

**GOSSIP'S ROLE IN CONSTITUTING JESUS AS A SHAMANIC FIGURE
IN JOHN'S GOSPEL**

by

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Gossip's Role in Constituting Jesus as a Shamanic Figure in John's Gospel

by J W Daniels

Doctor of Theology

New Testament

Promoter: Pieter F. Craffert

SUMMARY

Reading the Fourth Gospel, one is struck by the amount of talk about Jesus. Many of the reports in John describing such talk reflect the social process of gossip in concert with other processes and dynamics involved in constituting social personages in the ancient Mediterranean world.

Although there have been a few general treatments of gossip in the New Testament, none have focused on the subject of the gossip in John's gospel, Jesus, the generative cause of the emergence of gossip traditions. The aim of this research project is to explore how gossip is involved in constituting Jesus as a shamanic figure in the Fourth Gospel.

Building on the research of Pieter F. Craffert, and thus beginning with understanding Jesus as a shamanic figure, a viable framework for identifying and explaining features and functions of gossip is constructed after considering sociolinguistic studies and a number of ethnographies of extant traditional cultures of the Mediterranean. The framework is then brought to bear on texts in the Fourth Gospel reporting or describing gossip, in order to see how gossip contributes to constituting Jesus as a shamanic figure.

As a result, this research offers a significant contribution to New Testament studies as it 1) represents an exploration and appropriation of gossip that has scarcely been exploited in the field, 2) provides a viable theoretical framework for positioning gossip vis-à-vis other pivotal first-century Mediterranean social values and processes, 3) models a new way to see and understand John's gospel, and 4) is suggestive of an alternative to the reigning paradigm of conventional historical Jesus research in that it involves linking literary features about oral phenomena in John to a historically plausible figure thoroughly embedded in his social, cultural, and historical world.

Key Terms: Bible; Gossip; Historiography; Jesus; Jesus Christ; John, Saint (person); New Testament; Shamanism; Social Identity; Social Sciences; Sociolinguistics

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I declare that **GOSSIP'S ROLE IN CONSTITUTING JESUS AS A SHAMANIC
FIGURE IN JOHN'S GOSPEL** is my own work and that all the sources that I have
used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

SIGNATURE
(MR JW DANIELS)

DATE

**For Marcia,
The love of my life**

Ἴδου εἶ καλή, ἡ πλησίον μου, ἴδου εἶ καλή
-- Song of Songs 4:1, LXX

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>1 En.</i>	<i>1 Enoch</i>
<i>Aen.</i>	<i>Aeneid</i>
<i>b. Arak.</i>	<i>Arakhin</i>
<i>b. Pesah.</i>	<i>Pesahim</i>
<i>Cal.</i>	<i>Slander</i>
<i>Ebr.</i>	<i>De ebrietate</i>
<i>Eth. Nic</i>	<i>Nichomachean Ethics</i>
<i>Hist.</i>	<i>Historiae</i>
<i>LXX</i>	<i>Septuagint</i>
<i>m. Nid.</i>	<i>Niddah</i>
<i>m. Sanh.</i>	<i>Sanhedrin</i>
<i>Mor.</i>	<i>Moralia</i>
<i>T. Job</i>	<i>Testament of Job</i>
<i>Vita</i>	<i>Life</i>

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Jesus the Generative Font

In his book *Jesus the Magician*, Morton Smith discusses the emergence of traditions about Jesus in terms particularly compelling for this research project:

Whatever else Jesus may or may not have done, he unquestionably started the process that became Christianity. We have therefore to ask: What sort of man and what sort of career, in the society of first century Palestine, would have occasioned the beliefs, called into being the communities, and given rise to the practices, stories, and sayings that then appeared, of which selected reports and collections have come down to us? (Smith 1978, 5-6)

Compelling about the way Smith frames the historical question about Jesus is how he imagines Jesus *first*, that is, Jesus as the source – or generative font – of sayings, stories, beliefs, practices, and ultimately communities. This is clearly an alternative way to address the historical question about Jesus as it has been asked by the dominant paradigm of historical Jesus research, which has been consistently preoccupied with authenticity (or not) of Jesus' words and deeds (e.g., Funk and Hoover et al. 1993). The question as Smith asks it is compelling since it implies the possibility of construing Jesus from the sources as we have them, rather than from a sparse few “authentic” pieces. Smith's question asks not about the sources, but about the generative cause of the sources, that is, it asks about *what* or *who* the sources are about. This research project thus, takes for granted that the stories found in the Gospels share something in common, namely, that they are about the same sort of man. But what sort of man?

Pieter F. Craffert offers an answer to the question about the sort of man that was indeed, the generative cause for the emergence of the cultural stories that come down to us in the Gospels (Craffert 2008). By utilizing the methods of anthropological-historiography, Craffert offers a plausible portrait of Jesus as a Galilean shamanic figure who was the generative cause for the emergence of the cultural stories about him in the Gospels (cf. Chapter Three below). Once one is familiar with the features and functions of a shamanic figure, it is not hard to imagine that when such a man as Jesus uttered the sorts of words he uttered, and did the sorts to things he did, the talk about him that erupted was as compelling and evocative as the Jesus himself.

When one reads the Gospel of John¹ one may be struck by the amount of talk about Jesus, especially since the FG is well known for Jesus' long discourses. In fact, if one is attuned to the *talk about* Jesus, rather than the *words of* Jesus, one may be astonished by the amount of talk there is, as well as the content and circumstances of such talk. The amount of talk about Jesus in John's Gospel bears witness to the first-century Mediterranean oral culture, while the content and circumstances of the talk bears witness to intricate processes involved in constituting social personages in an agonistic, collectivist culture. Indeed, much of the talk about Jesus in John's Gospel can be seen as gossip, the identification of which will comprise a good portion of this project. How such gossip about Jesus contributes to constituting him as a shamanic figure will in fact comprise the bulk of this project.

¹ Henceforth, the Gospel According to John will on occasion be referred to as "John's gospel" or "FG." The author of the gospel will occasionally be referred to as "John" or the "Evangelist."

1.2 Statement of the Problem and the Research Proposal

While a number of other New Testament (henceforth, NT) commentators have offered culturally sensitive expositions of the narrative function of various scenes in John depicting gossip (e.g., Neyrey 1996, 2007a; Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 2003; Maloney 1998; Lincoln 1994), no one has to my understanding yet considered such texts from a culturally sensitive perspective with an eye toward shedding light on *the subject of the gossip*, that is, the social personage who was the *generative cause* for the emergence of gossip and the traditions reporting or embodying gossip in the first place, namely, Jesus.

Building on the research of Craffert, and thus beginning with understanding Jesus as a Galilean shamanic figure, this research project will include the construction of a viable framework for identifying and explaining various features and functions of gossip. Once such a framework is procured, it will then be brought to bear on texts in the FG identified as embodying gossip, with an eye toward seeing how gossip contributes to constituting Jesus as a shamanic figure, and in relation to a number of other social processes. Indeed, Craffert has correctly suggested that gossip played a vital role along with a number of other social-cultural processes in constituting Jesus as a Galilean shaman (2008, 102-123; 342-344). This project intends to follow Craffert's suggestion by looking more precisely into details of gossip, the features and functions of gossip, and how gossip operates within the context of the social world of first century Palestine along with a number of other social-cultural dynamics that participate in construing a social personage. *Thus, the purpose of the project is to explore how gossip events in John's gospel participate in constituting Jesus as a shamanic figure.*

1.3 Structure of the Project

Following the Introduction, the Second Chapter offers a survey of gossip research in consultation with modern socio-linguistic studies of the phenomenon as well as modern ethnographic studies of existing “traditional” cultures, paying the closest attention to Mediterranean cultures. Thus, by identifying elements of gossip research that may specifically contribute to understanding the role gossip plays in constructing social worlds and realities, it can be asked how gossip constructs social personages acting within such worlds. The character of this section is heuristic, and is thus not intended to suggest that gossip in the first-century Mediterranean is identical in form and function to gossip in modern Western-European or Mediterranean cultures. The ultimate goal is to provide an understanding of gossip that can be construed within the context of the social world of Jesus and John’s gospel. The interest in recent gossip research as well as in modern ethnographies then, is to become aware of what to look for in John as far as gossip goes, and to determine the kinds of questions to ask once gossip is identified (cf. Rohrbaugh 2007, 126, n.4). Thus, the aim is to secure a provisional definition of gossip that may accentuate the role this peculiar social process plays in constituting Jesus as a shamanic figure.

The Third Chapter details Craffert’s work, underscoring the features and functions of a shamanic figure ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels that plausibly construe him as a Galilean shaman. Indeed, since gossip is associated with a shamanic figure in Craffert’s appraisal, it is important to examine the relationship between the social process and the construction of the social figure. Thus, by understanding Jesus as a Galilean shaman from the start, and so the gossip in the FG as gossip *about* a shamanic figure, the

focus can be fixed on the social-cultural process of gossip and its role in constituting Jesus as such a figure.

The Fourth Chapter assesses the social world of the first-century Mediterranean in order to draw the contours of the world that provide the cultural backdrop for the social dynamics and processes illustrated in the FG that carry the information constituting Jesus as a shamanic figure. After certain elements of the first-century Mediterranean social-cultural world are examined such as the idea of “limited good,” collectivism, and honor-shame, a framework for imagining gossip in the social world of Jesus will then be suggested. Chapter Five comprises the bulk of the project, and is an exploratory application of the framework of gossip. The framework is used as a heuristic tool to see the texts differently, that is, with an eye toward gossip, and attending to how the gossip events in the FG participate in constituting Jesus as a shamanic figure.

1.4 The Context of Social-Scientific Research and the Fourth Gospel

This research project, exploring a peculiar social-cultural communicative process as it emerges in the FG, is conducted conscientiously within the context of social and cultural readings of the biblical texts. Indeed, Malina is often and correctly identified as the first to alloy biblical studies with the social-sciences by utilizing social-scientific models inducing new questions from out of the biblical text and thus providing a new way of seeing the cultural stories from the native’s perspective (Malina 1981). The importance of such “seeing” should not be underestimated as it recognizes that the values, social-dynamics, and reality-catalogs of ancient cultures are radically different than those of 21st century Western Europe or North America. Such “seeing” is done by means of

constructing social-scientific models, that is, “simple, abstract representations of human experiences and interactions which are often highly complex” (Malina 1981, 24). It is thus, by means of such models that the social-cultural interactions and emergent meanings encoded into words, deeds, and interactions are brought to light for an outside observer’s consideration. This is the work of bridging cultural gaps so as to avoid the domestication of the “other” by means of reading texts emerging out of ancient cultures, as if they emerged out of a post-enlightenment, industrialized world with its attendant, modern (and now postmodern) world view. What Malina’s work does, and the works of others who have followed, is provide a way of seeing ancient texts that generates new understanding from out of texts, and implies new and interesting questions to bring to the texts.

It has only been recently that John’s gospel has been read through the lenses of the social-sciences and cultural-anthropology. Consideration of the social context of the FG was first and most deftly constructed by the works of Martyn and Brown, who both plausibly drew the contours of a Johannine community behind the gospel (Martyn 1979; Brown 1979). In this vein, and more recently, works like Rensberger’s treatment of the Johannine community’s communal relationships sheds light on the Christological confession of the FG (Rensberger 1988). Indeed, all three of these works are suggestive of the importance of conflict in ancient communities, and how that shaped group identity that, in the case of the Johannine Community, involved sectarianism – all of these important elements of social-scientific research.

Neyrey’s is perhaps the most prolific scholarly voice reading John’s Gospel through the lenses of the social sciences. Indeed, his work entitled *Ideology of Revolt:*

John's Christology in Social Science Perspective (1988) marks the first monograph applying social-scientific methods directly to the FG, and one carrying with it valuable implications for understanding not only group identity-construction, but certainly the dynamics, formation, and function of anti-societies re-locating themselves socially and cosmologically vis-à-vis "the world." The scope of Neyrey's contributions to reading John's gospel via the social sciences is striking as it covers numerous elements of concern including, among others, honor-shame (1994a, 2001; Neyrey and Rohrbaugh 2002), forensics (1996), patronage-brokerage (2007b), secrecy (1998b), stereotyping (1994b), encomia (2007c), and territoriality (2002). Much of Neyrey's work is representative of a considerable number of other forays into the FG through the lenses of various key matrixes of social-scientific analysis, most appearing in scholarly journals and/or eventually edited collections of essays.

The most comprehensive applications of social-scientific and cultural-anthropological perspectives onto the FG are two commentaries, one by Neyrey (2007a), and the other by Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998). What is most notable about these is the sustained direct application of social-scientific models to John's Gospel that yields meaning from the text clearly illustrating its emergence from out of an agonistic social-cultural setting marked by group-oriented, dyadic collectivism in a context motivated by the idea of limited good. The stories in the FG are read by these authors as stories materializing from an ancient culture. Their consistent and sustained application of models sheds new alternative light onto the text, and so to a great extent bridges the chasm between western modernity and ancient antiquity.

Of particular importance for this project is Craffert's work that successfully appropriates social-scientific and cultural-anthropological approaches to biblical texts within the popular historical Jesus conversation (Craffert 2008). Utilizing cross-cultural research methods considering modern agrarian societies, Craffert constructs a model he calls the shamanic complex, from which emerges a cross-cultural social-type of a shaman, and proposes understanding Jesus in this way as a viable and new alternative to the many and varied portraits of Jesus that have been drawn by historically positivistic quests for the historical Jesus.

In sum, it is the generative work of Malina that has produced a still growing, fresh appraisal of biblical narratives by means of the utilization of social-scientific lenses as a creative and fruitful alternative to the reigning historical-critical paradigm, as well as the still prolific and productive literary and narrative-critical readings of biblical texts. The social-scientific and cultural-anthropological approaches to the bible are still growing, and it is within the context of this emergent perspective, and particularly as it attends to John's gospel, that this project intends to offer a contribution.

1.5 Scope of the Project: Historical Figure and Narrative World

This project *is not principally concerned with how Jesus is constituted as a shamanic figure in John's narrative, or story-world*. Rather, the project implies that the portrait of Jesus evinced by it provides a plausible picture of how gossip functioned in-and-around the life of the person about whom the traditions embodying gossip are about, since such a person's life – words and deeds – generated the gossip traditions in the first place. This person is here understood to be the historical figure of Jesus, and Jesus as a

shamanic figure. The project thus, presumes that beginning with understanding Jesus as a shamanic figure, and inquiring into whether Jesus can indeed be seen as such a figure by means of the gossip is certainly appropriate. Subsequently, it is also valid to inquire whether or not the information that emerges about Jesus by looking at the sources (in this case, John's Gospel) plausibly echoes the historical setting of the generative cause of the gossip traditions in the first place, that is, the historical Jesus. This is certainly a presumption of this project. Indeed, the presence of so many gossip events in the FG, especially events that convey features and functions of a shamanic figure, bears witness to the public, social construction of such a figure, and thus suggests gossip is to be expected as part of the life-experience of such a compelling figure. Because the traditions about a shamanic figure come to us within the narrative framework of, in this case, John's Gospel, it is important for the interpreter and reader to be aware of the inevitable blurring of boundaries between narrative world and historical setting. It is however, with such an awareness that this project proceeds with the intent of shedding light on the historical, social figure about whom the gossip traditions in John's Gospel are about.

CHAPTER TWO

A PERSPECTIVE ON GOSSIP RESEARCH

2.1 Introduction

To come to terms with how gossip constitutes Jesus as a shamanic figure, it is necessary to first offer an overview of gossip research to ultimately see how gossip functions, along with other social dynamics, within cultural contexts similar to Jesus', and with an eye toward noticing how gossip construes persons in those contexts. Such an overview need not detail every foray into the topic, but will suffice to cover a sufficient number of explorations within the broader horizon of the topic to eventually provide a framework for understanding gossip in terms not only of its definition, cause(s), and distinctive features, but also the character of the information carried by gossip, and its apparent social function(s). Gossip's relation to other social dynamics and values (collectivism, social identity, honor/shame, labeling, etc.) will be considered once the social-cultural context of Jesus is examined later on. All of these elements are here understood and so will be shown to play a significant role in constituting Jesus as a particular social personage. The sources consulted for the overview are chosen with the intent of moving the discussion in the direction of John's gospel, and thus include studies of gossip in the fields of social-psychology, social linguistics, as well as modern ethnographic research of traditional cultures, and extant studies of gossip in the NT.

This element of the project therefore, begins with a survey of important, recent considerations of gossip and then moves into modern ethnographies of existing

“traditional” cultures. The idea then, is to see how gossip constructs reality and persons in particular social-cultural contexts, in order to eventually observe Jesus as a particular social personage constituted by the dynamics of his social-cultural context. This portion of the project will thus, include an overview of the appropriation of gossip research in NT studies as scholars have recognized the pervasiveness of the phenomenon throughout the NT, and especially the gospels. Finally, this section will conclude by offering a provisional definition of gossip that may be utilized as a heuristic tool with which to begin constructing a viable framework for gossip with which to observe the gossip texts in the FG.

