

Workplace Gossip and Employee Cynicism: The Moderating Role of Dispositional Envy

Chien-Chih Kuo¹, Kirk Chang², Ting-Kuei Kuo³, and Sheng Cheng⁴

Department of Psychology, National Chengchi University¹

Department of Management, University of Sharjah²

Nottingham University Business School Ningbo China³

Department of Psychology, National Chengchi University⁴

This study investigated the relationship between workplace gossip (positive gossip and negative gossip) and employee cynicism and explored the moderating role of dispositional envy through the social information processing approach. Data were collected via a three-stage survey in 24 companies with 307 employees across various industries in Taiwan and analyzed through hierarchical linear modelling regression analysis. The results showed that negative workplace gossip engendered employee cynicism, whereas the effect of positive workplace gossip was not significant. Moreover, dispositional envy moderates these relationships, which denotes that individual differences are an important factor affecting employee cynicism within organizations.

Keywords: *Dispositional envy, employee cynicism, workplace gossip, positive gossip, negative gossip*

Workplace gossip (Kuo, 2012; Kurland & Pelled, 2000) is inherent in organizational life, which indicates that employees routinely exchange social information and discover meanings in the organizational setting. When people engaged in workplace gossip receive multiple sources of value-laden information (Noon & Delbridge, 1993), they may construct their organizational reality through sense-making from the collected information, which shapes their attitudes towards their organizations, such as employee cynicism (Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar, 1998; Kuo, 2010). Employee cynicism is an attitude characterized by frustration, hopelessness, disillusionment, and contempt towards the employing organization, which could undermine managers, organizations, and human resource management (Andersson, 1996; Wilkerson, 2002). For example, cynics

at work disbelieve their employers' motives and believe that their managers may exploit their contributions. Consequently, this may reduce job satisfaction and commitment and increased intention to resign (Dean et al., 1998). Hence, understanding how organizational contexts evoke employee cynicism is a significant academic and practical concern.

To address this issue, we argue that, where workplace gossip occurs, employee cynicism is influenced by the social context within the organizational setting. As far as we know, although research has proliferated decade on the topic of employee cynicism over the past, few researchers have focused on the formation of cynicism in the social contexts of work and organization (e.g., Kuo, Chang, & Monaghan, 2013; Kuo, Chang, Quinton, Lu, & Lee, 2015). To some extent, this knowledge gap reflects

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Corresponding Author: Chien-Chih Kuo (cckuo@nccu.edu.tw) Department of Psychology, National Chengchi University, NO.64, Sec.2, ZhiNan Rd., Wenshan District, Taipei City 116, Taiwan (R.O.C).

insufficient attention to employee cynicism in applied management research, because “cynicism is generally viewed as negative and is, therefore, a sensitive topic to managers and organizations. Because of this sensitive nature, negative attitudes as well as the organizational practices that foster them have been relatively neglected in management research” (Andersson, 1996, p. 1401). Thus, to bridge the aforementioned knowledge gap, we empirically examined the relationship between workplace gossip and employee cynicism, illustrating the organizational reality that social influence could shape employee attitudes towards an organization.

Furthermore, a review of workplace gossip literature reveals that little is known about the boundary conditions for the effects of workplace gossip. Therefore, it is meaningful to consider the role of employees’ dispositional envy, individual differences in tendencies to be envious (Smith, Parrott, Diener, Hoyle, & Kim, 1999), in the effect of gossip on employee cynicism. Many scholars describe dispositional envy as an upward-comparison-based emotional trait, which includes feelings of inferiority, frustration, ill-will, and resentment towards successful people (Smith et al., 1999). By extending the perspective of social information processing (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), the sense-making process and interpretation of organizational reality can be understood as disparaging. Employees with different levels of dispositional envy could have specific motivation and cognition preferences originating in unfavorable social comparisons, thus biasing the relevance and significance of workplace gossip and leading to varying degrees of employee cynicism. Specifically, we argue that dispositional envy could play a moderating role in the relationship between workplace gossip and employee cynicism.

Our research contributes to the literature in several ways. First, to our knowledge, little previous research has examined the relationship between workplace gossip and employee cynicism, which is regarded as a crucial detrimental factor in employee–organization relationships. By revealing the influence of social context on workers’ attitudes, we identify the impact of workplace gossip on employee cynicism. Second, workplace gossip

can be a social information source for organization members as part of the social context. We extended the perspective of the social information processing approach (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) and proposed that the social influence of workplace gossip affects gossip participants’ attitudes. This not only broadens the scope of the social information processing approach in organizational studies but also provides an operational mechanism for gossip in the workplace. Third, we suggest that an employee’s dispositional envy acts as a critical boundary condition for whether the person responds to workplace gossip with buffering or whether the gossip exacerbates that employee’s cynicism. In doing so, we believe that our moderating model can provide a solid foundation for future inquiry that could advance understanding the mechanisms underlying the association between workplace gossip and employee cynicism.

