gossip" through continual interaction and feedback (1997, p. 276). In essence, the public sharing of gossip is a shared and collaborative storytelling experience that cements solidarity through shared values and agreement upon a collective worldview through the contribution of individual participants (Baumeister et al., 2004; Dunbar, 2004).

Given that evaluative talk, or co-construction of storytelling, can occur externally through this public sharing of gossip, defined here as the actual spoken sharing of gossip discourse with another, this researcher considers that similar evaluative experiences can occur as an internal process during the private consumption of gossip, particularly when viewed through a celebrity gossip lens. It is important to understand the prevalence of celebrity gossip consumption and its potential for impacting consumers.

Celebrity gossip. One of the ways to measure celebrity influence is through an individual's involvement with the celebrity (Brown & de Matviuk, 2010). Sun, Rubin and Haridakis (2008) describe involvement as a psychological media process that motivates engagement with media messages. Television effects research has shown that repeated exposure to characters and stars increases viewer involvement with those particular figures (Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Turner, 1993). For example, when a sports celebrity becomes associated with a health issue, such as cancer or steroid use, the media draw attention to the issue, attracting public involvement regardless of the celebrity's actual status surrounding that issue (Brown & de Matviuk, 2010). Those already involved with a given celebrity are more likely to be influenced by that celebrity's beliefs and practices than those without such involvement.

Celebrity involvement blurs public and private lives, allowing consumers of gossip to perceive an authentic relationship with a celebrity, thus creating a sense of closeness to famous people (Mendelson, 2007). Whereas much of the celebrity-centered research centers around effects linked to individual involvement with celebrities such as liking, identification, parasocial interaction, or celebrity worship (e.g., Brown et al., 2003; Kalichman & Hunter, 1992), media studies have found that how people gossip about celebrities and television characters is quite similar to how people gossip about family, friends and acquaintances, which may imply that celebrity gossip consumers might have a hard time differentiating celebrity involvement from real-life relationships (Katz & Liebes, 1990; Fox, 2001; Post, 1994). This parasocial interaction, or a one-way friendship based on an illusion of interaction with a celebrity, results in gossip consumers believing that the celebrity is communicating directly to them, even though the celebrity has no knowledge of the relationship (Katz & Liebes, 1990). The public personae of celebrities are generally caricatures, but the media (and the public at large) call them by their

first names and believe that they/we understand their motivations (Brewer, 2009). Although some scholarly work has pathologized celebrity gossip fans, even characterizing them as lonely and labeling them as celebrity worshipers (Feasey, 2008; Giles, 2000), other researchers avoid such negative judgments, finding instead that celebrity gossip may serve many needs for consumers, including easing loneliness and creating a sense of community (De Backer et al., 2007; Gamson, 1994; Harrington & Bielby, 1985).

Although it is uncommon to do so, some scholars include celebrity gossip in the overarching definition of evaluative talk based on this perceived celebrity relationship (De Backer, 2012; De Backer & Fisher, 2012; Gamson, 1994; Harrington & Bielby, 1985). Whereas some argue that individuals speculating about celebrities they do not personally know should be excluded from the definition (Noon & Delbridge, 1993), others assert that gossip can include unknown others (De Backer, 2012; De Backer & Fisher, 2012; Gamson, 1994; Harrington & Bielby, 1985). Indeed, the nature of contemporary celebrity allows those gossiping to share about the people they have come to "know" through media depictions (Gamson, 1994). Unlike traditional news reporting, celebrity gossip reports information as if celebrities were real friends in an individual's network; thus it makes sense that many consumers' minds process the media encounters with celebrities as if they were real and personal experiences (De Backer, 2012).

In summary, celebrity gossip is a phenomenon that has the potential to affect consumers of such gossip. Given the massive volume of celebrity gossip consumed each year and that consumers, particularly those "involved" with a celebrity, may be susceptible to messages contained in celebrity gossip, it makes sense that both the public sharing and private consumption of celebrity gossip be considered a phenomena that serves the gossip functions described in the body of scholarly work about gossip in general.

Most of the research reviewed focuses on the private consumption of celebrity gossip as a parasocial activity—a form of mediated communication that gives the "illusion of a face-to face situation" (Horton & Wohl, 1986, pp. 185), with little attention to the public sharing of such information. This is an important gap in the body of gossip research for understanding some of the hidden motivations and needs that spur the public sharing of celebrity gossip that is so prevalent among individuals. This researcher enhances understanding of how celebrity gossip in particular meets both social and individual needs through the distinct and separate processes of public sharing and private consumption.

History of women and gossip. In the early eighth and ninth centuries, gossip was strongly associated with women, particularly midwives (Emler, 1994; Yerkovich, 1977). Women who delivered babies were called godparents or "god-sibs" (Yerkovich, 1977), and they were described as being "close to God" because when they delivered babies, they also shared the good news (gossip) that a child of God had been born into the community. Gossip later became perceived as negative in medieval society due to religious leaders warning of the evil of idle talk (Schein, 1994). Some scholars also argue men's fear of relinquishing power and loss of social control to women may be another reason why gossip garnered these negative connotations (Emler, 1994). Indeed, historically, men have feared how women talk or gossip, particularly surrounding men's sexual prowess. In Britain from the 14th through the 18th century, gossipers, mainly women, were labeled as witches and forced to wear iron masks with spikes directed inside their mouth, a symbolic physical device to stop their tongues (Emler, 1994). However, research shows both men and women gossip; the primary difference between the two involves the topic of gossip (Evaldsson, 2002; Smith, 2005). Men tend to gossip about sports and leadership, whereas women tend to gossip about family issues (Evaldsson, 2002; Smith, 2005).

Scholarly work has shown minimal differences between gossip and gender (Evaldsson, 2002), with little empirical evidence that women gossip more than men (Foster, 2003; Levin & Arluke, 1985). On the contrary, scholarly work has shown rather slight differences in gossip behavior. It is not that gossip is simply a woman's activity, but rather that women may be studied more often than men (Evaldsson, 2002). As such, this researcher's study of women, as discussed in the methodology section, is not meant to perpetuate the myth that women are "gossipers."

Functions of Gossip

Many scholars have defined various and often contradictory functions and features of gossip (Bosson, Johnson, Nikederhoffer & Swann, 2006; Foster, 2004; McAndrew et al., 2007; Sabini & Silver, 1982; Yerkovich, 1977). The following literature review follows the model set forth by Nevo and Nevo (1993), which approaches gossip functions according to two overarching themes: the sociological-anthropological approach and the psychological approach. As mentioned, these approaches form the definitions of public sharing and private consumption in this study. Scholars often cite Nevo and Nevo's approach, hence its selection for this project. While Nevo and Nevo's model provides a useful structure to examine social and individual gossip functions, the literature review warranted the need to modify and provide additional functions from other prominent scholars to render a full understanding of the phenomenon (Dunbar, 1996; Eder and Enke, 1991; Gluckman, 1963; Nevo & Nevo, 1993; Nevo, Nevo & Derech-Zehavi, 1993; Rysman, 1977). With that said, the sociological-anthropological approach focuses on how gossip contributes to group cohesion, group identification, group boundaries, and social norms through public sharing; and the psychological approach focuses more on the ways that gossip fulfills individual-based needs such as entertainment, status, identity, information, stress, and uncertainty while privately consuming gossip.

Sociological-Anthropological Approach

Nevo and Nevo's (1993) sociological-anthropological approach studies the social functions and impacts of gossip and how information is shared to enforce group norms. Through the public sharing of gossip, groups become cohesive, create internal identification, enforce moral policing, generate social norms, maintain social bonds, and reinforce group boundaries of insiders and outsiders (Dunbar, 1996; Eder and Enke, 1991; Gluckman, 1963; Nevo & Nevo, 1993; Nevo, Nevo & Derech-Zehavi, 1993; Rysman, 1977). For example, Dunbar's (2004) evolutionary approach suggests that gossip strengthens and bonds groups together, similar to ape grooming habits. Apes socially groom by picking bugs off each other to promote unity, closeness and group cohesion. According to this view, gossip is the human version of bug-picking; it too works to cement and maintain social bonds. Levin and Arluke (1985) described gossip's social value as so imperative that even long-standing religious and moral proscriptions against gossip could not dissuade people from this important social activity.

This section contains descriptions of three sociological-anthropological functions of gossip: social bonding, creation of insiders and outsiders; and social norms. Social bonding and social norms are conceptually different, but many gossip researchers use the terms interchangeably. To prevent confusion, however, this project defines *bonding* as the process of cementing relationships and norms as the cultural rules and regulations that formally or informally govern a group. Gossip aids in both functions and may do so simultaneously. With that in mind, this researcher first explores social bonds, examining how the public sharing of gossip can create intimacy. Next is the discussion of the in-group and out-group delineation based on social values. Finally, social norms are explored, focusing on the public sharing of

gossip through storytelling and how it can communicate sanctions when group norms are violated.

Social bonding. The idea that gossip unites people and functions as a social bonding system has dominated gossip research for more than twenty years (Baumeister et al., 2004; De Backer, Larson & Cosmides, 2007; Nevo & Nevo, 1993; Nevo, Nevo & Derech-Zehavi's, 1993). Gossip forges social bonds by storytelling (Baumeister et al., 2004; Dunbar, 2004). According to Fisher (1987), stories are also a way to make sense of the world, similar to the way people understand logical arguments. In stories, or in this celebrity gossip, participants are searching for "representations of commonly held values and beliefs...." (Brewer, 2009, p. 171), thereby fostering a social bond through a shared interactive experience (Baumeister et al., 2004; Yoo, 2009). This bonding process occurs not through passive listening, but rather through active participation in the public sharing and co-construction of gossip between the teller and listener in which the listener engages, elaborates and contributes to the ongoing story. These engaged stories, such as telling a friend about a wonderful experience with a new babysitter, talking with someone in line at the grocery store about how the store manager supports the local American Cancer Society, or speculating about how Tom Cruise's public divorce could affect his daughter's self-esteem, actively create a shared interactive experience between those communicating.

Contrary to Nevo and Nevo's (1993) sociological approach, other scholars claim gossip also fosters social bonding through shared entertainment and humor (Ayim, 1994; Foster, 2004; Morreall, 1994; Patel & Turner, 2008) such as when sharing the entertaining exploits of a local congressperson, celebrity scandal, or even how Aunt Millie makes awful fruit cake (Morreall, 1994). For example, Tovares (2006) analyzed interactions between family and friends after

watching the show "Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire?" He found that gossip about the television show was not only a valuable resource for entertainment, but that it also fostered intimacy in relationships; gossip about the show helped family and friends to bond more deeply through shared entertainment. In a study about soap opera gossip, Reigel (1996) found that soap opera fans developed social bonds based on shared interests in the characters' life experiences. Shuh (2012) found similar results when exploring celebrity gossip among adolescent girls during focus group interviews. Her findings indicate that gossiping about celebrities gave the girls an increased sense of group belonging, provided a forum to gather important information affecting their daily lives, and supported the formation and maintenance of social bonds.

As social bonds form, intimacy between individuals deepens as they spend more time together sharing information of mutual interest (Baumeister et al., 2004; Feasey, 2008; Foster, 2004). Many scholars assert that "true" gossip happens in the most intimate of settings and that it takes a deep level of trust to gossip and expose oneself to risk (Baruh, 2009; Baumeister et al., 2004; Feasey, 2008; Foster, 2004). Gossiping about the details of an attempted suicide, for instance, requires a lower level of uncertainty when one is intimately bonded through trust—the act of sharing gossip is a way to communicate the gossiper's confidence in the recipient (Hannerz, 1967). Thus, intimacy or "safety" is cemented in the relationship though the public sharing of gossip, which in turn creates trusted exchanges (Foster, 2004). Feasey (2008), for instance, found that women were motivated to exchange both positive and negative celebrity gossip as a way to deepen intimacy while exploring shared cultural ground between each other. Much scholarly work has shown that the public sharing and the private consumption of celebrity gossip is a focal point of intimate connection through soap operas, women's magazines and tabloids (Bird, 1992). These trusted exchanges can backfire as well. As Foster (2004) pointed

out, Monica Lewinsky quickly discovered how trust can backfire after sharing about her affair with President Bill Clinton with Pentagon employee Linda Tripp ("A chronology: Key moments In the Clinton-Lewinsky saga"). Tripp recorded the exchanges and gave those recordings to Newsweek, which turned into national headlines. Also, sharing negative gossip can potentially lead to alienation from the target of the gossip if discovered (Baumeister et al., 2004; Grosser et al., 2010; Turner, Mazur, Wendel, & Winslow, 2003).

Insiders and outsiders. As social bonds and intimacy deepen using gossip, groups of insiders and outsiders are created (Ayim, 1994; Hogg, 2000; Wert & Salovey, 2004). Many times consensus already exists with group insiders about shared values, an ingredient that helps determine how one chooses to engage in a group (Jaworski & Copeland, 2005). Gossip allows for the maintenance of social boundaries, which are used by "insiders" to flag differences between insiders and outsiders (Hannerz, 1967). Group insiders are afforded privilege, bringing pleasure to those who are socially bonded in the group (Ayim, 1994) and ultimately perpetuating social norms (Fine, 1977).

In the "us versus them" type of gossip, individuals gossip about their "enemies," but they also gossip about their peers or friends, those within the in-group. This process allows group members to compare the information to their own personal views, eventually leading to group agreement (Wert & Salovey, 2004). It also serves as a leveling device to neutralize an individual's dominant tendencies, which may affect the groups' best interests (Boehm, 1999). If one person has too much power or influence (Ayim, 1994), it can cause group members to question and criticize the powerful member, creating group anxiety. This anxiety can shift group goals in unintentional directions. Among scholars, this aspect of gossip is troubling in that outcomes such as group unity or exclusion can vary from group to group (Dunbar, 1996; Emler,

1994, McAndrew & Milenkovic, 2002). Ayim (1994) suggests that this might be one of the reasons society is frightened of gossip and its influence.

Gossip is particularly influential when a society or culture is threatened (Wert & Salovey, 2004), but there is also a threat of group members believing false information. Groups naturally tend toward group agreement rather than discord because groups tend to form along the same value systems (Wert & Salovey, 2004). That means gossip could go unchallenged, with group members believing information that is untrue (Bergmann, 1993). At the same time, during this social process of engaging in gossip, participants can also distance themselves from the subjects, allowing for what Jaworkski and Coupland (2005) referred to as "othering." They argue that while the "us versus them" contrasts in-group and out-group distinctions, "othering" places ambiguous definitions of individuals or groups into stereotypes for those considered peculiar, or "freaks," thus making them easier fodder for gossip. For example, the discourse surrounding Michael Jackson's odd behavior had some label him a lunatic ("Jackson: Baby stunt was 'mistake'", 2002, para. 1). When there is a threat of harm (such as Michael Jackson publicly dangling his child over a balcony), group gatekeepers (such as the gossip consumers' horrified response to the potential danger to the child) seem to be bonding through agreement over what society deems appropriate or inappropriate cultural behavior. (Ayim, 1994; Baumeister et al., 2004; Wert & Salovey, 2004). As demonstrated in this example and throughout this section, the social bonding of gossip can also enforce norms simultaneously.

Group norms and sanctions. Gossip often fulfills a social bonding experience, creates insiders and outsiders, and enforces norms simultaneously. Even so, it is important to focus on maintaining group norms and sanctions separately because this function communicates the rules that govern groups and dictates the interactions of people in social situations, as well as creates

and enforces social consequences for those who do not adhere to group norms (Dunbar, 2004; McAndrew et al., 2007). Numerous gossip studies that have examined particular group norms, such as within lobster fisherman (Acheson, 1988) and college rowing teams (Kniffin & Wilson, 2005), have found that gossip enforces group norms when individuals violate expectations within the group. In these cases gossip can be interpreted as an agent for social change when those subjected to gossip stop breaking rules in order to stay members of the group (McAndrew et al., 2007). For example, in the Kniffin and Wilson study, a rowing team member who consistently violated team expectations by arriving late for practice might have experienced gossip from other team members, which would in turn reach the violator (gossip target), who then either conformed to the rules or left the group. Britney Spears also violated group norms when disregarding seat belt safety laws by having her baby in her lap in the front seat of her car. Her actions caused a flurry of negative media celebrity gossip that not only reinforced the legal aspect and the danger she subjected her child to, but also enforced conformity to group norms when she publicly apologized. This type of norms violation and the subsequent consequences of negative gossip that followed could affect not only Spears's future parental choices, but those of gossip consumers as well.