2.2 Recent Gossip Research

For the most part, there has been an obvious dearth of research on gossip. The ebb and flow of gossip research has moved along with the study of rumor so that it is almost impossible to consider the research of one without the other. By way of summary (cf. Rosnow and Foster 2005; Foster 2004), seminal work on rumor was conducted after World War II, with even more coming the following decade only to have it recede by the late fifties (e.g., Allport and Postman 1947; Back et al 1950). The sixties and seventies witnessed a surge in rumor and gossip research that focused on sociological and psychological aspects of the phenomena (e.g., Shibutani 1966; Milgram and Toch 1969; Morin 1971; Knopf 1975; Rosnow and Fine 1976). Since the last two decades are marked by a significant increase in gossip and rumor research (e.g., Fine and Turner 2001; Ben-Ze’ev 1994; Kapferer 1990; Koenig 1985; Kimmel 2004; et al; cf. Rosnow and Foster 2005), there is now a great deal of opportunity for research to be done

appropriating gossip and rumor research in a number of areas, not the least of which is the NT.

When considering the shape of gossip research, one is likely and inevitably to be drawn back to the discourse on the subject between Gluckman and Paine (Gluckman 1963; Paine 1967). The exchange between the two is a definitive marker in the topic since two distinct angles of enquiry emerged from it, namely, the functionalist and transactionalist perspectives. Gluckman emphasizes “the connection of gossip with the maintenance of the unity of groups and their morality”, thus, underscoring gossip’s role in everyday community life (1963, 308). Over-against the popular view of gossip as “haphazard” and negative, Gluckman advances a clear positive function of the phenomenon and a way that suggests gossip’s cultural determinacy within logonomic structures:

Yet it is possible to show that among relatively small groups, gossip in all its varieties, is a culturally determined process, which has its own customary rules, trespass beyond which is heavily sanctioned. I propose to illustrate the social affiliations of this process and to suggest that gossip, and even scandal, have important positive virtues. Clearly they maintain the unity, morals and values of social groups. Beyond this, they enable these groups to control the competing cliques and aspiring individuals of which all groups are composed. And finally, they make possible the selection of leaders without embarrassment. (1963, 308)

Beside gossip’s role in maintaining group unity, values and morals, Gluckman highlights the role of marking off, or setting boundaries of one group vis-à-vis other groups, and this by means of what may be called its “in-group” technical language, that is, a specific vocabulary understood by insiders that signals a gossip event (1963, 309, 311). In other words, to be part of a group, one must be able to join in the gossip (cf. Foster 2004, 86). Working with several ethnographies to draw his conclusions, Gluckman demonstrates that one may even be granted the right to participate in gossip, which is a sign of being

accepted into a particular group, and once inside, one is duty-bound to participate in gossip (1963, 313). What is significant about Gluckman's position for this project is his recognition of gossip as a "*culturally* controlled game with important social functions" on behalf of the community or group (1963, 312; italics mine). Moreover, his emphasis on functionalist aspects of gossip for maintaining group identity and unity is suggestive of competitive social contexts (in-group/out-group dynamics) that are agonistic, and so provide rich soil from which gossip may emerge.

In response to Gluckman's work, Paine recognizes that connections have been drawn between gossip and social control, as well as group maintenance, but suggests that Gluckman's characterization of gossip serves methodological interests:

Gossip is here brought into service to illustrate two bedrock assumptions of much structural anthropology, namely, the 'unity' of the group which has been isolated as a unit of study, and its 'equilibrium'. Thus gossip is conceived as a property of the group; its use is regulated by the group in such a way that it serves to demarcate the group and, at the same time, helps to perpetuate it. (Paine 1967, 279)

Thus, Paine avers that Gluckman imagines the unity of the community as the "paramount value" that gossip seeks to affirm (1967, 279).

Alternatively, Paine emphasizes how gossip is used for "personal attainment of elite social (and status) privileges" (1967, 279). Following this line of thinking, Paine defines gossip as "1. Talk of personalities and their involvement in events of the community, and 2. Talk that draws out other persons to talk this way" (1967, 283). Paine's transactionalist approach to gossip is what precisely sets his over-against Gluckman as far as understanding the function/purpose of gossip. Control of information is what Paine sees as the chief characteristic of gossip as he supposes that the gossip event itself is controlled by the gossiper who seeks to advance a particular construal of a

person and/or event (the subject of the gossip). By conveying (initiating gossip) certain information to certain persons, information that s/he wants others to know, a gossipper hopes that a particular construal of the subject prevails, over-against other possible renderings. By gossiping to particular persons, and conveying only particular shreds of information about a subject, the gossipper places him/herself in a position to receive more information about the subject (Paine 1967, 283), and thus perhaps even to make considerable gains for his/her own reputation or status. Significantly, Paine describes what may be said to be a typically traditional Mediterranean, agonistic society (Greek shepherd community) where collectivist, dyadic family units are in a constant struggle to maintain honor and prestige:

Within the group, each Sarakatsani family struggles alone to retain its fund of prestige. As this is measured in relation to what prestige others possess, each family, in its struggle, attempts to slight the prestige of others. Thus, the social prestige of each family 'depends on the favourable response of enemies; or more accurately, on the inability of enemies effectively to denigrate a family's reputation'. (1967, 281)

Paine's work on gossip, in response to Gluckman's, is helpful in a number of ways. First, it draws attention to elements of gossip that focus on the content of the information insofar as information about a subject may be possessed and manipulated by an individual or group via a network. Thus, when considering gossip from the transactionalist angle, important questions to ask are *who* is gossiping about the subject, *what* is their relation to the subject, and what do they hope to accomplish or gain by means of the gossip? Additionally, another question suggested by Paine's research regards the relationship between parties (individuals or groups) engaged in gossip about a subject: What stake does an individual or group have in transmitting the information? Reputation maintenance or reputation gain? Paine's work anticipates the prevalence of

gossip in agonistic cultures where competition over reputation is an acute element of daily life. This subsequently attunes the researcher to the crucial relation between gossip and the pivotal value of honor when it comes to constituting social personages in Mediterranean cultures. Finally, Paine's notice that gossip can serve as a catalyst for "patterning," or ordering "issues which were vaguely or confusedly perceived by a local population" (1967, 283), draws attention to the relation between gossip and a generative event, and thus gossip's role in (re)constructing social reality.

Offering helpful perspective on how to adjudicate between Gluckman's and Paine's perspectives, Bergmann's work of analyzing most of the relevant ethnographic research on gossip to date describes them as "explanatory approaches" focusing on different social elements, namely, social control (morality), group preservation, and information control (Bergmann 1993, 139-149). Bergmann recognizes all three of these as functional variables of gossip while criticizing sociologists and ethnographers for universalizing a particular element toward securing a sole functionality for the phenomenon (1993, 148-149). Instead, Bergmann points out that all three variables – social control, group preservation, information control – "occur simultaneously" and so "intersect," thus underscoring the variable and multivalent nature of the information exchange involved in gossiping. Indeed, an oral gossip event may operate at both a functionalist and a transactionalist level simultaneously. Bergmann's observation highlights the extent to which gossip is a vital element of social organizations in diverse cultures where group identity is often solidified by gossip in its social functionality, even when that functionality involves transactionalist information control as well as any number of influential situational factors.

Foster (2004) reviews a “half century of gossip research” in an attempt to summarize and to suggest “promising ways” further study may go. In doing so, he draws a useful portrait of what he calls the “gossip construct” which basically provides facets forming a definition (2004, 80-83). Foster advances a survey of the social function of gossip as well as “other functions” of gossip before relaying various methodologies used in gossip research (2004, 80-89).

In his discussion of the gossip construct, Foster focuses on three elements: (1) The third party is not present, (2) the evaluative content, and (3) the situational factors that constrain gossip (2004, 81-83). Useful in helping to identify a gossip encounter is the third element of Foster’s construct, that is, “situational factors” important in drawing out how gossip eludes “simple formulaic definitions or uniform explanations” (2004, 80; cf. Bergmann 1993, 71-80, 140-153). Here Foster characterizes gossip as a “heterogeneous phenomenon in content, forms, and functions,” and thus may be “manifested differently across the life span (of the gossip)” (2004, 95; parentheses mine). It is precisely the situational factors, as Foster puts it, that make the attempt to define gossip in any monolithic-formulaic fashion difficult if not impossible.

These examples [of situational factors] serve to show that settling upon a final characterization of gossip for research purposes is not a simple matter. Yet, consistent with many researchers’ observations, the most frequently encountered definition may be summarized as follows: *In a context of congeniality, gossip is the exchange of personal information (positive and negative) in an evaluative way (positive or negative) about absent third parties.* Definitions of the phenomenon may be more or less restrictive than this summary... (2004, 83; brackets mine)

Thus, as Foster illustrates, there is a consistency in researchers’ observations that make constructing a definition *necessary* for research purposes, but without any presumption of finality or universality when it comes to defining gossip.

Foster suggests that researchers' knowledge of the purpose of gossip has coalesced into four functions, namely (1) information, (2) entertainment, (3) friendship, and (4) influence (2004, 84-87). Regarding information, Foster implies a connection between reputation – gossip – and possession of information when he notes that a gossipers' status may be elevated as s/he demonstrates a special understanding of the social rules and construct (2004, 84; cf. Paine 1967, 283). By observing how people go to great lengths to gather information about other people, plus the natural inclination that most people have to guard information about themselves, Foster raises important questions for understanding how gossip participates in the social-constitution of persons, the idea being that if people are concerned with protecting personal information, they must be seeking to protect it from a public construal that they do not like (2004, 84).

Foster refers to Emler to further illustrate this point:

Emler (1990), for instance, showed experimentally that people are likely to exert considerable effort to protect their reputations, particularly with those closest to them and more so in "dense" social networks (i.e., networks with relatively high percentage of dyadic contacts). This suggests that people have a keen sensitivity to gossip and its effects. (2004, 93)

Such "keen sensitivity" to gossip along with concern to protect reputation anticipates how gossip participates in constituting social personages and in cultural contexts quite similar to Jesus' first century Mediterranean world, that is, a collectivistic culture marked by agonistic competition for status and reputation in a world of limited good.

As far as gossip's influence is concerned, Foster suggests the importance of social context for sense to be made out of gossip. To begin with, gossip happens only where there is agreement on behavioral norms, or a sort of *status quo* (Foster 2004, 86). Thus, for someone to become the subject of gossip, that one must do something to draw

attention to him/herself, usually something that goes against social norms, or that undercuts the managed impression of the way things or individuals should be. The description, in this case, of gossip as “shepherding conformity” is very useful as it can then be seen to be a sort of teacher teaching how one is to behave properly according to rules, norms, and various guidelines for living (Foster 2004, 86; cf. Baumeister, et al 2004, 113). It is significant too, that gossip as influence also affects impressions of persons. Foster notes how gossip stigmatizes “the sinner,” and identifies “free riders” and “social cheats” (2004, 86). On the other hand, impressions of persons via gossip can be positive as well, and eventually may play an important role in identifying group leadership as certain personages emerge from among others by means of positive evaluation (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 103; 2003, 367; Neyrey 2007a, 55-56). This is important as it again, anticipates the measure gossip has to constitute persons in particular social contexts and cultures, in this case, in terms of either deviance labeling or positive labeling. Indeed, Foster underscores how gossip’s influence on members of a group whose survival depends on maintenance of a *status quo* may account for some vitriolic emanations of the phenomenon (2004, 86). The currency such observations have on the present research is rather straightforward since the social-cultural world of Jesus and the gospels, as will be elaborated on more fully below, may be described as agonistic, with a particularly high sense of limited good that makes survival a high priority.

Regarding entertainment and friendship, Foster’s work is suggestive of gossip serving to allay stress in agonistic environments as it may indeed provide the primary source of entertainment in traditional cultures (2004, 85). With respect to friendship, the way Foster imagines gossip functioning to allay in-group self-identity is instructive:

The friendship or intimacy function of gossiping refers both to dyadic interchanges and to the way in which gossip brings groups together through the sharing of norms, thereby establishing boundaries to distinguish insiders from outsiders. What begins as a trusted exchange in private becomes at the group level the knowledge, norm, and trust boundaries of tribes, clans, and cultures. (2004, 85)

Thus, gossip may be seen as a constitutive element of in-group self-identity construction as well as a social dynamic solidifying the embeddedness of individual self-identity in dyadic relational contexts.

What emerges from the above appraisal of a few seminal explorations of gossip are a number of factors important for characterizing a gossip event as well as identifying its functions within particular social-cultural contexts. Far from being idle chit-chat, gossip functions to maintain group boundaries and identity by enforcing accepted morals and values, and this while utilizing in-group, coded language to convey its information about a subject. Seen in this way, gossip can be said to affirm and enforce the cultural-social status quo. Implied by gossip's role in building and nurturing group identity and values, and as will become evident further below, is the apparent fact that gossip flourishes in competitive social contexts where groups are vying with each other over status and reputation mediated by the flow of information. Thus, the above survey shows gossip to be inextricably intertwined with the agonistic competition for honor and status.

Another element of gossip that is apparent above is the aspect described as information control. The control of information by a gossip, while it may be driven by a concern to evince her/his own status and reputation, plays an important part in constituting persons insofar as the gossip is an attempt to convey information in a particular way in order to evince a particular construal of the subject – deviant, honorable, or otherwise. This of course, implies gossip's role in the construal of

knowledge about the subject and so, the construction of reality vis-à-vis the subject, and so is suggestive with respect to the constitution of social personages.

Although, not focusing on ethnographic research of traditional cultures, the research about gossip evaluated thus far has not been without the influence of such research (cf. Colson 1953; Campbell 1964), and indeed, has not reached conclusions significantly different either, as will become clear with what follows.

2.3 Contributions from Ethnographic Research of Traditional Cultures

Ethnographers have for a number of years studied modern-traditional as well as ancient cultures (e.g., du Boulay 1974; Handelman 1973; Gilmore 1978, 1987; Brison 1992; Gleason 1998; Lewis 1996). This work has yielded much that is helpful in understanding gossip in a Mediterranean context. Although some of the cases utilized here are studies of relatively closed communities (Handelman, Gleason), the value in these efforts for this project is how they shed light on the social dynamics of Mediterranean societies including the role gossip plays in such dynamics. Discerning common elements shared between them is rather straight forward and helps to highlight not only the character and function of gossip, but its obvious intricate relation to other social dynamics. The research bears out at least four aspects of gossip in Mediterranean societies worth noting: (1) Gossip emerges out of collectivistic, group-oriented, agonistic societies; (2) Gossip is involved in the attainment and maintenance of reputation or status; (3) Gossip functions to maintain community morals and values; (4) Gossip plays a part in constituting knowledge and meaning, social structure, and social identity. The first two of these are closely related and in fact, function within the very social matrix (4) that they construct.

To begin with, it is clear from the research that gossip emerges readily and perhaps necessarily, in collectivistic societies marked by agonistic relational structures. Du Boulay's small Greek village is exemplary in this fashion as life is described, among other things, as a "continual battle between secrecy and curiosity" waged between families (1974, 202). Indeed, in Ambéli, evaluative talk about a particular individual is talk about the group the individual is from, that is, the group from where an individual gains her/his identity (du Boulay 1974, 201-202; cf. Gilmore 1987, 55). The group-orientation of collectivistic societies leads to the designation and maintenance of group boundaries, and so the protection of insider knowledge and information from outsiders.

The status of the family/group vis-à-vis others in the village is paramount, and it is via the acquisition of information that one group may gain status over-against another. This of course, translates to the individual's life experience of agonism as s/he ventures outside the confines of the group into the public arena where all eyes and ears are attuned in order to observe, and so report and affirm the battle over reputation, that is, the transaction of honor or shame. Gossip is thus recognized by the research as a fundamental social dynamic necessary for the transaction of honor and shame to be legitimized (Gleason 1998, 501, 503, 516; Lewis 1996 13; Gilmore 1987, 54-55). Constituent of honor-shame cultures is the transactional game of challenge-riposte where, in Mediterranean cultures, nearly every public social interaction is in fact an attempt on the part of persons to gain honor. Because of the prevalent notion of limited good common in the Mediterranean, the gain of honor from an individual corresponds to the loss of honor for that individual and his/her group. Gossip's role vis-à-vis honor and shame suggests as well, its role in constituting social personages since the transaction of

honor or shame involves the characterization of persons and their group, in very particular terms through various means like stereotyping, deviance labeling, as well as recognition by means of honorific titles.