The Role of Workplace Gossip in Employee Cynicism

This research argues that the social context of organizations, workplace gossip (Kuo, 2012; Kurland & Pelled, 2000), can influence employees’ evaluation of the organization (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008; Wilkerson, Evans, & Davis, 2008). Specifically, workplace gossip, which is characterized by its information uncertainty, incompleteness, and ambiguity, is the major aspect of the social context that engenders employee cynicism (Kuo et al., 2013; Kuo et al., 2015). Indeed, employee cynicism has been proposed as a new paradigm of employee–employment relationship, reflecting the negative attitudes toward employing organizations, executives, and managers in the workplace (Andersson, 1996; Dean et al., 1998; Kuo, 2010).

Employee cynicism is both a generalized and specific attitude comprising hopelessness and a sense of contempt and distrust towards people and groups (Andersson, 1996), which is anticipatory and outwardly directed (Wanous, Reichers, & Austin, 1994). Dean et al. (1998) defined employee cynicism as “a negative attitude toward one’s employing organization, comprising three dimensions: (1) a belief that the organization lacks

integrity; (2) a negative affect towards the organization; and (3) tendencies to exhibit disparaging and critical behavior towards the organization” (p.345). Wilkerson (2002) held that employee cynicism is “a negative attitude toward ones employed in an organization in general, and toward its procedures, processes, and management, that is based on a conviction that these elements generally work against the employee’s best interests” (p.533). Specifically, employee cynicism can be considered a learned negative attitude (Dean et al., 1998; Kuo, 2010; Wilkerson, 2002) derived from the negative evaluation towards the organization and disappointment regarding future expectations, can harm employees’ work satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and individual performance, and could result in emotional exhaustion and deviant behavior (Johnson & O’Leary-Kelly, 2003; Wilkerson et al., 2008).

As far as we know, almost all employees find themselves engaged in gossip at work by producing, listening to, or otherwise participating in evaluative comments about people who are absent from the room (Kuo et al., 2013), and their attitudes towards the organization were shaped by shared social information from workplace gossips (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). Noon and Delbridge (1993) defined workplace gossip as the informal communication process of value-laden information about members of a social setting. Grosser, Kidwell, and Labianca (2012) argued that gossip must be an evaluative conversation between two or more persons about a third party who is absent from the conversation. In our conceptualization, workplace gossip is the informal communication pattern that organizational members evaluate the behavior and attitudes of other members in the same organization who are not present in the discussion (Kuo, 2012; Kurland & Pelled, 2000).

Traditionally, scholars have categorized workplace gossip as positive or negative (Brady, Brown, & Liang, 2017; Kuo, 2012; Kurland & Pelled, 2000; Wu, Birtch, Chiang, & Zhang, 2018). Positive gossip happens when the gossip receivers perceive the evaluative information about the absent target as good news such as promotion, wage increase, or completing difficult tasks; by contrast, negative gossip happens when the exchanged information

is perceived as bad news such as blame, failure to achieve goals or sloppy work. Brady et al. (2017) demonstrated that positive and negative gossip could have distinct influences on a variety of organizational variables and processes, including uncertainty, emotional validation, self-esteem, norm enforcement, networking, interpersonal influence, organizational justice, performance, deviance, and turnover. The distinct nature and functions of positive and negative gossip were supported in the literature (Wu et al., 2018).

Positive gossip involves talking about normative behaviors or positive reputations (Kurland & Pelled, 2000). Participants receive positive evaluations regarding the capability, temperament, and performance of organizational members, such as excellent sales volumes or diligent work attitudes. In this context, gossip participants perceive a concern about an accomplishment from colleagues and managers, interpreting that people with good performance can gain recognition from the organization and be valued professionally because of their attributes and performance. Furthermore, the context of positive gossip can be a potent reinforcer of group morale and spirit, reflecting an organizational climate of high-quality fellowship and eliciting positive work-related emotions such as support and elation (Watson, Wiese, Vaidya, & Tellegen, 1999). Given this social emotional support, organization members tend to be friendly and warm to one another. Therefore, based on the shared psychological proximity and feelings of contentment with the social environment and workplace relationships, they may perceive a higher quality employment relationship.

Negative gossip involves topics about norm violations or negative reputations (Kurland & Pelled, 2000), in which gossip participants receive negative evaluations of the capability, attributes, and performance of organization members, such as failures to meet sales goals or lukewarm work attitudes. This creates an awareness of the expectations of the organization and supervisors concerning work duties and obligations at work. Gossip participants may sense social cues about what they should do, or what their supervisors or the organization expect them to do, and strive to meet these demands to avoid being socially undermined (e.g.,

being the target of negative gossip). Thus, negative workplace gossip may trigger a sense of insecurity and uncertainty, damaging the psychological attachment and identification with the organization. Furthermore, the evaluation of negative gossip diminishes individuals' need for affiliation, triggering negative emotions towards the organization such as quiescence and agitation (Watson et al., 1999), which can result in employee depression and anxiety or pressure and frustration. Negative gossip incites dislike and disharmony among colleagues, diminishing friendship, and inclusivity. Because of the lack of empathy and psychological proximity, employees are disappointed in the organization and have lower valuations and expectations of it.

