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RESEARCH REPORT

Socially Rewarded or Penalized at Work? The Mixed Reputational Implications of Disclosing One's Positive Nonwork Events on Social Evaluations and Workplace Gossip

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Existing research implicitly assumes that disclosing one's positive events—known as capitalization—is socially valuable in the workplace because such events are work-related and therefore relevant to coworkers and organizational goals. Indeed, management research has focused on how disclosers of positive *work* events and their coworkers feel about themselves. Broadening the focus of workplace capitalization to disclosure of positive *nonwork* events, which we refer to as *nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization*, we draw from boundary theory to investigate whether disclosers gain and/or lose social value at work because such capitalization is evaluated against normative expectations around the work–nonwork boundary. Specifically, we theorize that nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization carries mixed reputational implications for disclosers in terms of how they are evaluated by coworkers (i.e., perceived as other-focused and/or distracted from work) and, in turn, how coworkers spread evaluative information of disclosers to others (i.e., in terms of positive and/or negative workplace gossip about disclosers). Moreover, we propose that such reputational implications will be moderated by the discloser's workplace status. We test our model using a source- and time-separated field study (Study 1) and an experimental causal chain design (Study 2). Both studies showed that disclosers of positive nonwork events are more likely to be perceived as other-focused and thereby become targets of positive gossip. Across both studies, the effect of nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization on being perceived as distracted was stronger for lower status employees, who in turn were more likely to be gossiped about negatively.


Keywords: capitalization, work–nonwork interface, status, gossip, boundary theory


“How was your weekend?” is a common and seemingly innocuous way coworkers greet each other at the start of a new workweek. Ordinary exchanges like this offer opportunities for employees to recount the memorable, shareworthy highlights (i.e., positive events) of their nonwork lives to coworkers, prolonging associated positive feelings and memories (Langston, 1994) and conveying the


meaningfulness of their nonwork activities (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2002). Broadly, disclosing one's positive events to others is known as capitalization (Gable et al., 2004). Management research on capitalization has focused on positive *work* events, revealing that disclosing them to coworkers influences how we feel about ourselves (Watkins et al., 2023) and how coworkers feel about

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themselves compared to us (Watkins, 2021); disclosing them to close relationship partners enhances how we feel about our jobs (Ilies et al., 2011; see also Culbertson et al., 2012), relationships (Ilies et al., 2017; see also Donato et al., 2014; Reis et al., 2010), and lives (Ilies et al., 2015; see also Gable et al., 2004; for a review, see Table 1).

Accordingly, existing capitalization research gives us no reason to suspect that our coworkers would evaluate us—and certainly not *judge* us—for telling them about our positive nonwork events relating to our hobbies, family activities, and personal accomplishments, for example. Yet recent evidence shows that coworkers may draw inferences about us based on how much we bring our nonwork lives to work. One possibility is that coworkers evaluate us as authentic and trustworthy (Hardin, 2024; Hardin et al., 2025; Pillemer, 2024; Rothbard et al., 2022). As another—more disconcerting—possibility, a separate body of evidence suggests coworkers may evaluate us as less devoted to work or even “unprofessional” and “inappropriate” (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015; Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006; Uhlmann et al., 2013). These divergent streams highlight the uncertainty of whether disclosing our positive nonwork events to coworkers would increase or decrease our social value at work. Yet because existing conceptualizations of workplace capitalization focus on disclosure of positive *work* events, which are valued for their relevance to coworkers and organizational goals (Watkins,

2021; Watkins et al., 2023), they cannot explain how disclosers of positive *nonwork* events are evaluated in the workplace.

Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to investigate the evaluative consequences of disclosing one’s positive nonwork events to coworkers, a phenomenon we refer to as *nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization*. To do so, we draw from boundary theory to ground the idea that such capitalization integrates work and nonwork roles—“the more we integrate, the more colleagues ... are told a great deal about children’s, spouse’s, and our own exploits” (Nippert-Eng, 1996, p. 82)—and as such, is evaluated against two key objectives: advancing work relationships and focusing on work role performance (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015). We draw from this tenet to explain how disclosers of positive nonwork events are perceived by others in the organization. First, given that evoking one’s nonwork role activities in the workplace is “helpful for managing ... relationships in the workplace” (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015, p. 806), we argue that employees who disclose their positive nonwork events to coworkers (hereafter, disclosers) will be perceived as other-focused (i.e., show care for other people, Rodell & Lynch, 2016) because such disclosures are seen as sincere invitations to personally get to know coworkers. Second, because evoking one’s nonwork role at work may “hinder the ability to focus on work” (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015, p. 822; Leslie et al., 2019), we propose that disclosers will be perceived as distracted from work

Table 1
Existing Conceptualizations of Capitalization and Their Outcomes

Conceptualization	Outcome
Workplace interpersonal capitalization: “Sharing personal <i>work-related</i> positive events with coworkers” (Watkins, 2021, p. 537, emphasis added).	Has historically focused on <i>affective</i> outcomes that suggest positive work event disclosure is socially valuable: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discloser’s <i>pride</i> (and subsequent knowledge sharing with coworkers, if discloser perceived coworkers as responsive; Watkins et al., 2023) • Coworker’s <i>envy</i> of the discloser (if coworker–discloser relationship was higher on competitiveness) and subsequent social undermining toward the discloser (Watkins, 2021) • Coworker feeling <i>inspired</i> by the discloser (if coworker–discloser relationship was lower on competitiveness) and subsequent interpersonal citizenship toward the discloser (Watkins, 2021)
Work–family interpersonal capitalization: “Discussing positive <i>work</i> events and experiences with one’s spouse or partner at home” (Ilies et al., 2011, p. 116, emphasis added).	Has historically focused on <i>attitudinal</i> outcomes for the discloser: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job satisfaction (Ilies et al., 2011) • Work engagement (Culbertson et al., 2012) • Work–family balance (Ilies et al., 2017) • Family satisfaction (Ilies et al., 2017) • Life satisfaction (Ilies et al., 2015)
Capitalization in general: “Informing another person about the occurrence of a personal positive event and thereby deriving additional benefit from it” (Gable et al., 2004, p. 228).	Has historically focused on outcomes for the <i>discloser’s relationship with interaction partner and well-being</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marital satisfaction (Gable et al., 2004) • Perceived validation and understanding from interaction partner (Gable et al., 2004; Reis et al., 2010) • Trust toward interaction partner (Gable et al., 2004; Reis et al., 2010) • Felt closeness with interaction partner (Otto et al., 2015; Reis et al., 2010) • Prosocial orientation toward interaction partner (Reis et al., 2010) • Willingness to self-disclose intimate topics to interaction partner (Reis et al., 2010) • Life satisfaction (Gable et al., 2004) • Positive affect (Gable et al., 2004; Lambert et al., 2013) • Individual well-being (Donato et al., 2014) • Self-esteem (Pagani et al., 2015)

Note. For reviews of capitalization, see Ilies et al. (2024), which focused on positive *work* event disclosure, as well as Gable and Reis (2010) and Peters et al. (2018), which summarized the capitalization literature in social psychology. According to Langston (1994), “knowing that one experiences a positive event must be the result of a cognitive process of interpretation or appraisal that, at the very least, yields the knowledge that something good has happened” (p. 1112), which suggests that the positivity of a given event is subjective and interpreted as positive in the discloser’s eyes. Key functions of capitalization include “savoring ... retaining, and further benefiting from the event,” which are distinct from the key function of negative event disclosure: seeking social support from others “to diminish or alleviate the event” (Reis et al., 2010, p. 311).