The maintenance of community values and morals plays a large part in defining gossip's role in Mediterranean cultures. This usually operates out of the fear of becoming the subject of gossip (Gilmore 1987, 62-63), and so again discloses the agonistic character of the culture. When one is outside of one's group/family, one is careful not to behave in any way that may draw the attention of the community at large, lest one become a generative cause for evaluative talk of a negative sort. Indeed, this aspect of gossip may account for the overall ambivalence toward gossip in these societies. Although gossip is viewed negatively, it is presupposed and quite expected and so considered quite normal (du Boulay 1974, 205).

Finally, the research suggests gossip's role in not only the transmitting of news, but the constituting of information, meaning, and knowledge. For example, in evaluating gossip's role in an Egyptian Anchorite community of the 4th-5th centuries, Gleason notices how gossip "generates shared meanings" by means of the transformation of a generative event into stories that ultimately play a part in constituting corporate memory of the community (1998, 502; cf. Merry 1984, 278). In this view, gossip captures a generative event, and frames it in a way reflective of the values of the group, thus, becoming part of the process of shaping and evincing those very cultural values (Gleason 1998, 503):

When we study the ways in which people "constitute" social worlds by talking about them, we must move beyond the original speech – and guessing at the motives of the speaker – to examine the ways in which consensus is shaped by many voices as accounts circulate through a community. (Brison 1992, 14)

Gossip can therefore be seen as playing a significant part in a society's communal construction of reality – social, structural, and relational.

The relatively overt use of modern research of extant traditional cultures throughout the project will be done with awareness of the potential problems regarding ethnocentricity and anachronism (cf. 4.6.1 below). Because of this, the information learned from modern research will conscientiously be utilized *heuristically* in order to see clues in the ancient text signally gossip, rather than being applied rigidly, thus implying too high a level of certitude.

2.4 New Testament Studies: Contributions to Gossip Research

At a very minimum, it would be accurate to say that the New Testament is in touch with its oral world; the frequency with which gossip is evaluated, reported, or actually recorded is truly astonishing. (Rohrbaugh 2007, 146)

A good start for the consideration of gossip in the NT is an article by Rohrbaugh first published in 2001 (2007, 125-146). In it, Rohrbaugh offers a definition of gossip, a survey of Mediterranean ethnographies dealing with gossip, a survey of ancient comment on gossip, and a record of the causes of gossip. Most helpful for identifying gossip in the NT, Rohrbaugh compiles a lexicon of words modeled after Gilmore's construction of a semantic field for gossip in an Andalusian village (2007, 134-138; Gilmore 1978, 69-74). On the one hand, the list of 57 words in the NT (Rohrbaugh also includes a list from the Hebrew Bible) signaling gossip demonstrates the ubiquitous nature of the phenomenon. On the other hand, it also suggests the contextual character of gossip as many, if not most of the words are commonly found throughout the NT in situations that are not gossip events.

The heart of Rohrbaugh's work is his evaluation of the various social functions of gossip in Mediterranean contexts, and his bringing that information to bear on the NT texts and the social-cultural world of ancient Palestine. In doing so he highlights the first-century Mediterranean concern for group formation and maintenance common to collectivistic cultures, as well as the hyper-concern for reputation and status. This concern is borne out by the four functions of gossip that Rohrbaugh identifies: (1) clarification, maintenance and enforcement of group values, (2) group formation and boundary maintenance, (3) moral assessment of individuals, (4) leadership identification and competition (2007, 138-144). While the attention here to gossip's function emphasizes both functionalist and transactionalist aspects of the phenomenon, it more importantly situates the communicative event deeply within the context of the collectivistic culture characterized by the agonistic competition for honor in a world of limited good. Indeed, Rohrbaugh explicitly states that gossip plays an important part in the transaction of honor or shame, and so with the social identity of persons and the family/group(s) to which they are attached (2007, 142).

Another element of Rohrbaugh's work important for this project is the summary of types of NT texts having to do with gossip: (1) texts *about* gossip, (2) texts that are *reports* about gossip occurring, (3) texts that are themselves gossip (2007, 144-146). All three types are evident in John's gospel as this will become evident below.

At a minimum, Rohrbaugh's work highlights the important differences between oral cultures and literate cultures with the striking variations as to how the two handle information and news, and how each perceives the basis of reputation (honor) and how reputation is gained or lost. In his own words "the New Testament is in touch with its

oral world” (Rohrbaugh 2007, 146). Such synchronization implies a text emerging from a social-cultural context and worldview vastly different from our own. Moreover, the intricate connection between communication via gossip and the transaction of honor and shame described in vivid detail by Rohrbaugh, is vital for perceiving a social context within which gossip operates, along with other social variables, in constituting first-century Mediterranean persons. To be sure, Rohrbaugh suggests a close connection between gossip and reputation that demands close attention.

Botha’s work on rumor and gossip represents two forays into the NT pivotal for this research, as they both underscore the potential gossip research poses for understanding the social dynamics of the traditioning processes (Botha 1993), as well as the application of gossip research to understanding the social dynamics reflected in the NT, and particularly, in Paul’s letters to communities in conflict (Botha 1998).

A number of elements stand out from Botha’s work that must be considered for this project. First, the importance of recognizing the power of gossip in the first-century Mediterranean oral culture where there was uncritical acceptance of the spoken word, even over the written word (Botha 1998, 273; Schein 1994, 151; Witherington 2007, 28; cf. Graham 1987), is crucial for understanding its pervasiveness and pivotal effect on persons. Second, the significance of social-situational/contextual factors in not only determining the character of a gossip event, but even the motivation for gossip in response to an unexpected social-cultural event is demonstrated by Botha (1998, 279; cf. Foster 2004, 86; Malina and Rohrbaugh 2003, 367). Indeed, calling attention to the contextual factors in determining, to the extent it may be possible, a gossip event as opposed to rumor is here shown to be crucial.

Since Botha's work comprises both gossip and rumor, it will be helpful to briefly examine rumor vis-à-vis gossip since research of both communicative events suggests that both emerge under similar social circumstances, and that both are involved in constituting knowledge, or positing reality in light of some sort of unexpected or generative event contrary to a society's status quo.

A technical definition of rumor is "a proposition for belief of topical reference disseminated without official verification" (Knapp 1944, 22-27). In other words, rumor may be defined as unofficial news emerging from raw, unprocessed facts that are processed as they are "infused with private hypotheses," thus positing a reality (Botha 1993, 211; Rosnow and Fine 2005). By positing a reality, rumor rarely arises out of 'reality' (Botha 1993, 211). Botha suggests a definition of rumor as "improvised news resulting from a process of collective discussion entailing both an information-spreading procedure and a process of interpretation and commentary" (1993, 212). The information-spreading procedure involved is of interest here as this implies various communicative events, and so likely gossip.

It is generally agreed that the topic of a rumor is necessarily of great importance to those transmitting the information. Moreover, a connection is established between the rise of rumor and crisis situations in cultures generated by events that are "incomprehensible in terms of established assumptions" (Botha 1993, 213; cf. Foster 2004, 86; Malina and Rohrbaugh 2003, 367). Thus, rumor may be seen as a society's or group's attempt to make sense out of the apparently nonsensical, and so to (re)construct reality in a way that the apparently nonsensical can be accommodated (again) by the established assumptions. In other words, "rumours entail a subjective *construction* of

reality” in the face of ambiguity (Botha 1993, 214, 220). It is understood here that a likely vehicle for such “construction” is gossip that may be seen as an immediate, reactive communicative event that in certain cases, initiates the processing of an ambiguous event involving a person whose words and/or deeds go against the “established assumptions” and expectations of the social-cultural matrix, particularly in terms of how people are expected to act and what they are expected to say or do.

Determining how to define or differentiate between rumor and gossip in a way that is universally applicable is, after considering studies of both phenomena, surprisingly difficult. Indeed, it is not unusual to come across descriptions of elements of one that are constitutive of the other. For example, in his study of gossip in the NT, Rohrbaugh notes that “for gossip to occur (that is, critical talk about third parties), participants must (1) know each other (at least minimally), (2) understand the import of the situation, and (3) share evaluative categories” (2007, 127; Yercovich 1977, 192-197). All three of these elements, surface in other studies as important elements of rumor as well (cf. Botha 1993, 211; 1998, 273; Fine 1979; Koenig 1985, 136). On the other hand, there are clearly differences between gossip and rumor that are important to distinguish, at least when studying the phenomena in their “pure state” (Rosnow and Foster 2005). Although both gossip and rumor can often involve persons closely related (cf. Botha 1993, 211; 1998, 273), gossip is generally understood as having more of an “inner-circleness” about it (Rosnow and Foster 2005, ¶2). Additionally, gossip is understood as normally a signed “face-to-face” interaction between insiders, while rumor is unsigned communication that bridges the gaps between social groups thanks to individuals who find themselves situated at such social crossroads (Rohrbaugh 2007, 127; cf. Bailey 1971, 45; Yercovich

1977, 192-197). Indeed, as far as gossip goes, it is easy to observe, that researchers have proffered as many functions of gossip as there are researchers studying the phenomenon (e.g., Rosnow and Foster 2005).

All of this is to accentuate how intricate are both rumor and gossip if for no other reason, because of the contextual variables involved that are necessarily operative when either of them emerge. Thus, when rumor and gossip are considered within the sphere of biblical studies, no hard-and-fast differentiations between the two have been established. So, for example, in an important study of rumor research's potential for helping NT scholars understand the traditioning processes, Botha ventures to mention *only* two texts as containing "traces of the origins of possible rumour processes" (Botha 1993, 214):

But he went out and began to proclaim it freely, and to spread the word, so that Jesus could no longer go into a town openly, but stayed out in the country; and people came to him from every quarter. (Mark 1:45)²

The swineherds ran off and told it in the city and in the country. Then people came to see what it was that had happened. (Mark 5:14)

Conversely, in an equally important study of gossip in the NT, Rohrbaugh describes the very same two texts (Mark 1:45 and 5:14), along with a number of others, as "reports about gossip occurring," and as "texts...that report people talking evaluatively about Jesus" (2007, 144). Moreover, in their commentary on the Synoptic Gospels, Malina and Rohrbaugh suggest Mark 1:45 reflects a gossip encounter, while making no comment either way with regard to Mark 5:14 (2003, 151, 166). This is not to suggest Botha is necessarily in disagreement with Rohrbaugh and Malina over whether or not Mark 1:45 and 5:14 constitute gossip or rumor, let alone that they disagree on what *constitutes* a

² All translations of the Fourth Gospel are mine following the 27th edition of Nestle-Aland's *Novum Testamentum Graece*. All other translations of the Old and New Testaments follow the New Revised Standard Version (1993) unless otherwise indicated.

gossip or a rumor event. It is merely to suggest that the treatment of gossip and rumor, when it comes to understanding the dynamics of such informal communication in the first-century Mediterranean, need not be sharply divided, especially since both phenomena likely function similarly in constituting Jesus as a social personage. Thus, while differences surely do exist between gossip and rumor in their “pure state,” differentiation between the two will not be a focus of this project since both play similar, if not often identical roles in positing reality and constructing knowledge and in constituting Jesus as a Galilean shaman.

There are a notable few commentaries on the four gospels that have been published recently by the Context Group reading the gospels from a distinctively social-scientific and cultural perspective (see Chapter 1.4 above; Neyrey 2007a; Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 2003; cf. also Malina 2000; Malina and Pilch 2006, 2008). These works represent a notable alternative to traditional, historical-critical commentaries operating from the history-of-ideas perspective when interpreting the text. The commentaries by and Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998, 2003) both offer brief, explanatory social-scientific models they call “reading scenarios” by/through which readers may understand the social-cultural background, as well as the ancient world view that the gospel narratives operate within. Included in both commentaries are scenarios summarizing gossip and/or the gossip network. Thus, by surveying the background of gossip in the ancient world, as well as the functionalist and transactionalist aspects of gossip operative in that world, the reader is given new lenses by which to see texts talking about, describing, or actually embodying a gossip event. For the most part however, these works focus on pointing out the prevalence of the gossip network in the

ancient world, and so the important role gossip played in transmitting information or news. Neyrey's commentary contributes many of the same insights regarding gossip as a conduit of information in a low media culture as well as its role in "catechizing" outsiders into a group or faction (2007a, 55, 98; cf. John 1:35-50; 4:39-42).

The favorable result of these important commentaries is that they leave the reader with a vivid sense of the relative strangeness of the ancient agonistic Mediterranean world of limited good, where the pivotal value is honor that is endlessly and competitively transacted. More importantly for this project, these commentaries emphasize the thoroughly oral character of that world and the biblical texts that emerge from it. What the commentaries do not offer are detailed descriptions of how gossip operates along with other social-cultural dynamics in constituting social personages.

2.5 Features of a Gossip Event

The features of a gossip event involve several elements including a number of people/groups, a particular social setting/context, a generative event either past or present, an exchange of information that is evaluative in character, and may also entail various other social dynamics in the process such as honor/shame and deviance labeling. In other words, as the scope of gossip research bears out, for a gossip event to occur there must be an unexpected or unusual event that causes it, at least two persons engaged in the communicative event (gossiper and listener), a third party subject of the gossip, and some sort of social setting where communication occurs such as a street corner, marketplace, or courtyard where persons normally get together to socialize.

In order to be able to identify a gossip event in John's gospel, it is necessary to construct a definition of gossip that takes into account all of the above elements. Beginning with the number of persons involved and their relation to one another, the kind and character of information transmitted by gossip will then be considered, followed by the function(s) of gossip, and the relation between gossip and other speech events/social dynamics such as deviance labeling and honor/shame.

2.5.1 Gossip Involves a Number of Persons

Gossip studies have offered several options for designating the number of persons necessary for a communicative event to be considered gossip. Rohrbaugh suggests that three parties are always involved in a gossip event: "the gossiper, the party listening, and the gossipee" (2007, 127). The number of persons in a gossip encounter engaging in talk about a third party varies, often exceeding the minimal number of two. Guss's ethnographic study of the traditional Makiritare people of Venezuela reveals gossip occurring among a number of women, certainly more than two (1982, 260, 267). Likewise, du Boulay's description of gossip among villagers of a small, traditional mountain village in Euboea, Greece, indicates gossip among groups of both men and women (1974, 204). Gilmore's account of a small Andalusian town in southern Spain specifies gossip occurring among groups of women when occupying street fronts of their homes, and among men gathering in local taverns and barber shops (1987, 62). Indeed, several gossip events in John's gospel describe representative groups of persons involved in evaluative talk about a third party (John 1:45; 9:23-31, et al). Clearly then, "two or

more persons” may be involved in evaluative discourse such as gossip, about a third party.

The absence or presence of the third party subject of gossip is an element of the research that remains inconclusive and so relatively adaptable in an expansive way for identifying gossip encounters in the FG. In defining the “gossip construct,” Foster suggests that a generally recognized element of the construct is that the third party is not physically present in a gossip encounter even while admitting evidence of research to the contrary (2004, 81-82). Gilmore’s Andalusian natives were observed openly gossiping about one another during a public, cultural festival (1978, 93-94). Handelman’s research (1973) offers examples of gossip encounters occurring when the third party subject is physically present, thus constraining the gossipers to engage in strategies that enable communication to continue without the subject’s knowledge. Handelman notes a number of modes of exclusion including body positioning, eye-contact, and the use of third-person pronouns to exclude a subject who may be present (1973, 213). Bergmann deftly describes the various bodily maneuvers and gymnastic eye-contact between such gossipers as effectively rendering the present third-party subject a “nonperson,” that is, “physically present but interactively absent” (1993, 79-80; cf. Goffman 1959). Essentially then, the absence of the third party subject of a gossip encounter can entail either physical absence, or absence imputed by the gossipers given the circumstance of the presence of the subject.

It will be demonstrated in this work that John’s gospel reports gossip events that imply the absence of Jesus (1:45; 4:39-42), and others where Jesus’ presence, and so his ability to overhear the gossip, is a vital part of the gossip encounter (e.g., 6:41-43).

Indeed, it will be argued below that the latter situation often embodies a challenge issued at Jesus in response to his words or deeds. In sum then, the “third party external to the discussion group,” may be external in terms of physically external (not physically present), or external in terms of absence evoked by various communicative strategies rendering the subject absent.

