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# WINNER TAKES ALL (THE GOSSIP)

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reality show "Bigg Boss"

# **Winner Takes All (the Gossip): Conversations in the reality show**

## **“Bigg Boss”**

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# Winner Takes All (the Gossip): Conversations in the reality show “Bigg Boss”

## Abstract

Reality television is a social experiment and interactions observed among contestants reflect a microcosm of real-life exchanges. In the present study, we inspected gossip in the eleventh season of Bigg Boss, an Indian reality show fashioned after UK’s Big Brother. Specifically, two independent raters coded the frequency of conversations, how many of them were gossip, who the targets were, and how much each contestant contributed to the exchange. The connotation, content, and purpose of gossip was investigated for the top three contestants and those who were evicted in earlier episodes. We found that the winners engaged in and were targets of more conversations than those evicted. Consistent with theories of group and sexual selection, women spoke more about physical appearance and reputation, and the only male contestant investigated discussed status and prestige more than other topics. Information sharing was primarily motivated by social comparisons and intrasexual competition, but not so much to compare groups.

**Keywords:** Gossip; Social Information; Reality Television; Bigg Boss; Evolutionary Psychology

## **Winner Takes All (the Gossip): Conversations in the reality show “Bigg Boss”**

Gossip is often thought of as trivial, and those who gossip often attract a negative reputation. People reliably identify gossip and attribute to it certain distinct qualities, including whether or not it is acceptable. Yet, 65% of our daily conversations include gossip (Dunbar 2004). It allows us to share information regarding third-party others, thereby fostering relationship-building among those with whom the gossip is shared, and could help in negotiation in general (Bergmann 1993; Dunbar 2004). Much of gossip is negative in nature, and includes “morally contaminated material” (Bergmann 1993, 85); however, it could also be positive in nature.

Further, gossip goes beyond a descriptive exchange of information - the motivation for gossip and its content is intrinsically affective (Franks and Attia 2011). In other words, gossipers share emotional evaluations and moral judgments of themselves, of the target, and of the theme. Gossip thus includes descriptive, affective, and motivational evaluations about the target, the speaker, and the listener. The affective content of gossip reflects its adaptive functions. For example, emotions such as guilt, anger, pride, and gratitude might help in the management of social adaptive problems such as cooperation and altruism (e.g., McCullough et al. 2001; Tooby and Cosmides 1990). Gossip might then serve to inform social behaviors and mental states of others, and can evoke appropriate emotions, and thereby help define group structures.

### **Purpose of Gossip in Group Dynamics**

Eggin and Martin (1997) propose two socio-cultural functions of gossip: establishing and reinforcing group membership and exercising social control. For example, gossip helps punishing transgressors of group norms (Barkow 1992; Levin and Arluke 1987; Merry 1984), facilitating within-group cooperation (O’Gorman, Wilson, and Miller 2005; Wilson and O’Gorman 2003),

and in assessing the status of others (Goodwin 1990; McAndrew, Bell, and Garcia 2007). Studies in many real-life groups have shown that gossip is used in different settings to compel its members to follow norms when they fail to live up to group expectations (e.g., Acheson 1988; Kniffin and Wilson 2005; McPherson 1991). Thus, gossip seems to be an effective way to enforce group norms through cheater detection mechanisms (Boehm 1997; Dunbar 1996; Kniffin and Wilson 2010). It aids in dealing with alliances, friendships, and family relationships successfully (Shackelford 1997).

Gossip also helps in establishing norms and communicating rules with other members of the group in an informal way (Besnier 1989; Gluckman 1963). Further, both positive and negative gossip is more likely to be spread within the in-group, rather than with an out-group (Ellwardt, Labianca, and Wittek 2012). Further, gossip seems to have positive effects on the social behavior of an individual. For example, it facilitates identity-building (Noon and Delbridge 1993) and socialization into a group (Jaeger et al. 1994). It might also enable building social hierarchies and negotiating status (Goodwin 1990). Through comparison of social information, it amplifies self-worth in individuals (Levin and Arluke 1985), and helps in finding a mate of high reproductive value (Shackelford 1997). It also aids in toying with the reputation of others, criticizing others with impunity, and in the process, improving sociability and enjoying complicity with group members (Brenneis 1988).