Indeed, although workplace gossip targets employees rather than the organization, the cues for both positive and negative gossip may create a social context for employees' sense-making for the personal meaning of and how they evaluate the organization (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Some studies also support the arguments mentioned above. For example, when there is more negative gossip in the organization, employees would attribute this to a poorly managed environment with resulting in low trust in interpersonal relationships (Ellwardt, Wittek, & Wielers, 2012; Tebbutt & Marchington, 1997; Tucker, 1993). Thus, as we have argued, gossip participants receive social information within the workgroup that they use to construct and shape the interpretation of their experience in the organization and assign meaning to it. When gossip participants expose themselves to more positive social cues, they tend to attribute the perception to excellent management practice and organizational competence, facilitating psychological attachment to the organization and decreasing employee cynicism. By contrast, an environment of negative gossip generates an unpleasant atmosphere in which individuals or groups are considered unequally treated, resulting in the circulation of negative information in the organization. Under these circumstances, individuals are likely to feel undeserved in the employee-employer relationship. Gossip participants tend to attribute such perceptions to organizational misconduct and lack of competent management. This elevates the sense of alienation from the organization and

increases the likelihood of cynicism.

Hypothesis 1: Positive workplace gossip is negatively related to employee cynicism.

Hypothesis 2: Negative workplace gossip is positively related to employee cynicism.

The Moderating Role of Dispositional Envy

Envy is deep-rooted within human nature and is often a powerful motive for behavior. Envy can also explain why people refuse to cooperate and are willing to thwart others at their own cost (Cobo-Reyes & Jiménez, 2012). To understand the underpinnings of envy, prior studies have examined a range of individual differences as well as the propensity to experience envy, while others have conceptualized envy as a personality trait (Lange & Crusius, 2015; Smith et al., 1999). Smith and Kim (2007) define dispositional envy as "an unpleasant, often painful emotion characterized by feelings of inferiority, hostility, and resentment produced by an awareness of another person or group of persons who enjoy the desired possession (object, social position, attribute, or quality of being)" (p. 47). Drawing upon these conceptualizations, we consider dispositional envy as a desire to own others' possessions that one lacks while experiencing unfavorable social comparison. Under such circumstances, inferiority is triggered, which generates ill-will (Gold, 1996), resentment towards the possessors (Smith et al., 1999), and feelings of frustration and injustice (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007).

When participating in workplace gossip, individuals with different levels of dispositional envy may undergo different processes of perception and cognition. Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) argued that an individual's attitude comes from the interaction of social context and individual needs and desires. For example, if an individual's attitude is similar to other group members, he or she would perceive a higher level of group affiliation (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008). Therefore, we argue that the social cues of workplace gossip would prime the internal needs and desires of gossip participants with dispositional envy, prompting social comparisons (Festinger, 1954) and inducing a sense of inferiority, ill-will, and inequality,

leading them to frame their experiences through animosity and frustration.

For high-envy gossip participants, positive information produces comparative cue salience, which is easy to perceive and interpret because it is contrary to internal desires and expectations (e.g., unfavorable upward social comparison). Therefore, from a social interaction perspective, when a group member expresses information disrespectful to one's attitude, one struggles to feel included in the group, thus self-justifying an out-group member status. The sense of psychological detachment coming from the out-group identity reinforces the individual's negative cognitions and emotions towards the organization, further generating employee cynicism. Nevertheless, for low-envy gossip participants without a strong internal need for competition and success, the positive social cues satisfy their needs of affiliation and relationship, and they feel recognition and justice from the organization. Specifically, this positive gossip carries supportive cues of social emotion, and members attribute the positive atmosphere to the organization's management practices. Hence, employee cynicism decreases as self-interpretation facilitates a positive attitude towards the organization.

Respectively, the social cues from negative gossip meet high-envy gossip participants' expectations (i.e., ill-will, hostility, or resentment), satisfying their internal needs of cognition and affection through the self-affirmation process (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). In other words, they take for granted their negative perception and cognition towards the organization. Rather than recognizing it as a personal prejudice, they attribute it to management failure and ineffective organization, believing that other members share the same views. However, the increased negative cues only confirm the inherent expectations of other members' failures, restricting the salience and relevance of this information. Therefore, we argue that, for high-envy members, the influence of negative gossip on their attitudes towards the organization does not increase directly with the amount of negative social cues; their cynicism does not proportionately increase with their participation in gossip. However, for low-envy gossip participants, whose internal

desires and expectations for competition and success are relatively weaker, negative gossip cues have higher salience and relevance. These cues produce expectation-disconfirming feelings (Taylor, 1991) as individuals try to understand their social environment and evaluate their relationship with it. We argue that when physical evidence is unavailable or uncertain, people develop interpretations of organizations and events by interacting with other members (Festinger, 1954). Therefore, for gossip participants with low envy, repeatedly receiving negative gossip information increases the likelihood to be influenced by the negative information, thus increasing the employee cynicism.

Hypothesis 3: Dispositional envy positively moderates the relationship between positive workplace gossip and employee cynicism.