Consideration of the relation between the gossip(er)(s), listener(s), and subject(s) of gossip plays a part in determining a gossip event in traditional cultural settings. Gossip flourishes in cultures that are intricately connected with “morally homogeneous social networks” (Merry 1984, 277), and is as well the primary channel for information exchange in non-literate cultures (Arno 1980, 343; Paine 1967, 282; Rohrbaugh 2007, 126). Because gossip is “signed” communication, that is, face to face talk (Rohrbaugh 2007, 127), it is understood to involve participants that know each other, share evaluative categories, and have a mutual understanding of the importance of a situation that gives rise to gossip (Yerkovich 1977, 192ff.; Rohrbaugh 2007, 127). The third party subject of gossip is as well, somehow known to the gossipers (Merry 1984, 277). The presence of a gossip encounter implies a relatively intimate situation insofar as the parties engaging in the event know each other at some level. The transaction of information from one to another in a gossip encounter implies social intimacy and trust that is characteristic of collectivist cultures populated by dyadic groups wherein gossip itself often serves to mark off one group from another, and thus maintain ingroup-outgroup distinctions (Gluckman 1963, 311, 313; Foster 2004, 85-86; Merry 1984, 277). In John’s gospel on a number of occasions gossip is engaged by representative groups of people, implying at least a modicum level of intimacy between them (“the people” 6:14; “the Jews” 6:41, 52;

“the crowds” 7:12; cf. also “the people” Mark 3:21; “the Pharisees” Matthew 12:2; “the crowds”; et al). In sum then, the parties engaged in gossip about an absent third party are socially related to one another and share a common knowledge about the third party subject as well as social-evaluative categories by which to make sense of the generative cause of the gossip.

2.5.2 Gossip Conveys Information both Positive and Negative

The character of the information transmitted by gossip is what is in view here. Gossip may be connected with “drunkenness, divorce, sex, jail, and wealth,” and so with the behavior of particular individuals or groups within a given social framework (Fine and Rosnow 1978, 161), but is not always derogatory in character (Baumeister, et al 2004, 111). While an individual’s unexpected or unconventional public behavior may be described as a cause of a gossip event, it is important to note that public behavior has ultimately to do not only with moral status, but with social hierarchy, identity (public), as well as the gain or loss of reputation, or honor (Rohrbaugh 2007, 127; Gleason 1998, 501). The latter aspects will be addressed in greater detail below, but at this point it is sufficient to establish that the critical element of gossip involving moral evaluation or judgment is not necessarily negative in character, but may in fact be positive (cf. Rosnow and Fine 1978, 162; Ben-Ze’ev 1994, 23; Merry 1984, 276; Gleason 1998, 508):

Conceiving of gossip as having either positive or negative valence is hardly a novel idea: Machiavelli (1516/1995) maintained that “all men, when they are talked about...are remarked upon for various qualities which bring them either praise or blame” (p.89). Gossip certainly influences reputations; yet, there is no logical reason to suppose that this is solely accomplished with negative remarks. (Foster 2004, 82-83)

2.5.3 Gossip's Role in Constituting Cultural Events

The relation between gossip and cultural events and the social personages associated with certain cultural events is important to see since the presupposition of this project is that gossip in John is about a culturally embedded social personage, that is, a Galilean shaman. If gossip is understood as constituting Jesus as a shamanic figure, then this implies that it is talk about events associated with such a figure that play an important part in constituting both the cultural events and the social figure associated with or implied by the events. Indeed, gossip is understood not only as constituting Jesus as a shamanic figure, along with a number of other social-cultural dynamics that take part in constituting social personages, but also as being a constitutive part of the everyday life experience of such a figure. In other words, the construction of such a social figure via gossip must be understood as emerging from complex cultural events by means of a number of complex cultural phenomena embedded in a particular cultural matrix. Since traditions about such events, which include reports about gossip encounters, eventually end up in the form of evangelical material (the gospels), it is prudent to take into account the relation between gossip and the knowledge it constructs about social personages.

The relation between gossip and knowledge as this takes shape in historical Jesus research can be deduced by recalling how the socially constructed nature of cultural systems and their views of reality, are handled by NT researchers dealing with ancient texts. A key component of historical Jesus research is the securing of authentic material, which itself imagines a linear development of traditions from a single event(s) that is then artistically exploited to the needs of the gospel authors. In other words, in the context of historical Jesus research, a generative event begets tradition, and then tradition begets

evangelical material (the gospels), thus creating a neat trail from the gospels, back to generative event accessible by means of an elaborate methodology of stratification. What is important to recognize is how this view places the originating event at the bottom, and thus presumes the straight accessibility to the originating event from the top, through layers of tradition, to the bottom. At this point, Craffert's question is appropriate (2008, 76): "But what if there never were such 'single events' to begin with, but only cultural events with specific cultural features?" Rather than original-singular events, it is presupposed here that what we have in the gospel of John are cultural reports of cultural events that were experienced by multiple persons simultaneously. Thus, it is not off the mark to describe the emergence of traditions in terms of multi-originality and equiprimordiality (Kelber 2001, 139). Subsequently, the multiple experiences and multiple retellings are what constitute the generative cultural event, and in such a way that the event is only fully constructed and knowable as such "in its collective experiencing, telling, and retelling" (Craffert 2008, 104). Clearly, the construction of the cultural event is subject to cultural processes and dynamics (Craffert 2008, 93), one of which is gossip. Thus, the relation between the generative, "singular" cultural event and the evangelical material is not a one-to-one relationship that has been covered over with layers by intervening generations of early Christians changing, elaborating, and creating new traditions along the way. That such a linear process prevails is indeed, the presumption of the "authenticity paradigm" (cf. 3.2.1 below). To be sure, it is understood here that the relation between the generative cultural event and the evangelical traditions is constituted by an intricate intertwining of cultural processes and dynamics that work together – honoring, remembering, enscripturing, and gossip/rumor

(Craffert 2008, 105-123) – constructing knowledge about, in our case, a shamanic figure. Viewed from this perspective then, gossip is plausibly seen as an important part of the very cultural events that it emerges from, as well as the construal of cultural personages associated with such events. It is now, a matter of determining how, or better, what gossip contributes to the construction of a cultural personage, and to do this by observing how gossip is operative with other social-cultural dynamics.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has served to highlight a number of important factors about gossip that are crucial for the construction of a framework with which to approach John's gospel and how Jesus is constituted by gossip as a shamanic figure. At bottom, the embeddedness of gossip in the cultural fabric of traditional cultures serves notice of the importance of attuning one's gaze to the intricacies of communication in its various forms, even those that are apparently banal or even superfluous.

Gossip is shown to function in everyday community life in a number of ways including reporting news, maintaining social hierarchy and moral status quo, and this in agonistic social-cultural contexts characterized by competition over reputation and status. Gossip emerges whenever managed impressions or expectations of persons – words uttered or deeds done in public – are undercut by their actions, and so may be seen as a first-order response to make sense of ambiguity caused by non-conventional public behavior. In other words, gossip functions to construct reality as it seeks to make sense of ambiguous events, and so (re)construct established structures and assumptions, that is, to maintain the status quo. Indeed, another way to put it is to say gossip often functions

as the initial stage of a process of social domestication in response to unexpected words or deeds that call into question, or cut against the grain of the establish order. Often involved with this element of gossip are the practices of stereotyping and labeling.

The above analysis also demonstrates the intricate relation between gossip and the pivotal value of honor in traditional cultures. Gossip serves often to affirm the transaction of honor or shame. Moreover, it will be demonstrated later that gossip even plays a direct/active part in the agonistic game of challenge-riposte. In any event, the reporting of the outcome of honor transactions assists in establishing leaders for groups and communities. This implies the value of gossip for controlling information towards specific ends. In other words, one who initiates a gossip event is in a position to control the construction of reality depending on what information s/he communicates, and to whom the information is articulated. Thus, the role gossip plays in not only (re)constructing reality, but also in constituting persons by means of stereotyping, labeling, or honor challenges.

As far as identifying a gossip event in John's gospel goes, Rohrbaugh's summary of the types of gossip is particularly helpful for classifying a particular gossip text, while his lexicon of words signaling gossip are likewise, quite useful in securing whether a text reflects a gossip event or not. In light of the above analysis of the features of gossip events, the following is offered as a provisional definition of gossip to guide this project:

Gossip is a face-to-face communication involving at least two persons, two groups, or a single group, engaged in transacting information, either positive or negative in character, about a third-party subject who is either actually absent or rendered absent to the conversation. A gossip encounter occurs as a response to a generative event, or

reports about such an event, that undercuts or challenges the established social-cultural expectations of persons, in an attempt to (re)assert or (re)construct reality. Part-and-parcel to the (re)construction of reality that gossip intends to service, is the part it plays in constituting the third-party subject as a social personage.

CHAPTER THREE

GOSSIP AND THE SHAMANIC COMPLEX

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this project is to learn how gossip in John's gospel contributes to the process of constituting Jesus as a shamanic figure. Toward that end, it is here presupposed that the gossip texts in John are *about* a shamanic figure. This presupposition is following Craffert's work as it is borne out in his monograph *Life of a Galilean Shaman* (2008) in which he identifies the cross-cultural type of a shaman as that which best describes Jesus in light of *all* of the data that we have access to about him in the Gospels. In other words, the shamanic figure according to Craffert, accounts best for the variety of features and functions that are ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels and "can even offer explanatory power to understand the cultural dynamics of such a figure behind the gospel reports" (2008, 139).

The purpose of this chapter is ultimately to lay out the elements (features and functions) of the shamanic complex identified by Craffert that are ascribed to Jesus in the FG by means of various cultural processes, but with an eye toward the cultural process of gossip. Thus, this chapter is concerned with the features and functions normally associated with the shamanic complex which are ascribed to Jesus in the gospels as this is borne out in Craffert's work. This step is a necessary provision for ultimately seeing gossip's role in ascribing such features and functions to Jesus in John's gospel.

The chapter will proceed by reviewing Craffert's work in identifying Jesus as a Galilean shaman. This will entail a brief survey of (1) the context of Craffert's proposal, that is, the historical Jesus conversation, (2) Craffert's methodology, (3) the shamanic complex, and (4) the features and functions of a shamanic type figure normally ascribed to Jesus in the gospels. This survey will thus, pay close attention to *where* gossip fits within the model employed by Craffert, for although Craffert recognizes that gossip indeed plays a pivotal role in constituting Jesus as a shamanic figure, the scope of his work does not call for a detailed analysis of how gossip as it emerges in numerous texts, actually does this. Therefore, the survey of Craffert's work will not simply constitute a rehearsal of work already accomplished, but will rather be a concise appraisal in order to facilitate the project of understanding gossip's role in constituting Jesus as a shamanic figure. The idea here is to provide the necessary information needed to finally advance a framework, or model for understanding how gossip functions in the multifaceted process of constituting a social personage like a shamanic figure.

3.2 The Context of Craffert's Work

In order to gain some understanding of the significance of Craffert's proposals, it is necessary to see how his work fits generally within the overarching historical Jesus conversation. Only then is it possible to appreciate the extent to which he pushes the conversation away from the prevailing paradigms of historical-positivism and post modernism into what Craffert asserts to be a culturally sensitive procedure for engaging ancient texts, that is, within the framework of an "anthropological-historical perspective" (2008, xiii).

3.2.1 Current Historical Jesus Research

Craffert avers the situation of modern historians, social scientists, and humanities scholars as one demanding that the “discourse of ontological pluralism” be dealt with, and this since the postmodern landscape itself is characterized by a “plurality of viewpoints” and a “multiplicity of reality systems” (2008, xv). This is alternative to the ontological monism that ostensibly absorbs the otherness of the “other” in order to domesticate the other, and so make the other manageable and understandable within the worldview framing modern historiography. In other words, this alternative emerged due to the fact that the cultural and reality constructs of modern scientific societies cannot make sense of ancient texts that emerged from ancient cultural systems with different reality constructs based on vastly different worldviews (2008, xv-xvi).

The problem with modern historiography as it is concerned with historical Jesus research, is that it is too deeply ensconced in its positivistic/postmodern historiographical continuum that masters, absorbs, and reduces the “other” to “the same” (2008, 3). On the one hand, traditional historiography is overly optimistic about the ability of multifaceted methodologies and rigorously controlled research to produce objective knowledge about a directly knowable past (2008, 5). On the other hand, postmodern historiography makes the historian “master of ceremonies” as s/he wields the “power of reality and interpretation” by seeing him or herself as a maker of reality (2008, 7). Either way, it is empiricism as each maintains mastery of the “other” by different means of domestication.

What this translates into as far as the historical Jesus conversation is concerned is fetishism of texts and textuality, and a(n) (over) reliance on methodologies that in varying

ways and degrees rely on what Craffert calls the “authenticity paradigm” in order to evince a “historical Jesus” that is in varying degrees removed from the first-century Mediterranean social-cultural context and worldview of first-century Palestine (2008, 40). Ironically, the current paradigm of historical Jesus research is marked by a consistency in that there is (has always been) a multiplicity of images of Jesus emerging from the work, and a remarkable uniformity insofar as the use of positivistic methodologies goes (2008, 35-40). In other words, while the same authenticity paradigm drives the positivistic methodologies utilized by various scholars in the conversation, the results are nevertheless, quite disparate.

Chief among Craffert’s concerns as far as the results of the reigning paradigm go is that Jesus, as he is portrayed in the Gospels, is by methodological presupposition *not* similar to the “real” Jesus (2008, 39). Another concern is that in order to get at the real Jesus, modern historiography focuses on stratifying the ancient texts in search of the most “authentic” snippets of material conveying data (words and/or deeds) about Jesus (2008, 38). What is left is very little gospel material, and a number of rather truncated portraits of Jesus that are, to greater and lesser degrees, somewhat removed from the first-century Mediterranean world. The presumption of this methodology is that it imagines a linear developmental process was involved in the creation of the Gospels. That is, from a single original event emerged traditions that were by various ways and means, adapted creatively by the authors, which resulted in the inclusion of data about Jesus that either does not reflect what was actually/originally said or happened, or that probably reflects what actually/originally occurred. The driving questions behind the reigning paradigm are shared by all practitioners of it – what materials in the Gospels reflect what was

actually said and done by Jesus? The results are a number of portraits of Jesus, in other words, a variety of answers to the same questions.

In the end, the results that come out of the reigning paradigm give too little attention to either the cultural singularity of the events described in the Gospels because it does not attend to the cultural realities and worldview of the text, or the socially constructed cultural systems that are fundamental to the texts.

3.3 Anthropological Historiography: Cultural Bundubashing

Since the present track of the historical Jesus conversation cannot deal with the sources in a culturally sensitive manner, what is called for is a sort of historiography that can, namely, Anthropological Historiography. As an alternative to the reigning authenticity paradigm of historical Jesus research, Craffert offers a methodology he imagines metaphorically as a sort of off-road driving he calls “cultural bundubashing” (2008, 77-100).³

3.3.1 Cultural Bundubashing for a Shamanic Figure

In contrast to the reigning paradigm, cultural bundubashing presumes that reality is socially and culturally constructed, and thus that the gospels are “cultural artifacts produced by and in the sphere of a particular cultural system,” and are subsequently “connected to a social personage and to a particular sociohistorical setting” by means of various cultural fibers (2008, 16).

³ Craffert’s off-roading metaphor “bundubashing” is to be seen relative to N.T. Wright’s description of the two alternative “routes” or roads employed in historical Jesus research as the *Wredebahn* that is characterized principally by the excision of materials toward an “authentic core,” and the *Schweitzerbahn* – or *Schweitzerstrasse* – that is concerned with situating Jesus plausibly within his first-century “Judaic” context (Wright 1996, 28-124).

Cultural bundubashing is not interested in establishing as nearly as possible what actually happened or not, but rather seeks to establish “cultural plausibility” and “contextual particularity” by means of “thick description,” that is, describing to modern Western-European persons those cultural elements that are presumed or understood in the high-context culture of the first-century Mediterranean (2008, 78). The precise method for getting at “what essentially happened” as well as the “meaning of things” is called “abduction,” that is, a “process of reasoning from hypothesis to data and back as many times as necessary to gain insight” (2008, 79-82). In other words, it is reasoning toward a hypothesis (a social type model) by attending to any number of clues (imagined as fibers in a cable-like structure) as to what or who the stories in the Gospels are about, rather than excising most clues from the database as inauthentic (2008, 80). The clues, or fibers, are identified as specific “features and functions” that make sense within the framework of the social type model. The hypothesis that Jesus can be seen as a shamanic type figure (2008, 82) is corroborated by clues, that is, certain features and functions that subsequently make sense within the initial framework of the hypothesis. Thus, in its effort to offer a construal of Jesus, cultural bundubashing reads the text in light of a pre-established social type (a shaman), then attending to the sources for any number of cultural clues (features and functions) that in turn, offer insight into Jesus as a shamanic figure; from hypothesis – to text – back to hypothesis – back to text, and so forth.

An obvious strength of this methodology is its built-in, back-and-forth corroborative orientation, that is, its action of building layers (cultural clues) toward historical plausibility. This is expressed by Craffert who iterates that “[t]he plausibility of specific events or phenomena is dependent on the truth of the overall hypothesis (Jesus

as a shaman), while such a hypothesis can only be evaluated by testing the plausibility and possibility of specific elements (features and functions)” (2008, 126; parenthesis mine).