Moreover, gossip has been proposed to be women's intrasexual competition strategy of choice (McAndrew 2014; McAndrew, Bell, and Garcia 2007; Vaillancourt 2005, 2013). Women can learn about their same-sex competitors (Campbell 1999, 2004), and can use this information to derogate same-sex competitors. For example, they may try to diminish the perceived mate value of their same-sex other (Fisher et al. 2008). It may also aid in self-promotion through making

oneself more attractive to potential mates relative to rivals (Buss and Dedden 1990; Campbell 2004; Fisher and Cox 2009; Massar, Buunk, and Rempt 2012).

### **Content of Gossip**

Women have been thought of as enjoying gossiping and learning about others via gossip more than men (Leaper et al. 1995; McAndrew 2014, 2017). This might be because of its social value (Litman and Pezzo 2005). Female intersex gossip often includes information about physical appearance, and sexual reputation, i.e., sexual behavior and/or fidelity (Bendixen and Kennair 2015; Buss and Dedden 1990; Walters and Crawford 1994). It also includes information about culturally inappropriate content, such as people migrating to a different country (Davis et al. 2017).

However, men also engage in gossip. For example among Bhatgaon, a rural Fiji Indian community, gossip sessions are often held as a method for conflict management, and adult males who are allies frequently participate in such sessions (Brenneis 1988). Male intrasexual gossip often includes information that is derogatory about someone's wealth (e.g., financial standing), cues to resource acquisition (e.g., achievements), and physical prowess (e.g., strength, Bendixen and Kennair 2015; Buss and Dedden 1990; Walters and Crawford 1994).

### **Gossip and Big Boss**

Thornborrow and Morris (2004) studied gossip in the UK version of the show *Big Brother*. They argued that as contestants need to interact with each other in trying to complete certain tasks in a group, while also having to manage avoiding elimination, the gossip in the show orients participants to a double frame: the reality TV 'competition' frame, and the social 'house' frame. Through the social frame, the contestants negotiate group membership and structure, as well as signal solidarity with other members of the group, while engaging in gossiping behaviors. Further,

they contend that in gossip, there is a trade-off between building a positive identity for themselves within the social group (by gossiping), and with the general public (who have the power to vote), who may consider gossiping negatively. They conclude that gossip is a strategy that might improve popularity within the social group as well as the audience, as it is used to detect deviant behaviors (see Peters et al. 2017). Thus, gossip might aid individuals in progressing further in the game, and possibly winning the show.

The present study aims to understand gossiping behavior in the Indian reality TV show Bigg Boss (Endemol Shine India 2016), which follows the format of the UK reality show Big Brother. Although there are seven regional versions of the show, the present study involves the eleventh season of the Hindi version. The contestants (i.e., “housemates,” usually celebrities) live together in a purpose-built, quarantined ‘house’ throughout the duration of the show. They are constantly observed and monitored using around 90 live cameras and personal headphones and are voted out on a weekly basis. Contestants are allowed to secretly or publicly ‘nominate’ a member for eviction, and those with the maximum number of nominations are then nominated for eviction from the house. Viewers are then allowed the opportunity to eliminate these contestants through SMS, or other online or app-based channels.

Thus, we aim to expand the understanding of gossip in reality television shows, which use a ‘social experiment’ format (Kapoor and Tagat 2015), by exploring its evolutionary roots. In this, we interpret popular culture as cultural remains emphasizing certain features of the adapted human mind (Saad 2012). In particular, we explore how gossip exists in Bigg Boss, and whether it has an influence in who emerges as the winner of Season 11 of the show. The primary research question was to assess the nature of gossip in the house as well as the gossiping patterns of the top three and three of the first housemates who were evicted. Specifically, we explore the frequency of

gossip, their contributions to gossip, and how many times they were the target of gossip. Further, the connotation of the information as well as the content and the purpose of gossip were analyzed.