Hypothesis 4: Dispositional envy negatively moderates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and employee cynicism.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

The data were collected from 24 companies in Taiwan (company size: 1-50 people, 5 companies; 50-100 people, 3 companies; 101-500 people, 6 companies; 501-1000 people, 3 companies; and more than 1000 employee, 7 companies) in 9 industries (4 manufacturing industries, 2 high-tech manufacturing, 3 financial services, 1 communication service, 2 information services, 4 medical services, 2 general services, 1 distribution services, and 5 other industries). The participants were full-time employees. Three waves of data were collected. A total of 426 employees completed the Time 1 survey, and 353 employees completed Time 2 survey, and 307 employees completed Time 3 survey. The Time 1 survey contained measures of dispositional envy and demographic questions, and Time 2 contained two types of workplace gossip (one month after Time 1) and, finally, Time 3 contained employee cynicism (two months after Time 1). The independent, moderating, and dependent measures were collected at different times to reduce common method variance bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie,

& Podsakoff, 2012). Nearly 60% of the 307 employees were female, and nearly 70% of the employees had high school diplomas. Over 50% of the employees were in the youngest age band (aged 26-35 years), and over 60% of the employees were single. Variations in the nature of the work contracts and employment types were evenly distributed across the participants.

Measures

Dispositional envy. Eight items were used to measure individual differences in the tendency to be envious (Smith et al., 1999; Smith & Kim, 2007), including “Feelings of envy constantly torment me” ($\alpha = .90$). Responses were made using a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Higher scores represent greater tendencies to be envious.

Workplace gossip. The workplace gossip scale (Kuo, 2012), including both positive and negative gossip, was adopted to measure the individual tendency to gossip. Positive gossip included six items ($\alpha = .87$), including “colleague’s excellent job performance”, as did negative gossip ($\alpha = .85$), including “colleague’s poor job performance”. All items were preceded by a statement, “Have you recently participate to talk about x gossip in the workplace (x = a specific type of gossip).” Responses were recorded using a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = never, 6 = always). Higher scores represent a higher frequency of gossip participation.

Employee cynicism. An eight-item scale was used to measure employee organizational cynicism (Kuo, 2010), with items such as “suspicious of other people’s opinions and behaviours” ($\alpha = .86$). Responses were recorded using a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree). Higher scores represented more experiences of employee cynicism at work.

Control variables. We controlled for employee age, gender, education, organizational tenure, and marital status because these variables have been shown to be associated with cynicism (Chiaburu, Peng, Oh, Banks, & Lomeli, 2013; Kuo et al., 2015).

Results

Measurement model

Because our data for positive and negative gossip, dispositional envy, and employee cynicism were collected from the same source, we conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to test the distinctiveness of these variables. We examined the hypothetical model, which included all four variables. The overall model’s chi-square, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), normed fit index (NFI), comparative fit index (CFI), and incremental fit index (IFI) were used to assess fit. Our analysis revealed that the hypothetical model yielded an acceptable fit to the data, $\chi^2 (344) = 1173.48$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .07, NFI = .90, CFI = .93, IFI = .93, and that all factor loadings were significant, demonstrating convergent validity.

Discriminant validity of the four constructs was then tested by contrasting the hypothetical model against three alternative models. Model 1 (three-factor model): positive and negative gossip were merged; dispositional envy and employee cynicism stood alone. Model 2 (two-factor model): positive and negative gossip and dispositional envy were merged; employee cynicism stood alone. Model 3 (one-factor model): all four constructs were merged. Models 1-3 yielded poor fits to the data, Model 1: $\chi^2 (347) = 1788.02$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .12, NFI = .85, CFI = .88, IFI = .88; Model 2: $\chi^2 (349) = 4202.83$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .19, NFI = .75, CFI = .78, IFI = .78; Model 3: $\chi^2 (350) = 6330.78$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .24, NFI = .66, CFI = .68, IFI = .68. Results indicated that the hypothetical model yielded the best fit in comparison to Models 1-3. Thus, the distinctiveness of the four constructs was supported.

Descriptive statistics

Since the organization’s type and size may be associated with employees’ attitudes toward the organization, this study used ANOVA to analyze the effect of the above variables on employee cynicism. The results showed that organization type was not significant in the effect of employee cynicism ($F (1, 8) = 1.89$, *ns*), while the effect of organization size was significant (F

(1, 4) = 4.87, $p < 0.01$). However, it is indicated that the size of the organization affects the level of employee cynicism. Therefore, this study further uses HLM for data analysis, and the organization size is placed in Level 2 as the control variable.

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, scale reliabilities, and correlations of all variables in this study. Positive gossip was positively correlated with negative gossip ($r = .55, p < .001$); negative gossip was positively correlated with employee cynicism ($r = .26, p < .001$); and dispositional envy was positively correlated with employee cynicism ($r = .14, p < .05$), positive gossip ($r = .13, p < .05$), and negative gossip ($r = .38, p < .001$). The demographic variables of age ($r = -.22, p < .001$), education ($r = .20, p < .01$), tenure ($r = -.14, p < .05$), and marital status ($r = -.16, p < .01$) were significantly correlated with employee cynicism.

Hypothesis testing

We performed hierarchical linear modeling analysis to test the research hypotheses since our data are a nested

design, and the control variable (i.e., the size of the organization) is the organization-level variable. Therefore, in our models, we control organization size in level 2; and gender, age, education level, tenure, and marital status are controlled in level 1. Moreover, given that all research variables are at an individual level, we entered positive gossip, negative gossip, dispositional envy, employee cynicism, and interaction at level 1.