(Rodell & Lynch, 2016) as such disclosures are seen as identifying with and prioritizing nonwork activities at the expense of work.

Boundary theory suggests that lower (higher) status employees' integration of work and nonwork roles is assumed to be in conflict with (in service of) organizational goals (Nippert-Eng, 1996), which shapes how their integration is evaluated by others in the organization. For lower status employees, "full segmentation of home and work is both necessary and proper, since workers cannot be trusted to place appropriate boundaries, themselves" (pp. 163–164), whereas "higher-status, more trusted ... employees receive more discretion to ... construct the home-work boundary as they need or wish" (Nippert-Eng, 1996, pp. 162–163). As such, we propose that when the discloser's status is lower (higher), the positive effects of nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization on being perceived as other-focused and distracted is stronger (weaker).

Further, boundary theory recognizes how others in the organization, including coworkers, "enforce" boundary norms (Clark, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Building on this, we propose that coworkers ultimately enforce norms tied to boundary theory by spreading evaluative information about the discloser to others in the form of positive and/or negative workplace gossip. In the workplace, "gossip can be used to enforce group norms" (p. 2) because it "communicates an evaluation of the behaviors and/or reputations of others" (p. 3), whereby positive (negative) gossip about a given individual lets others know that individual conforms to (violates) norms (Brady et al., 2017). We expect disclosers of positive nonwork events to be gossiped about more (less) as a result of how they are evaluated when their workplace status is lower (higher). We examine our conceptual model, shown in Figure 1, in a source- and time-separated field study (Study 1) and in an experimental causal chain design (Study 2).

Our work builds on and contributes to our understanding of capitalization in the workplace and to boundary theory. In terms of the workplace capitalization literature, we challenge the assumption that "capitalization increases one's value in the eyes of others" in the workplace (Watkins, 2021, p. 561). We do so by theorizing how boundary-crossing capitalization at work has the potential to increase and/or decrease disclosers' workplace social value (in terms of being perceived as other-focused and/or distracted from work) because disclosers are evaluated against normative expectations around the work–nonwork boundary. Investigating the ripple effects for disclosers, we theorize that coworkers in turn spread evaluative

information about disclosers by positively and/or negatively gossiping about them. By investigating these mixed reputational consequences of workplace capitalization, we broaden understanding of workplace capitalization and its outcomes—from being inherently socially valuable for disclosers because it is work-related and therefore relevant to coworkers and organizational goals (Watkins, 2021; Watkins et al., 2023) to being nonwork-related and therefore having competing implications for disclosers' social value. Regarding boundary theory, we highlight workplace gossip as a means by which coworkers enforce boundary norms, whereby coworkers' positive (negative) gossip about the discloser rewards (penalizes) the discloser. Whereas prior research has examined how organizations control the work–nonwork boundary (Stanko & Beckman, 2015) and how employees manage this boundary with coworkers (Trefalt, 2013) and partners (Beckman & Stanko, 2020), we spotlight how coworkers themselves manage this boundary.

Theoretical Background and Hypothesis Development

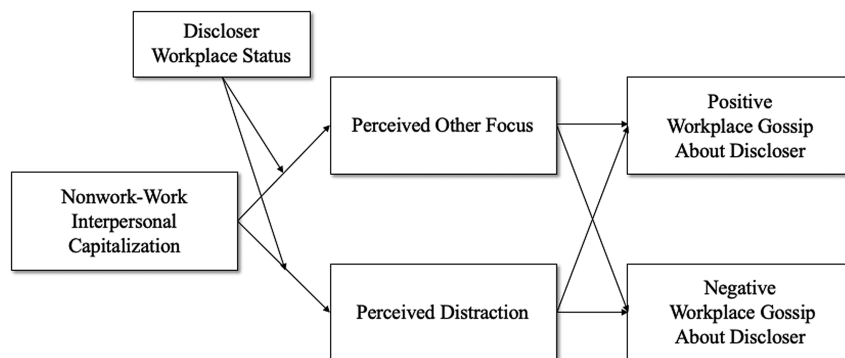
Boundary Theory

Boundary theory speaks to how employees navigate the intersection between their work and nonwork roles (Clark, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Boundaries capture the socially constructed demarcations around these roles, which employees can either integrate or segment (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Importantly, "an employee who integrates may often disclose information about his or her non-work life at work" (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015, p. 881). Disclosing one's positive nonwork events at work signals the meaningfulness of one's nonwork activities (Clark, 2002) and expresses one's nonwork identities (Ashforth et al., 2000). As such, the theory would suggest that an employee who engages in a high (low) degree of nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization integrates (segments) their roles.

Nonwork–Work Interpersonal Capitalization and Mixed Social Evaluations

According to boundary theory, whether employees integrate or segment their roles has implications vis-à-vis two primary work

Figure 1
Conceptual Model



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role objectives or norms: (a) form and maintain high-quality work relationships and (b) work role performance (Clark, 2000; Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015; Trefalt, 2013). In this research, we develop theory about how nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization influences the ways disclosers are evaluated based on how well such capitalization aligns with these work role objectives, given that “an individual’s nonwork role-referencing practices provides cues to others from which to form impressions of the individual’s reputation” (Uhlmann et al., 2013, p. 866). That is, we examine reputational perceptions, which capture evaluative information about a person (here, the discloser) in the minds of others (here, coworkers) based on how well someone’s behavior (here, nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization) aligns with objectives for a given role within a social system (here, whether one is focused on advancing work relationships and/or focused on work; Jensen et al., 2012).

Focusing first on the objective of high-quality work relationships, boundary theory suggests that “incorporating personal identities into the workplace can yield more high-quality connections ... with colleagues” (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015, p. 818). Signaling one’s nonwork identity to others at work aids in building relationships with coworkers because it facilitates the discovery of common ground with them beyond their work role (Byron & Laurence, 2015). Empirical work shows that revealing nonwork information about oneself to coworkers is associated with being perceived as warm (Rothbard et al., 2022), human, authentic, and trustworthy (Hardin, 2024; Hardin et al., 2025). More broadly, disclosing one’s positive events is positively associated with prosocial orientation (i.e., valuing relationships with others; Reis et al., 2010). Building on these streams, we expect that disclosing one’s positive nonwork events to coworkers conveys a genuine invitation to connect with coworkers on a personal level (i.e., get to know them beyond work). Because this closely aligns with the work role objective of cultivating high-quality relationships with others at work (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015), we propose that disclosers will be perceived as other-focused (Rodell & Lynch, 2016).