## **Method**

The eleventh season of Bigg Boss (2017-2018; Endemol Shine India 2016) was chosen as the sampling frame. This was done for two reasons: the dynamics of the contestants would be clear to the coders, and the winner of the season would be known. The consequent season (Season 12, 2018) was not chosen as the format had slightly changed and the coders were unfamiliar with it. However, the coders had details about what transpired behind-the-scenes of the previous season from the main and the additional footage, which meant that they were aware of gossiping behaviors within participants. Every sixth episode was selected to be coded unless they were 'special' episodes; for example, those with celebrity guests. In this case, the episode after the special episode was selected. Thus, a total of eighteen representative episodes were selected. Specifically, episodes corresponding to the following days were included: 1, 8, 13, 19, 25, 31, 37, 43, 47, 55, 61, 67, 73, 79, 85, 91, 99, and 103.

### **Coding Procedure**

Two coders (one female and one male, both aged 24 years) were sourced via social media. One of the raters worked in finance, and another worked as a market researcher in healthcare. They were first contacted via telephone and informed about the study; then they were provided with a detailed instructions sheet and the codebook.

The time in each episode was divided into five-minute conversation blocks (defined in the codebook), and for each block, the coders had to evaluate whether there were one, two, three, or



more conversations. If only one conversation had occurred in a given time slot, coders were asked to ignore the columns corresponding to the other conversations. For example, if only one conversation occurred in the block 15.00 to 19.59 minutes, raters were to code the row titled '15:00-19.59-Conversation 1,' and ignore the adjacent columns '15:00-19.59-Conversation 2,' and '15:00-19.59-Conversation 3.' Depending on the level of analyses, 5-7 episodes are sufficient to derive conclusions about sexual content in television shows (Manganello, Franzini, and Jordan 2008). Further, for most conversation blocks, the raters identified only one conversation. Therefore, to avoid giving extra weightage to certain conversation blocks over the others, only the first conversation in every block was used for analysis.

Table 1. Descriptive information about conversations

|   | 0:00-5:00-<br>Conversation 1 | 0:00-5:00-<br>Conversation 2 | 0:00-5:00-<br>Conversation 3 |
|---|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Spill over (Y/N)</b>   |                              |                              |                              |
| <b>Who is gossiping?</b>  | Name 1                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 2                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 3                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 4                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 5                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 6                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 7                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 8                       |                              |                              |
| <b>Target of Gossip</b>   | Name 1                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 2                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 3                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 4                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 5                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 6                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 7                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 8                       |                              |                              |
| <b>Who do they gossip with (1 = Same Sex Other/s, 2 = Other Sex Other/s, 3 = Mixed Sex group)</b> |                              |                              |                              |
| <b>Contribution of information</b>  | Name 1                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 2                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 3                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 4                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 5                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 6                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 7                       |                              |                              |
|   | Name 8                       |                              |                              |

The raters coded in two separate sheets. In the first sheet (called the 'Summary' sheet), they wrote the names of people who were having a conversation., the target of the gossip (i.e., the names of individual who they are having a conversation about), the sex composition of the gossiping group (1 = Same-Sex Other/s, 2 = Other Sex Other/s, 3 = Mixed Sex group), and the contribution of information, wherein they were asked to rank who contributed more to a conversation (see Table 1).

In the second sheet (called 'Gossip'), the coders evaluated whether the conversation was gossip or not, whether it was positive or negative gossip, whether the purpose was social comparison (1 criterion), group comparison (2 criteria), or intrasexual gossip (3 criteria), and whether the content was physical appearance (2 criteria), sexual reputation (1 criterion), inappropriate behaviors (2 criteria), or status and prestige (1 criterion; see Table 2 for definitions of each).

### **Coding Reliability**

Pearson's correlations were computed on the ratings on the first conversations in every conversational block to attest reliability of the codes. On average, the correlations were poor ( $M_{\alpha} = .23$ ,  $\text{Range}_{\alpha} = .00 - .68$ ). This indicated that the ratings were made in an inconsistent manner. Another joint discussion was held, and it was observed that one of the coders had a technical difficulty in coding, making their rating less reliable. Further, they consistently did not code conversations as 'positive gossip;' in the 127 conversations that they rated as 'gossip,' only 8 were considered positive, while 113 were rated as negative. Because of this, one coder's data was used for the main analysis.