Recalling the driving question behind the reigning authenticity paradigm – what materials in the Gospels reflect what was actually said and done by Jesus? – the question asked by Anthropological Historiography and cultural bundubashing comes into sharper focus, that is, “what are the cultural stories in the gospels about?” Craffert clarifies the relation between this alternative question and the process of cultural bundubashing:

It is necessary to know about Jesus’s social type in order to understand the Gospel pictures about him, but that cannot be understood without a glimpse of his social type. Put the other way around, in order to know what the literary texts are talking about, it is necessary to have a grasp of the cultural plausibilities of the historical figure, while an understanding of the documents as reporting about a specific social personage is presupposed in reading them. (2008, 81-81)

Thus, cultural bundubashing encounters the same material and data as the historian working under the reigning paradigm, but equipped with an alternative route, that is, a sociological framework for understanding the material, and that accounts for both the historical figure and the evidence evincing the figure. In other words, it explains “the shape, content, and nature of the documentary evidence,” and accounts for the “nature, origin, and character of the historical figure reported in the text” (2008, 82).

3.3.2 Cultural Artifacts Describing Cultural Processes and Dynamics

Anthropological Historiography presupposes that the gospels are cultural artifacts containing cultural stories about cultural events which are fundamentally connected to the social personage (2008, 92) who was, according to the perspective of this project, the generative cause behind the emergence of such stories in the first place. As Craffert

appropriately imagines it, the social personage and the literary documents were configurations of each other and connected via the cultural processes that constitute the social personage (2008, 93). Thus, the texts, as cultural artifacts, must be examined in terms of the various social processes and dynamics that link them to the social personage. It is specifically at this point where one can see where gossip fits constituting a shamanic figure, that is, as one of several social processes ultimately linking the literary texts to the social personage. Craffert sees three interconnected processes involved in constituting Jesus as a shamanic figure: (1) *constituting* a historical figure, (2) *communicating* a historical figure, and (3) *enscripturing* a historical figure (2008, 102-123).

3.3.2.1 Constituting a Cultural Personage

Constituting a cultural personage involves several elements. First, the experiencing and sharing of experiences of complex multifaceted cultural events are understood as part of the very creation, and so the reality of the cultural events within a particular cultural system (2008, 103-104). What this means is that cultural events are only fully constituted as (real) events within a cultural system by means of community participation, specifically, the principle sharing of the experience of an event. This of course implies subjective multiple retelling of such experiences and thus, multioriginality of an event in such a way that there is no single accessible version of “what happened.” Thus, a real cultural event “is only fully constituted and knowable in its collective experiencing, telling, and retelling” (2008, 104). It will be proposed later on that John’s gospel offers evidence that gossip was likely a catalytic component of such “collective

experiencing, telling, and retelling” and one that was often operative at the very initial phases of the constituting of a cultural event as a real and knowable event.

A second element of constituting a social personage identified by Craffert is the “legitimation and affirmation of identity,” or in other words, the ascription of honor or shame. The important connection between gossip and the public processes/dynamics involved with the transaction of the pivotal value in an agonistic social-cultural context has already been suggested above, and will be further illustrated when the details of gossip events on John are considered below. At this point it is significant to note that of the twenty or so specific texts cited by Craffert to illustrate “legitimation” in the gospels, nine of them are “gossip texts” (2008, n.4, 109).⁴

The third element is rumoring and gossiping as both of these processes are seen as partially constituting Jesus as a social personage, and doing this by constructing Jesus, in a literal sense, as a cultural figure (2008, 110). Craffert recognizes that gossip and rumors add biographical data insofar as they suggest “how things were” in his daily life, that is, a life marked by his experience of, among other things, social processes like gossip (2008, 110). Thus, in a very exact sense, gossip is acknowledged by Craffert as a constituent part, along with other processes, of the construction of the reality surrounding the social personage of Jesus, that was in turn subject to the same procedures of experiencing, telling, retelling, and so the characteristics of multioriginality that were all involved in constituting cultural events and cultural reality. In other words, like cultural events, Jesus as a social personage was certainly constituted by a communal process based on subjective cultural experiences of cultural events, thus implying there is no

⁴ Mark 1:27-28, 45; Matt 4:24; 9:31; 12:23; 14:1; Luke 4:22, 36; 7:17.

singular, “original” Jesus, but rather the social personage who is only fully constituted by means of the intricate processes of experiencing, telling, and retelling.

A fourth element involved in constituting Jesus as a social personage is visioning and prophesying Jesus (2008, 110-112), that is, experiences which were not Jesus’ alone, but were a component of his followers’ activities both during and after his lifetime. This element involves Alternate States of Consciousness experiences (ASC) that played a part in establishing certain properties of Jesus as a social personage (2008, 111).

3.3.2.2 Communicating a Social Personage

As far as communicating a social personage is concerned, what is under consideration are cultural mechanisms and dynamics of the traditioning process. In traditional societies, stories that nurture the identity of a group are recited and repeated in what amounts to a form of community control over the truth by various means (2008, 117). Within the framework of cultural bundubashing, although such control is exercised over orally transmitted information, it should not be imagined as “authentic nuggets.” Instead, what is conveyed is information about a social personage. In other words, since it is not the case that Jesus’ followers were conveying “authentic nuggets” of information (again, multioriginality and communally constructed reality), what they were conveying was information about a social personage, namely, a Galilean shaman (2008, 117-118).

3.3.2.3 Enscripturating a Social Personage

The third process involved in constituting Jesus as a shamanic figure is that of enscripturation, and thus brings attention to the cultural processes involved in the creation

of literary documents about such a figure. Important here is the appreciation of how the written versions of the Jesus traditions, including the gospels, are understood as a continuation of the previous two processes (constituting and communicating a social personage) rather than the end product (2008, 119). By surveying recent research, Craffert reiterates how oral and written processes went on concurrently well into the second century CE (2008, 119-120). This implies that the procedures of enscripturing cultural stories about a cultural figure were as fluid and dynamic as the oral ones, and in any case, about a shamanic figure.

In the view of cultural bundubashing, the communal memory about Jesus held by the earliest followers consisted of culturally construed material about a culturally construed social figure which was subjected to the selection, editing, and arranging *not of* “*authentic*” *nuggets of information*, but of material *about* a shamanic figure (2008, 121). Therefore, older written traditions about Jesus are no more significant for understanding Jesus than later ones, since the written material conveys the same sort of information as that of the oral procedures, namely, information about a social personage, and this because, like the oral processes involved, written texts about Jesus are culturally constituted “residues” about a shamanic figure (2008, 122).

3.3.3 Features and Functions of a Shamanic Figure

Craffert articulates a cross-cultural definition of a shaman that refers to “religious entrepreneurs” who perform various functions (healing, divination, etc.) that are based on ASCs, for their particular community (2008, 166). Accordingly, shamanism is “constituted by a combination of elements...that exist independently elsewhere but are

integrated in this complex with a particular worldview, and that validate specific techniques” (2008, 167).

The elements, or “features and functions” of a shamanic figure that are associated with ASCs are referred to as the “shamanic complex.” Craffert describes the complex:

[A] family of features that, as a regularly occurring pattern in many cultural systems, consists of a specific configuration of certain characteristics (ASC experiences such as visions, possession, or journeys) and certain social functions (such as healing, divination, exorcism, and control of spirits) that flow from these experiences. (2008, 135)

It is the combination of a number of characteristics that constitutes the shamanic complex, that is, a combination of regularly occurring features and functions that do not appear in such a pattern among other social types like priests, healers, or rabbis (2008, 135).

The definition of a shaman and the correlative pattern of various features and functions, do not together constitute a monolithic construct, but rather a “homomorphic model” that is adaptable to, and so remade in various historical and cultural settings but in a way that maintains the general pattern (2008, 155). In other words, the shamanic complex refers to “constellations” of an assortment of features and functions that emerge in different combinations in different cultural systems, but maintaining the general pattern (ASC – features & functions) (2008, 167).

As they are applied to Jesus, the foundational feature of a shamanic figure are various ASCs, such as visions and spirit-possession (e.g., Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; Matt 3:16; et al), or shamanic journey experiences (e.g., John 1:18; 3:13; cf. 2 Cor 12:2-4; Rev 1:10; 4:1; 17:3; 21:10; et al) as such experiences are components of the first-century Mediterranean’s polyphasic worldview (2008, 157-159). The salient functions associated

with a shamanic figure as they are applied to Jesus include healing, exorcism, control of spirits, exorcism, control of weather, divination, teaching, preaching, prophetic activities, and protection of the community (2008, 159-163). Several of the features and functions of a shamanic figure will be shown later to emerge along with gossip texts in John.

3.4 Summary

Reports about gossip and gossip events in John not only have something to do with social values and conventions, and the worldview of the first-century Mediterranean, but also carry with/in them clues to how Jesus is constituted as a shamanic figure. The fundamental clues, “features and functions” that constitute Jesus as a shamanic figure and which have been explored and elaborated by Craffert, can thus be carefully deployed as signals to look out for in the FG in order to home-in on how Jesus is construed as a shamanic figure in John’s gospel. The utilization of such clues, that is, the tracing out of the various features and functions of a shaman that are related somehow to a gossip report or encounter in John, must be handled in a particular way.

As mentioned above, and will be made clear when considering specific gossip events in John, the text contains clues to a number of components of a particular social type that are central to constituting Jesus as a shaman. The way this material is handled is crucial since it is not a goal to suggest that the Fourth Evangelist was interested in constructing Jesus as a shamanic figure within the story-world of the FG. Rather, presupposing that the gossip in John highlights, or is operative in some form or fashion with a number of components indicative of a particular social personage (a shaman), the goal here is to understand how gossip constitutes such a personage by underscoring those

components as they either emerge or are affirmed within the particular social-cultural matrix along side of, or by means of a particular social-cultural communicative process itself embedded in, or in concert with other social dynamics.

Craffert's work succeeds in demonstrating that specific recorded events and phenomena ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels plausibly belong to the biography of a particular historical character and are thus, components of a particular type of life (2008, 98). The shamanic complex proscribed by Craffert provides a mechanism for understanding and interpreting such events and phenomena, and part of the model is gossip. As a socially and culturally embedded process involved in constituting social personages, gossip can be seen as a plausible indicator of how what Jesus said and did, were and are to be understood (2008, 310) as the words and deeds of a shamanic figure.

CHAPTER FOUR

FRAMING GOSSIP IN THE SOCIAL WORLD OF JESUS

4.1 Introduction

In order to come to terms with the role gossip played in constituting Jesus as a shamanic figure in John, it is necessary to determine what to look out for in texts that reflect gossip about Jesus. Each of the twenty-five gossip events (texts that are gossip) that one encounters in the FG reflect the first-century Mediterranean world-view, and have something to do with the social values and conventions of that world. Since it is presupposed that the gossip in John is about a shamanic figure, of particular interest for this project is how gossip reports or gossip encounters in John play a part in constituting Jesus as a shaman within the ancient world-view and by means of particular social dynamics reflecting certain values and conventions. Moreover, since the gossip in John reflects a particular kind of social communicative process that is operative with and within other social processes and matrixes, it will be useful to carefully describe the various elements of the social structure, as well as the fundamental core values and presuppositions that intersect with one another in various gossip reports or encounters throughout. Thus, by linking social values and conventions of Jesus' time and place with notions of personhood, also of Jesus' time and place, gossip may be seen playing its part in constructing a rounded character thoroughly grounded in the social-cultural system and world-view of his day.

It is important to recall throughout that gossip is only one of a number of cultural processes that convey values and conventions in the first-century Mediterranean, and one that underscores the peculiarly oral character of Jesus' world. That Jesus' world was an oral world is a contentious topic among scholars. Gerhardsson, for example, considers Jesus' society to be distinctively non-oral (2005, 13), and one where the chief concern of the teacher's (Jesus') disciples was the transmission of *haggadic* material committed to memory first, then enscriptured in a way that reflects a professional pedagogical context (2005, 14, 18). On the other hand, Dunn suggests that not only was Jesus' world an oral world, but one wherein the traditioning processes involved "oral performances" of Jesus' words and deeds, that is, public "tellings" characterized by a free creativity with the oral material that may even account for the variance in the written traditions (Dunn 2003, 150-152). Thus, Dunn goes so far as to propose a sort of "oral writing," or retelling in "oral mode," on the part of the evangelists, thus constituting a "second orality" (Dunn 2003, 163).

The angle on the question of the orality of Jesus' world taken by Craffert and Botha is informed by social-cultural aspects, thus considering that a Galilean "peasant pedagogy" based on survival is suggestive of a culture that at least places literacy – in terms of reading and writing – at the back of the line of peasant priorities (2005, 26). At best then, Jesus' "literacy" was a "crude literacy" involving recitation and the recognition of various symbols and marks, all related to his peasant livelihood (2005, 28, 31). In any case, gossip in the first-century Mediterranean was a phenomenon that, as the research here will bear out, most often involved the initial emergence and construction of the reality of generative events, Jesus' words and deeds (cf. 2.5.3 above), and was thus a

process at home in either a primarily oral, or non-oral world. That said, the evidence of gossip and rumor in the FG, representing as it does enscriptured records of oral events, is understood here as indicative of a primarily oral world that was Jesus' world.

Again, gossip is a unique, communicative event that involves not only critical assessment of a subject, but also, and precisely because it is a common tool for sharing experiences, the construction of the generative event, and the subject, as well as the subsequent (re)construction of the social matrix (reality) within which the subject and the communicants operate. In critically assessing a subject, and so contributing to the ongoing social construction of the subject, gossip should be seen working with a number of other social-cultural processes within a thoroughly oral culture.

This chapter is concerned with first describing a number of elements of the social matrix, social processes and values closely involved in constituting social personages, with an eye toward those that will be later shown emerging in the various gossip texts in John. Second, this chapter will illustrate a conceptual framework, or "model" if you will, of gossip in order to envisage how the social process operates with other social processes within the agonistic context of an honor-shame society toward constituting a social personage. Such processes and values include principally labeling, stereotyping, anti-language, and honor/shame (challenge/riposte). Moreover, certain systematic elements of the first-century Mediterranean culture function as social matrices within which these processes are worked out. Foundational elements of the social matrix include collectivism, familism, in-group/out-group dynamics, dyadism, social identity (in-group and public), which will be highlighted here in order to construct a cultural backdrop before which sense can be made of the various processes.

In sum then, the goal of this chapter is to describe certain elements of the social structure of Jesus' world, including core values, presuppositions, and various social dynamics in order to provide a framework within which gossip events in John can be made sense of. Subsequently, gossip's function in relation to relevant core values, presuppositions, and dynamics will be drawn out in anticipation of what will be described in greater detail when the various gossip texts in John are dealt with.

4.2 Elements of the First Century Mediterranean Social World

The objective at this point is to establish a view of the first-century Mediterranean social world in order to (re)contextualize the reading within that world's high-context culture, and thus offer a thick description to bring cultural details to light that are not obvious to the modern, Western perspective, and to relate these details to gossip. It is presumed here that establishing such a view will assist in highlighting the cultural peculiarities of gossip in the first-century Mediterranean as this is borne out by the gossip encounters in John's gospel. What will also become clear is the place the pivotal value of honor plays in driving nearly every social element of the first-century Mediterranean. It is necessary as well, to note that while the presentation of various social-cultural elements, relational dynamics, core values and the like is done in outline fashion, the reality was that all of these functioned together intricately in ways that would not have been readily stratified by observation.

Finally, coming to some understanding of the contours of the social world, implies some understanding of the ancient personality. The sources that are used to construct the ancient Mediterranean social world are principally three: the encomium of

the *progymnasmata*, the forensic public defense speech, and ancient writings called *physiognomonica* (Malina and Neyrey 1996). The encomium, or “speech of praise,” was a genre of rhetoric taught to ancient youths by means of rule-books for how to write, such as Menander Rhetor’s *Treatise*, called the “*progymnasmata*” – that is, the rules for composition. From these instructions on how to write the encomium, we learn the desirable qualities in a person that deserved praise and were often articulated in stereotypical fashion. Students of encomia were taught to look for information according to five basic categories: Origin, nurture and training, accomplishments, grounds for comparison, and noble death or posthumous honors (Neyrey 2007c, 533; Malina and Neyrey 1996, 23-24). Thus, the encomium “constitutes a native’s view of what was deemed important to know about a person in antiquity,” but only as that person was embedded in his/her particular group, ethnic or otherwise (Malina and Neyrey 1996, 33, 51).

The second source is the public defense speech which was constructed to make the best possible showing for a person in a forensic setting. Thus, such speech may be seen as a framework within which to apply categorical elements utilized in encomia, in order to present someone in a positive light. The ancient authors Cicero and Quintilian are representative of this sort of writing.