Hypothesis 1: Nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization is positively associated with being perceived as other-focused.

Boundary theory also suggests that integration can violate the objective of work role performance because it is thought to impair focus at work (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015, p. 822; see also Leslie et al., 2019; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Integrating roles may be negatively evaluated in the workplace because it is seen as incompatible with the “ideal worker” and Protestant Relational Ideology (PRI; Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015). In brief, the “ideal worker” prioritizes work above all else (Ladge et al., 2015; Reid, 2015) and PRI prescribes that employees put their nonwork lives aside at work (Sanchez-Burks, 2004; Townsend & Thompson, 2014), including avoiding nonwork topics of conversation (Sanchez-Burks et al., 2003). Employees who refer to their nonwork lives or convey their importance (e.g., family involvement, using flexible work policies, and volunteering) in work settings are less likely to be recommended for a job offer (Uhlmann et al., 2013) and are evaluated as less committed and promotable and more distracted (Hoobler et al., 2009; Leslie et al., 2012; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2016; Reid, 2015; Rodell & Lynch, 2016). We expect disclosers to similarly be seen as violating “ideal worker” and PRI notions and thus be perceived as distracted from work.

Hypothesis 2: Nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization is positively associated with being perceived as distracted from work.

Downstream Effects of Nonwork–Work Interpersonal Capitalization on Workplace Gossip

Boundary theory posits that others in the organization, including coworkers, ultimately enforce boundary norms (Nippert-Eng, 1996; see also Clark, 2000; Gabriel et al., 2020; Perlow, 1998). Specifically, “coworkers may serve as border keepers who reinforce the appropriateness of a family role integrating with work” by conveying norm adherence and violation (Gabriel et al., 2020, p. 1530; see also Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000). We argue that coworkers enforce normative expectations tied to boundary theory—advancing work relationships and focus on work role performance, as argued above—by gossiping about disclosers because gossip spreads positive and/or negative social evaluations of those who are not present to hear what was said (Brady et al., 2017). As such, gossip “can facilitate the construction, comprehension, management, and communication of norms” (Brady et al., 2017, p. 3; see also Gluckman, 1963).

We propose that coworkers engage in positive gossip (i.e., complimentary and flattering talk; Brady et al., 2017) about disclosers perceived as other-focused and/or not distracted from work because such disclosers are norm-conforming and such reputational perceptions are rewarded by coworkers (Rodell & Lynch, 2016). Coworkers’ positive gossip about the discloser lets others know the discloser conforms to norms (Brady et al., 2017) tied to boundary theory. As such, positive gossip about norm-conforming disclosers reinforces such norms. We also propose that coworkers engage in negative gossip (i.e., critical and unflattering talk; Brady et al., 2017) about disclosers perceived as distracted from work and/or not other-focused because such disclosers are norm-violating and are penalized by coworkers (Rodell & Lynch, 2016; see also Hoobler et al., 2009; Leslie et al., 2012; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2016). Negative gossip lets others know disclosers violate norms and threaten the organization’s interests (Baumeister et al., 2004; Brady et al., 2017; Grosser et al., 2012; Lee & Barnes, 2021; T. M. Spoelma & Hetrick, 2021). Stated formally:

Hypothesis 3: Nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization is (a) positively indirectly related to positive workplace gossip from coworkers through being perceived as other-focused and (b) negatively indirectly related to negative workplace gossip from coworkers through being perceived as other-focused.

Hypothesis 4: Nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization is (a) negatively indirectly related to positive workplace gossip from coworkers through being perceived as distracted and (b) positively indirectly related to negative workplace gossip from coworkers through being perceived as distracted.

The Moderating Role of Workplace Status

Seminal boundary theory identifies employees’ workplace status as a key lens through which coworkers interpret employees’ integration of roles at work (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Workplace status captures “an employee’s relative standing, as characterized by the

respect, prominence, and prestige he or she possesses in the eyes of other organizational members” (Djurdjevic et al., 2017, p. 1125). The theory suggests that higher (lower) status employees are afforded more (less) latitude in how they are permitted to manage the work–nonwork boundary because they are assumed to contribute to organizational goals more (less) than other employees (Nippert-Eng, 1996; see also Jensen et al., 2012; Magee & Galinsky, 2008). As we detail below, we argue that workplace status shapes how disclosers’ reputational implications unfold.

According to boundary theory, integration of work and nonwork roles is assumed to be in conflict with (in service of) the organization when an employee has lower (higher) status (Nippert-Eng, 1996). Consistent with this idea, enacting behaviors that contribute to a valued reputation provides very little new information about someone who is higher status because they are already assumed to contribute to organizational goals (Jensen et al., 2012). Thus, because higher status employees are already assumed to advance work relationships, engaging in nonwork interpersonal capitalization does not materially convey new information about them. By contrast, when lower status employees engage in such capitalization, this offers new information suggesting they can, in fact, advance work relationships and are more likely to be perceived as other-focused. The higher one’s social status, the more one is conferred “idiosyncrasy credit” that permits greater latitude to deviate from norms (Hollander, 1958), and the less one becomes vulnerable to “unfavorable normative evaluations” (Morrill et al., 1997, p. 519). With these ideas in mind, and because their integration of work and nonwork roles is assumed to conflict with organizational goals (Nippert-Eng, 1996), lower (higher) status employees’ tendency to disclose their positive nonwork events is more (less) likely to be seen as indicative of being distracted from work. We propose that the effects of nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization on being perceived as other-focused and distracted from work will be stronger (weaker) for lower (higher) status disclosers. In turn, we expect that lower (higher) status disclosers are more (less) likely to ultimately be rewarded and penalized in terms of being gossiped about positively and negatively.

Hypothesis 5: Discloser workplace status moderates the positive association between nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization and (a) being perceived as other-focused, such that this association is weaker (stronger) when discloser workplace status is higher (lower), and (b) being perceived as distracted, such that this association is weaker (stronger) when discloser workplace status is higher (lower).

Hypothesis 6: Discloser workplace status weakens (a) the positive indirect effect of nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization on positive workplace gossip from coworkers through being perceived as other-focused and (b) the negative indirect effect of nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization on negative workplace gossip from coworkers through being perceived as other-focused.

Hypothesis 7: Discloser workplace status weakens (a) the negative indirect effect of nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization on positive workplace gossip from coworkers through being perceived as distracted and (b) the positive indirect effect of nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization on negative

workplace gossip from coworkers through being perceived as distracted.

Overview of Studies and Transparency and Openness

We first conducted a pilot study to understand nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization as a phenomenon. To test our conceptual model, we conducted two main studies. Study 1 is a field study, and Study 2 uses an experimental causal chain design (Spencer et al., 2005). We adhered to the *Journal of Applied Psychology*’s methods checklist and describe our sampling plan, data exclusions, manipulations, and measures below. Our data, analysis syntax, results output, results with and without controls, full measures and manipulations (including the Study 2a videos), and results of supplemental studies are uploaded to an Open Science Framework repository as additional online material, which is accessible at https://osf.io/5vspx/files/xun8e?view_only=9c46727ce43945dd805791a84d3566c8. Study 1 was not preregistered. Studies 2a and 2b were preregistered (see additional online material).