Table 2. Types, purpose, and content of gossip, with inclusion criteria

| No.                      | Term  | Inclusion Criteria  |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| 1                        | <b>Gossip (Dunbar 1996)</b>   | Making judgments about behavior/s of (an) absent other(s), usually done by an informal group of two or more people. It usually involves exchange of both positive and negative information that is personal about other people.   |
| 2                        | <b>Positive Gossip</b>  | Talk is prosocial, helpful, benevolent, ethical, fair, constructive, adaptive, mature, rational, functional, and/or empathetic in nature.   |
| 3                        | <b>Negative Gossip</b>  | Talk is aggressive, avoidant, destructive, malevolent, unethical, harmful, hurtful, maladaptive, dysfunctional and/or immature in nature.   |
| <b>Purpose of gossip</b> |   |   |
| 4                        | <b>Social comparison information</b>  | The talk is used to assess self in comparison to others, in terms of status (Goodwin 1990), and/or is used to toy with the reputation of others (Brenneis 1988).  |
| 5                        | <b>Group comparisons</b>  | Information with the purpose of punishing group members who do not adhere to norms, and/or to better promote group cooperation (Barkow 1992; Levin and Arluke 2013; Merry 1984).<br>Helps successfully manage friendships, alliances, and other group relationships (Shackelford 1997).               |
| 6                        | <b>Intrasexual Gossip</b>   | Information helps to learn about same-sex competitors (Campbell 1999, 2004).<br>Information that is used to derogate same-sex competitors (Fisher et al. 2008).<br>Information used to make oneself more attractive to potential mates relative to rivals (Buss and Dedden 1990; Fisher et al. 2008). |
| <b>Content of gossip</b> |   |   |
| 7                        | <b>Physical Appearance (Nevo et al. 1994)</b>   | Information about the way a person is dressed and/or accessorized, and/or has chosen to manipulate their form, for instance, through make-up, hair, etc.<br>Information about another person's behaviors like gait, facial expressions, and/or energy levels.   |
| 8                        | <b>Sexual Reputation (Buss and Dedden 1990)</b>   | Discussion about another person's sexual affairs, and/or fidelity.  |
| 9                        | <b>Inappropriate behaviors (Davis et al. 2017)</b>                                      | Discussion about another person's behavior as being inappropriate behavior within the context of one's culture.<br>Discussion about another person's behavior as being inappropriate behavior   |
| 10                       | <b>Status and Prestige (Buss and Dedden 1990; De Backer, Nelissen, and Fisher 2007)</b> | Talk about financial standing, professional and personal achievements, ambition, physical prowess, current resource holdings, long-term ambition, intelligence, interpersonal dominance, social popularity, sense of humor, reputation for kindness, maturity, height, strength, and/or athleticism.  |

## Data Treatment

Participants who were eliminated first, and the winner and two runners up were considered for their frequency of gossip (rated as '1' if gossip occurred and '0' if it did not) and whether they were the target of gossip (rated as '1' if they were and '0' if they were not). How much they contributed to the conversation (rated '5' if they contributed the most, '4' if they contributed the second most, and so on) was summed into a contribution score. Thus, the higher the contribution score, the more they engaged in conversations about others. An average contribution score (i.e., the contribution score divided by the total number of conversations) was also computed for the top three participants. Second, the conversations were then examined for whether or not it was gossip, whether or not it was positive, and whether or not it was negative in nature. Conversations could be coded as both positive and negative. The conversations were then classified based on the purpose and the content of gossip (see Table 2 for definitions).

## Results

Among the participants of Season 11, Zubair was eliminated first, on Day 7. Because his data does not give an opportunity for meaningful analysis, it was not utilized. The participants Shivani, Lucinda, and Jyoti were then eliminated on Days 14, 15, and 28 respectively. Their conversations on Days 1, 8, and 13 were analyzed.

On the first day, Lucinda engaged in 2 conversations and had a contribution score of 4. This implies that while she did gossip, she was not an active member of the gossiping group. Gossip served the purposes of social comparison and intrasexual competition; the content of the conversations included the physical appearance of others, their inappropriate behaviors within the cultural context, as well as about status and prestige.