The high correlation coefficients between positive and negative gossip ($r = .55$) suggest a potential multicollinearity problem, which may reduce the statistical power and attenuate multiple regression coefficients. Therefore, we performed a variance inflation factor (VIF) test. This test did not indicate serious multicollinearity for positive and negative gossip (VIF = 1.04 and 1.03, respectively). Given our hypotheses of interactive effects between workplace gossip and dispositional envy, because interacting predictor variables may contribute to multicollinearity, we centered these variables on reducing this effect (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003). The transformation had no noticeable influence on the results and did not alter the conclusions.

Table 1. Summary of descriptive statistics (N = 307)

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Level 1											
1. Gender ^a	0.63	0.48	--								
2. Age ^b	2.31	0.98	0.04	--							
3. Education ^c	3.16	0.54	-0.06	-0.24***	--						
4. Tenure ^d	2.84	1.50	0.01	0.64***	-0.26***	--					
5. Marital status ^e	0.39	0.49	-0.01	0.60***	-0.33***	0.52***	--				
6. Positive gossip	3.06	0.81	-0.14*	-0.03	0.03	-0.01	-0.11	(.87)			
7. Negative gossip	2.70	0.81	-0.08	-0.12*	0.08	-0.07	-0.15**	0.55***	(.85)		
8. Dispositional envy	2.60	0.82	-0.08	-0.11	0.02	-0.14*	-0.13*	0.13*	0.38***	(.90)	
9. Employee cynicism	3.97	0.83	0.02	-0.22***	0.20**	-0.14*	-0.16**	0.03	0.26***	0.14*	(.86)
Level 2											
1. Organization scale ^f	3.23	1.03	--								

Note. Figures within brackets are internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha).

^a Gender: 0 = male; 1 = female. ^b Age: 1 = aged 20 or below; 2 = aged between 21- 29; 3 = aged 30 - 39; 4 = aged 40 - 49; 5 = aged 50 or above.

^c Education: 1 = junior high school; 2 = senior high school; 3 = undergraduate; 4 = graduate. ^d Tenure: 1 = 1 year or below; 2 = 2 - 4 years; 3 = 5 - 7 years; 4 = 8 - 10 years; 5 = 11 years or above. ^e Marital status: 0 = single; 1 = married. ^f Organization Size (people): 1= 1-50; 2= 51-100; 3= 101-500; 4=501-1000; 5= above 1001.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 2. Summary of moderation analysis

Items	Employee Cynicism			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	3.88***	3.90***	3.86***	3.86***
Control variables	.15*	.11*	.10*	.08
Level 2				
Organization size ^a				
Level 1				
Gender ^b	.11	.12	.17*	.24**
Age ^c	-.07	-.07	-.04	-.02
Education ^d	.17	.15	.17	.17*
Tenure ^e	.01	.01	.02	.02
Marital status ^f	-.20	-.12	-.13	-.15
Independent variables				
Positive gossip		-.08	-.06	-.03
Negative gossip		.23***	.17***	.17***
Moderator				
Dispositional envy			.09	.07
Moderating effect				
Positive gossip * dispositional envy				.12*
Negative gossip * dispositional envy				-.14*
<i>n</i> (Level 1)	307	307	307	307
<i>N</i> (Level 2)	24	24	24	24
Model deviance <i>a</i> ^g	720.11	698.94	695.47	676.97

Note. Deviance = $-2 \times \log$ -likelihood of the full maximum-likelihood estimate. In all model, level 2 variables were grand-mean centered.

^a Organization Size (people): 1 = 1-50; 2 = 51-100; 3 = 101-500; 4 = 501-1000; 5 = above 1001; ^b Gender: 0 = male; 1 = female. ^c Age: 1 = aged 20 or below; 2 = aged between 21- 29; 3 = aged 30 - 39; 4 = aged 40 - 49; 5 = aged 50 or above. ^d Education: 1 = junior high school; 2 = senior high school; 3 = undergraduate; 4 = graduate. ^e Tenure: 1 = 1 year or below; 2 = 2 - 4 years; 3 = 5 - 7 years; 4 = 8 - 10 years; 5 = 11 years or above. ^f Marital status: 0 = single; 1 = married. ^g a: deviance is a measure of model fit; the smaller the deviance is, the better the model fit.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

In the hierarchical linear modeling analysis, the control variables were entered in both level 2 and level 1, followed by the independent variables of positive and negative gossip in level 1. Then we entered the moderator (i.e., dispositional envy) and followed the interaction items in level 1 to test the moderation effects. Both hypotheses 1 and 2 predict that different types of workplace gossip affect employee cynicism at the individual level. Hypothesis 1 predicted that positive gossip is negatively related to employee cynicism and

Hypothesis 2 predicted that negative gossip is positively related to employee cynicism. As shown in Table 2 (Model 2), positive gossip did not predict employee cynicism ($\gamma = -.08$, $p > .05$) and negative gossip positively predicted cynicism ($\gamma = .23$, $p < .001$). These findings imply that positive gossip has no effect on employee cynicism, but that negative gossip was positively related to employee cynicism. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was not supported, but Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 4 discussed

dispositional envy and have a moderated effect on the relationship between workplace gossip and employee cynicism at the individual level. Detailly, Hypothesis 3 predicted that dispositional envy positively moderates the relationship between positive gossip and employee cynicism, and Hypothesis 4 predicted that dispositional envy negatively moderates the relationship between negative gossip and employee cynicism. As indicated in Table 2 (Model 4), the interactive relationship between positive gossip and dispositional envy positively predicted employee cynicism ($\gamma = .12, p < .01$), and the interactive relationship between negative gossip and dispositional envy negatively predicted employee cynicism ($\gamma = -.14, p < .05$). Thus, Hypotheses 3 and 4 were supported.