Feasey's (2008) study examined the enforcement of group norms. She gathered responses from young women who read a specific magazine called *heat* to examine the meaning of gossip for this "celebrity-mad" audience. She discovered, among many things, that the women used celebrity knowledge as a way to enforce group norms:

> Indeed, the ways in which my participants used celebrity coverage as a safe and seemingly harmless way into wider discussions about sexuality, morality, and social roles can be seen to pick up on existing research that tells us that popular star coverage appeals

to the reader precisely because it can be used to engage in debates about fundamental moral issues, such as infidelity and the role of violence in society, without passing judgments and making potentially unpopular comments about friends, family and work colleagues. (p. 693)

Gossip communicates norms through storytelling, and it functions as "an extension of observational learning, allowing one to learn from the triumphs and misadventures of people beyond one's immediate perceptual sphere" (Baumeister et al., 2004, p. 116). As Brewer (2009) pointed out, celebrity gossip fills a need by exposing what famous people do in their personal relationships, offering gossip consumers the freedom to assess celebrity actions against their own lives while at the same time reinforcing existing beliefs. The public sharing of interpersonal celebrity gossip provides the context in which to do so.

In review, Nevo and Nevo's (1993) sociological-anthropological approach helps to explain how the public sharing of celebrity gossip enforces group social norms, creates insiders and outsiders, and maintains social bonds through deepening intimacy (Dunbar, 1996; Eder & Enke, 1991; Gluckman, 1963; Rysman, 1977). The next section explores Nevo and Nevo's (1993) psychological approach, which will show how both the public sharing and private consumption of celebrity gossip serve important functions at the individual level.

Psychological Approach

Nevo and Nevo's (1993) psychological approach to gossip centers on widely cited gossip functions at the individual level. Specifically, this section outlines entertainment, status enhancement, identity formation, information gathering, stress relief, and uncertainty management (Baumesier et al., 2004; Ben-Ze'ev, 1994; Dunbar, 2004; Gluckman, 1963; Wert & Salovey, 2004).

Entertainment. Private consumption of gossip is a form of entertainment that provides a needed break from everyday routines (Dunbar, 2004; Fox, 2001). Although Nevo and Nevo (1993) do not recognize this, the public sharing of interpersonal celebrity gossip meets entertainment needs as people bond, share, and discuss information together. As many scholars point out, celebrity gossip can merely serve the purpose of immediate amusement (Ben-Ze'ev, 1984; Rosnow, 1977), transcending the maliciousness and pettiness that have given gossip a bad reputation (Morreal, 1994; Shuh, 2012).

Status. Besides providing entertainment, gossip can enhance the value, influence, and power of the individuals who engage in it (Foster, 2004; Mills, 2010). One way that a gossiper can become influential is when others agree with the gossiper on what is considered acceptable behavior (Foster, 2004). As McAndrew et al. (2007) point out, gossipers increase their status when they protect the group by publicly revealing cheaters, for instance. At the same time, gossip can provide a way to neutralize power (Boehm, 1999). Those who misuse their status at the expense of the group can be ostracized or put in their place by social pressures through the public sharing of gossip. Tholander (2003) asserted gossip can increase status because navigating gossip conversations requires considerable skill. Finally, gossipers gain status because they have information others do not. Donath (2007) found such status-enhancing results when examining online activities such as celebrity fashion gossip. He suggested that the celebrity gossip his subjects were consuming was not about fashion. Rather, it was a venue to create status through "social position in an information based society" (p. 242). Likewise, Feasey (2008) found that celebrity knowledge functioned as a status enhancer for those "in the know" (p. 690).

Stress. As suggested, gossip helps people to lower stress by offering a much-needed distraction from everyday life (Dunbar, 2004; Fox, 2001), although it can also lead to increased

stress. For instance, although fast-paced technology has increased societal stress levels by fragmenting people's ability to connect in small communities that promote social bonding, technology also actively keeps us connected to one another, which in turn boosts the immune system, stimulates endorphins, and lowers stress (Fox 2001). According to Fox, mobile gossip via cell phones is a social lifeline that "restores our sense of connection and community, and provides an antidote to the pressures and alienation of modern life" (p. 1). Similarly, although researchers claim that witnessing a social norm violation increases stress (Feinberg, Willer, Steller, & Keltner, 2012), that stress decreases when witnesses are able to publicly share that behavior with someone else. In essence, gossiping about the person who violated a social norm "quiets the frustration that drove their gossip" (Feinberg et al., p. 1022).

Information and uncertainty. Information-seeking explains much of the drive to publicly share and privately consume gossip (Wert & Salovey, 2004). At the same time, gossip also helps people to cope with uncertainty (Grosser et al., 2012). When sharing gossip, personal connections are made, providing social and emotional support that helps disseminate valuable information, thereby reducing uncertainty ("Defend your research: It's not 'unprofessional' to gossip at work," 2010, para. 1; Foster, 2004; Waddington & Fletcher, 2005). A number of scholars have used phrases such as "letting off steam" and "venting" emotions (Foster, 2004; Levin & Arluke, 1985), language that "implies a cathartic release from anger, guilt, anxiety or some other unpleasant internal state and a return to a balanced state of repose," relieving unease or discomfort from unknown forces (Foster, 2004, p. 85).

Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, Labianca, and Ellwardt (2012) discussed a workplace situation between co-workers Amanda, Louis and Ron that points to the uncertainty-reducing function of gossip. Amanda, a project manager charged with recruiting a special team, asks trusted co-

worker Louis about Ron's potential for being a successful team member. Louis shares that Ron is struggling with personal difficulties and may not be a functional team member. When Amanda recruits Ron and he in turn declines the assignment, she is neither surprised nor concerned about Ron's decision. According to Grosser et al. (2012), this informative gossip exchange may have alleviated Amanda's uncertainty and saved her from misunderstanding why Louis did not want to be part of her team.

In terms of the public sharing of celebrity gossip, Feasey (2008) points to the liberating effects her focus group participants experienced when gossiping about stars with obvious flaws. She found that when her participants shared what they thought of as mistakes by celebrities, such as the fashion and make-up imperfections emphasized in *Heat* magazine, they were better able to accept their own imperfections while at the same time enjoy familiar aspects of life.

Identity. A number of different terms are used in the scholarly literature for the formation and maintenance of identity, including self, identity exploration, identity development, self-concept, ego and similar terms (Bailey, 1999; Barker, 2005; Collette, 2005). This project uses work on identity formation guided by Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory, which states that identity formation is a process of exploring and selecting knowledge about oneself from a social environment. In essence, identity is an individual's expression or conception of their individuality or group associations, including their cultural identity and work identity. (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Gleason, 1983; Tracy & Tretheway, 2005). Identities are "highly malleable" (p. 1038), and people strive to enhance their identities. A person's identity formation constantly evolves, shifts, and adapts to transitions in life (O'Reilly, 2010). The process allows people to explore, choose, adjust, and progress in their lives in various contexts (Grotevant, 1987) while also integrating past experience, present understanding, and future plans into self-awareness

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(Marcia, 1988). As part of this process, people sort themselves and others into groups that allow for comparisons and enhancements to their identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

The public sharing of gossip also plays an important role in the creation of self-views (Wert & Salovey, 2004), thereby including a social component in this individual-level process of identity formation. Because gossip helps individuals learn how to behave in acceptable ways through social groups (Baumeister et al., 2004; Dunbar, 2004; Kuttler, Parker, & La Greca, 2002), it affects identity as people seek social environments that support self-verification. The public sharing of celebrity gossip allows individuals to talk about themselves with others through the guise of third parties. This is likely to happen when the celebrity's choice aligns with the gossiper's personal choice (Jenkins, 1992). In addition, if negative gossip about a celebrity occurs through public sharing, individuals look to others to verify their identity when they believe they are being misconstrued (Swann, 2005).

The Public Sharing and Private Consumption of Gossip

Gossip serves many functions. From a social learning perspective, gossip offers cultural codes of conduct and moral rules (Brewer, 2009). From an individual perspective, gossip provides a representation of a person's fundamental values that reinforces a sense of self (Wert & Salovey, 2004). Despite the fact that there is a growing body of research on gossip functions, few studies have explored how the public sharing and private consumption of gossip may serve different gossip functions. Much of the existing research treats social and individual gossip functions interchangeably. For example, Foster (2004) categorizes the social functions of gossip as mechanisms for information, entertainment, friendship and influence, functions commonly cited in Nevo and Nevo's (1993) psychological approach for individuals. De Backer and Fisher (2012) describe the functions of gossip in an information-based context that drives reputation

management and strategy learning. Such inconsistencies within gossip research may be one of the reasons a gap persists in understanding gossip as a complex social and personal phenomenon.

Gossip research has also categorized its subject—often inconsistently—in terms of valence (Baumeister et al., 2004; Foster, 2004; Grosser et al., 2010; Turner et al., 2003). Positive gossip is when the evaluative talk of the third party is favorable (Dunbar, 1996; Patel & Turner, 2008) or if it is sanctioned as socially approved behavior (Patel & Turner, 2008). Negative gossip, on the other hand, is evaluative talk of a pejorative nature that puts the third party in the negative light (Dunbar, 2004; Eder & Enke, 1991; Emler, 1994; Wert & Salovey, 2004), or else is sanctioned as socially unapproved behavior (Patel & Turner, 2008). While both positive and negative frames are valid contexts with which to explore gossip, this study eliminated a valence context. The researcher thought valance to be a diversion from the targeted focus of better understanding the functions being served when publicly sharing and privately consuming.

Public sharing of gossip. The public sharing of gossip, based on Nevo and Nevo's (1993) sociological approach, is the actual spoken sharing in person or online of interpersonal celebrity gossip discourse with another. Gossip scholars have differentiated the public sharing of celebrity of gossip primarily as it relates to group cohesion, group identification, moral policing, social norms, social bonds, and group boundaries (Dunbar, 1996; Eder & Enke, 1991; Gluckman, 1963; Nevo & Nevo, 1993; Rysman, 1977). Despite the numerous studies describing the functions of gossip and how it is shared publicly, none have sought to separate the functions and explore them from both a public sharing and private consumption lens. Hatfield (2011) was one of the first media scholars to find evidence that publicly sharing celebrity gossip among mothers served information-seeking needs. Feasey (2008) found that interpersonal celebrity gossip sharing among women met both social and individual needs through status and entertainment.

Given the massive volume of celebrity gossip, and given that numerous gossip scholars have defined various and often contradictory functions and features of the public sharing of gossip (Bosson, Johnson, Nikederhoffer & Swann, 2006; Foster, 2004; McAndrew et al., 2007; Sabini & Silver, 1982; Yerkovich, 1977), it makes sense that celebrity gossip should be considered as a phenomenon that serves important functions, particularly in the realm of the public sharing of celebrity gossip. This public sharing could be meeting needs and serving functions not previously understood. Exploring celebrity gossip, rich with information-seeking and uncertainty, could lay the groundwork for understanding such processes. It also makes sense that the private consumption of celebrity gossip be considered as a separate phenomenon as well.

Private consumption of gossip. In line with Nevo and Nevo's (1993) individual psychological approach as one of two functional approaches to gossip, the private consumption of gossip is defined as the personal reading and viewing of celebrity gossip via magazines, newspapers, television shows and internet. Although most gossip scholars have not differentiated private consumption as a separate aspect of gossip, Nevo and Nevo (1993) have identified several gossip functions at the individual level that are similar in definition to other prominent gossip scholars: entertainment, status enhancement, identity formation, information gathering, stress relief, and uncertainty management (Baumeister et al., 2004; Ben-Z'ev, 1994; Dunbar, 2004; Gluckman, 1963; Nevo, Nevo, & Derech-Zehavi's; 1993; Wert & Salovey, 2004).

One of the main mechanisms driving gossip consumption is the opportunity for vicarious learning; gossip consumers gain indirect experience and insight through gossip's content (Baumeister et el., 2004; De Backer and Fisher, 2012). The importance of the content does not primarily reside in the subject of the gossip itself, but rather on what happened to the people within the gossip narrative, providing valuable life lessons (De Backer and Fisher, 2012). De

Backer and Fisher suggest through an evolutionary approach that gossip contains problem-solving strategies that are associated with meeting biological survival and reproduction needs. Gossip that deals with topics that involve conflict, scandal, or romance and sexual relationships outweigh all other topics of gossip:

> Acquiring information on who was having sex with whom, who was fighting with whom, and who had access to valuable resources would have increased individuals' ability to navigate their social environment, and consequently their ability to obtain access to mate and resources. (p.407)

Despite these claims that biological and reproductive needs are a driving force for gossip consumption, a large gap persists in understanding the importance of the functions being served when people privately consume gossip.

When people consume celebrity gossip, they are often seeking representations of their fundamental values that contrast celebrity circumstances with their own (Wert & Salovey, 2004). Private consumption is also influential when examining celebrity involvement (Brown & de Matviuk, 2010). As previously mentioned, television effects research has shown that repeated exposure to characters and stars increases viewer involvement with that individual (Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Turner, 1993) allowing consumers of gossip to perceive a sense of authentic relationship with a celebrity and sense of closeness to those famous (Mendelson, 2007).

With that said, even though gossip is inherently social in nature, there are no empirical studies of gossip that separately examine social and individual gossip functions. This study expands the understanding of gossip in the scholarly literature, particularly within the genre of media gossip studies. Academics have typically placed celebrity gossip within the contexts of fandom and parasocial activities, which are often characterized as pathological and marginal.

Placing the public sharing and the private consumption of celebrity gossip back into the mainstream of social behavior can contribute unique elements to the scholarly understanding of the social and individual aspects of gossip. As such, the literature supports that a gap exists in the understanding of how gossip functions when publicly sharing and privately consuming celebrity gossip.

This researcher has built a rationale to establish that the two processes of celebrity gossip (public sharing and private consumption) are important and independent, while also serving specific functions of gossip. Since there are social functions to celebrity gossip as well as individual functions to celebrity gossip, it is possible that an understanding of all functions, as well as lived experiences, could shed light on what may be occurring for people as they participate in celebrity gossip.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to first separate social and individual gossip functions according to the binary approach framed by Nevo and Nevo (1993) through the lens of public sharing and private consumption. In addition, the study explored participants' lived experiences of celebrity gossip to better understand these two modes of gossip engagement and how they may be used in different (though interrelated) ways. As such, the following research questions evolved from the study's purpose:

RQ1: What are the functions of celebrity gossip when publicly sharing?

RQ2: What are the functions of celebrity gossip when privately consuming?

RQ3: What is the lived experience when publicly sharing celebrity gossip?

RQ4: What is the lived experience when privately consuming celebrity gossip?

In addition, as discussed in the research results in Chapter Four, an additional question emerged that warranted investigation:

RQ5: What is the lived experience when publicly sharing and privately consuming celebrity gossip?

The next chapter outlines the methodology used to explore the research questions.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents the study's methodology. An explanation of the assumptions inherent to a qualitative design and grounded theory are discussed. A detailed description is provided of the ways that focus groups and individual interviews are used in the study with a special emphasis on the role of the researcher as a data collection tool. The chapter then outlines procedures for data collection and analysis and concludes with addressing the study's trustworthiness to ensure methodological quality.

Research Design

This project uses an interpretive qualitative methodology. In qualitative research, the researcher is particularly concerned with the actual process of collecting data—results are determined to a large extent by the type of information gathered and the method of collection, and the researcher herself is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The data collected in qualitative studies generally reflect the researcher's focus on individual experiences and how individuals make sense of their world (Merriman, 1988). Qualitative researchers are seeking an in-depth understanding of the meaning-making process in order to interpret a phenomenon through the meanings that individuals bring to the topic (Melincavage, 2008; Yin, 2003). As Creswell (1998) points out, a qualitative approach will bring forth the answers to questions of how or what, rather than trying to ascertain why something is "so." Gamson (1994) noted that qualitative methodologies can be especially appropriate for shedding light on the ways in which celebrity gossip is consumed and interpreted.

Qualitative analytic methods tend to be divided into two camps: "those tied to, or stemming from a particular theoretical or epistemological position," such as conversation analysis and interpretive phenomenological analysis; and those that are "independent of theory

and epistemology," such as grounded theory, discourse analysis, and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.78). Grounded theory, a foundational method for qualitative analysis, provides the researcher theoretical freedom, since it is based upon developing an overarching explanation for the findings within the data while also offering flexibility and exploration (Charmaz, 2006). While formal theories may be created using grounded theory, the present study strives to develop a rich conceptual analysis through categories that explain and synthesize the ways that people use celebrity gossip, with an emphasis on understanding complexity and facilitating a deeper awareness of the phenomenon under study (Pugach, 2001). The aim is to develop a fresh theoretical interpretation of the data rather than aim for a final or complete interpretation (Charmaz, 1983). The conclusions drawn are then compared to previous work as well as other literature and perspectives to point out differences or gaps in current understanding of the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Grounded theory was developed in 1967 through the collaborative effort of sociologists Glaser and Strauss, and it focuses on the interpretive process of how a theory emerges based upon the following criteria: how well data fit conceptual categories; how well the categories explain or predict ongoing interpretations; and the relevance of the categories to the core issues being observed by the researcher. This method is built upon two key concepts: constant comparison, in which different streams of data are collected and analyzed simultaneously (Allan, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and theoretical sampling, a "systematic and credible approach" that allows for the emergence of categories that "meet certain theoretical characteristics or conceptual frameworks" (Tracy, 2013, p. 136). This approach allows a researcher's decisions regarding data collection to be determined by the understanding that is being constructed as the research unfolds (Charmaz, 2006; Tracy, 2013). At the same time, few grounded theory studies

actually build theory, but focus on providing "an analytic handle on a specific experience" (Charmaz, 2008). Because of this study's exploratory and interpretive orientation for deeper understanding, grounded theory was employed incorporating both Glaser and Strauss's (1967) more traditional constant comparative methodology, along with Charmaz's (2006) co-constructive process. It also closely adheres to a social constructionist interpretation as outlined by Charmaz.