Study 1

Method

Sample and Procedure

Recent applicants of a graduate business program at a university in India were invited via email to participate in this study by a member of the research team. Disclosers were eligible if they worked at least 30 hr per week and worked with at least three coworkers at least weekly. They nominated three to five coworkers with whom they interact at least weekly, who were invited to the coworker survey 2 weeks later. Participants were entered into a raffle with the chance of winning one of 20 \$50 gift cards. After matching discloser and coworker surveys and removing disclosers (6) and coworkers (24) who failed two attention checks, our final sample size included 271 disclosers ($M_{\text{age}} = 37.07$ years, $M_{\text{tenure}} = 6.1$ years, 89.4% male) and 477 coworkers ($M_{\text{age}} = 34.9$ years, $M_{\text{tenure}} = 5.81$ years, 73.8% male; $M_{\text{relationship tenure}} = 3.23$ years). Participants were employed in a range of industries, for example, marketing, hospitality, and technology. This study was approved as exempt by Indiana University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB No. 17415, “Coworker Communication About Good News”).

Measures

Unless otherwise specified, all measures used 7-point Likert-type scales in which 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*. Coefficient α values are reported in Table 2 ($\alpha = .77-.95$). Disclosers self-rated their *nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization* using the five-item Workplace Interpersonal Capitalization Scale from Watkins (2021), adapted to refer to positive *nonwork* events disclosed to invited coworkers.¹ We used Rodell and Lynch’s (2016)

¹ We conducted supplemental Study 1 (https://osf.io/5vspx/files/yx9zn?view_only=9c46727ce43945dd805791a84d3566c8), which showed that disclosers are not very selective about the coworkers to whom they disclose their positive nonwork events, and supplemental Study 2 (https://osf.io/5vspx/files/xun8e?view_only=9c46727ce43945dd805791a84d3566c8), which showed that disclosers and coworkers are able to identify positive nonwork events disclosed. See the additional online material for details.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study 1 Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization	5.11	1.29	(.92)								
2. Perceived other focus	6.13	0.80	.13*	(.90)							
3. Perceived distraction	2.54	1.16	.04	–.30**	(.77)						
4. Discloser workplace status	6.12	0.90	.08	.55**	–.42**	(.94)					
5. Positive workplace gossip	4.00	0.70	.15**	.58**	–.29**	.62**	(.88)				
6. Negative workplace gossip	1.42	0.66	.05	–.23**	.27**	–.13*	–.04	(.86)			
7. Workplace friendship	5.00	1.55	.14*	.38**	–.12*	.36**	.41**	.03	(.88)		
8. Discloser job performance	6.31	0.76	.07	.58**	–.40**	.78**	.64**	–.09	.35**	(.95)	
9. Discloser prototypicality	5.73	1.01	.05	.56**	–.30**	.53**	.49*	–.09	.29**	.52**	(.91)

Note. $N = 271$. Coefficient α s are presented along the diagonal.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

scales to measure coworkers' perceptions of the discloser's *other focus* and *distraction*, which includes four items for each scale. We used Lian et al.'s (2023) four-item scale to assess coworkers' perceptions of the discloser's *workplace status*. We assessed coworkers' self-ratings of *workplace gossip* about the discloser using the 10-item scale from Brady et al. (2017), which includes five items each for positive and negative workplace gossip (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *a great deal*).

We controlled for coworkers' ratings of the discloser's *prototypicality* with the five-item scale from van Knippenberg and van Knippenberg (2005), because boundary theory suggests that prototypical employees' integration is more rewarded by organizations (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015). We also controlled for disclosers' *job performance*, rated by coworkers using the five-item scale from MacKenzie et al. (1991), given that reputation may be a function of a given individual's job performance (Hochwarter et al., 2007; Rodell & Lynch, 2016). Finally, we controlled for *coworkers' friendship with the discloser* using Colbert et al.'s (2016) three-item scale because friendship may influence coworkers' reactions to capitalization (Watkins et al., 2023) and because friendship captures the extent to which coworkers' relationships with the discloser extend beyond work (Colbert et al., 2016). The results are consistent both with and without control variables (see the additional online material for the results without controls).

Given that our theoretical model focuses on disclosers, we aggregated coworkers' ratings to the discloser (i.e., individual) level (Connelly & McAbee, 2024). Following recommendations (LeBreton & Senter, 2008; LeBreton et al., 2023), we support aggregation by interpreting ICC(1) and r_{wg} as a set. An ICC(1) value of .05 indicates a small to medium effect size that offers preliminary evidence for an effect of discloser on coworkers' ratings, and r_{wg} of .51–.70 indicates moderate agreement (LeBreton & Senter, 2008); we thus use ICC(1) = .05 and r_{wg} = .51 as minimum cutoffs. Measures for hypothesized variables exceed these cutoffs (see Table 3).

Analysis, Results, and Discussion

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations. Results of confirmatory factor analysis in Mplus V8.9 showed our hypothesized six-factor model fit the data well, $\chi^2(309) = 616.74$, comparative fit index = .94, Tucker–Lewis index = .93, root-mean-

square error of approximation = .06, standardized root-mean-square residual = .05, and showed better fit than any five-factor models combining any two of the constructs, $\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df = 5) \geq 318.60$, $ps < .001$. Table 4 and Figure 2 present unstandardized results of path analysis in Mplus V8.9. Missing data were handled using full information maximum likelihood estimation. As Table 4 shows, capitalization had a significant positive main effect on other focus (supporting Hypothesis 1), but its main effect on distraction was not significant (Hypothesis 2 was not supported). Prior to creating the interaction term to test Hypothesis 5, we mean-centered capitalization and status. As Table 4 shows, the interaction between capitalization and status did not significantly predict other focus (Hypothesis 5a was not supported) but did significantly predict distraction. We plotted the latter interaction in Figure 3, which showed that the positive relationship between capitalization and distraction was stronger for disclosers lower in status ($-1 SD$; $b = .11$, $SE = .05$, $p = .017$) versus higher ($+1 SD$; $b = -.00$, $SE = .05$, $p = .962$), supporting Hypothesis 5b.

To test the indirect effects and conditional indirect effects hypotheses, we used Monte Carlo procedures in R Version 4.2.3 using 20,000 resamples and assessed whether the 95% confidence intervals (CIs) excluded 0 (MacKinnon et al., 2004; Preacher et al., 2010; see Table 5). The indirect effects of capitalization through other focus on positive gossip ($ab = .008$, 95% CI [.000, .018]) and negative gossip ($ab = -.011$, 95% CI [–.026, –.000]) were in the expected direction, supporting Hypotheses 3a and 3b, respectively. Hypothesis 4 was not supported for the indirect effects of capitalization through distraction on positive gossip ($ab = -.001$, 95% CI [–.007, .002]; Hypothesis 4a) and negative gossip ($ab = .007$, 95% CI [–.003, .019]; Hypothesis 4b). Given that the interaction posited by Hypothesis 5a was not significant, Hypothesis 6 was not supported. Hypothesis 7a was not supported: The difference between the indirect effects of capitalization on positive workplace gossip through distraction at higher and lower status was .003 (95% CI [–.004, .012]). In support of Hypothesis 7b, the difference between the indirect effects of capitalization on negative workplace gossip through distraction at higher and lower status was significant (difference = $-.014$, 95% CI [–.033, –.000]), and this indirect effect was significant when status was lower ($ab = .014$, 95% CI [.001, .031]) but not higher ($ab = -.000$, 95% CI [–.014, .013]).