On the eighth day, she engaged in one conversation and had a contribution score of 2. The gossip had both positive and negative connotations, about inappropriate behaviors within the cultural context. It served the purposes of social and group comparison, as well as intrasexual competition. On the same day, Jyoti engaged in one conversation and had a conversation score of 3. It included inappropriate behaviors, motivated by intrasexual competition, and social and group comparison. Shivani did not engage in any gossip in the coded episodes

We then investigated the winner (Shilpa) and the two runners up (Hina and Vikas). Shilpa engaged in 70 conversations, 67 of which were gossip. She was the target of 47 conversations, of which 9 were in her absence. Her total contribution score was 276, and the average contribution score was 3.94. Out of the conversations scored as gossip, 95.52% was rated as positive, while only 53.73% was rated as negative. Further, 79.10% was rated as information about others' dressing or presentation and 82.09% of the gossip was regarding gait, expressions, or energy levels of others; 83.58% of the gossip was regarding the sexual reputation of others; 86.57% was about inappropriate behaviors and 82.09% was rated as culturally inappropriate behaviors of others, while 85.07% was about status and prestige. Finally, up to 97.01% of the gossip was rated as intrasexual competition of some kind (94.03% was information to derogate same-sex competitors, 97.01% to make oneself attractive to opposite sex compared to same sex rivals), while 95.52% included social comparisons of some kind. Of the 9 rated as gossip, where she was the absentee target, 8 were positive and 6 were negative (that is, five conversations were rated as containing both positive and negative elements). Ten of the conversations were motivated by social comparison and nine by intrasexual competition, while physical appearance, sexual reputation, inappropriate behaviors, and status and prestige made up an almost equal number of conversations respectively.

Hina engaged in 97 conversations and all of them were rated as gossip. She was the target of 51 conversations, but only 3 were in her absence. Her total and average conversation scores

were 326 and 3.36 respectively. Like Shilpa, she engaged in positive gossip (93.81%) more than negative (60.82%). Most of them were aimed at gathering social comparison information (95.88%) or were coded as involving intrasexual competition (to derogate same sex competitors: 93.81%, and to make oneself attractive to potential mates relative to rivals: 94.85%). Most of the content was about physical appearance (information about how others are dressed or present themselves: 87.63% and information about how they are dressed or present themselves: 80.41%). Additionally, conversations were rated as inappropriate within the cultural context 83.51% and generally inappropriate 79.38% times, and both sexual reputation and status and prestige constituted 86.60% of the conversations.

Among the three conversations in which she was the absentee target, all were rated as positive, while two were also negative. All of them were justified as social comparison and intrasexual gossip, while none were rated as group comparisons. All of them comprised sexual reputation and physical appearance of others, while status and prestige were the content of two.

Finally, Vikas engaged in 83 conversations, all of which were rated as gossip. He was the target of 61 conversations, in 11 of which he was absent. His total and average contribution scores were 290 and 3.62 respectively. Of his conversations, 91.57% were rated as positive gossip, while 53.01% was rated as negative gossip. The purpose of most of the gossip he engaged was rated as intrasexual competition (make oneself more attractive: 95.18% and derogate same-sex rivals: 87.95%), while social comparison was the motivation for 91.57%. Most of his gossip included details about status and prestige of others (90.36%), followed by sexual reputation (86.75%), physical appearance (both clothing and presentation and gait, expressions, and energy levels: 81.93%) and inappropriate behaviors (within the cultural context: 72.29%, general: 85.52%).

In the conversations about him where he was absent, 11 was rated as positive gossip, while 6 as negative. Social comparison and intrasexual competition were most rated as the purpose of

gossip, while inappropriate behaviors and status and prestige were the content of most of the gossip.

Finally, we also found that the winners consistently gossiped more than those who were eliminated the earliest (see Table 3). However, the purpose and the content of gossip seemed to be similar. However, this should be interpreted with caution, given that those who were eliminated first did not engage in many conversations at all.