Social constructionism is a theoretical perspective which assumes that people create their own social realities (Charmaz, 2006). It places its emphasis on everyday interactions between people, especially how they use language to construct their reality (Andrews, 2012). This perspective allows for the researcher to take an active role, making decisions that shape the process and finished product throughout the research (Charmaz, 2011). According to Charmaz (2008), this perspective makes the following assumptions:

> (1) Reality is multiple, processual, and constructed—but constructed under particular conditions; (2) the research process emerges from interaction; (3) it takes into account the researcher's positionality, as well as that of the research participants; (4) the researcher and the researched co-construct the data—data are a product of the research process, not simply observed objects of it. Researchers are part of the research situation, and their positions, privileges, perspectives and interactions affect it (p. 402).

This iterative approach enables a reflexive process—the researcher revisits data and progressively refines focus and understanding (Tracy, 2013). For example, Zambrano-Varghese (2014) explored the development of life plans in young adult women utilizing an iterative process. Her goal was to glean information that would empower participants to achieve their life visions. Through the iterative process, which included memo-writing and simultaneous data collection and data analysis, the researcher revealed that the participants were already empowered and were actually more focused on striving to become role models themselves.

With that said, this approach is aligned with the goals of this study as it seeks to understand how gossip functions as well as explore the lived experiences of people as they publicly share and privately consume celebrity gossip.

Researcher Background

Each stage of inquiry in this study was a co-construction between the participants and the researcher (Charmaz, 2006; Tracy, 2013). This researcher was not separate from the setting, context, and responses of the participants, as suggested by Morrow (2005). The researcher's personal experience includes a career and business based on the topic of gossip. Although this researcher has been speaking about gossip to an international audience through a pop culture lens, she now turns to an academic framework to gain a deeper understanding of the social and individual functions that the private consumption and public sharing of gossip can serve. Given this involvement in both her practice and her scholarship, it was imperative the researcher take a reflexive stance, including an in-depth scrutiny of her own experience, interpretations and decisions influencing the inquiry (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher maintained this scrutiny through a number of methods, including self-reflective journaling, memos, and critical discussions with advisors, which are detailed in the discussion about data collection and data analysis below.

Additionally, the researcher employed bracketing (Moustakas, 1994) during the focus groups and interviews to understand and experience each response through a suspension of critical judgment and suspension of critical engagement of the researcher's assumptions to allow for the interpretive process to follow.

Method of Evidence Collection

Evidence was collected using three focus group interviews and seven in-depth individual interviews with female employees of Detroit-based advertising agencies. A semi-structured interview guide was designed for the initial focus group and individual interviews. This guide was refined as the study progressed, reflecting the flexibility afforded in a grounded theory method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The initial interview protocol evolved for the remaining focus groups and interviews to allow for emerging patterns and categories. Skilled grounded theory interviewers focus on remaining alert to interesting leads to obtain rich material (Charmaz, 2006). This flexibility stimulates discussion, allowing interviews to be more creative while learning what data are most important (Tracy, 2013). Upon completion of the fifth individual interview, two more individual interviews were conducted to allow for member checking. The final interview was also the first individual interview participant. Data were collected within a five-month period.

Participants

In order to focus on the experience of public and private gossip consumption, the researcher created criteria for participation. At the start of the study and prior to data collection and analysis, this researcher decided to examine celebrity gossip through the motherhood role, and particularly through the lens of what constituted being a "good mother," to build upon the work of Hatfield (2011). During initial interviews, it became apparent that capturing this sample of mothers' lived experiences could not be limited to the conversation of motherhood in the public sharing and private consumption of celebrity gossip: these mothers wanted to share about a vast array of issues within their multiple roles. In retrospect, being a mother may not have been a necessary criterion.

With that said, eligibility criteria required mothers to be between the ages of 18 and 55. The wide range in age guards against group cohesion, which can narrow the scope of views (Krueger & Casey, 2009). They were also required to be mothers through childbirth, adoption, or marriage, and they had to serve as the primary caretaker of one or more children ages 0-18. Finally, mothers had to report that they actively engage in the public sharing and private consumption of celebrity gossip, similar to Feasy's (2008) focus group criteria of "celebrity-mad" participants. A homogenous group, such as this group of mothers who actively engage in celebrity gossip, allows for a better free-flow of discussion among participants with a shared perspective on the research topic (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Morgan, 1997). That interest could be reflected in their celebrity gossip sharing and consumption through internet use, subscriptions to magazines such as "Star Magazine" or "People," or a commitment to watching such shows as "TMZ" or "Entertainment Tonight."

A purposeful sampling design was implemented for this study (Charmaz, 2006; Morse, 2007; Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2013). This sampling choice brings focus to the sample, reduces variation, simplifies analysis, and facilitates group interviewing (focus groups) (Patton, 2015). The logic and power behind purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases, providing depth, particularly from those engaged in the phenomena of celebrity gossip, matching the aims of this study. Participants were recruited from five metro Detroit advertising agencies for both the focus group interviews and individual interviews based upon whether they met the criteria. The advertising agencies were chosen for several reasons. This researcher wanted to quickly reach an audience engaged in the public sharing and the private consumption of celebrity gossip; those in advertising were thought to be more likely to discuss it because of the nature of their business. Advertising agencies tend to be progressive in nature and require employees to

have an awareness of trending conversations within pop culture audiences. The progressive nature of the industry also makes advertising agencies more likely to accommodate and hire mothers, similar to the practices of tech companies like Google. Also, advertising agency employees were thought to be more open to participating in this type of study; they conduct focus groups themselves and are familiar with the process.

Additionally, the participants in this study knew each other. According to Morgan and Krueger (1993), the idea that focus groups must consist of strangers is a myth. As Morgan (1997) points out, "social scientists routinely conduct focus groups in organizations and other naturally occurring groups in which acquaintance is unavoidable" (p. 38). In fact, those who know each other have more of an ability to generate a discussion, compared to strangers who often experience great difficulty in focus group settings (Morgan, 1997). As Krueger states, while "the focus group is characterized by homogeneity, sufficient variation among participants" will "allow for contrasting opinions" (p. 71). A possible drawback, for instance, may be that the group consists of all friendly co-workers currently in a relationship. This situation could harbor an already made in-group that may affect the results of the study. However, groups with familiarity could also convey a deeper understanding of the functions that gossip serves because of the intimacy already developed in their relationships with one another. Also, as suggested by Kreuger and Casey (2009), care was exercised in selecting participants who are in equivalent positions of power within the organization to ensure that participants have freedom to explain their comments fully while avoiding power differentials in the workplace.

Five Detroit advertising agencies were selected for recruitment. They were selected for two reasons. First, they each have an employee base of 50 or more employees to create the likelihood of sufficient participation. Second, these agencies allowed the researcher to conduct

focus groups onsite to provide a naturalistic setting for participants. Selecting a naturalistic setting provides a level of comfort for participants (Krueger & Casey, 2009) and makes attendance more feasible during work hours, which also alleviated the need for daycare. The agencies' key stakeholders were also amenable to repeating the recruitment process for the individual interviews that followed the focus group participation.

Participants were first informed of the eligibility criteria for focus group participation via email through their advertising agency's HR department and through poster distribution in the workplace (See Appendix H). The researcher pre-scheduled the focus group activity at a location, day and time specified by the agency. Posters were also strategically placed at each agency's location to solicit participation (See Appendix G). One week prior to the focus group, the HR department sent out a company-wide email invitation for potential participants to attend a short presentation which functioned as an overview of the project. The researcher conducted a 5-minute presentation that day, explaining the study and requesting employee participation at the designated time the following week. Interested participants were asked to fill out a pre-screening questionnaire to evaluate their fit with participation criteria (See Appendix A). It was critical to the pre-screening that the participant qualified as a working mother and had a familiarity with celebrity gossip.

The researcher coordinated with each agency to verify participation, including sending a focus group reminder email to the participants selected for the study who met the criteria just prior to the selected date for the focus group (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Because advertising agencies operate on extremely tight deadlines, the researcher conducted a quick "walk through" at each location just prior to the focus group interviews, requesting last-minute participation from

employees to ensure adequate focus group numbers. Participants received a small "thank you" for participation in the form of a $20 gift card.

The individual interview recruitment was also driven by purposive sampling. Upon completion of the three focus group interviews, each agency's HR Department sent email invitations for individual participation. Interested participants were asked to fill out the pre-screening questionnaire to evaluate their appropriateness for the current study (See Appendix A) and instructed to contact the researcher directly. Arrangements were made individually for each participant based upon her convenience. Four of the individual interviews were conducted at their respective offices. One individual interview was conducted via phone because of weather-related issues. One individual interview was conducted at the participant's home.

During the initial data collection and analysis, it became clear that working mothers, rather than mothers, became the most optimal descriptor for the participants. Because the participants did not just discuss their motherhood role and being a "good mother," the researcher, from that point on, started identifying participants as working mothers, providing a rich opportunity to examine the research questions. With that said, working mothers have many concerns including work-life balance matters, equality issues in the workplaces and even finding quality daycare, among many others (Buzzanell, 1997; Buzzanell, Meisenbach, Remke, Liu, Bowers & Conn, 2005). These concerns are replete with potential problems that could be supporting working mothers to publicly share and privately consume celebrity gossip, and providing what Bradac (2001) refers to as the fundamental drive to release doubt and create predictability.

Focus Group Interviews

The focus group has been frequently used in researching celebrity gossip (Feasey, 2008; Gamson, 1994; Hatfield, 2011, Shuh, 2012). Focus groups stimulate conversations, public discourse, and gossip, which contribute to the social construction of meaning (Hermes, 1999). Gossip interaction was critical to this project. Focus groups allow for increased levels of self-disclosure and group interaction that otherwise would be difficult to obtain (Merriman, 1995). The interactive nature inherent to the public sharing of gossip makes focus group interviews an excellent choice for further exploration.

Given that the research questions focus on exploring celebrity gossip that is shared and consumed, it is important to follow the lead of other qualitative researchers to capture the interpretations and experiences of participants as this project sought to explore and separate the functions of public sharing and private consumption of celebrity gossip. This approach provides understanding that is true to a subject's personal experience (Giorgi, 2008) as demonstrated by the rich data obtained during the study.

The use of multiple focus group interviews is ideal in assuring that trends and patterns are detected during data collection (Krueger & Casey, 2006; Morgan, 1997). Krueger and Casey suggest that when using one type of participant, three or four focus groups can ensure saturation. Saturation occurs when new information is no longer gathered from additional data collection (Lunt & Livingstone, 1993; Mason, 2010). Morgan asserts that having "more groups seldom provides meaningful new insights"; researchers stop collecting data when they can anticipate what will be shared next within a group (p. 43). In this case, it was determined that saturation was reached after conducting three focus group interviews ranging from three to six participants. Ideally, participant numbers would range from five to 12.

Individual Interviews

In order to deepen the richness of the findings and enhance trustworthiness, the researcher conducted in-depth individual interviews from the sample of participating advertising agencies for the second phase of the study. As pointed out by Rossman and Wilson (1994), multiple-source data corroborates, elaborates, and illuminates the research in question. Designing a study with more than one method of data gathering can strengthen the study's usefulness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Therefore, after the completion of the first interview and three focus groups, the researcher conducted six additional interviews. Six of the interviews were conducted with new participants. The last interview consisted of a second interview with the study's first individual interview participant. The goal was to reinforce emerging patterns through member checking as discussed in the data analysis section below.

In-depth interviews provide detailed information about a person's thoughts and behaviors (Boyce & Neale, 2006). According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), the in-depth interview is a common strategy for capturing the "deep meaning of experience in the participants' own words" (p. 93). Understanding the individual experiences is important to this project in that it may uncover different uses of gossip by revealing what may have remained untapped in the focus groups. Additionally, focus group participants may struggle to share extensively if others are dominating the discussion (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). Individual interviews also afford the researcher the ability to extract data from an individual participant that may otherwise be difficult to obtain (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). For example, through individual interviews Johansson (2008) discovered that the meaning of "fun" might be serving different gossip functions hidden under the guise of entertainment. Johansson interviewed regular readers of two prominent British tabloids and found that the celebrity gossip consumption may be functioning

as a way for participants to deal with the boredom of day-to-day routines, release unwanted emotion, and manage anxiety, rather than merely what had previously appeared to be an entertainment function. De Backer et al. (2007) discovered through interviewing 103 adolescents that celebrity gossip served educational functions by modeling to teens how to dress and impress as well as helping them decide what is morally right or wrong in culture.

Additionally, incorporating individual interviews after focus group data collection may take the data in a new and possibly contrasting direction (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The premise of the focus group interview is to provide interaction in a non-threatening environment (Morgan, 1997), yet conformity threatens the advantages of focus group interviews. For example, after conducting several focus group interviews, Shuh (2012) found in her individual interviews with teens that some of the participants "edited themselves" in the group setting and proceeded to share more openly on a specific topic during the individual interviews, uncovering rich and previously undisclosed experiences. This new data are directed toward any gaps, unanswered questions, and underdeveloped ideas in the emerging understanding (Fassinger, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Incorporating this new information increases the "conceptual precision" of ideas as the researcher proceeds (Charmaz, 2006). Given the co-constructive nature of sharing gossip with others as well as the constant interplay between data collection and analysis, individual interviews provided additional insight into the participants' experiences as detailed in the next chapter. It also broadened the researcher's understanding of these participants' experiences as reported during the focus group interview phase.

Data Collection

Data collection, which was IRB approved, consisted of a semi-structured interview protocol and questioning routine as suggested by Kreuger and Casey (2009) (See Appendix C).

Audio equipment captured the data. Verbatim transcription of the focus group interviews and individual interviews was completed immediately following each data collection. All transcripts and recordings were held in the strictest confidence. The researcher personally transcribed the data, reading and listening to all transcripts to ensure accuracy. Audio recordings were housed digitally on the researcher's personal computer with a locked password to ensure confidentiality. All transcripts and field notes were locked in the researcher's office file cabinet. All participants were assigned a number for confidentiality during the focus group interviews and were given a pseudonym during the analysis. At the end of the study, all files and recordings were destroyed.

Focus group interviews. Focus group interviews took place at the designated advertising agency's requested location, date and time, and they lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Because audio recordings allow researchers to devote their full attention to the participants being interviewed (Patton, 2002), a microphone was used to accurately capture the group interviews verbatim. One IRB-trained assistant accompanied this researcher in tracking the focus group interactions. Immediately following the focus group, the researcher also documented observations through a personal reflective journal as suggested by Creswell (2003). The goal of this exercise was to capture key words, body language, or any of her own thoughts about the interview, and to also document information gathered from any personal connections including email and telephone conversations.

According to Lindlof and Taylor (2002), a semi-structured interview schedule increases reliability and credibility for a study involving focus groups. With that in mind, the researcher followed the guidelines of Krueger and Casey's (2009) questioning route to extract rich responses and allow for probing. The interview protocol was strategically developed to gain

insight into the experiences of working mothers as they publicly share and privately consume celebrity gossip (See Appendix C).

Focus group moderation consisted of the researcher and one assistant. The researcher served as moderator, while the assistant tracked turn-taking to accurately differentiate participant responses. An audio check was employed before the arrival of participants to ensure an accurate record of the interview. The pre-screen interview survey questionnaires (See Appendix B) and participant consent forms (See Appendix E) were numbered to correspond with each individual participant and were placed on each chair. The participants were greeted at the door and shown to their pre-numbered seat for ease of tracking.

As the moderator, the researcher started with brief consent instructions and member introductions. Consent forms were signed, and she asked each participant to share their first name in order to provide the tracking assistant with a vocal identifier to increase accuracy during the tracking of the interviews. Participants were asked to share if they knew anyone else in the group and, if so, in what capacity. The goal of this inquiry was to uncover possible existing relationships between group members. The researcher employed Morgan's (1997) ice-breaker technique, which evolved into a discussion of "What is the definition of a celebrity?"

The researcher navigated the prepared questions and activities from the interview schedule (See Appendix C) along with the natural flow of conversation, probing to elicit rich data, while at the same time understanding that changes would be made for subsequent interviews based on emerging patterns in data (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researcher conducted a flexible, informal, semi-structured interview allowing for a free flow of information from participants as they shared and related their experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2006; Patton, 1980). Semi-structured interviews are flexible and organic in nature, and stimulate

open discussion. (Tracy, 2013). This type of interview structure is appropriate when the researcher has in-depth knowledge of the topic (Morse & Richards, 2002), and allows for more conversational data collection (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The structure was flexible, as suggested by Kvale (1996), yet allowed the researcher some freedom to probe more or less in-depth as the situation required (Patton, 1990). The researcher maintained consistency across all focus groups with her tone of voice, and she directed probing questions to less verbal participants in order to control any tendency of more active participants that may dominate the discussion (Morgan, 1997).