Overall, Study 1 demonstrated that nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization influences how one is perceived and gossiped about

Table 3
Aggregation Indices for Coworker-Rated Measures in Study 1

Variable ^a	ICC(1)	ICC(2)	<i>r</i> _{wg}
Hypothesized variables			
Perceived other focus	.18	.28	.79
Perceived distraction	.12	.19	.63
Workplace status	.36	.50	.80
Positive workplace gossip	.17	.27	.82
Negative workplace gossip	.06	.11	.85
Control variables			
Discloser prototypicality	.14	.22	.70
Discloser job performance	.36	.49	.84
Disclosers' friendship with coworkers ^b	.15	.24	.47

Note. ICC = intraclass correlation coefficient.

^aWe note that our aggregation indices may be attenuated for several reasons. First, *r*_{wg}, ICC(1), and ICC(2) are in part a function of the number of raters and are attenuated when the number of raters is low (Bliese, 1998; Woehr et al., 2015). Here, the average number of coworkers per discloser is 1.76. Second, variability between groups (perceptual targets or disclosers in our case) is lower for individual referents compared to group referents (Klein et al., 2001; e.g., coworkers referring to an individual discloser vs. coworkers referring to “our work group”), which may also attenuate aggregation indices. Regarding ICC(2) specifically, lower values can be acceptable if there is theoretical justification for aggregation along with acceptable ICC(1) and *r*_{wg} values (see, e.g., Dong et al., 2015; Li & Tangirala, 2022; T. Spoelma et al., 2023). Theoretically, the nature of our model variables is likely to involve some variation among coworkers, but aggregation to the individual discloser level aligns the measures rated by coworkers with the reputational focus of the theoretical model. ^bAs noted in the article text, all of our hypothesized variables exceed the cutoffs of ICC(1) = .05 and *r*_{wg} of .51. The *r*_{wg} of coworker friendship, a control variable, falls slightly below our cutoff and indicates weak agreement among coworkers' ratings of their friendship with the discloser (LeBreton et al., 2023; LeBreton & Senter, 2008). We suspect that coworker friendship's ICC(1) (which exceeded the cutoff) and *r*_{wg} (which did not) diverge from one another because according to LeBreton and Senter (2008), “the use of *r*_{wg} is predicated on the assumption that each target has a single true score on the construct being assessed. ... Consequently, any variance in judges' ratings is assumed to be error variance” (p. 818). However, we do not necessarily assume that coworker friendship has a “true score” because variance among coworkers' ratings may be meaningful (i.e., coworkers' idiosyncratic relationships with the discloser), rather than to be considered as measurement error. Accordingly, we expect some variation across coworkers' ratings of their friendship with the discloser, and such variation is reflected in how its *r*_{wg} is lower than that of the other variables.

by coworkers. A key limitation of Study 1 is that our mediators and dependent variables were measured by the same source at the same time, making these relationships vulnerable to common method bias (P. M. Podsakoff et al., 2024). Relatedly, concerns may exist

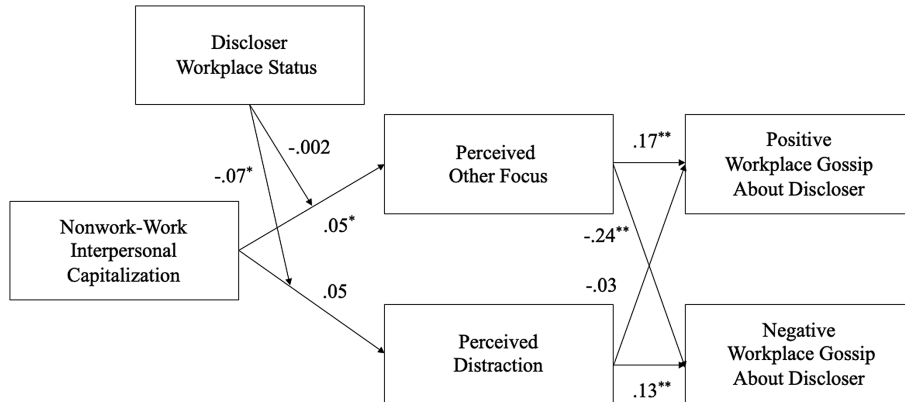
regarding selection bias, as nominated coworkers who agreed to participate may have done so because they have a positive relationship with the discloser, which may have biased their evaluations more positively. To address these limitations, we conducted Study 2.

Table 4
Unstandardized Path Modeling Results of Study 1

Variable	Perceived other focus			Perceived distraction			Positive workplace gossip			Negative workplace gossip		
	Estimate	SE	<i>p</i>	Estimate	SE	<i>p</i>	Estimate	SE	<i>p</i>	Estimate	SE	<i>p</i>
Control variables												
Workplace friendship	.07**	.02	.002	.02	.04	.581	.08**	.02	<.001	.01	.03	.703
Discloser performance	.20**	.07	.006	-.27*	.13	.043	.22**	.07	.001	.03	.08	.757
Discloser prototypicality	.28**	.04	<.001	-.20**	.08	.008	.08	.04	.061	.03	.05	.555
Focal predictors												
Nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization	.05*	.02	.043	.05	.04	.199	.03	.02	.099	.02	.03	.471
Discloser workplace status	.12	.06	.058	-.35**	.12	.002	.14*	.06	.017	.09	.10	.362
Perceived other focus							.17**	.05	.002	-.24**	.07	<.001
Perceived distraction							-.03	.03	.373	.13**	.04	.001
Nonwork–Work Interpersonal Capitalization × Discloser Workplace Status	-.02	.02	.372	-.07*	.03	.043						
<i>R</i> ²	.43			.28			.53			.11		

Note. *N* = 271. *SE* = standard error.
* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01.