To illustrate the moderating effect, we plotted interactions using Aiken and West's (1991) procedure of computing slopes one standard deviation above and below the mean of the moderating variable (i.e., workplace gossip and dispositional envy). Figure 1 depicts the interactive effect of positive gossip and dispositional envy on employee cynicism. Specifically, when employees' dispositional envy was low, positive gossip was more negatively related to employee cynicism ($\beta = -.16, p < .01$), but when employees' dispositional envy was high, positive gossip was unrelated to employee

cynicism ($\beta = .09, n.s.$). Thus, we found that employee cynicism depended more on positive gossip when the participants had low dispositional envy. Figure 2 illustrates how employee cynicism is influenced by the interaction of negative gossip and dispositional envy. Here, the relationship between negative gossip and employee cynicism was more positively related to employee cynicism when dispositional envy was low ($\beta = .31, p < .001$). However, for those individuals with high dispositional envy, the prediction effect was not significant ($\beta = .03, ns$). Thus, we argued that employee cynicism depended more on negative gossip when the participants had low dispositional envy.

Discussion

Based on the social information process approach (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978), we identified a significant relationship between workplace gossip and employee cynicism. Negative gossip increased cynicism, and positive gossip had no significant effect. We also found that dispositional envy moderated the relationship between the two types of gossip and employee cynicism. Regardless of positive or negative gossip, employees with low dispositional envy had significant effects on employee

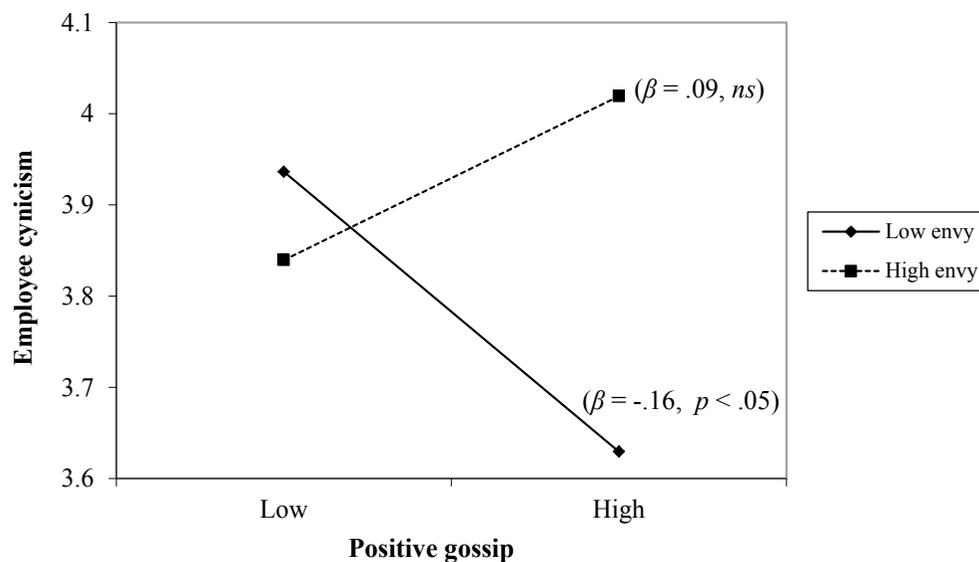


Figure 1. Moderation Analysis (positive gossip)

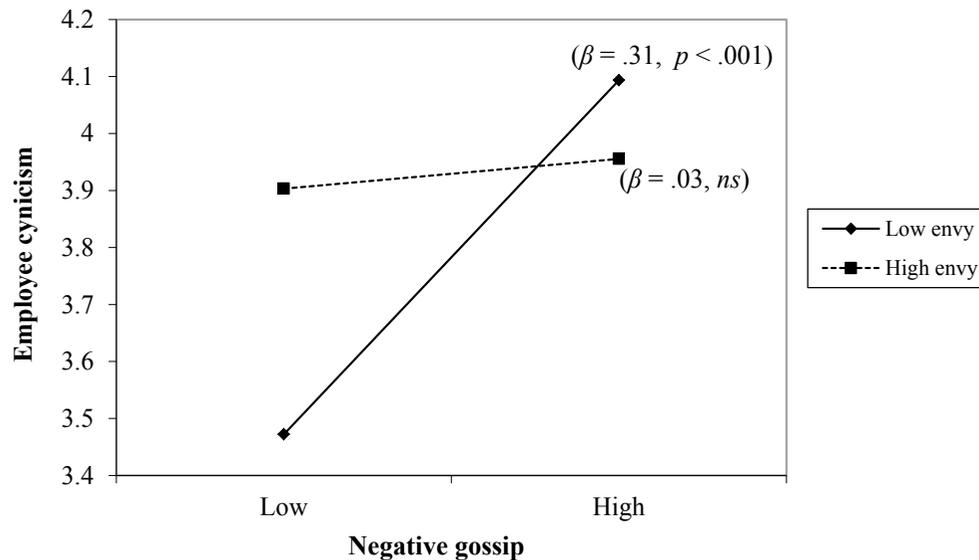


Figure 2. Moderation Analysis (negative gossip)

cynicism, while employees with high dispositional envy did not.