Table 3. Gossiping behavior in the first three episodes coded

| Evicted Contestants      |                                      | Day 1 | Day 8 | Winning Contestants |   | Day 1 | Day 8 | Day 13 |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------|-------|---------------------|---|-------|-------|--------|
| Lucinda                  | <b>Gossip</b>                        | 2     | 1     | Shilpa              | 1 | 4     | 2     |        |
|                          | <b>Positive Gossip</b>               | 1     | 1     |                     | 1 | 4     | 1     |        |
|                          | <b>Negative Gossip</b>               | 1     | 1     |                     | 1 | 4     | 2     |        |
| <b>Purpose of gossip</b> |                                      |       |       |                     |   |       |       |        |
|                          | <b>Social comparison information</b> | 2     | 1     |                     | 1 | 4     | 2     |        |
|                          | <b>Group comparisons</b>             | 0     | 0     |                     | 0 | 0     | 0     |        |
|                          | <b>Group comparisons</b>             | 0     | 1     |                     | 0 | 4     | 1     |        |
|                          | <b>Intrasexual Gossip</b>            | 0     | 0     |                     | 0 | 0     | 1     |        |
|                          | <b>Intrasexual Gossip</b>            | 2     | 1     |                     | 1 | 4     | 1     |        |
|                          | <b>Intrasexual Gossip</b>            | 1     | 1     |                     | 1 | 4     | 2     |        |
| <b>Content of gossip</b> |                                      |       |       |                     |   |       |       |        |
|                          | <b>Physical Appearance</b>           | 1     | 0     |                     | 1 | 0     | 1     |        |
|                          | <b>Physical Appearance</b>           | 1     | 0     |                     | 1 | 0     | 2     |        |
|                          | <b>Sexual Reputation</b>             | 1     | 0     |                     | 1 | 0     | 2     |        |
|                          | <b>Inappropriate behaviors</b>       | 2     | 1     |                     | 1 | 4     | 2     |        |
|                          | <b>Inappropriate behaviors</b>       | 1     | 1     |                     | 1 | 4     | 2     |        |
|                          | <b>Status and Prestige</b>           | 1     | 0     |                     | 1 | 0     | 2     |        |
| Jyoti                    | <b>Gossip</b>                        | 0     | 1     | Vikas               | 3 | 4     | 5     |        |
|                          | <b>Positive Gossip</b>               | 0     | 1     |                     | 3 | 4     | 1     |        |
|                          | <b>Negative Gossip</b>               | 0     | 1     |                     | 3 | 4     | 3     |        |
| <b>Purpose of gossip</b> |                                      |       |       |                     |   |       |       |        |
|                          | <b>Social comparison information</b> | 0     | 1     |                     | 3 | 4     | 4     |        |
|                          | <b>Group comparisons</b>             | 0     | 0     |                     | 0 | 0     | 0     |        |
|                          | <b>Group comparisons</b>             | 0     | 1     |                     | 0 | 4     | 1     |        |
|                          | <b>Intrasexual Gossip</b>            | 0     | 0     |                     | 0 | 0     | 1     |        |

|                          |                               |   |   |      |   |   |   |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|---|---|------|---|---|---|
|                          | Intrasexual Gossip            | 0 | 1 |      | 3 | 4 | 3 |
|                          | Intrasexual Gossip            | 0 | 1 |      | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| <b>Content of gossip</b> |                               |   |   |      |   |   |   |
|                          | Physical Appearance           | 0 | 0 |      | 3 | 0 | 5 |
|                          | Physical Appearance           | 0 | 0 |      | 3 | 0 | 5 |
|                          | Sexual Reputation             | 0 | 0 |      | 3 | 0 | 3 |
|                          | Inappropriate behaviors       | 0 | 1 |      | 3 | 4 | 3 |
|                          | Inappropriate behaviors       | 0 | 1 |      | 3 | 4 | 4 |
|                          | Status and Prestige           | 0 | 0 |      | 3 | 0 | 5 |
| Shivani                  | Gossip                        | 0 | 0 | Hina | 2 | 4 | 6 |
|                          | Positive Gossip               | 0 | 0 |      | 2 | 4 | 2 |
|                          | Negative Gossip               | 0 | 0 |      | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| <b>Purpose of gossip</b> |                               |   |   |      |   |   |   |
|                          | Social comparison information | 0 | 0 |      | 2 | 4 | 5 |
|                          | Group comparisons             | 0 | 0 |      | 0 | 0 | 0 |
|                          | Group comparisons             | 0 | 0 |      | 0 | 4 | 1 |
|                          | Intrasexual Gossip            | 0 | 0 |      | 0 | 0 | 1 |
|                          | Intrasexual Gossip            | 0 | 0 |      | 2 | 4 | 4 |
|                          | Intrasexual Gossip            | 0 | 0 |      | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| <b>Content of Gossip</b> |                               |   |   |      |   |   |   |
|                          | Physical Appearance           | 0 | 0 |      | 2 | 0 | 5 |
|                          | Physical Appearance           | 0 | 0 |      | 2 | 0 | 6 |
|                          | Sexual Reputation             | 0 | 0 |      | 2 | 0 | 4 |
|                          | Inappropriate behaviors       | 0 | 0 |      | 2 | 4 | 4 |
|                          | Inappropriate behaviors       | 0 | 0 |      | 2 | 4 | 5 |
|                          | Status and Prestige           | 0 | 0 |      | 2 | 0 | 6 |