Figure 2
Unstandardized Path Model Results (Study 1)



Note. Nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization was self-rated by the discloser. Discloser workplace status, perceived other focus, and perceived distraction of the discloser were rated by the discloser’s coworkers. Positive and negative workplace gossip were self-rated by the discloser’s coworkers. See Table 4 for the full path model results, including the direct effects of capitalization on positive and negative workplace gossip, as well as the effects of control variables.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to test our hypotheses using an experimental causal chain design (Spencer et al., 2005; see, e.g., Burgess et al., 2022; Kundro et al., 2023), which breaks down our hypothesized mediation chain into its component parts, strengthening causal inference. Specifically, in Study 2a, we manipulated nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization and status to examine their main and interactive effects on perceived other focus and

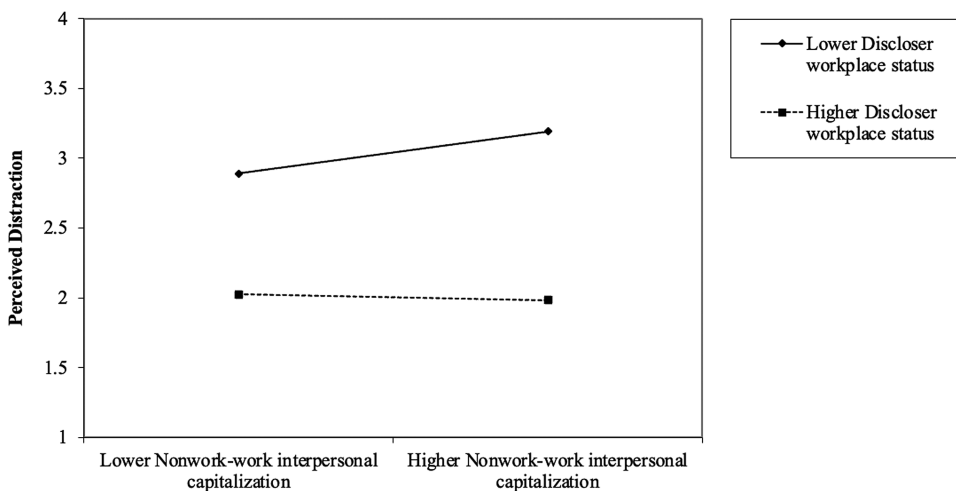
distraction. In Study 2b, we manipulated these perceptions to examine their effects on workplace gossip.

Study 2a

Method

Participants and Procedure. We recruited from Prolific full-time employed adults who interact with coworkers. The final

Figure 3
The Interactive Effect of Nonwork–Work Interpersonal Capitalization and Workplace Status on Perceived Distraction (Study 1)



Note. Higher refers to 1 standard deviation above the mean, and lower refers to 1 standard deviation below the mean.

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Table 5
Indirect Effects and Conditional Indirect Effects in Study 1

Indirect effect	Estimate	95% CI
Nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization → perceived other focus → coworkers’ positive workplace gossip		
Indirect effect (H3a)	.008	[.000, .018]
Indirect effect conditional on higher discloser workplace status (+1 <i>SD</i>)	.005	[−.004, .017]
Indirect effect conditional on lower discloser workplace status (−1 <i>SD</i>)	.009	[.001, .023]
Difference between conditional indirect effects and higher versus lower workplace status (H6a)	−.005	[−.017, .006]
Nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization → perceived other focus → coworkers’ negative workplace gossip		
Indirect effect (H3b)	−.011	[−.026, −.000]
Indirect effect conditional on higher discloser workplace status (+1 <i>SD</i>)	−.008	[−.023, .005]
Indirect effect conditional on lower discloser workplace status (−1 <i>SD</i>)	−.014	[−.032, −.001]
Difference: conditional indirect effects and higher versus lower workplace status (H6b)	.007	[−.008, .024]
Nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization → perceived distraction → coworkers’ positive workplace gossip		
Indirect effect (H4a)	−.001	[−.007, .002]
Indirect effect conditional on higher discloser workplace status (+1 <i>SD</i>)	−.003	[−.012, .004]
Indirect effect conditional on lower discloser workplace status (−1 <i>SD</i>)	.000	[−.004, .004]
Difference between conditional indirect effects and higher versus lower workplace status (H7a)	.003	[−.004, .012]
Nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization → perceived distraction → coworkers’ negative workplace gossip		
Indirect effect (H4b)	.007	[−.003, .019]
Indirect effect conditional on higher discloser workplace status (+1 <i>SD</i>)	−.000	[−.014, .013]
Indirect effect conditional on lower discloser workplace status (−1 <i>SD</i>)	.014	[.001, .031]
Difference: conditional indirect effects and higher versus lower workplace status (H7b)	−.014	[−.033, −.000]

Note. We used Monte Carlo procedures with 20,000 resamples to obtain 95% CIs. CI = confidence intervals; H = hypothesis.

sample was 501 participants ($M_{age} = 40.41$ years, 60.1% male, 71.1% White). Pay was \$2. This study was approved as exempt by Indiana University IRB: No. 19821, “Workplace Communication and Perceptions.” We used a 2 (nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization: high vs. low) × 2 (workplace status: high vs. low) between-subjects factorial design. A hypothetical coworker, Alex, served as the discloser, and the participant served as a coworker (see, e.g., Harari et al., 2022). Participants were randomly assigned to the high ($N = 250$) or low ($N = 251$) status condition. We manipulated Alex’s status using scenario methodology (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014), drawing on key elements of the construct and scale items (Djurdjevic et al., 2017; for similar approaches, see, e.g., Park et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2025). Given that status captures “relative standing” (Djurdjevic et al., 2017, p. 1125), and our theorizing comparing lower and higher status disclosers, Alex’s status was contextualized to be relative to that of other employees in the organization (i.e., lower or higher).

Participants were randomly assigned to the high ($N = 252$) or low ($N = 249$) capitalization condition. In the capitalization manipulation, we sought to balance internal validity (by including a brief scenario drawn from scale items) with ecological validity and immersion (N. P. Podsakoff et al., 2013; by including a brief selfie-style video that demonstrated Alex’s typical degree of such capitalization; see, e.g., Cho & Jiang, 2022; Watkins, 2021).² Alex’s capitalization was contextualized to be relative to other employees (i.e., “more” or “less” than; see, e.g., Rodell & Lynch, 2016). We drew from the pilot study results to write the video scripts and hired a professional actor from <https://Upwork.com> to produce the videos. Similar to He et al. (2025) and Lee and Johnson (2025), we validated the manipulation, which showed that it manipulated the target construct as opposed to potential confounding constructs (see supplemental Study 3 at https://osf.io/5vspx/files/xun8e?view_only=9c46727ce43945dd805791a84d3566c8).

Measures. We used the same scales and anchors as in Study 1 to measure capitalization, which was higher in the high ($M = 6.46$, $SD = 0.77$) versus low ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.50$) condition, $t(499) = 39.79$, Cohen’s $d = 3.47$, $p < .001$. Status was measured with the four-item scale from Djurdjevic et al. (2017) and was higher in the high ($M = 6.57$, $SD = 0.69$) versus low ($M = 1.79$, $SD = 1.09$) condition, $t(499) = 58.49$, Cohen’s $d = 5.23$, $p < .001$. Other focus ($\alpha = .94$) and distraction ($\alpha = .96$) were measured using the same scales as Study 1.