Theoretical Implications

Our research explores the effect of employee cynicism in the crucial social context of workplace gossip and explains the boundary conditions of workplace gossip on employee cynicism centered on the individual difference. Our results revealed that workplace gossip affects the development of employee cynicism following the exchange of negative information in organizations. Indeed, they highlighted the role of social influence on employee attitude formation, which supports the perspective of social information processing (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). That is, individuals could construct their organizational reality by sense-making from social cues, which in turn shapes their attitudes in the workplace (Tebbutt & Marchington, 1977). Specifically, our research highlights the importance of specific social environments within the organization, that is, positive gossip or negative gossip, which are pivotal factors affecting the shaping of employees' attitudes toward the organization (Brady et al., 2017). Indeed, this study provides a theoretical framework to interpret the mechanisms of employee cynicism and enlarges the domain knowledge

of employee cynicism research.

Some scholars argue that workplace gossip can be beneficial. For example, McAndrew, Bell, and Garcia (2007) claimed that it facilitates information exchange and helps people make sense of their environment. Other scholars maintain that it is malicious. For instance, Cole and Dalton (2009) argued that gossip only causes colleagues' discomfort and may ruin their reputation. Both perspectives have advocates and supporting empirical evidence (Brady et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2018). However, our results showed that negative gossip impacted employee cynicism, but positive gossip did not. Previous studies have found that compared to workplace positive gossip, negative gossip was significantly associated with unfavorable organizational evaluation (e.g., Brady et al., 2017; Ellwardt et al., 2012), indicating that different types of workplace gossip have different effects on employee attitudes toward the organization. In short, our results signified that the utility of workplace gossip varies depending on social interaction. Individuals may construct different organizational meanings within different social contexts, affecting the formation of subsequent attitudes and behavioral responses. Therefore, understanding the valence of workplace gossip is particularly important for future research.

This study also found the relationship between workplace gossip and employee cynicism to be moderated by dispositional envy, showing that individual differences were also an important factor affecting the utility of workplace gossip. For employees with higher dispositional envy, positive or negative gossip was not related to employee cynicism. For employees with lower dispositional envy, positive gossip leads to less cynicism, whereas negative gossip leads to more cynicism. It suspects that employees with high dispositional envy are not that susceptible to social cues produced from workplace gossip when it comes to forming attitudes about the organization compared to those with low dispositional envy. Indeed, employees with high dispositional envy will be less affected by social cues due to enduring personal traits (Smith & Kim, 2007).

On the contrary, employees with low dispositional envy do not have an enduring attribute, so they become more susceptible to the social cues provided by workplace gossip. While this view of insusceptibility has not been validated, but the work of Parks, Rumble, & Posey (2002) found that individuals of high dispositional envy seem to be less affected by certain cues provided by researchers, which could support the inference above. Generally, for employees with low dispositional envy, the social cues of positive gossip or negative gossip could be interpreted as reflecting the favorable or unfavorable qualities of the organization's management. The results showed that the power of social influence on low dispositional envy was significantly higher than that of high dispositional envy. Therefore, when theorizing about the utility of workplace gossip, personal attributes should be taken into account (Brady et al., 2017) to give a clear explanation of how workplace gossip operates.

Practical Implications

In practical terms, employee cynicism is harmful to human resource management and organizational performance (Wilkerson, 2002). Our findings suggest several implications for managers and organizations to reduce employee cynicism. First, negative workplace gossip is related to the presence of employee cynicism,

and organizations and managers should be concerned about how to manage negative gossip. Thus, we suggest that organizations should deliberately develop multiple information exchange channels such as idea boxes, town hall meetings, GM mailboxes, and department bulletin boards. With such facilities, employees can express opinions and exchange information, so that negative gossip is less likely to spread across the organization.

Second, positive workplace gossip is negatively related to employee cynicism. Thus, managers and organizations should understand that not all gossip is negative and that encouraging a more open attitude towards positive workplace gossip could be beneficial. 'Water cooler' or 'kitchen' conversations should not be viewed as 'wasting time' but as an important mechanism for venting or facilitating interactions. A positive organizational culture is crucial for decreasing employee cynicism because group norms influence the extent of gossip (Michelson, Van Iterson, & Waddington, 2010). Therefore, after confirming the truth, quality, and usefulness of information, organizations should adequately encourage employees to engage in positive gossip (Wu et al., 2018). This can facilitate the construction, comprehension, management, and the communication of norms within an organization (Brady et al., 2017).