*Note:* None of the evicted contestants engaged in conversations on Day 13. Shivani did not engage in any conversations that were considered.

## Discussion

The aim of the present study was to explore gossiping behaviors of the winners and those who were eliminated the earliest in Season 11 of Bigg Boss. Specifically, we aimed to investigate the patterns in the frequency of their gossiping behavior, how much they contributed to gossip, and how many times they were targeted. Further, the connotation of the information, as well as the content and the purpose of gossip were analyzed.

We found that in the sample used, the only male (Vikas) was rated as conversing most about status and prestige, while both Shilpa and Hina engaged in conversations about the physical appearance of others. This is in line with the finding that men share information about others' status and prestige cues to enhance themselves (e.g., Buss and Dedden 1990). Thus, it is possible that Vikas emerged as one of the top three contestants by discussing others' status and prestige with a mixed group of Bigg Boss contestants. Female intersex gossip often comprises information about physical appearance and sexual reputation (Buss and Dedden 1990). This is because these are thought to impugn their intrasexual competitor's reproductive value, thereby making them less attractive to men. Consequently, it is possible that both Shilpa and Hina were able to navigate through the season by gossiping about the physical appearance of others. On the other hand, neither Lucinda nor Jyoti engaged in many conversations about physical appearance or sexual behavior of others.

Further, in the conversations wherein Vikas was absent, the content of gossip was primarily regarding status and prestige or inappropriate behaviors. For Hina, physical appearance and sexual reputation was the content of gossip while she was absent, but for Shilpa, all four types of content almost had equal weight. Thus, conversations about men's resources and cues to resource acquisition seemed to be more relevant to others, while that of physical and sexual reputation are considered as more pertinent for women.

All participants engaged in gossip about inappropriate behaviors of others, but especially those who were eliminated earliest. Considering that inappropriate behavior was given the context of culture, gossiping about it might help in building group cohesion, exerting social control, and reinforcing group membership (Eggins and Martin 1997). Thus, gossiping about inappropriate behaviors might be one of the factors that abetted participants in forming and maintaining friendships and affiliations successfully.

With respect to the purpose of gossip, social comparison and intrasexual competition emerged as primary motivators for gossip for both winners and those who were eliminated. Social comparison facilitates locating ourselves in relation to others (Festinger 1954). Gossiping about others refines one's sense of acceptable behaviors in juxtaposition to others' transgressions as well as appropriate behaviors (Wert and Salovey 2004). Then, gossiping helps in enhancing one's self-worth for both men and women. This is especially true in reproductive contexts, wherein through social comparison, one may assess one's mate value (Shackelford 1997). Learning about same-sex competitors also helps in self-promotion as well as the derogation of others (Campbell 2004).

Further, we found that the winners consistently gossiped at a greater frequency than those who were eliminated first. This confirms that engaging in gossip, and thereby sharing of social information informally, facilitates the development of skills required in social settings. Bigg Boss, even as a reality television show, can be considered a microcosm of the interpersonal relationships observed in real life. Therefore, the observation that the winners gossiped more is in line with the contention that gossip has adaptive functions in the form of group and interpersonal dynamics.