Results

Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations. We first conducted a two-way multivariate analysis of variance in SPSS Version 29 with capitalization, status, and their interaction as independent variables and other focus and distraction as dependent variables (see Table 7). Univariate tests revealed significant main effects of capitalization on other focus ($F = 253.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .34$) and distraction ($F = 30.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$), supporting Hypotheses 1 and 2, respectively. The interaction between capitalization and status predicted a marginally significant amount of variance in other focus ($F = 3.19$, $p = .075$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$)³ and significantly predicted

² Given concerns around potential confounds from combining video and scenario components in our manipulation (e.g., dose–response confound or additive effect and ambiguity regarding which component drove the manipulation), we conducted a supplemental study ($N = 79$ working adults recruited on Prolific). This study showed that the video and scenario components each manipulated the construct independently and that the combined manipulation had an averaging effect, rather than an additive effect, whereby each component alone had similar mean differences on the manipulation check (video: 3.55 and scenario: 5.04) as the combined manipulation (4.13).

³ While Hypothesis 5a was not supported at $p < .05$, the simple effects aligned with Hypothesis 5a; when the discloser’s status was low, the discloser was perceived as more other-focused for engaging in high (vs. low) capitalization (mean difference = 1.61, $p < .001$) versus when their status was high (mean difference = 1.29, $p < .001$; see Figure 4, left panel).

Table 6*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study 2a Variables*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization manipulation	0.50	0.50	—			
2. Workplace status manipulation	0.50	0.50	.01	—		
3. Perceived other focus	4.90	1.29	.56*	.25*	(.94)	
4. Perceived distraction	3.34	1.89	.17*	−.67*	−.14*	(.96)

Note. $N = 501$. The capitalization conditions were coded as 0 = *low* and 1 = *high*. The status conditions were coded as 0 = *low* and 1 = *high*. Coefficient α s are presented along the diagonal.

* $p < .05$.

distraction ($F = 9.51, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .02$). As Figure 4 shows (right panel), when the discloser’s status was low, the discloser was perceived as more distracted for engaging in high (vs. low) capitalization (mean difference = 1.04, $p < .001$) compared to when their status was high (mean difference = .30, $p = .081$).

Study 2b

Method

Participants and Procedure. We recruited full-time employed adults from Prolific using the same eligibility criteria and pay as Study 2a (Study 2a participants were not eligible). Our final sample size was 394 ($M_{\text{age}} = 37.65$ years, 44.70% male, and 74.4% White). We used a between-subjects design and randomly assigned participants to one of four conditions that manipulated a hypothetical coworker’s other focus (high, $N = 100$, and low, $N = 100$) or distraction (high, $N = 96$, or low, $N = 98$). We developed a scenario for each condition (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014), drawing on scale items for and key elements of these constructs (Rodell & Lynch, 2016). This study was approved as exempt by Indiana University IRB: No. 24159, “Coworker Communication.”

Measures. As manipulation checks, we used the Study 1 and Study 2a scales for other focus ($\alpha = .99$) and distraction ($\alpha = .98$). Other focus was higher in the high ($M = 6.58, SE = .08$) versus low other focus condition ($M = 1.43, SE = .08$), $p < .001$. Distraction was higher in the high ($M = 6.45, SE = .11$) versus low distraction condition ($M = 1.40, SE = .11$), $p < .001$. Positive ($\alpha = .98$) and negative gossip ($\alpha = .94$) were self-rated using the Study 1 scales (1 = *extremely unlikely* and 7 = *extremely likely*).

Results

Table 8 shows the descriptive statistics and correlations. We conducted a multivariate analysis of variance with other focus and

distraction as independent variables and positive and negative workplace gossip as dependent variables (see Table 9). Positive gossip was significantly higher in the high other focus condition ($M = 6.11, SE = .11$) than in the low other focus condition ($M = 2.56, SE = .11$), $p < .001$. Negative gossip was significantly lower in the high other focus condition ($M = 1.88, SE = .13$) than in the low other focus condition ($M = 3.39, SE = .13$), $p < .001$. Taken together with Study 2a, these results supported Hypothesis 3. Positive gossip was significantly lower in the high distraction condition ($M = 2.63, SE = .11$) than in the low distraction condition ($M = 5.90, SE = .11$), $p < .001$. Negative gossip was significantly higher in the high distraction condition ($M = 3.31, SE = .13$) than in the low distraction condition ($M = 1.93, SE = .13$), $p < .001$. Taken together with Study 2a, these results supported Hypotheses 4 and 7 (Hypothesis 6 was not supported).

General Discussion

Theoretical Implications

Our findings hold important theoretical implications for research on workplace capitalization and for boundary theory. First, we challenge the implicit assumption that the value of capitalization in the workplace is its work-related content. Specifically, prior research has shown that capitalization is socially valued in the workplace as evidenced by the affective reactions it elicits: The discloser feels pride because “capitalization [of positive work events] is self-enhancing, drawing disclosers’ attention to their accomplishment of organizationally valued goals” (Watkins et al., 2023, p. 954), and the coworker feels inspired by or envious of the discloser because of an inflated or deflated self-evaluation compared to the discloser (Watkins, 2021). We call this assumption into question by investigating how disclosers of positive *nonwork* events are evaluated against normative expectations tied to boundary theory (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015). Our findings reveal that disclosers gain social value

Table 7

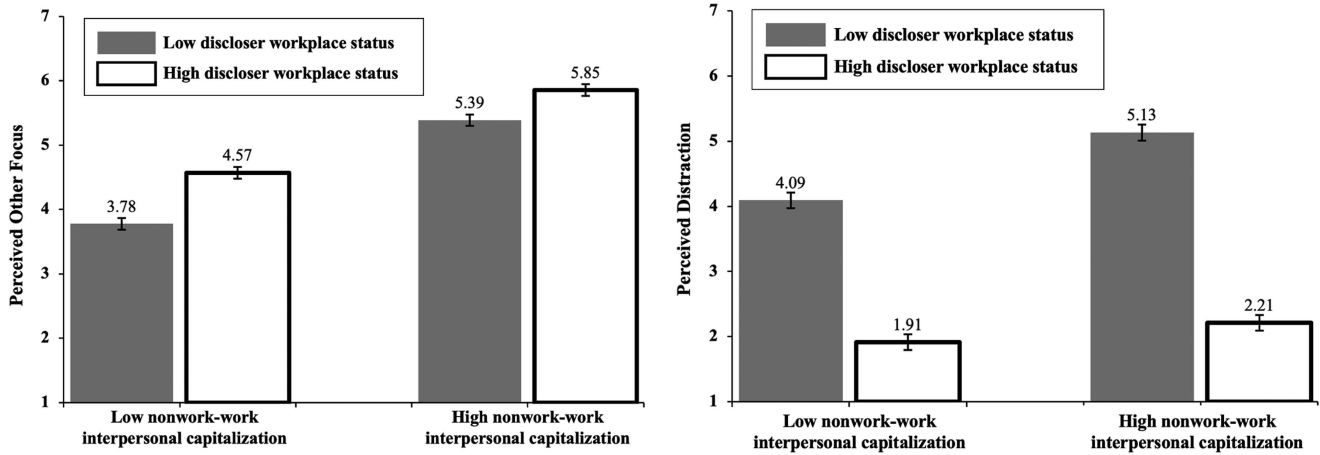
Two-Way (Factorial) Multivariate Analysis of Variance Results of Nonwork–Work Interpersonal Capitalization and Workplace Status (Study 2a)

Manipulation	Omnibus test			Univariate test					
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2	Perceived other focus			Perceived distraction		
				<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
Nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization	$F(2, 496) = 156.93^*$	<.001	.39	253.54*	<.001	.34	30.88*	<.001	.06
Discloser workplace status	$F(2, 496) = 231.59^*$	<.001	.48	48.14*	<.001	.09	447.43*	<.001	.47
Capitalization Manipulation \times Status	$F(2, 496) = 7.22^*$	<.001	.03	3.19	.075	.01	9.51*	.002	.02

* $p < .05$.