A third source for the ancient personality is a body of literature called *physiognomonica* that dealt with “how to understand the nature of human beings in terms of their gender, their group and place of origin, and their appearance” (Malina and Neyrey 1996, 108). The idea behind this literature was that by understanding these things, one could establish the character of any person. Again, this literature dealt with

personal character in terms of stereotypes as was common in the ancient Mediterranean. The influence of physiognomic literature was widespread as it can be found in treatises by Maximus of Tyre, Lucian, Dio Chrysostom, and many others. Pseudo-Aristotle's *Physiognomics* is a primary example of this sort of literature.

4.2.1 Collectivist Orientation and Embeddedness

As much work has been done recently to bring the social world of the Gospels to bear on interpretation of the text, the key characteristic of *collectivism* has rightly set a framework around our understanding of the relation between the ancient individual and her/his surrounding social world, and is described as “the belief that the groups in which a person is embedded are each and singly ends in themselves” (Malina 1996, 79). The descriptor “collectivist” when applied to the ancient Mediterranean refers to the most “elementary unit of social analysis” (Malina 1996, 38), namely, the dyadic person. The dyadic, or collectivist person is one who is always connected to another individual and group/social unit, and in such a way that the individual's identity is construed by the group rather than the individual as it is in a modern Western perspective. Indeed, ancient persons defined themselves exclusively in terms of their embeddedness within their group, and in a way that has been described aptly as a “sequence of embeddedness” (Malina 1996, 41; Malina and Neyrey 1996, 157). Embeddedness here refers to “a psycho-social quality describing that dimension of group-oriented persons by which all members share a common perspective” (Malina and Neyrey 1996, 158). The sequential character of this particular quality has been vividly expressed by ancient authors such as Plutarch who in his *Dialogue on Love* clearly describes embeddedness sequentially: “The nurse rules the

infant, the teacher the boy, the gymnasiarch the youth, his admirer the young man who, when he comes of age, is ruled by law and his commanding general. No one is his own master, no one is unrestricted” (Plutarch, *Mor.* 9.754D). In other words, the collectivist self overlaps the group from/to which the self belongs, and is thus “‘set in relation’ to others” and “‘set within’ a given social background” (Malina and Neyrey 1996, 157).

The extent of an individual’s embeddedness has been described as that individual’s “virtual identity with the group” to which s/he belongs (Malina and Neyrey 1996, 158). Such embeddedness of ego in the group meant that when one stepped outside of one’s group, s/he represented principally, the group, and so every action taken or word said was done as representative of the group (Malina 1996, 50, 81; Malina and Neyrey 1996, 170; Malina and Pilch 2006, 345). To further illustrate this, the first-century Mediterranean “self” was constituted by three distinctive selves: the private self, the public self, and the collective-in-group self (Malina 1996, 83-85; Malina and Pilch 2006, 344; Rohrbaugh 2007, 69). Such a person, being a dyadic person whose self-understanding was identified and shaped by a group, was least concerned with who s/he thinks s/he is, but was most assuredly concerned with who the group thinks s/he is. Thus, it is the collectivist, in-group self that overrides the private self. Indeed, in the ancient collectivist culture, it was considered honorable to conceal the private self since any assertions of one’s uniqueness was seen to betray a lack of loyalty to the in-group, which was of course, paramount (Rohrbaugh 2007, 70).

Rohrbaugh has convincingly demonstrated the importance of understanding the difference between the collectivist in-group self and the private self in a study of what Jesus knew about himself (2007, 61-76). In it, Rohrbaugh asks what information Jesus

was seeking when he asked his disciples “Who do people say that I am?” at Mark 8:27-30 (2007, 73). Rather than testing his disciple’s knowledge about his identity, Rohrbaugh suggests Jesus seeks to find out how his public self is matching-up vis-à-vis his in-group self by following the question concerning his public self – “Who do people say that I am?” (Mark 8:27) – with a question regarding his in-group self, that is, “Who do you say I am?” (Mark 8:29). Rohrbaugh summarizes the dynamic: “In other words, what the anecdote narrates is Jesus asking an in-group *to identify both his public self and his in-group self*. *Conspicuous by its absence, however, is any talk whatsoever about Jesus’s private self, either from the disciples or from Jesus*” (2007, 74).

Subsequently, since the definitions of one’s in-group and public self matched, as everyone in the ancient world would have expected, then the individual person not only carried with them the reputation and status of their group, but was also expected to protect that status in the public sphere. In other words, since first-century Mediterranean persons were “sons and daughters of certain fathers and mothers whose honor and shame engulf them” (Malina 1996, 52), it followed that any construal rendered about an individual in public, was understood as a construal rendered about the group which the individual publicly “represented” (Triandis 1993, 368). Since the primary family group and the extended family provided the principle social, economic, and religious networking for persons, this kind of collectivist self-understanding and embeddedness, at the level of virtual identities, was essential for preserving the group’s physical, social, and moral integrity (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 88-89).

Embeddedness was experienced in the first-century Mediterranean over a range of in-groups. In other words, persons were often members of a number of groups to which

they offered varying degrees of loyalty. Relative to the primary family in-group, such “fictive” kin-groups included coalitions, factions, work associations, village and polis (Malina and Neyrey 1996, 158). The first and most important group was the family or kin-group based on nurturing or biological reproduction, and was recognized as the central institution that maintained societal existence (Malina 1996, 45). Thus, other groups or social relations that persons might have been a part of were modeled after the family or household, and included embracing certain values supported by socialization patterns typical of most family in-groups such as “obedience, duty, sacrifice for the group, cooperation, favoritism toward the in-group, acceptance of in-group authorities, nurturing, and interdependence” (Triandis 1993, 368). Persons entered into fictive kin-groups through social relationships such as membership, discipleship, and clientelism (Malina and Neyrey 1996, 160).

A particular type of fictive kin-group that has been understood most adequately to describe Jesus and his disciples is a form of coalition called a “faction” (Malina 1996, 163-165; Malina and Pilch 2008, 193). A faction is a group personally recruited by an individual to help in conflictive competition with other groups and/or factions for limited goods for a definitive amount of time. Thus, rivalry within an agonistic setting is constitutive of a faction and the experience of its members who are bound to one another in exclusive loyalty to the leader. Because of the relatively limited lifespan of the faction, the over-arching goal is not the maintenance/nurturing of the faction, but rather the realization of the goals of its leader. In other words, while for most in-groups in the first-century Mediterranean, self-identity was sequentially embedded in the group and its members, and carried with it various roles toward the nurturing of the group, the faction

member's self identity was sequentially embedded in the core group around the identity of the leader.

In sum, understanding the relational fabric of a collectivist, group oriented culture is important for understanding gossip encounters at several levels. First, at the level of a generative event, since an individual's way of interacting with others in public is scripted according to stereotyped expectations based on family/group membership (lineage), geographical origin, and the like, whenever someone acted outside the confines of the script, then that would likely have generated a gossip event. Such an event would have prompted observer-participants to begin the sense-making process in terms of the social-cultural map available to them. Second, given the dyadic character of the Mediterranean group-oriented self, an individual's public actions would have reflected directly onto the family or group to which s/he was attached since the public self matched the collective, in-group self. Likewise, and with reference to the pre-scripting described in the first level above, public knowledge of one's family or group would have constructed expectations to be either affirmed, thus maintaining the status quo, or disconfirmed and so reconfiguring the social map. Third, that Jesus' primary in-group was likely a faction implies a conflictive aspect to any generative event, and so likely the subsequent, negative assessment of the event as well as the subject of the gossip. As will become clear however, negative appraisal is not always the result of a gossip-generating event in John's gospel.

4.2.2 Anti-Language

Because of their emergence from out of conflictive contexts, factions would often develop their own language, or even inscribe alternative meanings to words and concepts that they shared with other groups they were competing with. This is referred to as “anti-language” which, like language for the larger social context, actively creates and maintains reality for an anti-society that has emerged as an alternative to the prevailing one (Halliday 1976, 576). In creating this alternative reality, the anti-language re-lexicalizes words and meanings in a way that makes sense to members of the anti-society or faction (Halliday 1976, 571).

Examples of anti-language are plentiful in John’s gospel and also illustrative of the results following the use of anti-language in a public setting where the prevailing system of meaning is in force. In essence, what occurs is a collision of symbolic worlds that results in tension and conflict. One obvious example of anti-language and its effects is reported in John 6:22-59, the “‘Bread of Life’ discourse,” where the use of the alternative language results in misunderstanding and conflict.

In the high context culture of the ancient Mediterranean, anti-language functioned as the bearer of social and cultural reality for the group using it. Thus, because the anti-language carried with it an alternative construal of society and culture, it served to re-socialize and reaffirm the alternative socialization of the members of the group or faction. In this way, the constant use of anti-language in the context of a faction would function to strengthen the solidarity of the group and nurture its perception of reality.

It will become clear as this project proceeds, that the use of anti-language in John’s gospel is closely related to the emergence of gossip events since when utilized in

public, anti-language and the meanings embedded in it, collided with customary uses and meanings of words and phrases. Thus, cutting against the grain of established and customary use of language, the public use of anti-language can plausibly be seen as a generative event for the materialization of gossip.

4.2.3 Group Perception and Stereotyping

First-century Mediterraneans perceived the world with reference to their broad ethnic group as the center of that world (Malina 1996, 39), and so subsequently with reference to their various in-groups. Such an ethnocentric viewpoint, which was operative at the level of both kin-groups and fictive kin-groups, lead to a number of distinctive, dynamic ways that groups assessed themselves as well as outsiders. One particular dynamic of interest here is stereotyping.

Stereotyping involved assessment of outsiders or ethnic groups from a social viewpoint, and was itself an attempt to construct a sensible, cognitive map of the world (Malina and Neyrey 1996, 169-170). Such a map allowed groups to know what to expect of outsiders and how to assess them in a relatively simplified way. Stereotypes came in various forms including ethnic stereotypes that often carried with them labels conveying either positive or negative traits, thus adding to the construction of a person (Malina and Neyrey 1996, 171). For example, Virgil quite easily generalizes about the character of “the Greeks” by means of a sweeping comment: “Hear now the treachery of the Greeks and from one learn the wickedness of all” (Virgil, *Aen.* 2.65). To be sure, this led to the division of people into “us” and “them,” insiders and outsiders, “Judeans and Greek” (Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:24; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11), “circumcised and uncircumcised” (Gal 2:7-

8), and the like. Stereotypes were made in terms of geographical origins, as well as status, trade, and even membership in various groups or factions, again the idea being that if one has a manageable, fixed notion about what to expect from someone depending on public perception, then, all the better (Malina and Neyrey 1996, 172).

Another form that stereotyping took was in regard to social roles that generated certain social expectations (Malina and Neyrey 1996, 173-174). Thus, the father and mother had differentiated roles in the context of the family/household. Likewise, in the political sphere were different roles to kings and to governors. In the cultic sphere resided various roles to the high priests and to attendants. Considering the society portrayed in the NT, a number of social roles are described such as scribes, tax collectors, and teachers, each of which implies a particular social class that inscribes onto the social map what to expect and what not to expect from particular persons in public settings, based on their social location (Malina and Neyrey 1996, 174). Thus, within the public sphere, how people related – what they said or did – did not come as a surprise as it was practically scripted. Subsequently again, when a person’s words or deeds publicly deviated from expectations related to their lineage, family/group orientation, or social role status, this would have caused participants and observers to attend to their social-cultural maps in order to make sense.

4.2.4 Labeling and Deviance Labeling

Related to stereotyping is the praxis of identifying a person by means of some trait or behavior called “labeling” (Malina and Neyrey 1988, 35). Labeling was the means by which information about a subject was encoded into stereotypical outlook of the group to

which s/he belonged, and was thus an important element, for better or worse, for shaping a person's identity (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 149).

From a sociological perspective, labeling people is an essential part of every culture arising out of the need to evaluate and assess things (persons) understood to be out of place vis-à-vis the local system of established normative boundaries. In the context of ancient Judaism, such a system was based on the perception of purity and impurity as this correlated to holiness expressed by God in God's created order (Neyrey 1990, 26-29; Malina and Neyrey 1988, 36). Thus, that which deviated from that order was dis-ordered, and so impure. Likewise, persons "saying or doing" things "out of place," and thus socially interpreted to be "out of place" generated negative labels as an act of social retaliation for the deviant behavior, which was considered an acute challenge to honor (Malina and Neyrey 1988, 37).

Negative labeling functioned, among other things, as a "social distancing device" and thus reflected and reaffirmed the ancient perspective of polarities by asserting such polarity in black and white terms, "dividing social categories" into good and evil, believers and unbelievers, honorable and dishonorable (Malina and Neyrey 1988, 37), and so in-group and out-group. Such negative labeling is referred to by sociologists as "deviance accusations" and involved labels such as "sinner" (John 9:16, 24-25), "demon-possessed" (John 7:20), and "not from God" (John 9:16). If this sort of labeling was tendered publicly by persons of high status or power, it could have socially devastating results for the target as it defined the target as "impure," "out of social place," and/or even "permanently deviant" and so functioned well as a social weapon (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 150; Malina and Neyrey 1988, 36-37).

Labeling was not always a negative thing however, since persons could as well be labeled with descriptors or titles that conveyed positive assessments. Thus, for example, in Matthew's gospel, characters are labeled positively no less than 128 times, and so Jesus with labels such as "Son of David" (1:1), "my beloved Son" (3:17), "Son of Man" (8:29), "Lord" (14:28), and many others. The result of such positive acclamations was the opposite of deviance accusations as it played an important part in constituting a person positively rather than negatively.

The individual target of a deviance accusation had several options of recourse with which to respond to the labeling. One could repudiate a label by means of argumentation. One could evade a label by (a) denying responsibility for the deviant behavior, (b) denying injury to anyone because of the behavior, (c) denying there is a victim of the behavior, (d) condemning those doing the accusing, or by (e) appealing to higher loyalty. One could also redefine or reframe a situation so that the deviance behavior may be seen to be appropriate (Malina and Neyrey 1988, 63-65).

Labeling, like stereotyping, carried with it considerable weight in the construction of social personages in the first-century Mediterranean. It will become clear later that such labeling was itself, often a constitutive part of gossip since gossip involved the critical assessment of persons. Whether someone was, because of their behavior, labeled a "sinner" (deviant), or "Son of God," the conveyance of this information via gossip was crucial in constructing a plausible social personage in their proper social-cultural setting.

4.3 Honor: The Pivotal Value of Concern

As mentioned earlier, honor was the single value that drove nearly every element of social relations in the first-century Mediterranean, and this since it was at the center of most if not all of the values held in the ancient world (Malina and Rohrbaugh 2003, 370). The extent to which honor permeated the culture is made clear by many ancient authors. For example, in his *Histories*, Tacitus relates the story of how the emperor Vespasian was approached by two men, one blind and the other with a useless hand, and asked for healing by both. As Tacitus tells of it, Vespasian's concern over honor is prominent: "At first Vespasian ridiculed and repulsed them. They persisted; and he, though on the one hand he feared the scandal of a fruitless attempt, yet, on the other, was induced by entreaties of the men and by the language of his flatterers to hope for success" (Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.81). Aristotle, while writing of the "great-souled man" in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, articulates the superiority of honor as well:

Worth is spoken of with reference to external goods; and the greatest external good we should assume to be what we render to the gods, the good most aimed at by people of worth, the prize for the noblest. Such is honour, since it is the greatest external good. (*Eth. Nic.* 3.1123b)

Because of the preeminence of the concern for honor, and its alternate value, shame, the Mediterranean culture can be described as an honor-shame culture, or society.

Of particular importance for this project is the relation between honor-shame and gossip. Since gossip is not a value subject to the influence of honor, but a social dynamic often operative along with the transaction of the central value, it is vital to understand how gossip functions vis-à-vis honor-shame in constituting social personages. Gossip has already been recognized to work with honor insofar as it carries and so affirms the gains or losses involved in the social transaction of honor or shame, and this often toward

the subsequent identification of leaders (Malina and Rohrbaugh 2003, 366-368; Rohrbaugh 2007, 141-144). The primary concern for this project will not only be with how gossip carries and affirms the results of honor-shame transactions, but also how Jesus is constructed as a shamanic figure by means of various gossip events. Therefore, it will be necessary to attend to how gossip fits within the prominent model(s) of honor-shame, and what information about Jesus emerges from such transactions as this information is conveyed via gossip. Before this can be done, it will be helpful to offer a brief overview of honor-shame and the various social values and dynamics that emerge because of the concern for honor in the ancient Mediterranean.