While gossip has often been perceived negatively and has been discerned as morally corrupt (Bergmann 1993), one interesting finding was that most conversations (94.77%) were rated as positive gossip, while comparatively fewer conversations were rated negatively (63.30%). This was also true of both groups: the winners and those who were eliminated early. This is perhaps

explained by the need to form positive relationships; on the one hand, it was essential for the participants to compete with each other, but they also needed to form alliances and friendships, for which they would need to be perceived positively. Further, other than interacting with housemates within the Bigg Boss house, the audience was in charge of the elimination process. Consequently, participants have to function within two contextual frames: the interpersonal relationships that they have to form within the house, and the frame in which they have to present themselves positively to the audience, in order to avoid elimination. Hence, it is likely that the participants, by having positive conversations that are prosocial, benevolent, empathetic, or fair in nature were trying to display themselves in a positive light. On the other hand, one coder rated most conversations as negative, suggesting that perhaps the outcome of gossip, even if the content was positive at first glance, was negative. Considering that five of the six housemates investigated were women, this is also in line with the finding that when women gossip, they employ positive terms, even if the emphasis is on negative traits (Eckhaus and Ben-Hador 2017). Another interesting finding was that hardly any conversations were rated as comprising information about group comparison. This is perhaps because of the transient nature of groups in the Bigg Boss house. That is, groups are not permanent, and unlike real life instances, most participants were competing for resources at an individual level. Thus, there is no reward for improving group bonds, but there is ample for improving one's position in the overall population. Participants may thus be unmotivated to promote group cohesion.

Of course, cultural notions about sex roles could play a role in what is gossiped about. It is possible, for example, that the raters themselves may have perceived a male-to-male conversation as relating to status and prestige, while the same conversation, when involving women, was regarded as about physical appearance or sexual reputation. For example, in a conversation about expensive leather shoes, it is possible that raters coded it as involving status and prestige if the

conversation was among men, and the same conversation was rated as involving physical appearance, if it involved women. However, considering that men tend to be attuned to physical appearance and sexual fidelity of women, and women tend to be attuned to resource acquisition skills of men, the very fact that there are differences in how a conversation is perceived based on the sex of the speaker also supports our contention that these are evolved preferences. It is also in line with the finding that men are judged to be derogatory of others' resources, resource acquisition skills, status, and wealth, while women perceive others' physical appearance, sexual fidelity, and behavior as consequential (Buss and Dedden 1990).

## **Conclusions**

The present study benefits from certain strengths. First, this was one of the first studies that explored an Indian reality show from an evolutionary framework. Second, a large number of episodes and conversations were investigated. This is beneficial, because it is reasonably illustrative of the behavior exhibited by the housemates, ensuring generalizability of conclusions. Third, the study benefited from a double-blind design, in that the raters were not aware of the details of the purpose of the study, and the author who analyzed the results had not watched the episodes. Fourth, understanding how gossip functions in the context of reality TV may be a frugal way of understanding how gossip functions in real life, as most reality TV can be viewed as a microcosm of real life.

While there are a number of strengths to the study, it also has some limitations. First, even though a large number of conversations were analyzed, only two coders were utilized. Second, only six housemates' behaviors were investigated; the study might have benefitted from exploring gossip by those who were evicted in the middle of the season. However, six is a relatively high number, given that there were a total of nineteen housemates. Third, since the content of reality TV was analyzed, it is likely that a large number of conversations were fabricated for entertainment

purposes, rather than reflecting authentic exchanges. This is especially true since the housemates know that there is a large number of audience watching them on national television (see Labov 1972). However, given that they are monitored twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week for more than hundred days, it might be difficult for them to remain insincere throughout. Further, the show itself may have been edited to bring out the “juicy” content, and not every conversation that occurs within the twenty-four hours would be telecast. Reality television includes aspects of real life and transmutes them into a livelier and more appealing experience (Bloom 2010), and without the creative editing employed by the telecasters, it would just reflect the dull bits of life. Additionally, it is likely that the “juicy” conversations that were telecast would contain most of the gossip that did occur in the house.

In sum, we investigated gossiping behavior in the Bigg Boss House, and found that the winning housemates gossiped and were gossiped about more than those who were evicted first. They also engaged in more conversations than those who were eliminated first. Further, we found that women engage in conversations about the physical appearance and sexual reputation of others. Similarly, Vikas engaged in conversations about status and prestige more than the other content areas. Further, sharing information for the purpose of social comparisons and intrasexual competition seems to be more salient than to compare groups. Even though gossip is one of the mechanisms for punishing norm violators, it is possible that this may not be the case in the framework of Bigg Boss. That is, because within the Bigg Boss house, there is no explicit need to form groups like the ones in real life that can then be promoted through gossip; all members compete to “win,” and the competition is not between groups.

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