Third, this study also indicated that employees with low dispositional envy, not with high dispositional envy, tend to decrease cynical attitudes as positive gossip increases and to increase cynical attitudes as negative gossip increases. The results showed that social context within the organizational setting has significant influences on the attitudes toward employing organizations for low dispositional envy employees. Therefore, organizations could offer managers training programs to identify employees' tendency towards dispositional envy, or to those with envy-related issues that can potentially impact employees' work attitudes and behaviors. With an improved understanding of employee envy, managers can make responses more effectively and create a more positive working environment to reduce employee cynicism.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations of the present research should be considered. We illustrated a certain causal flow in which workplace gossip results in employee cynicism, and the patterns of results are robust. However, we cannot exclude other possibilities. For instance, employee cynicism could generate workplace gossip, with dispositional envy as a moderator. Besides, this research has identified two individual factors, dispositional envy and workplace gossip, which are important in forming employee cynicism. However, whether individual factors are more salient than organizational factors instigating cynicism has not been answered by this study. In the future, researchers could compare the relative contributions of individual and organizational factors to cynicism to provide a more holistic view of the antecedents of cynicism.

Second, this study collected data through a self-report method. This could result in common method bias. Nevertheless, according to Podsakoff et al. (2012), collecting independent and dependent variables at different times could reduce such bias. Along with the CFA results, the theoretical model had a closer fit than the one-factor model, indicating that common method bias should have little to no effect on our empirical findings. Apart from self-reports, other information sources such as supervisor appraisal, peer reviews, and employment data could be considered to avoid common method bias in future workplace gossip research.

Third, this study focuses on the moderating role of dispositional envy, indicating individual differences in the informational process and sense-making about the social context in the organization. Future research can extend the exploration to group-level or organization-level situational variables, such as social support (Tian, Song, Kwan, & Li, 2019) or organizational culture (Kurland & Pelled, 2000; Michelson & Suchitra Mouly, 2004) to examine the moderating effect of gossip on workers' attitude toward the organization. Moreover, for the operating mechanism of workplace gossip, in addition to the social information processing theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) used in this study, future research can employ a variety of different perspectives to clarify the mechanism of workplace gossip, such as how workplace

gossip through self-consistency (Wu et al., 2018) or harmony perception (Wu et al., 2018) influences workers' attitudes and behaviors. By exploring situational variables and operating mechanisms, we can enrich the theoretical knowledge of workplace gossip, thereby enhancing our understanding of informal organizational communication.

Finally, as previous studies (e.g., Barnes, 2010; Bedeian, 2007; Chiaburu et al., 2013; Evans, Goodman, & Davis, 2010) found that employees' demographic variables had significant effects on attitudes toward organizations, so our study found that education levels are positively associated with organization cynicism in the gossip context. Females demonstrate a higher level of organization cynicism than males. However, we do not have a theory and mechanism to explain these relationships. Thus, future research may further investigate and interpret the effects of demographic variables on employee cynicism.

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Appendix

正向八卦

1. 談論同仁優異工作表現的話題。
2. 談論同仁工作上認真盡責的相關話題。
3. 談論同仁豐富工作經驗或專業知識技巧等工作能力優異的話題。
4. 談論同仁在工作上待人處事圓融，與他人相處融洽等人際關係佳的話題。
5. 談論同仁不收回饋或不洩漏公司機密等遵守職業倫理的話題。
6. 談論同仁在工作上應對得宜等優良情緒管理的話題。

負向八卦

1. 談論同仁工作表現不佳的相關話題。
2. 談論同仁工作上態度散漫的相關話題。
3. 談論同仁擅於做表面功夫等工作能力不佳的話題。
4. 談論同仁在工作上待人處事缺乏圓融，與人相處有嫌隙等人際關係不佳的話題。
5. 談論同仁收回饋或洩漏公司機密等不遵守職業倫理的話題。
6. 談論同仁在工作上亂發脾氣等情緒管理不佳的話題。

員工犬儒

1. 在公司裡，有人會對別人所說的話保持懷疑的心態。
2. 在公司裡，有人會放著事情不管，不在乎是否影響到別人的進度。
3. 在公司裡，有人會故意不跟你講哪裏有問題，讓你做錯事情。
4. 在公司裡，有人依仗著年長或權威高而瞧不起人。
5. 在公司裡，工作負荷量大會讓人心存怨念。
6. 在公司裡，當在工作上遇到不喜歡的人事物，有人會保持逃避的心態。
7. 在公司裡，有人講話會意有所指的挖苦別人。
8. 在公司裡，遇到不順心的事情是，有人會以輕慢的態度工作。

職場八卦與員工犬儒主義：氣質性嫉妒的調節角色研究

郭建志¹、張守中²、郭庭魁³、程晟⁴

國立政治大學心理學系¹

沙迦大學管理學系²

寧波諾丁漢大學商學院³

國立政治大學心理學系⁴

本研究採用社會訊息處理理論的觀點，探討職場八卦（正向八卦和負向八卦）與員工犬儒主義間的關係，並檢驗個人的氣質性嫉妒在其間的調節角色。研究者採取三階段取樣的方法，總共蒐集了來自台灣各個產業 24 家公司的 307 份員工資料，以階層線性模型（hierarchical linear modeling, HLM）進行資料之分析。研究結果發現負向職場八卦與員工犬儒主義呈顯著正向關，而正向職場八卦則與員工犬儒無顯著相關。此外，本研究也發現氣質性嫉妒可以調節職場八卦與員工犬儒主義間的關係，顯示個別差異是影響員工犬儒主義展現的重要因素之一。

關鍵詞：職場八卦、員工犬儒主義、氣質性嫉妒