4.3.1 Honor Defined

The over-arching concern for honor in the ancient and modern Mediterranean world has garnered the attention of anthropologists, such as Pitt-Rivers whose ethnographies of traditional cultures provides clues crucial to understanding the pivotal value in the ancient world (e.g., 1966). In NT studies, it was Malina who brought attention to the significance of honor and shame to the field, and upon which today models are still constructed (1981, 27-57). Understanding honor involves seeing how it both constitutes and impinges upon societies and cultures, and so on how it is that people conduct their lives in particular social matrixes in light of it. Pitt-Rivers iterates this while reflecting on the goal of attaining honor in traditional cultures:

Honour, therefore, provides a nexus between the ideals of a society and their reproduction in the individual through his aspiration to personify them. As such, it implies not merely an habitual preference for a given mode of conduct, but the entitlement to a certain treatment in return. The right to pride is the right to status (in the popular as well as the anthropological sense of the word), and status is established through the recognition of a certain social identity. (1966, 22)

Malina suggests that honor surfaces at the intersection of three critical social features: (a) *authority*, that is, the symbolic reality that controls the behavior of others, (b) *gender status*, that is, the obligations or entitlements that one owes others (or that others owe you) in light of your gender, and (c) *respect*, or, the proper attitude and willingness to behave relative to those one is in service to (1981, 27-29). Thus, where these three features come together, honor emerges as the controlling value of social life around which one conforms one's actions vis-à-vis everyone else's in either an effort to maintain or to claim honor. The key point is that honor is the pivotal value and is something gained or lost only by the affirmation or recognition of the public. With this in view, a most useful definition of honor is proposed by Malina: "Honor is the value of a person in his or her own eyes (that is, one's claim to worth) *plus* that person's value in the eyes of his or her group. Honor is a claim to worth along with the social (public) acknowledgement of worth" (1981, 27; parentheses mine).

4.3.2 Limited Good and Envy in an Agonistic Honor-Shame Culture

Since honor is all about reputation, and is the pivotal value of the Mediterranean world, the acquisition or loss of honor is painstakingly sought after or avoided, and so is intrinsic to an *agonistic* culture. An agonistic honor-shame culture, like first-century Palestine, is one wherein persons are in constant competition (*agon* in Greek) for limited resources, of which honor is one. The foundational backdrop for such an agonistic social matrix may be located in the symbiotic relationship between the village and city in which most people found themselves subject to powerful persons of status outside of their own social realm. Their lives were essentially out of their control, and thus controlled by power

brokers. This “socially limited and determined existence” (Malina 1981, 75), led to a perception that all resources were out of reach, pre-determined, and thus, limited. This outlook of scarcity, that all good things are pre-determined and limited, would subsequently play a role in scripting behavior, thus prompting a fearful, competitive “agonistic outlook” on the world. This is the idea, or perception of “limited good” which prefaced life in the ancient world, and is summarized well by Foster:

The model of cognitive orientation that seems to me best to account for peasant behavior is the “image of Limited Good.” By “Image of Limited Good” I mean that broad areas of peasant behavior are patterned in such fashion as to suggest that peasants view their social, economic, and natural universes – their total environment – as one in which all of the desired things in life such as land, wealth, health, friendship and love, manliness and honor, respect and status, power and influence, security and safety, *exist in finite quantity and are always in short supply*, as far as the peasant is concerned. Not only do these and all other “good things” exist in finite and limited quantities, but in addition *there is no way directly within peasant power to increase the available quantities*. It is the obvious fact of land shortage in a densely populated area applied to all other desired things: not enough to go around. (1965, 296)

In traditional cultures, and the first-century Mediterranean, the idea of limited good perceives all resources, “all of the good things in life” as constituting a closed system that is finite and incapable of expansion, that is, a “small pie” and very few pieces to go around, if any (Foster 1972, 169). Such societies imagine life as a “zero-sum game,” thus every perceived or actual advantage of one person, must necessarily imply the loss to someone else or even a group (Foster 1972, 168; Malina 1981, 75).

Much in the same way that honor may be seen as a value controlling people’s actions and words, the same controlling characteristics are in place for the idea of limited good since it is the impulse for honor-shame. In other words, social institutions, personal behavior, values, and personality all display patterns that are functions of the perception of limited good and thus operate at the impulse of limited good (Foster 1965, 301).

The evidence in ancient literature for the perception of limited good is demonstrated forcefully by Neyrey and Rohrbaugh in their study of John 3:30, from which a few of their examples will suffice to make the point here (2002, 464-483). There is evidence in ancient literature that limited good was a consideration in the ascription of honor from one person to another. Plutarch intimates how such a grant of honor implies the self-deprivation of an equal measure of honor: “And whereas men attack other kinds of eminence and themselves lay claim to good character, good birth, and honour, as though they were depriving themselves of so much of these as they grant to others” (Plutarch, *Mor.* 10.787D). Josephus may as well be mined for evidence of limited good. For example, describing John’s envy of his own son’s (Levi’s) rise to fortune, Josephus iterates:

Supposing that my success implied his destruction, he drifted into extreme envy. Hoping to arrest my good fortune if he could incite hatred among my supporters, he tried to persuade the residents of Tiberius, those of Sepphoris along with them, and also those of Gabara – these cities are the greatest throughout Galilee – to defect from loyalty to me and to join him. (*Vita* 25.122-123)

The idea of limited good is shown to extend even to God by Philo who relates the honor shown by “the man of undiscerning vision” to the god’s he himself crafts of stone and wood as honor shared, from a limited supply:

For polytheism creates atheism in the souls of the foolish, and God’s honour is set at naught by those who defy the mortal. For it did not content them to fashion images of sun or moon, or, if they would have it so, of all the earth and all the water, but they even allowed irrational plants and animals to share the honour which belongs to things imperishable. (*Ebr.* 3.377)

Since the perception of limited good is thus inscribed into the first-century Mediterranean culture, as the ancient literature bears out, it is easy to see how such an idea can drive institutions and personal actions in an attempt to maintain an equitable distribution of

resources both tangible and social. Thus, it is common for persons in traditional societies to try and maintain a sort of “shared poverty” that guards against conspicuous successes that would subsequently upset the balance of limited resources (Foster 1960, 176; 1972, 169). The reason for wanting to maintain the balance, or the “shared poverty,” is not only due to the understanding that any one person’s conspicuous gain is a threat to the stability of the entire community, but also and subsequently, the fearful avoidance of envy which can call up sanctions inscribed in the culture, often in the form of various social dynamics including gossip, and that may have devastating results.

4.3.3 Honor Ascribed and Acquired

Honor is something that is claimed either passively (ascribed), or actively (acquired) and distinction between the two is important. “Ascribed honor” is a claim to worth that is passed to a person by means of either birth/family origins or by a notable person. Honor ascribed by birth is reflected conspicuously by the genealogies found in the gospels of Luke and Matthew (Luke 3:23-38; Matt 1:1-17) and the prologue to John’s (John 1:1-18). Thus, a number of biblical texts illustrate the idea of ascribed honor: “See, everyone who is fond of proverbs will say of you, ‘Like mother, like daughter’” (Ezek 17:44); “All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him” (Matt 11:27); “He who spoils his son will have wounds to bandage, and quake inwardly at every outcry” (Sir 30:7). Thus, a person bore the honor (or shame) of his or her family and the cumulative honor of the family’s ancestry as that honor is borne throughout the family’s history (Malina 1981, 29). Honor ascribed by means of lineage

is thus “symbolized by blood (one’s blood relations, group) and name” so that having a recognizable good name, made for relatively smooth social interactions (Malina 1981, 47). The idea of honor ascribed by blood or name is also operative in stereotyping about lineage which is often closely connected with geographical stereotyping implied in questions about Jesus’ origins. In any case, honor is at stake, and it is in limited supply. Honor could also be ascribed to someone by another person whose status or power, and certainly honor, demanded public acknowledgement by everyone around. In John’s gospel, Jesus can be understood as attempting to evade envy by constantly pointing away from himself to the Father, thus implying his ascribed honor (John 5:30). The Christ Hymn also reflects ascribed honor to Jesus as it describes the once crucified and buried Jesus as “exalted by God” (Phil 2:9).

On the other hand is “acquired honor” which is honor claimed by means of “excelling over others in the social interaction that we shall call challenge and response,” or challenge-riposte (Malina 1981, 29; Malina and Pilch 2006, 334-335). Challenges were either negative or positive, that is, they could either be made with the object to dislodge someone from their social space/standing, or to acquire “a cooperative share in a mutually beneficial foothold” (Malina 1981, 30). Honor challenges came in the form of gifts, questions, dares, compliments or insults, and if unsuccessfully responded to, or even ignored by the one challenged, could result in the loss of honor and so, social status (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 334). Philip Esler offers a lucid description of the social pattern of challenge-riposte:

The idea behind this social pattern is that a person (usually a male) challenges, that is, enters into the social space of another (usually someone of roughly equal social status) either positively by gift or compliment, or, more typically in a negative way by insult or physical affront. The person so challenged then must

appraise the effect upon his honour of the challenge. A failure to produce an adequate response generally results in his being shamed before the relevant public, so a response there must be, in word or deed. This response may well elicit a counter-response from the original challenger and so the exchange continues, until there is a clear victor, who thereby earns honour while the loser loses honour to such an extent the he will often be left hungry for revenge. (2000, 108)

Challenge-riposte exchanges like this could be positive, merely seeking advantage or creating debt (thus, reciprocity). On the other hand, such exchanges could be negative, thus seeking to harm or diminish the one challenged (Neyrey 2007a, 66). In any event, the acquisition or loss of honor – and so the status of the persons involved – was subsequently reported, and so affirmed, by the public. It is this particular phase of the challenge-response pattern that is important for this project since the public's initial response was often embodied in the social, communicative dynamic of gossip. In such instances, a gossip event served to determine the result of a challenge, and subsequently inscribe the outcome into the social map. Such information then functioned as a knowledge base for determining reputation and authority, and thus for expecting proper social interaction according to a person's position in the social hierarchy in light of the challenge event (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 334). Therefore, gossip functioned to reinforce the ideological complex behind the hierarchical social structure (Rohrbaugh 2007, 46).

4.4 Ancient Mediterranean Evaluation of Gossip

It seems appropriate here, while considering the social matrix of the first-century Mediterranean, to point out the common attitude toward gossip as far as can be gathered from written sources. Doing so will certainly draw out the irony of a culture that by-and-

large universally denounces gossip, and yet tacitly embraces it as part of every day life – an irony still present today, East and West. All of the following examples have been recognized elsewhere by other biblical scholars, most notably Rohrbaugh and Malina (2003, 366-367; Rohrbaugh 2007, 130-131), in their own appraisals of gossip but in no way represents all ancient comment on the phenomenon.

Plutarch offered much comment on gossip, the following two characterizing it as particularly devious behavior:

Just as cooks pray for a good crop of young animals and fishermen for a good haul of fish, in the same way busybodies pray for a good crop of calamities, a good haul of difficulties, or novelties and changes, that they, like cooks and fishermen, may always have something to fish out or butcher. (*Mor.* 6.519B)

(Gossips) spend their time digging into other men's trifling correspondence, gluing their ears to their neighbors' walls, whispering with slaves and women of the streets, and often incurring danger, and always infamy. (*Mor.* 6.519F; parentheses mine)

The following comment, again by Plutarch, situates gossip clearly within the context of an honor-shame culture, especially with its recognition of envy:

Since, then, it is the searching out of troubles that the busybody desires, he is possessed by the affliction called "malignancy," brother to envy and spite. For envy is pain at another's good, while malignancy is joy at another's evil. (*Mor.* 6.518C)

Lucian is descriptive of the perceived terrible consequences of gossip:

What I have in mind more than anything else is the slanderous lying about acquaintances and friends, through which families have been rooted out, cities have utterly perished, fathers have been driven mad against their children, brothers against own [*sic*] brothers, children against their parents and lovers against those they love. Many a friendship, too, has been parted and many an oath broken through belief in slander. (*Cal.* 1)

Thus, Greco-Roman comment on gossip is nearly universally negative, ascribing the most devious and dubious characterization to the communicative event that one may imagine.

In the Israelite world, apart from biblical examples, one can gather further notorious comment on gossip from the Babylonian Talmud and the Mishnah:

One who bears evil tales almost denies the foundation [of faith]. (*b. Arak. 15b*)

Any one who bears evil tales will be visited by the plague of leprosy. (*b. Arak. 15b*)

Of him who slanders, the Holy One, blessed be He, says: He and I cannot live together in the world. As it is said: *Whoso slandereth his neighbor in secret, him will I destroy.* (*b. Arak. 15b*)

Whoever relates slander, and whoever accepts slander, and whoever gives false testimony against his neighbour, deserve [*sic*] to be cast to dogs, for it is said, *ye shall be cast to the dogs*, which is followed by, *Thou shalt not take up a false report*, which may be read *tashshi*. (*b. Pesah. 118a*)

Not only is the pernicious character of gossip maintained throughout these, but particularly noticeable are the comments that read almost like curses, or threats to those who engage in its practice.

The Hebrew Scriptures are replete with wisdom, comment, and command with respect to gossip:

You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the Lord. (Lev 19:16)

The wise of heart will heed commandments, but the babbling fool will come to ruin. (Prov 10:8)

One who secretly slanders a neighbor I will destroy. (Ps 101:5)

You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit. You sit and speak against your kin; you slander your own mother's child. (Ps 50:19-20)

But at my stumbling they gather in glee, they gathered together against me; ruffians whom I did not know tore at me without ceasing; they impiously mocked more and more, gnashing at me with their teeth. (Ps 35:15-16)

The following text remarks on Israel's gossiping about the character of the Lord during their wilderness wandering:

But you (Israel) were unwilling to go up. You rebelled against the command of the Lord your God; you grumbled in your tents and said, "It is because the Lord hates us that he has brought us out of the land of Egypt, to hand us over to the Amorites to destroy us." (Deut 1:26-27)

This text from Jeremiah reflects how gossip may be part-and-parcel of even in-group dynamics:

For I hear many whispering: "Terror is all around! Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. (Jer 20:10)

The witness of Israelite literature then, confirms gossip's bad reputation even while illustrating its prevalence and its closeness to home. It is not among strangers only that one may be gossiped about. Neither does the divine escape gossip.

The NT offers its own comments on gossip as well, and characterizes the phenomenon in much the same way as the previous examples. First, the following text offers a glimpse at the relationship between privacy and what is gossiped about in private, and thus illustrates that although the gospel is easily conferred in private space, it is to be proclaimed in public space:

What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. (Matt 10:27-28a)

The following three texts reflect what sociologists refer to as the "gossip network" which was so prominent in the ancient oral cultures and important for spreading news as well as constructing public identity:

But they (two men cured of blindness) went away and spread the news about him throughout the district. (Matt 9:31; parentheses mine)

At once his (Jesus') fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee. (Mark 1:28; parentheses mine)

Jesus went on with the disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" (Mark 8:27)

This last text (Mark 8:27) and its parallels offers an important clue to how public perception in the first-century Mediterranean partly constructed one's "public self" ("Who do people say that I am?"), and how that identity relates to one's in-group identity, or "ingroup self" (cf. "But who do you (disciples) say that I am?" [Mark 8:29; parentheses mine]; cf. Rohrbaugh 2007, 61-76).

Paul was concerned over the effects of gossip in his fledgling communities, as for example, the church in Corinth when he compares himself and his companions with the Corinthians who consider themselves over-achieving at the kingdom of God:

When reviled we bless, when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly. (1 Cor 4:12b-13a)

Indeed, Botha has demonstrated the importance of the gossip network for informing the Apostle of news (troubles) of his churches (Botha 1998).

Finally, we can look to the Pastoral Epistles for much on gossip as the concern for the household was so important for these third generation Christians:

Besides that, they (young widows) learn to be idle, gadding about from house to house; and they are not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not say. (1 Tim 5:13; parentheses mine)

Avoid the profane chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge. (1 Tim 6:20b)

Avoid profane chatter, for it will lead people into more and more impiety. (1 Tim 2:16)

Reading within a framework of a hermeneutic of suspicion, Kartzow has astutely drawn out how the author of 1 Timothy “downloads” the first-century Mediterranean caricature of women’s speech, that is, women as “gossips,” in order to label young widows in the community as somehow deviant (2005). Kartzow thus illustrates how the phenomenon of gossip was attached to women.⁵

In sum then, what is interesting to note is, again, how the ancients were relatively ambivalent toward the practice of gossip, while gossip was by-and-large disparaged in the literature. This is clear throughout the bulk of the literature and stands in interesting contrast to how sociologists and biblical interpreters see vital functionality in gossip of the first-century Mediterranean culture.

4.5 Gossip and the Social World of the First-Century Mediterranean

Thus far, this chapter has provided a glimpse at foundational elements of the social matrix of the first-century Mediterranean. On the one hand, consideration was given to elements providing the framework for identity, and included collectivism, familism, in-group/out-group dynamics, dyadism, and self-identity. The culture of first century Palestine was a collectivistic culture wherein the principle institution was that of the family, extended family, or kin-group. Self identity during this time should be characterized as dyadic in that one’s identity was embedded in one’s principle in-group(s) in a sequence of embeddedness. Thus a person’s identity was not constituted by self-image, but in allocentric fashion, by who/what others in the group thought. Since the in-group self was understood to match the public self, the individual was seen as

⁵ That gossip was a stereotypical element of the social construction of women in the ancient world is well known and may shed some light on the Fourth Evangelist’s attitude toward gossip as such (see 5.4.5 below; cf. also Rysman 1977).

representative of his/her in-group while engaging in public interactions, and thus carried the responsibility of maintaining the reputation of the group while in public.