Individual interviews. The researcher complemented the design that was developed through the focus group interview questions by also using a semi-structured interview protocol. An initial list of questions was created that related back to the guiding research questions for this study (See Appendix D). These questions evolved for subsequent interviews based on the emerging patterns in data (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 90 minutes, as suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009).

As with the focus groups, participants filled out the pre-screen interview survey questionnaires (See Appendix B) and the individual interview consent form (See Appendix F). Audio equipment captured the data. A microphone was used to accurately record the individual interviews verbatim (Patton, 2002). The researcher documented observations in a personal reflective journal immediately following each interview.

Data Analysis

At the start of this project, the researcher initially conducted one focus group interview followed by one individual interview. The initial data collection demonstrated the emergence of new codes that have not been previously explored in gossip literature. The field study yielded a

number of emotional reactions among the participants being interviewed: feeling guilty because of the pleasure and escape derived from consuming and sharing celebrity gossip; feeling sorry for and having empathy for particular celebrities in uncomfortable situations; and praising celebrities whom they considered courageous for having drive and ambition as working mothers. This methodology provided an interesting and fruitful starting point for the project. Grounded theory's iterative nature also allowed for further exploration into uncharted experiences of celebrity gossip's role in these participants' lives.

With that in mind, the researcher used an iterative approach, allowing her to work back and forth between codes, categories and data, and linking the eventual findings to existing research (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2005; Creswell, 2013). With this inductive approach, the researcher extracted information to check, qualify and elaborate category boundaries. Later, she demonstrated comprehensive links among categories through memos, reflexivity and previous literature. In this project, the researcher combined the constant comparison technique of Glaser and Strauss (1967) with Charmaz (2006) and Tracy's (2013) interpretive and co-constructive approach. To do this, the researcher had to use complex reasoning skills throughout the entire process (Creswell, 2005; Creswell, 2013). The researcher's codes were strongly linked to the data (Patton, 1990) at the latent or interpretive level to illuminate the underlying ideas and conceptualizations "that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). However, as Charmaz (2006) notes, the codes and categories identified within the data may bear no apparent relationship to the questions being asked of the participants. This data-driven approach allows for the inclusion of the entire data set to be considered during analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Patton, 1990). While depth and complexity may be

lost, a rich overarching description can be maintained, which is particularly useful when examining an under-researched topic.

Therefore, for both phases of this study, this researcher employed the grounded theory coding process suggested by Charmaz (2006) for both phases of this study which consists of a two-phase approach: (a) initial; (b) focused. Phase 1 involved immersion in the data so that the researcher was familiar with the depth and breadth of the content. This is achieved through the reading and re-reading of the data while simultaneously taking notes and marking ideas for potential codes. The actual and initial coding process entails a line-by-line process that labels a code associated with each line. Initial codes included in vivo codes (the exact words or phrases used by the participants) (Creswell, 2008). As suggested by Charmaz, gerund phrasing was used to create initial codes to assist in remaining immersed in the data.

Phase 2 involved what Charmaz (2006) describes as the secondary coding cycle or focused coding. The focused coding resulted in a list of 69 codes (See Appendix H). These codes are more directed, selective, and conceptual to help synthesize and sift through large amounts of data. This non-linear process requires the researcher to make decisions about which codes make the most analytic sense. A concentrated, active involvement in the process allows for codes to emerge. The codes were reviewed and grouped to see relationships between data for both phases of this study. The researcher immersed herself in the data through the reading and re-reading of the data while simultaneously taking notes, marking ideas for potential codes and memo-writing. Memo-writing allows the researcher to stop, analyze, and describe code emergence as the research progresses. This process supported the researcher in making comparisons across and between data and codes. It also fostered the development of new understandings for suitability of

the codes to address the research questions, while simultaneously linking back to existing literature for emerging interpretations.

This constant comparative method represents the fundamental aspect of employing a grounded theory approach: allowing for the analysis of a field at a solid or foundational level (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2008). While formal theories can be developed employing grounded theory, the emphasis can also be placed on understanding the complexities of the phenomenon under study (Pugach, 2001). This study strived to form a rich conceptual analysis through categories that explain and synthesize the ways that these working mothers use celebrity gossip, to develop a fresh theoretical interpretation of the data rather than aim for a final or complete interpretation (Charmaz, 1983). In essence, the researcher was not attempting to construct social scientific theory using grounded theory as a methodological framework. The goal was to utilize analytic strategies commonly used in grounded theory inquiry (e.g., initial and focus coding, constant comparative methods) to explore, sort, synthesize, summarize, and contrast data (Charmaz, 2011). The conclusions drawn are then compared to previous work as well as other literature and perspectives to point out differences or gaps in current understanding of the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Each of the three focus groups and seven interviews was analyzed following grounded theory techniques outlined by Charmaz (2006) and Tracy (2013). These focus groups and individual interviews formed a single body of data; material within each category informed the researcher's analysis of the data as a whole. As suggested by Kreuger and Casey (2006), the researcher immediately commenced data analysis after the completion of the first focus group and had completed an analysis prior to conducting the next focus group. Employing data collection and analysis concurrently is a common strategy that improves the data collection and

focus group moderation, allowing for the modification of questions if necessary (Charmaz, 2006; Krueger & Casey, 2006; Tracy, 2013).

Trustworthiness (Quality)

Tracy (2010) points to eight criteria for identifying and creating trustworthiness in qualitative research. The researcher utilized Tracy's criteria for excellence in qualitative quality for this project: worthy topic; rich rigor; sincerity; credibility; resonance; significant contribution; ethical; and meaningful coherence. A worthy topic can stem from scholarly theories, social events, or in this case, from a topic that has been overlooked or misunderstood. Rigor was achieved through data immersion that resulted in thick descriptions that illustrated the data's complexity.

Another criterion, according to Tracy (2010), is sincerity which translates into being genuine and vulnerable. Vulnerability was established through the researcher's openness to the experiences of participants and was fostered through her self-reflexivity when revealing biases and subjectivity. This vulnerability also includes full transparency about the methods. In-depth coverage of the methodologies utilized will allow readers to assess the content and its effectiveness, thereby assisting other researchers to assess its applicability to other situations and populations (Shenton, 2004).

Credibility was obtained through thick descriptions, member checks with participants and through triangulation, which assumes that if two or more data collections converge with the same findings, the research is more credible (Denzin, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010). While focus groups and individual interview methodologies can suffer from common shortcomings (Shenton, 2004), the two methodologies have distinct characteristics that can also result in individual strengths (Guba, 1981). The researcher employed the methods to work in

concert together, while simultaneously compensating for their individual limitations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Resonance is another marker for quality in qualitative research, which allows the researcher to convey her findings so that they correspond to the readers world (Tracy, 2010). In essence, resonance is achieved when readers feel they have been there and can intuitively apply the findings to their own lives. This researcher achieved resonance by focusing on making sure the findings were congruent with reality through a refinement of the interview protocols along with frequent debriefings with her advising committee. As suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the researcher used interview tactics that encouraged honesty in the responses and incorporated real-time member checks at the end of all focus groups and interviews to ensure that participants' words matched their verbal intentions, deepening the readers' ability to resonate with the findings.

Another key characteristic of quality is the importance of a study's contribution to the literature (Tracy, 2010). This project has made a significant contribution by extending the existing understandings surrounding how celebrity gossip functions through the experiences of the participants, as detailed in the next chapter. According to Tracy, this "boundary pushing" is the hallmark of a significant contribution.

Quality is also achieved through procedural and situational ethics (Tracy, 2010). This study incorporated procedural and situational ethics consistent with IRB requirements, such as: do no harm; avoid deception; get informed consent; ensure privacy and confidentiality; and practice moral principles.

The final characteristic of quality is that the study provides meaningful coherence (Tracy, 2010). This project provided meaningful coherence by meeting all eight of Tracy's criteria, as

detailed in the remaining chapters: achieving its stated purpose; accomplishing what it set out to do; using methods that partner well with advocated theories and paradigms; and interconnecting the literature reviewed with the research focus, methods and findings.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed account of the study's methodology. It detailed the organization of the project and related that organizational design to the study's purpose. Each of the procedures utilizing focus group interviews and individual interviews was outlined. The data collection and analysis procedures were discussed, including thoughts on the study's trustworthiness. The next chapter reveals the study's findings

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the findings for the data collected during the study. It begins with a brief description of the process along with participant demographics. Final categories are then discussed while providing a thick description of the gossip phenomena under examination. Finally, I address each research question and relate the results to the five research questions outlined in this chapter.

Description of the Process (Data Analysis)

The data collected for this study consisted of 3 focus groups and 7 individual interviews for a total of 17 participants. Each participant identified herself as a mother working at an advertising agency with at least one child under the age of 18 and described herself as enjoying celebrity gossip. Each participant was interviewed either through a focus group interaction or an individual interview. After 15 participants, analysis of the data resulted in categories reaching theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2006; Simon, 2006). Two more individual interviews were conducted for member checking purposes (Tracy, 2013), one of which had already participated in an earlier interview.

Table 1 Participant Demographics details the breakdown of participants in this research study:

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Characteristic	Measure
Focus Group and Individual Participants	17 Total Participants
Mean Age	41 years

Relationship Status	14 married 2 Single 1 Dating
Total # of children and age range	31 children ranging in ages 0-20
Mean Length at job	6 years
Education	11 BA's 3 MA's 1 MBA 2 Some College
Ethnicity	13 Caucasians 3 African Americans 1 Hispanic

Data collection consisted of a semi-structured interview protocol and questioning route suggested by Krueger and Casey (2009). As expected, the initial list of questions expanded as more in-depth probing allowed for the emergence of patterns in the data (See Appendix D). Interview questions 1-4 were developed to answer research questions 2 and 4, exploring individual gossip functions and participants' lived experiences surrounding private consumption. Interview questions 5 and 6 of the interview protocol were activity driven to solicit participants' experiences of celebrities they liked and disliked. Interview questions 7-11 were developed to answer research questions 1 and 3, exploring social gossip functions and participants' lived experiences surrounding public sharing. Whereas the researcher structures the interview guide to address the research questions posed in the project, the interview questions are meant to stimulate discussion and allow emergent understandings to blossom (Tracy, 2013). As the analysis progressed into eventual categories, additional individual interview questions were used to expand strategies for creating and questioning data (See Appendix D).

The researcher employed an iterative approach that combined Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative methodology, along with Charmaz (2006) and Tracy's (2013) co-constructive approach, which allowed for the emergence of categories to address the research questions in this project. According to Charmaz, the researcher cannot assume to know the categories in advance, nor have them contained within the research questions. Grounded theory grounds the data into the emergence of categories through the comparative and iterative applications of analyzing data. It became apparent while addressing the gossip functions research questions, that something much more complex was occurring in the data set as a whole. Whereas Nevo and Nevo's (1993) social and individual functions presented themselves in the focused coding, the data revealed the categories went beyond an explanation for gossip functions. The synthesis of the participants' lived experience's allowed for the emergence not only of the categories, but of the final research question, which uncovered a complex interaction that had not been previously explored. As such, below is the list of the categories and how they address each research question.

Emergent Categories as Overall Lived Experience

The following eight categories emerged from the data analysis: 1) indulging pleasure; 2) expanding empathy; 3) recognizing contradictions, 4) granting admiration; 5) evaluating morals; 6) affirming choices; 7) staying relevant; and 8) managing impressions, as demonstrated in Table 2. The categories emerged dynamically and interchangeably in both the public sharing and private consumption experiences of the participants.

Table 2

Identified Categories from Data Analysis

Emergent Categories
Indulging Pleasure
Subcategories: Entertainment Pleasure, Stress-Free Pleasure, and Guilty Pleasure
Expanding Empathy
Recognizing Contradictions
Granting Admiration
Evaluating Morals
Affirming Choices
Staying Relevant
Managing Impressions

Indulging pleasure. The data revealed the first category of indulging pleasure. This category was demonstrated by the continual discussion of pleasure in focus groups and individual interviews in both the public sharing and private consumption of celebrity gossip. Indulging pleasure was divided into three sub-categories: entertainment pleasure, stress-free pleasure and guilty pleasure.

Entertainment pleasure. All participants expressed an entertainment component that included humor, intrigue, and fun whether they were consuming or sharing celebrity gossip. For example, participant remarks such as "it's fun," "it's entertaining," and "it makes me laugh" recurred throughout the data collection.

Stress-free pleasure. In addition, the sub-category of stress-free pleasure was frequently discussed. There was a pattern of the participants seeking escape from everyday life and stresses of being a working mother. Remarks such as "escaping stress," or "It's just a way to...to leave where you're at," or "the real world is emotionally draining" were commonly stated. For example, as Terri stated, "I don't get anything out of it, except I make so many decisions throughout the day. A lot of my day is just um, like I'm focused on things, I'm doing a lot of the work, and so for me it's an escape." Another example of stress release through gossip was:

Ann: Well, one of the things I know and part of the reason that I will even look at (gossip) websites or different things, I feel like I get real world news overload. Like you can only take so much real world tragedy. You can only hear so many stories about Ferguson, Missouri. You can only hear so much about Gaza. You can only hear so much about fracking and this and that. And I'll get to a point where I won't even look at the news or turn on the TV unless it's something that doesn't make me think. Because I don't have to think about this.

Guilty pleasure. The sub-category and in vivo code of guilty pleasure was also a frequently expressed experience. Many participants used the actual phrase: "So I am not as deep into the whole thing, gossip wise, you know the celebrity stuff? But I do get People magazine, which is one of my guilty pleasures. Like I'll read that cover to cover in the bathtub..." While others expressed outright embarrassment, such as Sue: "I am a little bit embarrassed about it, but um I don't typically admit to like being on TMZ a few times a day or week, but…"

Expanding empathy. Expanding empathy evolved as a category from the data to describe experiences of pity for a celebrity and empathy for their circumstance. It typically included a sense of "cheering" a celebrity on. For example, this interaction "of feeling sorry for" a celebrity was commonly shared across focus groups and in individual interviews:

Sue: "Sometimes I have conversations about how I feel sorry for some of these children. (hmm group agreeing) Some children with like ridiculous names for instance."
Mary: "Like North West?"

Sue: "That or Apple or whatever you know."
Tammy: "We didn't say Gwyneth Paltrow in any of these mom conversations."
Mary: "Oh that's right."
Sue: "She kind of rides the line for me. Yeah she does. It's like how sorry I feel for these kids, they're not going to have a normal childhood."

This common exchange below between two focus group participants discussing Lindsay

Lohan shared participants' feelings of pity and the experience of "cheering:"

Sue: "I like Lindsay Lohan, I'd like to hang out..."
Mary: "I just feel bad for her I just feel like her parents just use her."
Sue: "She's one of those ones that I root for her, like I don't hate her."

The repetitious mentioning of cheering on was evident throughout the individual

interviews as well:

Katie: And Kate Middleton because I think of her almost not as someone I would emulate. I think of her though almost like a kid's sister kind of an energy? Like I look at her going through things and it's after I've gone through that. And so, it's sort of, like, "Look at you girl. Like, good for you.

Recognizing contradictions. Data analysis supported the importance of participants'

experiences of mixed feelings toward a celebrity through the category of recognizing

contradictions. In many instances a participant remarked about her love/hate relationship with a

particular celebrity, such as this comment on Monica Lewinsky after her TedTalk went viral on

the Internet:

Amanda: For her to get out there and do that, and to have it travel so fast and go so far and create such a big conversation about online bullying. We have all said it is just kids. It happens in middle school and stuff. No, it happens everywhere. It happens in all ages, and she really brought that out and started big conversations about it online. I don´t really even like Monica Lewinski. I don´t. I don´t like her personally. There is something about her I don´t like. I don´t know what it is, but what a great thing she did.

This participant stated her love/hate relationship as one where she couldn't look away:

Maria: But sometimes those people though you still like to watch. Like, I can't stand Madonna. But I am (pause) to me she's like watching a train wreck. She is, like when she has to speak publicly, or even sing live, I have to watch it. But

I can't stand her. Do you know what I mean?

The category of recognizing contradictions was also associated with emotions such as

sadness:

Katie: Tom Cruise makes me sad because I think he is very wounded and kind of like I know these people, right? But I think of him as being very wounded and someone who's so desperate to do right that he ends up doing wrong at moments. And then, it'll turn around something like a hero would do it will turn onto something stupid again. (Laughs) I know there were two different examples, like, I know one where a crowd was crushing a girl because they were trying to surge to get to him and he saved her life and what I mean he's done things like that which is so ADMIRABLE and he's so very talented. But then, he'll turn around and when he was on his major scientology train and you know saying that people who take prescription meds for certain things are idiots or whatever. And that is so broad and ignorant to go after a generalization like that. And I definitely have the sense that he was going off a very limited information. But he again, you have such power. You should be so careful with what you do with that power and that influence because it can have disastrous effects, so that really made me sad. I didn't like seeing that.