Figure 4

Interaction Between Nonwork–Work Interpersonal Capitalization and Workplace Status on Perceived Other Focus (Left Panel) and Perceived Distraction (Right Panel; Study 2a)



Note. Error bars represent the standard errors.

(in terms of being perceived as other-focused) yet lower status disclosers also lose social value (in terms of being perceived as distracted from work). Such implications demonstrate how the boundary-crossing nature of nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization complicates prior assumptions by introducing the potential for the discloser to lose and/or gain social value in distinct ways.

Second, we show that these implications depend on the discloser’s workplace status, which broadens research on contingencies shaping capitalization’s implications. By highlighting the importance of the discloser’s social standing in the workplace, we extend prior workplace capitalization research that has focused on moderators relating to the specific discloser–coworker relationship (competitiveness, Watkins, 2021; and coworker’s responsiveness, Watkins et al., 2023) or the positive event itself (i.e., attributed to the discloser’s effort; Watkins et al., 2023).

Finally, we contribute to boundary theory by spotlighting workplace gossip as a means by which coworkers enforce boundary norms. Specifically, we show that coworkers express approval (via positive gossip) and—for lower status disclosers—disapproval

(via negative gossip) of boundary-crossing employees. Whereas prior research has recognized “boundaries as cocreated by employees, outsiders, and organizations” (Beckman & Stanko, 2020, p. 411; see also Nippert-Eng, 1996), we show how coworkers cocreate the boundary. By doing so, we extend research on how organizations enforce this boundary (Perlow, 1998; Stanko & Beckman, 2015) and how employees navigate boundary pressures (e.g., Kreiner et al., 2006; Reid, 2015) and manage the boundary with coworkers (Trefalt, 2013) and partners (Beckman & Stanko, 2020).

Practical Implications

Our research offers clear guidance for employees, managers, and organizations. Given our finding that nonwork–work interpersonal capitalization was associated with being perceived as other-focused, managers who oversee work groups where being caring and sincere (i.e., other-focused) is particularly important (e.g., surgical teams where task interdependence is high and relational processes such as trust are crucial, Marlow et al., 2018) should offer opportunities for

Table 8
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Study 2b Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. High other focus manipulation	0.25	0.44	—					
2. Low other focus manipulation	0.25	0.44	-.34*	—				
3. High distraction manipulation	0.24	0.43	-.33*	-.33*	—			
4. Low distraction manipulation	0.25	0.43	-.34*	-.34*	-.33*	—		
5. Positive workplace gossip (self-rated)	4.31	2.02	.52*	-.51*	-.47*	.46*	(.98)	
6. Negative workplace gossip (self-rated)	2.63	1.47	-.29*	.30*	.27*	-.27*	-.52*	(.94)

Note. N = 394. Other focus refers to perceived other focus. Distraction refers to perceived distraction. For ease of interpretation in this table, the conditions were coded as 0 = not assigned to condition and 1 = assigned to condition. Coefficient α s are presented along the diagonal. For robustness, we also collected the likelihood of others’ gossip about the discloser as supplemental data; the results replicated those reported in the main analysis (see the additional online material: https://osf.io/5vspj/files/xun8e?view_only=9c46727ce43945dd805791a84d3566c8 for details).

* p < .05.

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Table 9
Workplace Gossip Means and Mean Differences for Manipulations in Study 2b

Variable	Omnibus test	Perceived other focus manipulation						Perceived distraction manipulation					
		Low		High		Mean difference		Low		High		Mean difference	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>p</i>
Positive workplace gossip	$F = 330.83, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .72$	2.56	.11	6.11	.11	5.55	<.001*	5.90	.11	2.63	.11	3.28	<.001*
Negative workplace gossip	$F = 41.67, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .24$	3.39	.13	1.88	.13	1.51	<.001*	1.93	.13	3.31	.13	1.39	<.001*

Note. *SE* = standard error.

* $p < .05$.

employees to share their positive nonwork events, such as before meetings start.

Because we also found that lower status employees who share positive nonwork events are more likely to be perceived as distracted, managers should recognize that well-intentioned efforts to build connections through nonwork disclosures, such as “icebreakers,” may inadvertently disadvantage lower status employees. Moreover, managers should be mindful about ensuring that lower status employees are afforded the same leeway to share their positive nonwork events by discouraging others to view such disclosures as indicators of distraction from work. In organizations and work groups that emphasize “ideal worker” and PRI norms (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015)—such as consulting organizations like those in Reid’s (2015) study—managers could consider alternative ways for employees to positively interact (e.g., showing appreciation), which could help bypass negative evaluative impact for lower status employees.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

As with any study, ours are not without limitations. A key limitation of Study 1 is that our mediators and outcomes were measured by the same source at the same time, which may raise concerns regarding common method bias (P. M. Podsakoff et al., 2003, 2024). We sought to mitigate this in Study 2b by manipulating our mediators using an experimental causal chain design. Yet a limitation of Study 2b is that we measured our dependent variable (workplace gossip) using behavioral intentions (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014), following other scenario experiments that measured gossip intentions (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Martinescu et al., 2019) and other behavioral intentions as dependent variables (e.g., Bordia et al., 2014; Ho et al., 2025; Mitchell et al., 2025; Park et al., 2024). To address this, future experiments could consider measuring enacted positive and negative gossip, such as by coding participants’ responses.

Similar to other scenario experiments involving a hypothetical coworker, we used low and high conditions in Study 2 (Fehr et al., 2025; Rodell & Lynch, 2016; Wee et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2025) to manipulate status, capitalization, and perceptions. Doing so allowed us to capture the full range of each construct in our hypothesis testing. However, participants may have interpreted the low conditions as overly negative, strengthening observed effects. Additionally, we acknowledge that our Study 1 sample was male-skewed; as such, gender composition may have influenced whom participants disclosed to and how coworkers reacted, given that people are more likely to self-disclose to others of the same gender (Dindia & Allen, 1992). However, this concern is mitigated to some extent by the more gender-balanced samples in Study 2 (and the fact that the discloser’s

gender was held constant). Finally, while Study 2a controls for capitalization content by design, we did not capture content in Study 1. We encourage future research to build on our work to investigate the content of positive nonwork event disclosures, for example, by drawing from theories explaining themes of autobiographical narratives (e.g., events evoking commitment and empathy; McAdams et al., 1997, 2008).

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