Granting admiration. The category of granting admiration embodied statements that

included phrases describing a celebrity as having any of several positive traits: authentic;

humorous; down to earth; responsible; philanthropic; courageous; and loving. This focus group

participant remarked on why she admires Angelina Jolie and Jada Pinkett Smith:

Jan: I like, um, Angelina and Jada Pinkett for their humanitarian efforts. Collectively I like them. They're just kinda like selfless people that are always in some random country doing something that of course is not on the front page of anything. You kind of gotta dig to find it, but when you actually read about it, it's like, oh wow. And also like Jada as a mom, because she's ...she's really doesn't care like what people say or what's on the blogs or what are you know like about her kids are doing. She kind of raises her kids herself. And it's like, well this is my house so, you know, whatever, yeah.

Being "powerful" was another common pattern that emerged in granting admiration:

Sue: I like the CEO of Yahoo...the thing is, she's written about a lot and she has a lot of followers that either love her or hate her. Um, she's very controversial, she is a woman, and a mother in a very, very high position,

and she's made some decisions in that company that people weren't so crazy about. For instance, no more working from home, and a lot of people were like, oh my god no more working from home. Well it's like, you know that she's a numbers girls too, she saw that the people work, working from home, weren't really logging into what they needed to be they were just at home probably fooling around, doing what side businesses and that kind of thing. You know, she's, she's a woman, that is probably seen as a bitch, cause women in control often are, but you know, I dig her, I like it. And I look up to women that can be in those power positions.

"Drive" was another trait participants admired:

Terri: I like Beyonce because she's like super driven. There is just something about that girl that you just can't stop. And somebody I didn't put on there but kinda follow in her footsteps is like Rihanna, like you won't, like no matter what she does, she's like had seven albums in seven years. If that's not drive, then I just don't know. I like the drive and the ambition.

Finally, a common conversation of "they would be my friend" also became apparent early on in the data collection, including remarks such as, "I would so hang with him," "I would go out partying with her," and "Most of these people I want to be friends with, like I want to be their friend. I think we would have fun, and they just don't know me yet."

Evaluating morals. The category of evaluating morals contrasts completely to the granting admiration data. Participants' experiences of evaluating morals included behaviors and statements that described a celebrity with any of several negative or stigmatized characterizations: annoying, slutty, a bitch, stuck up, trampy, a home-wrecker, a diva, selfish, inauthentic, vindictive, manipulative, or a media whore. The participants also repeatedly stated they would not be a "friend" to celebrities in this particular category.

This focus group data captures the essence of those exchanges, especially the particular strength of responses when asked who they disliked:

Tammy: "I feel like all these people on this list love to make a scene, love to be in the media. Yes."
Sue: "Controversy."

Tammy:	"Yes."
Mary:	"Yes."
Sue:	"All attention whores."
Tammy:	"Yes exactly and that annoys me."
Sue:	"Especially Miley Cyrus lately. I feel like she's doing a lot of things that she is doing right now."
Mary:	"I feel like she almost was a home wrecker on the VMA's, like she almost broken up their marriage just like, bumping and grinding on Robin Thicke. Like, I hope he stripped and like sterilized his clothes and started some penicillin before he went home."
Sue:	"I think he's a home wrecker not so much her. Cause he's caught photographed with another girl."
Mary:	"Oh he was?" (laughing)
Sue:	"The mirror?" [a media publication]
Jan:	"Yea. You see which kind of worms you opened up?"
Tammy:	"I know." (laughing, all talking at once)

Statements surrounding Miley Cyrus appeared in many of the individual interviews as well, such as this one:

| Amanda: | If you look at the difference between the Williams sisters and a Miley Cyrus, she is out there singing about getting high and taking her clothes off and doing stupid things. They are out there being powerhouses and playing tennis. Like they have a purpose, where these seem to be just like look at me, look at me, look at me, which to me is why? What do you have to show me that has any substance? So I would say lack of substance is probably a part of that. |

Being "nasty" to others was a common theme of complaint in the evaluating morals category, such as this participant remarking about Joan Rivers:

| Maria: | I just kept seeing all of these tributes and oh she was a pioneer in women´s comedy and stuff like that. And I just kept looking at it going anytime I saw her on TV, I actually just would shut it off because I felt like she was so nasty to people. Like that whole Fashion Police thing, it was just like tearing people apart. And I just didn´t enjoy watching that. |

Affirming choices. As a category, affirming choices encompassed participants' descriptions that validated or invalidated behaviors or experiences of celebrities that resulted in conversations of personal comparison. For example, this category included remarks such as "One of the reasons I watch Real Housewives is that I watch it and think thank goodness I'm not there"

and "Overall it's neat seeing celebrity women going through a life stage as I'm going through the same life stage too."

Staying relevant. Another category, staying relevant, was associated with exchanges that typically fall under Nevo and Nevo's (1993) "social function" explanation: status building, being in the know, and social bonding. For example, this focus-group participant shared her experience using celebrity gossip in bonding exchanges with her son:

Judy: Well, you know, my son does something really interesting. One of his favorite programs - he's 12 years old - and one of his favorite programs is *Keeping up with the Kardashians*. [laughter]. Which I think is hilarious, but he doesn't watch it from a purely voyeuristic perspective to find out gossip. I wouldn't let him watch it if he didn't sit there and talk about the program and say, talk about the poor communication they have in their relationship. And he really examines this program as if he's - as if he's looking at somebody's life from above, you know. It's almost like a scientific experiment to him, or a sociology experiment. So I wouldn't normally encourage it at all, but he looks at it from a really different perspective that I just find really interesting.

Others remarked on their use of celebrity gossip in social situations:

Tammy: You know what I sometimes do too, this is really sad. Sometimes I feel a little isolated like with what's going on, so before I have a cocktail party to go to or a date with my husband, I go online really fast to like figure out like what's like current so we have like something to talk about and I know what's going on.

Managing Impressions. Just over half of the participants made some kind of reference or remark about managing impressions, the last category. Those statements included "she rocked that dress," "her butt was sticking out and I couldn't take it," and "it's entertaining to see what they wear to awards." Those experiences also dove-tailed with other categories, in that the managing impressions statements had similarities to the explanations for granting admiration, evaluating morals and indulging pleasure categories.

Gossip Functions: Social and Individual

The purpose of this study was two-fold: to deepen understanding of Nevo and Nevo's (1993) gossip functions through the separation of these social and individual processes; and to examine participants' lived experiences while exploring the processes of public sharing and private consumption. As such, rather than address each question individually, the researcher's questions were addressed first through exploring the social and individual gossip functions through public sharing and private consumption, then through the participants' lived experiences as they shared and consumed, and finally as an interactive process exchange between both public and private.

Gossip Functions: Public Sharing

This section addresses the following research questions:

Q1: How does the public sharing of celebrity gossip function?

Q2: How does the private consumption of celebrity gossip function?

Part of the data collection for this project included asking participants with whom they typically shared celebrity gossip. The information showed that this group of working mothers shared gossip extensively with family, friends, colleagues, spouses and, in some cases, with their children. In line with Nevo and Nevo's (1993) sociological perspective on gossip functions, the data revealed that, indeed, participants' experienced social bonding when public sharing, as can be seen in these remarks:

Tammy: It links me between my friends that are stay at home moms. Because they totally get into this stuff. I have a friend, good friend, who always gives me all her trashy magazines like US and whatever so we always talk and chat it up every once in a while.

Ann: For me if there was a show on, like my favorite show is the Voice. That's my favorite thing. But when the Voice is on in the evening, first thing in the morning my sister and I will wake up at a certain time and we'll call each other, just to say good morning and stuff. "Oh my, did you see what Blake said and how cool it was between Adam Levine and him,

what they were doing or whatever." But my sister and I really we like that one and the Housewives. That's one of our favourite things which I actually talk about.

Many participants also socially bonded by displaying vulnerability, particularly in comments focusing on guilty pleasure:

Terri: And my real dirty little secret that I'll share with all of you is I teamed on to the 16 and Pregnant Teen Mom. I love it. I actually would DVR it. So there it is. So okay now everybody knows (all laugh).

Liz: I have watched TMZ late at night I have to admit. (all laughing) With Harvey, what's his name? They film, you know, celebrities walking through the airport, or it's ridiculous. But it's mindless entertainment.

During an individual interview, one participant described gossip's role in an intimate social bond between a mother and daughter:

Katie: So my mom and I, we psychoanalyze everyone. Like, a big one, my mom loves to talk about Giuliani and Bill Rancic, loves them, loves their show, loves everything about their lives. But she and I psychoanalyze the hell out of their marriage (laughing) like, oh, like she has predicted every potential minefield that lies ahead for them. Oh, she has that already figured out, just like, "If she does that, I just don't see how it's gonna last, you know, oh, but you know, but she did this 'cause I know she loves....." Like she got it all figured out. The Bachelor, Bachelorette stuff, we watch it. We actually a lot of times, we will sit on the phone and leave it on during the show. And we'd be like, "Pause. Okay, go to 1 minute, go to 15 minutes and 4 seconds or whatever. Okay, go." And we'll, "Stop, stop, stop. Can you believe she said like that?"

In the "us versus them" type of gossip, individuals gossip about their "enemies" but they also gossip about their peers or friends, or the in-group. This particular participant actually goes so far as to defend her "insider," which evolved from her experience of privately consuming:

Amanda: For example, Russell Brandt, I adore him. I thought he was crazy. I thought who is this asshole, and then I started watching what he was doing because he was so out there and bizarre. And so I started watching what he was doing and started paying attention and watching him, who he is in the world, and the one particular show was this thing he did with people from Westboro Baptist Church. And it was his talk show, and these people were the most homophobic, obnoxious, mean people. And he kept talking to

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them, but he did it in such a kind and compassionate way. It was really interesting to watch, and so in defending him that not only is he brilliant but he can be compassionate with people that are just so far to the opposite of his own beliefs and my beliefs that I think he has got a lot of power. And I just love him. So defending him because you believe in what they are doing, like you feel like you want to explain it to someone else so that they truly understand them.

It is evident in the data that participants publicly shared celebrity gossip by engaging in the social functions according to Nevo and Nevo's (1993) sociological approach.

Gossip Functions: Private Consumption

Part of the data collection for this project also included asking participants about their private consumption practices. In line with Nevo and Nevo's (1993) individual perspective on gossip functions, the data revealed that, indeed, participants' also experienced individual gossip functions while consuming. Participant consumption included a variety of mass media celebrity gossip, including: television, radio, online, gossip websites, magazines, blogs, and social media platforms.

The data revealed most participants experienced concern regarding the vast availability of private media consumption, especially where it concerned their children:

Sue:	"My eleven year old came home the other day and asked me if I had seen Miley."
Jan:	"Right."
Sue:	"I was like, where you've seen Miley Cyrus' new video.(everyone talking at once) Yeah exactly, where have you seen that?"
Jan:	"Yeah the stuff that they know is so quick it's like the kids at school have phones now, so even if you shut off everything in your house and they never saw MTV, the parental blocks, and all that crap. They're still gonna find out."

Participants, while expressing their struggles with juggling motherhood and work demands, also shared they found time to consume celebrity gossip while multitasking, such as cooking and watching television, or getting a quick update in line at the grocery store.

Interestingly, many stated they do not buy magazines; nonetheless, most found ways to consume

the guilty pleasure, such as this participant:

> Maria: I have to say, like I don´t buy the magazines but when I do go to get a manicure, I do like to consume. I do like reading them or actually (husband's name) and I have a funny treat that like there is a Baskin Robbins in Royal Oak, and they always have People magazine there. So we go and we eat our ice cream and read *People* magazine. There´s a train, so (daughter's name) plays with the train and we do that. So like there´s a little bit of fun like mindlessness to it almost, you know, but it is actually like eating junk food to me.

In line with Nevo and Nevo's (1993) individual functions, private consumption also

relieved stress, as indicated in this commonly talked-about concern in a focus group exchange.

> Lisa: "Mindless. I don't know. To me it's kind of mindless thought, like where you're..."
> Pam: "It's just entertainment."
> Lisa: "It's not hard."
> Judy: "Escapism."
> Lisa: "That's it exactly. You know, whatever. Work stresses you out. Life in general. And it is. It's kind of an escape where you can..."
> Judy: "Without harming your liver." (everyone laughs)

Given the uncertainty that often surrounds parenting, consuming gossip for information

purposes was commonly discussed, which is completely in line with this project's model for

individual gossip functions. This participant's information-seeking behavior is reflected in how

she experiences being a new mom:

> Donna: Okay, like with the singer Ciara, for example, she is a new mom. And she is always kind of in the blogs. A lot of the blogs are always kind of following her and talking about some of the different choices that she makes in terms of what stroller she uses or just the different products that she uses on her son, things like that. So I think being able to kind of see that information and say I use that same thing or oh yeah, I know about that type of thing. I think for me that's something that is of interest, especially being a new mom.

Others, such as this participant, experienced value from learning about the inner workings

of relationships:

Katie: I just love to hear about how people fall in love and how they fall out of love and um what their needs are... it makes you feel like.. I think it helps you understand the complexities of being human a lot better because you had your own limited experiences in life but if you can learn from everybody else's experiences and masks and you'd be wiser for it.

Many participants felt the information one sought when consuming celebrity gossip was dependent upon a stage in life and the degree of identification with a particular celebrity.

Amanda: If you are a mom, you are interested in how young women are presenting themselves to the world and what they are wearing. If you are aging, you might look to people like Jamie Lee Curtis and how she is presenting herself to the world and actually feel better about yourself. So I think in a lot of cases, it can make you feel better about yourself when you see somebody like that that´s out there doing things that maybe you think you are too old to do or you think you are. So I mean it can be helpful and it can be detrimental. It really I guess depends on where you are with your maturity. Like I wouldn´t want to have a 15 year old girl that was madly in love with Miley Cyrus. I would be freaking out because then you wouldn´t want her to emulate that behavior. But then again, you would have something to talk about. I don´t know. I am all over the map.

In line with the project's individual gossip function model, participants regularly commented upon identity formation, particularly as it pertains to being a "good mother."

Donna: I am sure there are a lot of moms that relate to all different things they see, like what sticks in my head the most is the Britney Spears and the car seat thing. There were tons of moms that were like I hope I am doing it right that may have gone on to get that checked or gotten a new seat.

An important part of the identity formation process is when individuals seek media choices that support their identities and avoid media that do not (Harwood, 1997). Statements such as these were riddled throughout the data.

Sharon: It shows that they are normal people. They have all this money and they have just as many problems as we do. It's probably bad but that's what I like about it.

Amanda: They are fake. They stand for things that I wouldn´t stand for. I think some of them are very manipulative and trying to do things, trying to be somebody that they are not.

Katie:	They appear to be fake to me, like really inauthentic, which is one of my big values, authenticity. So either that or I think they are perpetuating aspects of our culture that I don´t really care for, like over-sexualization of young women. Like the *Blurred Lines*, to me, that´s like glorifying rape culture, those kinds of things.

Lived Experiences: Public Sharing and Private Consumption

The following research questions regarding the participants' experiences are addressed:

Q3: What is the lived experience when publicly sharing celebrity gossip?

Q4: What is the lived experience when privately consuming celebrity gossip?

During data analysis it became clear that Nevo and Nevo's (1993) approach to gossip functions was not a binary approach, but in line with the many function contradictions expressed by gossip scholars in the literature (Bosson, Johnson, Nikederhoffer & Swann, 2006; Foster, 2004; McAndrew et al., 2007; Sabini & Silver, 1982; Yerkovich, 1977). The researcher discovered that functions typically labeled as meeting individual functions in Nevo and Nevo's (1993) model were expressed in the social function components of public sharing, and functions that would be labeled as meeting social functions were expressed through meeting individual functions. For example, this next participant has a unique adoption circumstance enabling her to identify with both celebrity challenges of gender issues and the obstacles of having a bi-racial child as she consumes celebrity gossip. While identity lives in the individual gossip function realm in Nevo and Nevo's (1993) model, it could be argued this function actually meets group norms functions, a criterion according to Nevo and Nevo's descriptions. Group norms dictate social consequences and communicate rules that govern groups (Dunbar, 2004; McAndrew et al., 2007).

Maria:	When you say Angelina Jolie, there are a couple of things, like I did read the article about their young daughter, Shiloh, that they are giving

[unclear]. She talked about like she would rather be a boy and that they have given her freedom to express herself that way and to dress that way and stuff. And I do recall reading that and thinking that that was really cool that that was a non-issue for them and that they were really, that when celebrities do that, it takes the stigma away. And the same thing I relate to with the adoption piece of it. When you see these celebrities that have bi-racial adoption and stuff, I absolutely do appeal to those kinds of stories. I remember it was Sandra Bullock. I think she adopted an African American boy, and Madonna.

A similar experience of an individual function meeting social needs occurred during this participant's statements below. During this individual interview and after finishing the activity list of celebrities liked and disliked in the interview protocol, the data revealed this mother's private consumption experiences indicated the process of creating insiders and outsiders (Ayim, 1994; Hogg, 2000; Wert & Salovey, 2004), a social function used in this model. As previously mentioned, gossip allows for the maintenance of social boundaries, used by "insiders" to flag differences between insiders and outsiders (Hannerz, 1967).

Amanda: When I look at my stuff here, I would trust my son to have a conversation with any of these people on the left. I would not trust him to have a conversation with any of these people on the right. Isn´t that funny? That´s hilarious. I so totally see that. Absolutely. That these people have values or I have interpreted that they have values that are in line with mine, the ones that I like, and the ones that I don´t like, stay away from my kid. That´s really fascinating.

It is clear that through the participants' lived experiences of private consumption, the social functions of insiders and outsiders are being met, and that gossip functions are much more complex than previously understood in the literature.

This next exchange not only encompassed social bonding, but also brought in humor and entertainment (i.e., "Lucky bitch") and status building (i.e., "He is engaged now"), which are both frequently labeled as meeting individual gossip functions (Foster, 2004; Nevo & Nevo, 1993).

Sue:	I want to know who's dating who. Like that I think that is one of my biggest things, like especially like Adam Levine cause it's usually a new model every month or two.
Mary:	"He is engaged now, you know."
Sue:	"Yeah I know, Uhh.. Lucky bitch. Yeah. I think she's pregnant personally but you know, that's just my thinking." (all laughing).

Similarly, when this participant shared in the focus group about her bonding experience through sharing celebrity gossip with teens, her comments revealed that the individual status-building function was being served:

| Jan: | I have a credibility about myself that I connect with youth like I'm not too old, and I'm not so like holy roly like we used call the older people in our church. Where you know like, they didn't understand us, like we were like you know, you don't get what's going on. Because you're just too Jesus like, you know. You're a Jesus freak or whatever. So I have more of a credibility with them it's you know to where there are it's just so shut off. And they see that they can talk to me because while I believe in God, you know I get it too. I'm not like too far off, I'm not too old to where you know I get it. you know So they all they will open up and they find that they can talk about stuff because I get it. |

The participant used the word *credibility,* a word commonly associated in gossip literature as meeting individual functions of "being in the know" (Feasey, 2008; Foster, 1993).

This next participant's statement demonstrated the complexity of bonding with colleagues, especially in an advertising agency that demands knowledge of media conversations:

| Amanda: | I have that thing I want to know about pop culture because they are people that I work with that think Kanye West is a brilliant artist. I am like you have got to be kidding me. And in the environment where I work, I work in a creative department, ad agency, I wouldn´t express that I think he sucks. But I would want to know what he sounds like, what his music is like and what he is doing. For some reason, like if somebody says something at work that they really like and then I like really. And so, I will go peek and kind of find out about a little bit more about them, kind of as a contrast or education in pop culture kind of thing. So I can´t say that I never look at it because I do if I hear other people talking about it. |

This researcher argues that not only is this participant above (Amanda) deepening social bonds at work, she's adhering to group norms (social function) of "being in the know," which is a

status-building activity in the individual function realm of gossip. This participant is also actively engaged in information-seeking behavior, commonly labeled as an individual gossip function. It is clear that the data revealed that through the participants' lived experiences of public sharing, various social and individual functions are being met, and that the issue is much more complex than the model set forth by Nevo and Nevo (1993). This discovery led to addressing an additional and final research question regarding this interactivity.

Celebrity Gossip: The Simultaneous Interaction Between Public and Private

During analysis, this final question emerged that warranted investigation:

RQ5: What is the lived experience when publicly sharing and privately consuming celebrity gossip?

This project's social constructionist application assumes people create their own social realities (Charmaz, 2006), allowing for an emphasis on everyday interactions between people and how they use language to construct their reality (Andrews, 2012) while also allowing active participation by the researcher to make decisions that shape the finished product throughout the research (Charmaz, 2006). While the early stages of this study focused on the more traditional strands of grounded theory utilizing Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative analysis, the subsequent stages of this process became focused on a co-construction between the experience of the participants and the interpretations of the researcher (Charmaz, 2006; Tracy, 2013). With that in mind, this non-linear iterative process allowed for new threads of analysis and a deeper articulation of categories in participants' lived experiences (that had not been previously explored and analyzed in gossip literature), that allowed access to the dynamic interaction taking place.

Nevo and Nevo's (1993) two-pronged model showcased a binary dynamic of gossip interaction. In other words, when people gossip they are either meeting social functions or individual functions. However, this project's exploratory analysis showed a much more complex interaction taking place which was revealed within the participants' lived experiences. Whereas the social and individual functions were present, they were found deeply embedded in the lived experiences, allowing access to understanding the complex interactions. The data also helps to explain how some researchers would argue a gossip exchange could be an example of a social gossip function, while at the same time could also be interpreted as an individual function being met and vice versa. This simultaneous interaction interpretation is demonstrated in yet another focus group interaction:

Judy:	"I heard something about the George Clooney thing earlier. The thing I loved about that whole spread was that people were turning it on its head and talking about the fact that he was engaged. There were articles saying that whatever her name is, she's an international human rights lawyer, and she is engaged. And it wasn't about George Clooney being engaged. It was about her being engaged."
Lisa:	"I love it!"
Judy:	"It was great."
Lisa:	"Did she have to write her own press release to get it to be that way?'
Judy:	"No, I think that people just really supported it. They got fed up of expecting the - oh George Clooney said he'd never marry again, and here he is engaged. It was a quick turnaround."
Pam:	"Again? Has he been married? I don't think he's ever been married."
Lisa:	"Has he ever been married?"
Pam:	"He was like the forever bachelor."
Judy:	"No. He got divorced and said he'd never marry again."

During this interaction, many functions are interacting simultaneously and independently. In this exchange above, one participant is building her individual status by being in the know of the circumstances of George Clooney's engagement. Others are validating the information through social bonding. One participant acts as the moral police to make sure the press release is not manipulated.

Another example of this simultaneous interactivity is this participant's experience of bonding as well as gathering individual information to navigate important relationships.

> Katie: I could like an outfit and my mom will think it's a little bit slutty. So I now know, like, my code would think that's fine. My mom's code does not think that's fine. Or like, if a celebrity cheats, some people are like… like know what to sell (laughing). They think that's okay. (laughs) So it's a nice way as you're interacting with people. It's very subconscious but it helps you understand what their value system is and what they deem acceptable behavior.

During analysis, social bonding consistently interacted to also meet identity functions, through the sub-category of stress-free pleasure. Common threads of conversation included personal escape and release. At the same time, social bonding was expressed as participants consistently made comments such as: "Thank God I'm not alone," and "now I don't feel so crazy," agreeing with each other during the interactions.

When examining the sociological function of insiders and outsider, examples of individual functions surfaced via Nevo and Nevo's (1993) status explanation through the staying relevant category. One participant remarked on discussions of celebrities such as "someone's boob slipping," or "someone gets out of a car with a bad shot." These exchanges point to the creation of insiders and outsiders in that you are an insider if you keep your sexual parts covered and an outsider if you do not. The data goes on to discuss the exchange of conversations that include: "Did you see that?' and "Can you believe that Lindsay Lohan did that?" In many instances the other party had not heard about that particular celebrity gossip and the sharer continues on to meet the individual status function by "being in the know."

When data revealed evidence of creating group norms and sanctions, they shifted to Nevo and Nevo's (1993) explanation of the individual entertainment function that was expressed in the indulging pleasure category. The use of humor was clearly evidenced throughout the entire data

set. From discussion on Bill Cosby's inappropriate sexual behavior, to Beyonce's "badass drive," to the Kardashians being "slores," "divas," and morally unsound, the discussions created group norm and sanctions for those that violate societal rules, while also supporting the social bonding function often found in entertainment and humor. Contrary to Nevo and Nevo's definition of entertainment meeting individual needs, many scholars point to the ability of gossip to foster social bonding through entertainment and humor (Ayim, 1994; Morreall, 1994; Nevo & Nevo, 1993; Patel & Turner, 2008), and the data revealed that as well.

The data also revealed similar instances of simultaneous interactivity while initially fulfilling on individual functions to intersect and meet social functions. Entertainment also became a social bonding process through the category of guilty pleasure. Participants repeatedly shared their experience of consuming gossip as one of a "guilty pleasure" that resulted in feelings of embarrassment. Consistently after these exchanges, participants bonded with that particular participant by expressing similar experiences, cementing Nevo and Nevo's (1993) sociological function. These exchanges were also consistent throughout the data when stress and status functions were being expressed, and consistently moved to the creation of social bonding, insiders and outsiders, and group norm enforcement and sanctions. For example, the individual function of stress commonly became a social function by creating insiders and outsiders through the categories of expanding empathy and recognizing contradictions. Participants often shared experiences of empathy and ambivalence surrounding a celebrity's circumstance. Whereas stress is categorized in the individual function category, the data revealed these exchanges could be interpreted as release valves of stress and frustration encountered by the participants that promote bonding from shared experiences.

Information seeking and uncertainty reducing are also individual gossip functions in this project's model. With that in mind, many of the gossip experiences shared by participants resulted in social bonding, as well. The category of evaluating morals displayed consistent debate on what is acceptable in culture and what is not. Because people are driven to cope with uncertain situations, to release doubt and to create predictability (Bradac, 2001), and because gossip is a source of information gathering (Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell & Labianca, 2010; Wert & Salovey, 2004), it makes sense participants would engage in this type of debate as a coping mechanism. It also allows them to learn and navigate rules and norms in their own lives from the successes and failures of celebrities without personally exposing their own failings.

Participating in the public sharing and private consumption of celebrity gossip may be a tactic for people to make sense of the world and reduce uncertainty. The interaction between identity formation functions of gossip and sociological functions is evidenced throughout the data. Part of the identity formation process is when individuals seek media choices that support identities and avoid media that do not (Harwood, 1997).

Gossip also helps people create a forum to reinforce, understand, or revise their values and beliefs, thereby creating a deeper sense of self (Dunbar, 2004; Emler, 1994; Wert & Salovey, 2004). Participants consistently displayed instances of identity formation functions that also met the sociological model. Remarks such as "I wouldn't be caught dead doing that" and "Can you believe she did that? I would never in a million years" cemented social bonding as participants agreed with the sharing. Wilson (2008) argued media celebrity gossip consumption "works as a self-disciplining, testing technology of self" (p. 7), which allows individuals to privately seek information; evaluate the representations of others, thus directing that information back to self-evaluation; and enhance how individuals see themselves (Swann, 1987). This researcher asserts

this identity formation is enhanced through social bonding when others in gossip exchanges validate those discussions.

And finally, both social and individual gossip functions are expressed in this focus group exchange. A combination of status building, stress relief by venting, social bonding with sharing experiences, formation of insiders and outsiders through acceptable and unacceptable behavior around gay issues, and group norm values are also shared.

Liz:	"My kids are coming up where, okay, being gay. They have like celebrities, who's that [indiscernible]. You know, like he's kind of talking about people's clothes on the Academy - and they see it. And yeah, it doesn't even phase my kids."
Pam:	"They don't even think twice about it. They don't. They're totally..."
Liz:	"When it was taboo when we were, you know. My gosh."
Lisa:	"And even between - - us and another generation."
Liz:	"They're more open to - differences like that because that's just what they're exposed to. They see more because it's out there."
Lisa:	"And it's accepted. It's almost, I don't know how to say, it's just more accepted. It's okay."
Pam:	"Well sometimes these things do actually raise discussions for our family that wouldn't normally happen in our circle. And it gives us an opportunity to talk about things. Because with myself and my husband, we're in a biracial marriage. So the kids are a mix. But they also don't think anything about having gay relatives or friends. And my daughter was invited to her first boy-girl party. And she just told us about this boy named Josh Richardson. Is he a nice boy? Yes, he's a nice boy. Okay, good. I go to drop him off and he's African-American. But that never dawned on my daughter to say anything like that. And to me, that's win. That's a big win. She didn't say he's Indian. He's this. He's that. He's just a nice boy. And I was kind of like, that's huge. That's a big deal. You know. And I was driving away, thinking, okay, when I was 12, if I had been invited I don't know that my parents would have been similar."

The analysis clearly shows the research questions provided the framework to explore the interactive complexities that were hidden and ultimately revealed in the participants' lived experiences.

In summary, this chapter presented the results for the data collected during the study. A detailed description of the grounded theory employed as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967),

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Charmaz (2006) and Tracy (2013) for data analysis was discussed. Codes, concepts and final categories were discussed while providing a thick description of the gossip phenomena being examined. I proceeded to take each research question in turn and discuss the findings of this study in relation to the five research questions outlined in the chapter. The final chapter presents the conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This final chapter discusses the significance of the research findings. Chapter 5 provides a brief overview of the study's findings. A detailed discussion follows and presents conclusions drawn from the data analysis. Limitations and recommendations for future research are also addressed.

Findings Review

The purpose of this study was two-fold: To examine and separate social and individual gossip functions as structured by Nevo and Nevo (1993). In addition, the researcher sought to better understand the processes of the public sharing and private consumption of celebrity gossip as it pertains to the participants' lived experiences. Focus group and in-depth interviews were conducted by a purposive sampling of working mothers who enjoyed consuming and sharing celebrity gossip. A methodology in grounded theory that combined the constant comparison techniques of Glaser and Strauss (1967) with Charmaz (2006) and Tracy's (2013) interpretive and co-constructive approach guided the data collection in order to answer the following five research questions:

RQ1: What are the functions of celebrity gossip when publicly sharing?

RQ2: What are the functions of celebrity gossip when privately consuming?

RQ3: What is the lived experience when publicly sharing celebrity gossip?

RQ4: What is the lived experience when privately consuming celebrity gossip?

RQ5: What is the lived experience when publicly sharing and privately consuming celebrity gossip?

To address these questions, the research culminated in the development of 8 categories for gossip consumption and sharing: 1) indulging pleasure; 2) expanding empathy; 3) recognizing contradictions; 4) granting admiration; 5) evaluating morals; 6) affirming choices; 7) staying relevant; and 8) managing impressions.

Before this study was conducted, there was no research that attempted to separate and understand social functions through the public sharing of celebrity gossip from individual gossip functions through the private consumption of celebrity gossip, nor was there research that explored the lived experiences of participants. Thus, this study was developed to address the relational components of how gossip, and particularly celebrity gossip, may serve these functions through the lived experiences of working mothers while addressing the complexities and experiences expressed through the engagement of celebrity gossip.

Gossip Functions: Public Sharing and Private Consumption

The data revealed that both the social and individual functions indicated by Nevo and Nevo (1993) were met through the public sharing and private consumption of celebrity gossip.

Research questions one and two ("What are the functions of celebrity gossip when publicly sharing?" and "What are the functions of celebrity gossip when privately consuming?") were addressed through all categories obtained from the data. For example, as evidenced by the category of managing impressions, participants socially bonded over discussing their disapproval of inappropriate attire worn by specific celebrities such as Miley Cyrus and Angelina Jolie. They also bonded over discussions surrounding specific attire for the Oscars and Golden Globe awards.

This social process was also displayed when participants engaged in the focus group activities of discussing celebrities they liked and disliked, forming group insiders and outsiders.

The category of granting admiration clearly showed how participants related to celebrities who displayed attributes of being authentic, down to earth and socially responsible as being the in group. Common interactions included participants sharing "She would be my friend" and "I'd so hang with her," with other participants chiming in agreement. The same social bonding occurred when participants shared instances of agreement on their dislike of celebrities who expressed "diva" behavior and misused their fame, indicating that they are outsiders.

From a sociological perspective, the data also revealed how gossip serves as a regulator and enforcer for group norms. As evidenced by the category of affirming choices, numerous discussions revolved around infidelity, women as sex objects, and stereotyping. Group norms were enforced as the participants engaged in debates about moral issues, similar to Feasy's (2008) study in a focus group discussing *heat Magazine.* Participants also displayed group norms processes through the consistent construction of storytelling in both the focus groups and individual interviews. Storytelling is a way to make sense of the world through collaboration, and it requires those engaged in a story to continually interact and give feedback (Baumeister et al., 2004; Dunbar, 2004; Eggins & Slade, 1997; Fisher, 1987; Wert & Salovey, 2004). This feedback process occurs through active participation in the public sharing and co-construction of gossip between the teller and listener; both parties engage, elaborate and contribute to the story. The data showed that participants consistently created celebrity gossip stories together in their sharing, offering feedback to create a cohesive group story, while dictating that the interactions adhere to group norms.

Data about participants' consumption of celebrity gossip on the individual level also revealed that celebrity gossip meets the individual functions as indicated by Nevo and Nevo (1993). As shown by the category of indulging pleasure (which includes the subcategories of

entertainment pleasure, stress-free pleasure and guilty pleasure), participants consistently remarked on how much they enjoyed consuming gossip, that it relieved everyday stress, and that they experienced celebrity gossip as an escape or guilty pleasure.

Another feature of Nevo and Nevo's (1993) individual approach is gossip's ability to enhance status. Individual status is gained when one has information that others do not (Feasey, 2008; Tholander, 2003). During data collection, particularly during the focus groups, participants engaged in actual gossip sessions, showcasing status building or "being in the know" during several gossip exchanges. Those instances included when participants shared information to which the group as a whole was not privy, such as updates on George Clooney's marriage and Monica Lewinsky appearing on a talk show sharing about cyber bullying.

Stress relief was another individual function. Gossip helps its consumers to lower stress by offering a much-needed distraction from everyday life (Dunbar, 2004; Fox, 2001). Consistent with the individual approach, the data revealed participants encountered stress and relied on gossip consumption to lower it, as shown by the repeated conversations of participants needing a break from everyday world tragedies, the stress of being a working mother, and demands at the workplace.

The individual approach also addresses that gossip fills the need to seek information and lower uncertainty. Because the world is fundamentally unpredictable and people are often forced to cope with uncertain situations, explaining the world through information gathering helps to release uncertainty and create predictability (Bradac, 2001). People also gossip with those in the same predicament, while gathering important information and to manage feelings of uncertainty (Dunbar, 2004; Foster, 2004; Levin & Arluke, 1985; Wert & Salovey, 2004). The data agreed, showing many instances of participants' expressing the fulfillment of information gathering and

lowering uncertainty functions through gossip. For example, one participant shared how she sought out information on purchasing a stroller through a blog by Ciara to make sure she was making the safest choice for her child.

This drive for predictability is also evidenced in gossip's identity formation function, in line with the final individual function of gossip (Hatfield, 2011; Ochs & Capps, 1996). When media audiences read and watch celebrity gossip and share the celebrity gossip interpersonally, they are often seeking representations of their fundamental values to reinforce their sense of self by contrasting themselves with the celebrity's circumstance (Wert & Salovey, 2004). The data revealed the formation of identity through many conversations of personal comparison in many categories, including affirming choices. For example, one participant validated her own experiences with this comment: "Celebrities make me feel better about me because they have so much going on with themselves negatively that it just makes me feel better about me." Other participants shared their discomfort on issues surrounding marriage and felt reading about celebrities could help them identify with marital struggles and had them feel not so alone.

Overall, the categories consistently revealed Nevo and Nevo's (1993) two-prong gossip function approach as participants engaged in the public sharing and private consumption of celebrity gossip addressing the functional research questions it sought to address. However, it was the more evolutionary strands of Charmaz's (2006) grounded methodology application that exposed the complexities of how gossip functions outside this binary understanding, while also revealing the interactivity between public sharing and private consumption. The functions of gossip are clearly more complex than previously understood in the literature, as evidenced through the next set of research questions.

Lived Experiences

Research questions three and four ("What is the lived experience when publicly sharing celebrity gossip? and "What is the lived experience when privately consuming celebrity gossip?") was addressed.

Whereas Nevo and Nevo's (1993) binary approach addresses basic understandings of the social and individual functions of gossip, it does not address the discrepancies of conflicting functions that were revealed while exploring the participants" experiences. As discussed in Chapter 2, many scholars have defined various and often contradictory functions and features of gossip (Bosson, Johnson, Nikederhoffer & Swann, 2006; Foster, 2004; McAndrew et al., 2007; Sabini & Silver, 1982; Yerkovich, 1977). For example, some researchers argue the experience of entertainment and humor while engaging in gossip, actually meets social function criteria (Ayim, 1994; Morreall, 1994; Patel & Turner, 2008), conflicting with Nevo and Nevo's (1993) sociological explanations. Additionally, Foster (2004) points to social functions as a facilitator for information flow, contradicting the explanation that information seeking is individual gossip function (Nevo &Nevo, 1993). This confusion of definitions is commonly threaded in gossip literature overall. As evidenced by the data and revealed in the category emergence in this study, participants consistently expressed these discrepancies through their lived experiences.

Celebrity Gossip: The Simultaneous Interaction Between Public and Private

Research question five ("What is the lived experience when publicly sharing and privately consuming celebrity gossip?") was addressed.

Although Nevo and Nevo's (1993) two-pronged model showcased a binary dynamic of gossip interaction in their social and individual approaches, the categories revealed another layer

of complex interaction occurring. This binary understanding evolved to an understanding of simultaneous interactivity: social gossip functions were meeting individual functions, and individual gossip functions were meeting social functions, as demonstrated in the findings and in the graphic below:
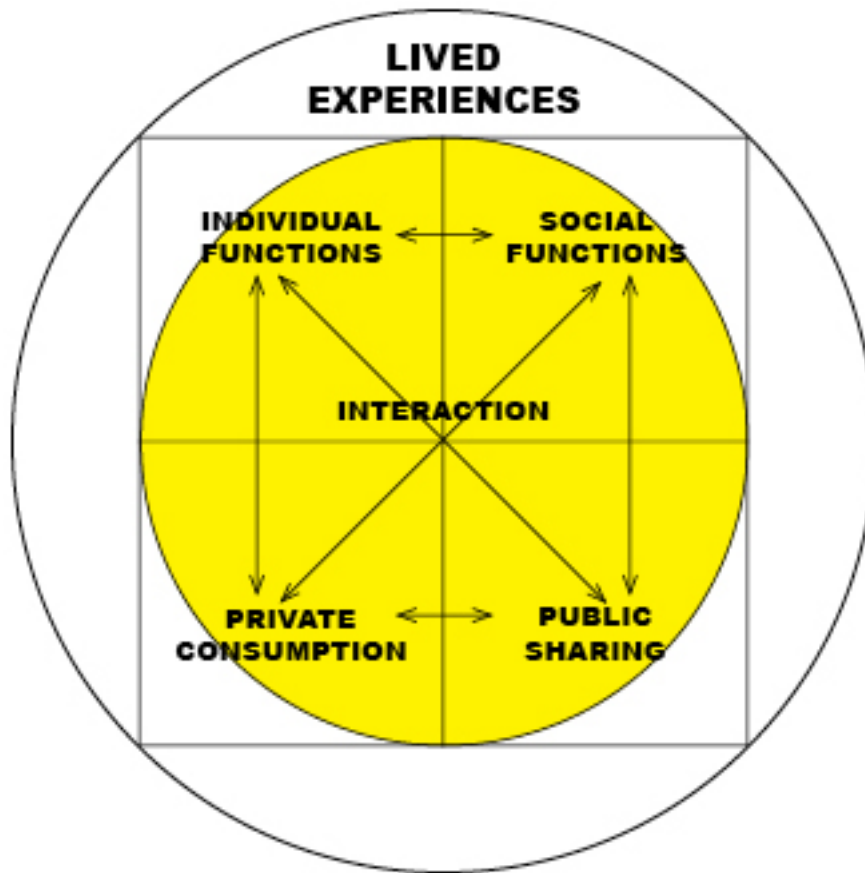
Through focus groups and individual interviews, the analysis identified a consistent interaction of both social and individual functions being served simultaneously. Separating gossip's functions had a simple goal: to examine and explore the discrepancies commonly cited in gossip literature and to achieve a new level of understanding for gossip functions.

It is clear that many gossip scholars interchangeably describe and explain gossip functions in a way that could be quite confusing to researchers (Baumeister et al., 2004; Ben-Z'ev, 1994; Dunbar, 2004; Emler, 1994; Nevo & Nevo, 1993; Wert & Salovey, 2004). It also

makes sense that this final research question emerged during the grounded theory methodology to allow for new perspectives surrounding this simultaneous occurrence to materialize in this context. Nevo and Nevo (1993) set a structure of a binary model in which to begin to understand the complexities of gossip interactions. Hatfield (2011) contributed to the body of literature by examining celebrity gossip through private consumption. The significance of the findings in this project (through the use of the context of both public sharing and private consumption), allowed for the emergence of the simultaneous interactions between the two. The categories emerged as the expression of the participants lived experience, which led to the discovery of the occurrences of simultaneous interactivity. While social and individual functions are important processes to explore, this study demonstrates that the functions are simply a part of the process embedded within the lived experiences. This project clearly demonstrates that a binary approach does not sufficiently explain the complexities of gossip interactions. These findings are significant in that the data opens a new door for understanding the simultaneous interactions hidden within the categories expressed through the participants' lived experiences.

Implications

Overall, Nevo and Nevo's (1993) sociological and individual model was useful in exploring the complexities of gossip functions. One of the goals of the study was related to the limited and often conflicting research that addresses, and at times bypasses, the relationship between the public sharing and private consumption of celebrity gossip. Whereas this study provides an example where group and individual functions divide and overlap, it helps forward understanding in the wide variation of discussion among gossip researchers. Many scholars continue to debate, define, and categorize functions differently (Bosson, Johnson, Nikederhoffer & Swann, 2006; Foster, 2004; McAndrew et al., 2007; Nevo & Nevo, 1993; Sabini & Silver,

1982; Yerkovich, 1977). This study helps clarify how gossip functions could become merged across disciplines and points to the importance of examining the complexities of the interaction encountered while examining participants' lived experiences. The interpretive model that emerged in this study contributes to an awareness of the need for expanded exploration of interpretive approaches to better understand gossip as a complex, simultaneous and interactive process. In other words, the discovery of the interpretive model raises questions surrounding what other experiences might be embedded in gossip interactions.

While this study is one example focused on a sample of working women, it does suggest that the simultaneous interaction of gossip is worthy of discussion across samples. As the literature reveals, working mothers (Ochs & Capps, 1996), and particularly women that enjoy gossip (Feasey, 2008), are rich candidates for the exploration of celebrity gossip to help release doubt and create predictability (Bradac, 2001). With that said, it would be interesting to examine other samples also faced with a need to cope with life's unpredictability, such as high school students. For example, some scholars argue teenagers tend to focus on more negative gossip as they navigate identity formation (Eder and Enke, 1991). It would be interesting to incorporate valance as a factor in determining interaction through lived experiences. Also, variations in gender, education and income levels could shed light on other complex dynamics and nuances yet to be discovered.

This study also supports merging gossip literature as a whole with celebrity gossip literature. Gossip scholars continue to debate and discuss the legitimacy of including celebrity gossip as an interpersonal phenomenon because of its links to parasocial interaction (Brown et al., 2003; De Backer et al., 2007; Gamson, 1994; Harrington & Bielby, 1985; Katz & Liebes, 1990; Kalichman & Hunter, 1992). Gossip is a little-studied topic, and even fewer studies have examined celebrity gossip from the perspective of social and individual functions. This project takes

the parasocial relationship to a more advanced place and demonstrates just how similarly we view celebrities with our personal relationships. The contribution of this study also acknowledges that celebrity gossip is a growing and significant reality within our culture and is worthy of strong debate among gossip researchers.

Limitations

Limitations exist within a study of this undertaking. As previously mentioned, the primary challenge was the researcher's professional experience and involvement with gossip as a whole. When researchers have too much familiarity with a phenomenon, "projection" naturally becomes an ego defense mechanism and developing consistency of judgment prevents or lessens biased contamination (Boyatzis 1998). With that in mind, it was very important to not allow work experiences to interfere with the interview process nor the interpretations of the findings. This researcher was quite mindful to suspend her understanding of celebrity gossip while continually focusing on the participants' lived experience in the study.

Also, this sampling of mothers working in advertising agencies was problematic in that it does not accurately represent a sampling of all working mothers, but rather a small subset, thus limiting the overall impact of the findings. Granted, this study aimed to extract in-depth experiences from mothers working in advertisement agencies, however this specific sampling of working mothers created commonality in how they experience the phenomena. Indeed, a different sampling that included working mothers in other industries, such as manufacturing, healthcare or technology, could develop into a study with different understandings of the simultaneous interaction of gossip.

Another limitation existed with the education level of the sample. Nearly all working mothers in this study had obtained a college degree. Examining alternative socio-economic

backgrounds may produce different findings. This sample might not represent the broader spectrum of those who participate in consuming and sharing celebrity gossip.

Another challenge is that this study does not take into account ethnicity or family history, which could affect important findings. The diversity of the participants' backgrounds could cause a lack in commonality. It may be difficult to develop interpretations and experiences with a heterogeneous group due to differences in cultural backgrounds and experiences with the phenomena (Moerer-Urdah & Creswell, 2004).

Also, the gossip interactions in this study were artificially produced. First, most of the gossip exchanges were created through an activity of sharing celebrities liked and disliked. Long-term studies would be useful in determining the scope of interaction in a work place setting for mothers. Second, the data was limited to verbal exchanges. It would be interesting to explore celebrity gossip exchanged through social media.

Despite the limitations of this study, while understanding and separating gossip functions that adhered to Nevo and Nevo's (1993) two-prong model, the study also revealed the complexities of gossip functions and the interaction of public and private when consuming and sharing celebrity gossip. This illustrates the need for more research, as suggested in the next section.

Future Research

This study was the first of its kind to attempt to separate and understand the sociological and individual functions that gossip serves through the context of public sharing and private consumption. The discovery of the simultaneous interactivity within participants' lived experiences calls for further examination. Different qualitative methodologies to further

understand gossip functions could provide new clarity for the interactivity that was present in this study.

Furthermore, research that focuses on a particular ethnic group would be enlightening as well, in that women of different races in this study deeply connected and shared about celebrities who looked physically most like them. It would be interesting to examine how ethnicity plays a role in gossip functions and its interactivity.

Because this study specifically looked at working mothers, further researcher on the challenges working mothers face with the effects of unrealistic expectations and blame, deeply and culturally embedded in the motherhood role (Thurer, 1995), could provide additional insight on how to fulfill on strategies to be a more successful mother.

While gossip research has not pinpointed a hierarchy of importance within a functions context, some suggest one of the main mechanisms driving gossip consumption is the vicarious learning that consumers gain through the indirect experience and insights garnered through gossip's content (Baumeister et el., 2004; De Backer & Fisher, 2012). Further research to explore specific life experiences while examining gossip content could shed light on how gossip functions to provide these valuable life lessons.

The final challenge is addressing the argument by some scholars that individuals speculating about celebrities they do not personally know should be excluded from the broader view of gossip scholarly work (Noon & Delbridge, 1993). Others assert media and interpersonal celebrity gossip can include unknown others (De Backer, 2012; De Backer & Fisher, 2012; Gamson, 1994; Harrington & Bielby, 1985) and that, unlike traditional news reporting, media celebrity gossip reports information repeatedly that becomes proof that celebrities are real friends in an individual's network; thus, consumers' minds process the media encounters as if they were

real and personal experiences (De Backer, 2012). This study certainly opens the doors for more research on broadening the view and impact of celebrity gossip on meeting social and individual needs in the overall gossip literature field.

Conclusion

This study serves to fill several gaps in gossip literature. First, it confirmed Nevo and Nevo's (1993) findings, that indeed utilizing their social and individual function model is a structure that supports gossip function understanding within the literature. Second, through participants' lived experiences of the public sharing and private consumption of celebrity gossip, the study addressed the commonly cited discrepancies of conflicting and contradictory function definitions and understandings among gossip scholars (Bosson, Johnson, Nikederhoffer & Swann, 2006; Foster, 2004; McAndrew et al., 2007; Sabini & Silver, 1982; Yerkovich, 1977). And finally, it demonstrates and identifies a consistent interaction of both social and individual functions being served simultaneously. While these processes are important to explore, this study demonstrates that the functions are merely a part of a complex process embedded within the lived experiences. This project indicates that a binary approach does not sufficiently explain the complexities of gossip interactions and opens new doors for better understanding the simultaneous interactions taking place.

APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PRE-SCREEN QUESTIONS

1. Do you have a child(ren) or step-child(ren) under the age of 18 that primarily resides in your home? Please circle one response.

   Yes   No

2. How would you describe yourself? Please circle one response:

   I read and watch celebrity gossip. I'm quite aware of celebrities and the current circumstances in their lives. It's fun to talk about and I do so with my friends.

   I have a limited interest in celebrity lives. I can take it or leave it and don't pay much attention.

   I don't like celebrity gossip and rarely engage in this type of talk.

This focus group is designed to include working mothers who engage, read, watch and/or share celebrity gossip. Participants who have no children or who have limited interest, do not like nor participate in celebrity gossip, will not be included in the focus group.

3. Please circle if you would like to participate in the focus group on ***DATE*** at ***TIME,***
here at the agency in room _____.

Yes   No

The focus group and interviews are designed to include mothers who engage, read, watch and/or share celebrity gossip. Participants who have no children or who have limited interest, do not like nor participate in celebrity gossip, will not be included in the focus group or individual interviews.

Name:
_____

Email:
_____

Agency:
_____

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL PRE-SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Age: _____

2. Relationship Status: _____

3. Number of Children and ages: _____

4. How long have you worked here?_____

5. What is your highest level of education? _____

6. Please describe your race/ethnicity. _____

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Schedule

Introduction
As participants enter the room, they were provided first name only nametags and given a seat. Placed upon their seats were two forms with corresponding numbers to the first name of the participant as identifiers. Form one is the consent form (See Appendix D), form two is the pre-survey questionnaire (See Appendix B). Participants were asked to fill out the pre-survey questionnaire when they are seated.

As I began, I briefly explained the research project, described participant rights and IRB necessities. I asked for the reading and signing of the consent forms and collected the paperwork.

Moderator Opening: ―Hi Everyone. Thank you for coming today. My name is Shawne and this is Jessie. She is going to be helping me with the equipment. As you know, the topic today is celebrity gossip.

Before we head into the topic.. Let's start by going around the table to get acquainted.
1) Please tell us your name, your job, and how long you've been working here?

2) Now.. do you know others in this group? If so how?

3) Let's jump into the topic of celebrity gossip. Icebreaker suggestion: What makes someone a celebrity? How would you define a celebrity?

Next, I want to get an idea of what you're reading watching, and possibly surfing on the web.
Working Mothers' Experiences and Functions of Private Consumption

4)What types of celebrity gossip do you enjoy reading?
     Probes:
     -What about magazines
     -What about TV
     -What about online or blogs?
     -What do you like about these particular ways to find out about celebrities?

5) You're busy moms! When do you find time to do this?
     Probes:
     -Why do you think you make the time?

6) Why celebrity gossip? What do you get out of it?
     Probes:

-What do you like about it?
-Why do you think this is the case?
-What don't you like about celebrity gossip?
-Why do you think this is the case?

Working Mothers' Experiences and Functions of Public Sharing

Activity
We're going to shift our focus to actual celebrities. We are going to pass out a piece of paper. Please put your first name at the top of the paper and list your 5 favorite celebrities. We'll give you a few minutes then add the names to this flip chart.

(Gather names as a group)

7) -What do you like about the celebrities on this list?

We are going to pass out a piece of paper again. Please put your first name at the top of the paper and this time please list the 5 five celebrities you like the least. We'll give you a few minutes then add the names to this flip chart again.

(Gather names as a group)
        Probes:
        -What is your hunch about why you like them?
        -What do you assume to be true about them?
        -What do you think is the connection between liking a celebrity mom and sharing
          about them?

8) -What don't you like about the celebrities on this list?
        Probes:
        -What's the criteria you used to determine that?
        -What do you assume to be true about them?
        -What do you think is the connection between liking a celebrity and sharing
          about them?

9) Have you discussed these celebrities with your friends? What kind of dialogues did you have?
        Probes:
        -With friends?
        -With colleagues?
        -With family members?
        -What do you enjoy about these interactions? Dislike?

10) What celebrity stories in particular have showed up in your discussions?
        Probes:
        -Why do you think this is the case?

11) What are the celebrity stories that you personally reacted to?

Probes:

-Why do you think you have a reaction?

-What would be your reasoning to share about it?

12) We want your help as we conduct this study. Let me do a brief summary of the information gathered today. Is that an accurate summary? Is there anything that we missed? Is there anything you came wanting to say that you didn't get a chance to say?

APPENDIX D

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Schedule

I provided the interviewee with the consent form and let them read it and ask any questions. After consent was signed, I asked permission for the record. After they agreed, I turned on the recorder and began the interview.

I asked for background information such as their name, job title, and how long they've been working at the agency. I'll also asked them to tell me about their children, how many, ages, sex, etc.

Let's jump into the topic of celebrity gossip. What makes someone a celebrity? How would you define a celebrity?

Next, I simply want to get an idea of what you're reading watching, and possibly surfing on the web.

Working Mothers' Experiences and Functions of Private Consumption

1) What types of celebrity gossip do you enjoy reading?
   Probes:
   -What about magazines
   -What about TV
   -What about online or blogs?
   -Why do you think that is your personal preference?

2) You're a busy mom, when do you personally find time to do this?
    Probes:
    -Why do you think you make the time?

3) Why celebrity gossip? What do you get out of it?
    Probes:
    -What do you like about it?
    -Which stories are most memorable for you?
    -Why do you think that is?

Working Mothers' Experiences and Functions of Public Sharing

Activity
I'm going to shift our focus to actual celebrities. Here is a piece of paper. Please list your 5 favorite celebrities. I'll give you a few minutes then we'll discuss your choices.

4) -What do you like about the celebrities on this list?

      Probes:

      -We're there any that stood out for you?

      -What do you like about these celebrities in particular?

      -Are there any more celebrities that come to mind?

      -How, in your life, do you find yourself relating to these celebrities, or not relating?

Activity

Let's do that again. Here is a piece of paper. This time, please list your 5 least favorite celebrities. I'll give you a few minutes then we'll discuss your choices.

5) What don't you like about the celebrities on this list?

      Probes:

      -What's the criteria you used to determine that?

      -What are your thoughts about why that might be?

      -Which celebrities do you find yourself relating to, or not relating to?

6) Have you discussed these celebrities with your friends? What kind of dialogues did you have?

      Probes:

      -With friends

      -With colleagues

      -With family members

      -What do you enjoy about these interactions? Dislike?

7) What celebrity stories in particular have showed up in your discussions?

      Probes:

      -Why do you think they're worth talking about?

8) What are the celebrity stories that you personally reacted to?

      Probes:

      -What might be the reason you have a reaction?

      -Why do you think you share about it?

9) We want your help as we conduct this study. Let me do a brief summary of the information gathered from you today. Is that an accurate summary? Is there anything that we missed? Is there anything you came wanting to say that you didn't get a chance to say?

Additional questions that emerged in this iterative process:

On the basis of my fieldwork so far, I'm noticing a few things and I would like to get your feedback on some of my interpretations.

10) I'm discovering that individuals who read and share celebrity gossip talk about it as being a guilty pleasure, is sometimes embarrassment? What do you think about that interpretation?

11) I'm noticing there are some celebrities participants feel sorry for and pity then, and there's also celebrities that you feel sorry for and have empathy for them or want to cheer them on. Have you heard this interpretation before? What do you think?

12) In many of the focus group interactions the discussion of whether you like or dislike a celebrity is about categorizing them as a potential friend or not a potential friend. Can you relate to this discussion? How so?

13) The annoying, home-wrecker, manipulative selfish celebs seems to have some element of participants becoming the moral police. What are your thoughts about that?

14) Being a good mother seems to be a theme as well. My interpretations point to that however you share celebrity gossip, you're really unveiling your own personal values around what constitutes a good vs. bad mother. What do you think of that interpretation?

APPENDIX E

Behavioral Research Informed Consent: Focus Group
Title of Study: The Public Sharing and Private Consumption of Celebrity Gossip Through The Motherhood Role

Principal Investigator (PI):   Shawne Duperon
                                      Doctoral Candidate,
                                      Department of Communication
                                      Wayne State University
                                      248-669-1868

Purpose

You are being asked to be in a research study about the consumption and sharing of celebrity gossip by mothers because you are a female between the ages of 18-55 years, you are the primary caretaker of at least one child age 0-18 years old, and you participate in the consumption and sharing of celebrity gossip. This study is being conducted at your place of employment. **Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.**

This research study will look at how and why working mothers read, watch, and listen to celebrity gossip and which celebrity stories they share with others and why.

Study Procedures

If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group session comprising 6-8 participants. Participation entails one 45-minute to 90-minute focus group session at your place of employment. Focus group questions will consist of asking the types of celebrity gossip you read or watch, and which celebrity stories you tend to share with others and why. You have the option of not answering specific questions and still being able to remain in the study. The focus group sessions will be audio recorded.

Benefits

As a participant in this research there may be no direct benefit to you; however, information from this study may benefit other people now or in the future.

Risks

By taking part in this study, you may experience mild feelings of insecurity, and possibly stress and anxiety, regarding your identity as a mother. You may also experience mild discomfort in regards to talking about consuming celebrity gossip. There is also a social risk of a potential breach in confidentiality.

Information must be released/reported to the appropriate authorities if at any time during the study there is concern that child abuse has possibly occurred.

Study Costs

Participation in this study will be of no cost to you.

Compensation
For your time and inconvenience for participating in this study you will be given a $20 Starbucks gift card. If you terminate participation it will not involve a penalty or loss of the $20 Starbucks gift card to which you are entitled.

Confidentiality

All information collected about you during the course of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. Information that identifies you personally will not be released without your written permission. However, the study sponsor, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Wayne State University, or federal agencies with appropriate regulatory oversight [e.g., Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), Office of Civil Rights (OCR), etc.) may review your records.

When the results of this research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that will reveal your identity.

Audiotape recordings of the interview will be used solely for research or educational purposes, and all identifying information will be changed or removed in the transcript to protect your identity. Upon completion of the study, all recordings will be destroyed. As a participant you have a right to review and/or edit the recordings. I will be the only researcher with access to the recordings.

As a participant, you will not receive a performance evaluation from your company on whether you participated or not, nor will your employer be aware of your responses if you choose to participate.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal/Compensation

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in the study you can later change your mind and withdraw from the study. You are free to only answer questions that you want to answer. You are free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time. If you terminate participation it will not involve a penalty or loss of the $20 Starbucks gift card to which you are entitled. Your decision will not change any present or future relationship with your employer, Wayne State University or its affiliates, or other services you are entitled to receive.

The Principal Investigator (PI) may stop your participation in this study without your consent. The PI will make the decision and let you know if it is not possible for you to continue. The decision that is made is to protect your health and safety, or because you did not follow the instructions to take part in the study.
.

Questions

If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact me, Shawne Duperon at the following phone number 248-669-1868. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call (313) 577-1628 to ask questions or voice concerns or complaints.

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. If you choose to take part in this study you may withdraw at any time without penalty. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you have read, or had read to you, this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits, and have had all of your questions answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form.

_____   _____

Signature of consent   Date

_____   _____

Printed name of person consenting   Time

_____   _____

Signature of person obtaining consent   Date

_____   _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent   Time

APPENDIX F

Behavioral Research Informed Consent: Interview
Title of Study: The Public Sharing and Private Consumption of Celebrity Gossip Through The Motherhood Role

Principal Investigator (PI):   Shawne Duperon
                                         Doctoral Student, Department of Communication
                                         Wayne State University
                                         248-669-1868

Purpose

You are being asked to participate in a research study about the consumption and sharing of celebrity gossip by working mothers because you are a female between the ages of 18-55 years, you are the primary caretaker of at least one child age 0-18 years old, and you participate in the consumption and sharing of celebrity gossip. This study is being conducted at your place of employment. **Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.**

This research study will look at how and why mothers read, watch, and listen to celebrity gossip and which celebrity stories they share with others and why.

Study Procedures

If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview. Participation entails one 45-minute to 90-minute individual interview at your place of employment or other location convenient for you. Interview questions will consist of asking the types of celebrity gossip you read or watch, and which celebrity stories you tend to share with others and why. You have the option of not answering specific questions and you will still be able to remain in the study. The interviews will be audio recorded.

Benefits

As a participant in this research there may be no direct benefit to you; however, information from this study may benefit other people now or in the future.

Risks

By taking part in this study, you may experience mild feelings of insecurity, and possibly stress and anxiety, regarding your identity as a mother. You may also experience mild discomfort in regards to talking about consuming celebrity gossip. There is also a social risk of a potential breach in confidentiality.

Information must be released/reported to the appropriate authorities if at any time during the study there is concern that child abuse has possibly occurred.

Study Costs

Participation in this study will be of no cost to you.

Compensation

For your time and inconvenience for participating in this study you will be given a $20 Starbucks gift card. If you terminate participation it will not involve a penalty or loss of the $20 Starbucks gift card to which you are entitled.

Confidentiality

All information collected about you during the course of this study will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number. Information that identifies you personally will not be released without your written permission. However, the study sponsor, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Wayne State University, or federal agencies with appropriate regulatory oversight [e.g., Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), Office of Civil Rights (OCR), etc.) may review your records.

When the results of this research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that will reveal your identity.

Audiotape recordings of the interview will be used solely for research or educational purposes, and all identifying information will be changed or removed in the transcript to protect your identity. Upon completion of the study, all recordings will be destroyed. As a participant you have a right to review and/or edit the recordings. I will be the only researcher with access to the recordings.

As a participant, your participation (or not) in this study will not be part of a performance evaluation from your company, nor will your employer be aware of your responses if you choose to participate.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in the study you can later change your mind and withdraw from the study. You are free to only answer questions that you want to answer. You are free to withdraw from participation in this study at any time. If you terminate participation it will not involve a penalty or loss of the $20 Starbucks gift card to which you are entitled Your decision will not change any present or future relationship with Wayne State University or its affiliates, or other services you are entitled to receive.

The Principal Investigator (PI) may stop your participation in this study without your consent. The PI will make the decision and let you know if it is not possible for you to continue. The decision that is made is to protect your health and safety, or because you did not follow the instructions to take part in the study.

Questions

If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact me, Shawne Duperon at the following phone number 248-444-7573. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call (313) 577-1628 to ask questions or voice concerns or complaints.

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. If you choose to take part in this study you may withdraw at any time without penalty. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by signing this form. Your signature below indicates that you have read, or had read to you, this entire consent form, including the risks and benefits, and have had all of your questions answered. You will be given a copy of this consent form.

_____ _____
Signature of consent   Date

_____ _____
Printed name of person consenting   Time

_____ _____
Signature of person obtaining consent   Date

_____ _____
Printed name of person obtaining consent   Time

APPENDIX G

Ever wonder why women love to dish about celebrity gossip?
Ever think about what role celebrity gossip plays in mothers' lives?

We are conducting a research study that examines mothers' consumption and sharing of celebrity gossip. The title of the study is: *The Public Sharing and Private Consumption of Celebrity Gossip Through the Motherhood Role*

This study is being conducted by doctoral candidate Shawne Duperon, in the Department of Communication at Wayne State University.

The purpose of the research study is to understand the role of consumption and sharing of celebrity gossip in mothers' lives.

Your participation in the study will be as a participant in a focus group session. The 60-90 minute focus group session with the researcher will have 6-8 participants and will take place in the _____ room here at _____.

We will audio-record the focus group session. These recordings will be erased once the interview has been transcribed. All identifying information will be changed in the transcript to protect your identity.

We are seeking women for this study who:
- are between 18-55 years old,
- take care of at least one child age 0-18 years old, and
- enjoy reading, watching, and sharing celebrity gossip.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. The benefit to your participation is helping advance knowledge about the consumption and sharing of celebrity gossip.

To thank you for your time and participation, you will receive a $20 gift card for Starbucks.

If you are interested in being a participant in this study or have any questions please contact: Shawne Duperon via phone at 248-444-7573 or via email at sduperon@aol.com

THANK YOU!

APPENDIX H

Focused Codes

entertaining	humor	intriguing	strikes my fancy
addicting	escaping stress	relaxing from heavy demands	guilty pleasure
real world overload	feeling empathy	hot messes	poor dear
feeling compassion	cheering them on	hating them, but smart	can't stand them, but talented
disliking them, but respect them	authenticity	down to earth	being responsible
humanitarian	courageous	being conscious	protective
talented	strong	speaking out	good mom
driven	respecting	annoying	diva
nemesis	never my friend	bad mom	home-wrecker
slutty	love to make a scene	self-indulgent	selfish
manipulative	insincere	inauthentic	stuck up
bitch	selfish	slore	tramp
friend	agreeing	safety in sharing	validating
she rocked it	intimacy	accepting	role model
having credibility	community	socially connected	the in crowd
not looking stupid	status	having authority	in the know
having power	staying hip and cool	beauty	fashionista
stylish			

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ABSTRACT

**THE PUBLIC SHARING AND PRIVATE CONSUMPTION OF CELEBRITY GOSSIP:
A MULTIFUNCTIONAL, SIMULATNEOUS AND INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCE**

by

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Research has demonstrated that gossip, and specifically celebrity gossip, functions to meet many social and individual needs, yet the identified needs and functions differ and often conflict in the literature. The current study focused on examining the lived experiences of working mothers as they publicly share and privately consume celebrity gossip. Three focus groups and six individual interviews were conducted with mothers who enjoy sharing and consuming celebrity gossip. A Grounded Theory approach was used to analyze the data, revealing eight emergent categories. The emergent categories reveal a lived experience of celebrity gossip, a complex and dynamic process beyond yet inclusive of meeting needs. This study revealed that working mothers experience celebrity gossip as an active and engaging process involving public sharing and private consumption that includes meeting both social and individual needs, which are often interchangeable and simultaneous.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Shawne Duperon received her Bachelor degree in Telecommunications from Eastern Michigan University in 1992. She entered the communication program at Wayne State University in 1996 and received her Master of Arts degree in 2002.

Ms. Duperon holds certification as a Women Business Owned Enterprise (WBENC) along with Department of Defense Clearance through her communications training company, ShawneTV.

Her research interests are focused on interpersonal and celebrity gossip, along with forgiveness. Using gossip theory, she created a non-profit called The Project: Forgive Foundation, a non-religious leadership organization concentrated on compassion, integrity, diversity and forgiveness in the workplace. The organization received an official endorsement from Archbishop Desmond Tutu and reaches millions in social media.