When members of a group or faction considered outsiders (in-group/out-group), it was most often in terms of stereotypes tied up with geographical origins or family/group affiliation. Geographical and ethnic stereotypes were encoded negatively or positively depending on a place's or family's/group's reputation. Stereotypes provided an easy and straightforward way to gauge who someone was, and so anticipate how an interaction with someone should turn out. So, for example, the stereotypical understanding that nothing good can come out of a village like Nazareth of Galilee was all one had to know in order to understand who they were dealing with when they met someone from Nazareth (John 1:45). If encoded negatively, geographical and ethnic stereotypes could change into "deviance labeling."

Because of their counter-cultural way of life, certain concepts, words, and phrases commonly used and understood in the prevailing culture would take on new/alternative meaning by members of a faction. Such "anti-language" served to build and so nurture a faction's group identity, but it also created and nurtured misunderstanding of the faction to those outside, and thus generated social tension.

When members of a family, kin-group, fictive-kin-group, or faction found themselves in public, they carried with them not only their own honor (or shame), but also that of their group. And since honor was the pivotal value in the ancient world, and was in limited supply due to the overarching perception of limited good, every public interaction between members of different groups was marked by varying levels of suspicion and distrust. Any perceived honor claim – display of wealth, extraordinary

knowledge or power – could be met with a challenge since such claims were perceived as breaches of the social balance. If a challenge was not responded to successfully, it meant the loss of honor for an individual and his/her group.

Because much of what Jesus says or does in John is not expected of someone of his lineage and/or origin, and thus amounting to unwelcome honor claims, his words or deeds are challenged. Often such public scrutiny, worked out through the social pattern of challenge-riposte, is in turn affirmed, or not, by gossip. In other words, someone hailing from an aristocratic family living in Sepphoris would be expected to say and do things differently in public than say, Jesus, the son of an artisan from a small village like Nazareth, and for no other reason than the expectations generated by honor ascribed by birth, that is, one's lineage (Rohrbaugh 2007, 19-30). And since honor was considered a limited good, an attempt to claim more honor than one's birthright ascribed, such as acting or speaking in an unexpected manner, would have been viewed as an unauthorized honor claim and thus, a breach of the balance of limited good (in this case, honor), and thus was considered stealing and would likely generate envy and so elicit a public backlash via the gossip network (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 367; Neyrey and Rohrbaugh 2002, 467-477). This pattern can be seen in John when at the start of the gospel Nathanael responds to Philip's invitation to see Jesus, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (1:46). Nathanael's cynical attitude to Jesus' claim to honor, via Phillip's appellation is later fleshed out in full when the Jews question "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?" (6:42), and again when the crowds wonder "Yet we know where this man is from; but when Messiah comes... Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he?" (7:27, 41b) – all three of these texts

reporting gossip events. Again, what is said about or by Jesus often amounts to an honor claim that generates a negative response, and often in terms of stereotypical notions about lineage (name) or geography (origins) and the honor, or shame, tied up in both. Such negative responses themselves often amount to challenges made to the implied honor claim made by Jesus. Simply put, since a person's words and deeds in public were prescribed by perceptions of reputation and status – both of these often encoded positively or negatively due to one's ethnicity, lineage, and/or origins – anything outside of the prescription was seen as an intolerable breach of the balance (the *status quo*) and thus likely an illegitimate honor claim, and was met with envy and ultimately challenged.

Gossip functions noticeably in several ways vis-à-vis the transaction (challenge-riposte) of honor-shame. First, and which has already been recognized by NT scholars, is gossip's role in articulating, and so affirming the outcome of an honor transaction and updating the status of persons at a constant pace (Mark 1:27-28; 1:45; 9:15; Matt 4:24; 9:31; Luke 2:47; 4:36; 18:43; et al; Rohrbaugh 2007, 142). Second, gossip can be observed actually embodying a challenge to an honor claim when it is apparently intended to be overheard by the subject (John 6:42; cf. Gilmore 1987, 56). Three, as an initial response to a generative event, gossip functions as an initial, constitutive element of the event as a real cultural event, and thus as well, the construction of the subject as a real social-cultural personage. It will be demonstrated later on that this constitutive function of gossip is most intense and constructive in gossip events that involve adjudication between the gossipers over what happened and/or who or what the subject (person) is.

4.6 Framing Gossip in the First-Century Mediterranean

To this point a definition of gossip sufficiently abstract to be serviceable enough to embrace a number of texts in John has been offered. Gossip's role in constructing cultural events, and so reality, has also been examined and is thus suggestive of its role in constituting social personages as well. Additionally, it has been shown that gossip, like most if not all social dynamics was intricately connected to or even involved in the social transaction of the pivotal value of honor via the dynamic of challenge-riposte. Foundational elements of the social matrix of the first-century Mediterranean have also been observed to provide a framework within which either honor or shame were transacted, and this by means of a number of social processes and practices that made up the way persons related to their primary family/group and to outsiders – stereotyping, labeling, deviance accusations – all of which can be seen operative along with the agonistic challenges so prevalent at the time.

The idea is to construct a viable framework that can account for the following: (1) the likely causes of gossip (generative events); (2) the features of a gossip event/encounter; (3) the information conveyed about the subject of a gossip event/encounter; (4) other social-cultural dynamics present or related to a gossip event/encounter; (5) elements of a gossip event that relate it to the shamanic complex, and so the constitution of Jesus as a shamanic figure.

Before offering a framework for gossip it is first necessary to briefly discuss the usefulness and use of models in interpreting the biblical text as this has been under extensive discussion in the field. The purpose is not simply to outline an interesting discussion, but to take note of strengths and weaknesses of the utilization of models in

order to ultimately deploy the model implied in this project in a way that is responsible, that is, that considers the otherness of the cultural events and worlds from which they emerge, and that recognizes the inevitability of ethnocentricity when using social-scientific models. This is the case because although social-scientific models may be the best way to access and understand ancient cultures, models emerge from a modern culture that is alien to the ancient world.

4.6.1 Scope and Value of a Model

Part of the process of reading cultural stories reporting gossip events in John will be the breaking down of the story into cultural cues or patterns in order to understand what it is that is being observed, and what (or who) of course, emerges from the gossip event. This is a very rough description of modeling. To be precise models are “abstract, simplified representations of more complex real world objects and interactions” (Malina 1981, 17). Put another way, a model is not a description of reality, but “an explicit simplification and accentuation of empirical reality used for organizational and heuristic purposes” derived from social-scientific research (Esler, 2000, 108). Thus, a model is an attempt to describe the particularities and intricacies of human relational patterns that are socially-culturally embedded and so, socially-culturally encoded. The objective is to “read” the patterns, and so understand what is being pictured in the ancient text from the “native’s point of view” (Goldsmith 1989). Models, especially cross-cultural models, offer a reasonably viable strategy for bridging cultural distance and so, curbing ethnocentricity and anachronism in understanding ancient, cultural stories about cultural events.

It has also been suggested however, that models carry with them their own shortcomings that the researcher need be aware of. For example, in a vigorous conversation with Esler and his use of social-scientific models, Horrell suggests that a model-based approach's viewing of culturally and historically variable evidence through "the lens of a generalized model" too readily "homogenizes" human behavior into what is "typical," and thus cannot account for the diversity present in all human behavior in every culture (2000, 84). Horrell also sees starting off with models as problematic as such a process may condition the researcher to (only) see, and so assume the presence of certain "patterns of conduct," whether such patterns are present or not (2000, 91). In other words, the comprehensive pattern of Mediterranean social behavior articulated by a model, too rigorously constrains behavior described in ancient cultural stories so that the behavior can only be understood in a particular way. This potential problem can easily change into what has been described as the "iron law of perspective," that is, that models may act as blinkers blinding the researcher to other areas or viewpoints once immersed in the model (Carney 1975, 34).

Another critique of models has been leveled by Craffert (1992, 2001) who observes that models, despite their intention of overcoming selective perception, ethnocentricity and anachronism, are nevertheless, "embedded in their own philosophy of history and theory of science" in such a way that the use of a model is predetermined by the researcher's "aim of interpretation" (2001, 23). In other words, by their very nature, models do not automatically reduce anachronistic or ethnocentric interpretations of cultural stories. Moreover, since models operate at a high level of abstraction when "reading" cultural stories with an eye for patterns of behavior, a considerable number of

behaviors are usually swept up into the model, thus reducing a model's explanatory power. Recognizing this shortcoming should compel the interpreter to refrain from certitudes and to instead, conscientiously utilize the model as a heuristic tool.

The presence of shortcomings however, should not deter the use of a model, but rather compel the present project to utilize various means to reduce the inevitable "misfit" in order to, as Craffert puts it, "counteract the total contamination of evidence" by the model or theory (1992, 232). To this end, Craffert offers a number of suggestions. First, that a model should not be "applied" but used to stimulate the imagination and thinking of the interpreter, and so, to raise interesting questions (1992, 232). This is in fact, one of the great advantages of using models, and is evidence of their heuristic value insofar as they pose interesting questions and ideas that may likely have never been put to the evidence before (Craffert 2001, 24). This may also be seen as "postulating" a model rather than imposing one (Malina 1981, 17). Second, divergences between the model and the evidence should be ascertained and considered rather than ignored (Craffert 1992, 232). This not only implies how broad a model can be, and so sweeping in its generalizations, but also that in the modeling process itself, there is some give-and-take as far as the data either allows or suggests. Thus, the model is always under construction in light of the diversity, and the divergences of the evidence. As Carney avers, a model should actually expand the researcher's "sense of the possible" rather than inhibiting it (1975, 37). In this way, that is, considering data that both reflects and diverges from the model, a model is tested against, and (if necessary) modified in light of the "real world experiences it relates to" rather than affirming an already stacked deck (Malina 1981, 17). Third, it is necessary that models be acknowledged as carrying the interpreter's own

values and assumptions, and so inserting a built-in aversion to any over-riding certitudes when construing the evidence (Craffert 1991, 232-233). Fourth, since a text can support almost any interpretation, the initial steps of the modeling process should include construction of the “social and cultural codes and conventions” constituting the “mental world” of the text (Craffert 1992, 233).

These four procedures will be exercised throughout the project in an effort to keep in check the author’s social and cultural codes that might interfere with allowing the native’s point of view to emerge by means of the model. To be sure, for this project, social-scientific models are understood to be critical tools in not only constraining selective perception, ethnocentricity, and anachronism when it comes to interpreting ancient cultural texts, but also in adequately bridging the historical-cultural gap and allowing the cultural singularity of a text to remain reasonably in tact.

4.6.2 Gossip Around Shamanic Features and Functions

Since the presumption of this project is to see how gossip in John’s Gospel constitutes Jesus as a shamanic figure, the foregoing information suggesting a definition of gossip, Jesus’ social world, and the relevant features and functions of the shamanic complex as construed by Craffert should be here pulled together in order to postulate a conceptual framework for gossip to refer to when coming across gossip texts in the FG. What this entails is imagining how the provisional definition of gossip, the salient elements of Jesus’ social world, and the features and functions of the shamanic complex interact with one another, then constructing this as a framework (model). The framework, thus postulated, can then be brought as a catalyst to the cultural stories in John embodying

gossip in order to see how gossip is operative along with other social dynamics in constituting a shamanic figure. The framework itself should be abstract enough to incorporate a reasonably large database of material (“gossip events” or “gossip encounters”) from the gospel, and should as well be modified as the evidence demands.

In Chapter Two, the results of looking at modern socio-linguistic research on gossip as well as ethnographic studies of traditional Mediterranean cultures, provided the building blocks for a provisional definition of gossip as the following, and here broken into its two parts: (A) *Gossip is a face-to-face communication involving at least two persons, two groups, or a single group, engaged in transacting information, either positive or negative in character, about a third-party subject who is either actually absent or rendered absent to the conversation.* (B) *A gossip encounter occurs as a response to a generative event, or reports about such an event, that undercuts or challenges the established social-cultural expectations of persons, in an attempt to (re)assert or (re)construct reality.* This definition will be brought to John’s gospel as a catalyst, to offer cues as to what to look out for, and thus to see the Fourth Gospel in a new way. But first, the two parts of the definition should be related to both the social world of Jesus, and the features and functions of the shamanic complex.

The first part of the definition involves the features of a gossip encounter thus enabling one to spot a communicative event similar enough in character, as a gossip event. Such similarity should not only be suggested, but demonstrated as well. That gossip involves communication between two individuals, two groups, or amongst a single group of persons is borne out by the socio-linguistic and ethnographic research. It will be demonstrated that John’s gospel bears this out too as various gossip texts are observed.

The character of the information conveyed in a gossip event is “critical” or “evaluative” and can be either positive or negative. In the context of the agonistic honor-shame society reflected in the FG, positive information may come in the form of titular honoring (e.g., “Messiah,” 1:41; 11:27; 20:31; “Son of God,” 1:49; 11:27; 20:31; “Rabbi,” 1:38, 49; 3:2; “King of Israel,” 1:49; “Lord,” 9:38; 11:27; et al) and positive labeling or name calling (e.g., “good man” 7:12), and either of these may be articulated in the gossip event in the form of a question(s) (e.g., 7:26, 31). In the case of negative information one can look for deviance accusations and name calling (e.g., 6:24), or in the raising of questions that imply a negative character portrayal of the subject, Jesus (e.g., 6:42, 52, 60). What is important is that all of this information, positive or negative, is conveyed in a gossip event and thus, partly constitutes the social identity of the subject.

As the definition indicates, the research supports the idea that the subject of a gossip event is absent, but that such absence does not necessitate actual, physical absence from the scene. In such cases, the subject is rendered absent by various means like gestures, tone of voice (audibility), and body positioning (Handelman 1973, 213). It will be suggested later that this aspect of a gossip encounter can be envisaged in the literature in a number of ways including narrative descriptions of groups talking with or disputing amongst themselves (e.g., John 6:52), and the use of third person speech by gossipers about someone who is actually present (e.g., John 6:42). It will as well, be suggested that in a number of cases, such elements of gossip themselves embody a challenge that invite a response.

The second part of the provisional definition of gossip situates it firmly within an agonistic context, and this in terms of a *generative event*, that is, words or deeds said or

done by a person that are unexpected, or rather, contrary to the script of the social matrix, and thus generate gossip. Indeed, such words and/or deeds can be understood as challenges to the *status quo*, and thus challenges for the status or honor of anyone higher on the social scale than the person issuing the challenge. In other words, many of Jesus' words and deeds constitute a challenge at least to the established, scripted social matrix, and thus may be seen as attempts to (re)construct the matrix according to an alternative matrix imagined, and lived out by Jesus' group.

In John's gospel, Jesus' healing a sick person (John 9) thus constitutes a generative event. Likewise, and more directly related to the agonistic culture, the use of anti-language may generate gossip (e.g., 6:51-52). Even Jesus' absence generates gossip in a number of cases (e.g., 7:11; 9:12). In any case, what is important at this point is to recognize gossip as commencing with the process of making some kind of sense out of Jesus' strange words or deeds, and thus to either incorporate his words or deeds into the *status quo* usually by means of negative appraisal, or to re-script the *status quo* by positive appraisal – “could this be the Messiah” (e.g., John 7:26). In other words, the social personage is constructed partly by gossip in the same way that the generative event is construed by the collective experience of persons present, and specifically, the telling of the experience by the persons present (Craffert 2008, 103-104). Gossip can be easily imagined here as a communicative event that often initiates this process of the construction of cultural events as real events, and so social personages as real persons. Subsequently, the construction of a cultural event and a social personage is an ongoing process as the “news” makes its way around via the gossip network. Thus, it may be said

that in a very literal way, cultural events and social personages are always under construction.

In the previous chapter it was pointed out that Craffert identifies a number of components constituting a shamanic figure, that is, “features and functions” that can be plausibly seen as ascribed to the life of a Galilean shaman. The features isolated by Craffert are ASC experiences including shamanic initiation rituals, journeys to other worlds (soul flights, cosmic travels), spirit possession, and visionary experiences (2008, 157-159). Likewise, the functions delineated include healing, control of spirits, divination, prophecy, and education (Craffert 2008, 159-163). In order to successfully connect the features and functions to a communicative process embedded in its own social-cultural matrix, it is necessary to situate them in the appropriate cultural context, that is, that of first-century Palestine. This is possible since it is already established by the research that ASC-based religious practices are an observable cross-cultural phenomenon, which thus implies the likelihood of the existence of a cross-culturally established religious practitioner that can be identified from an etic perspective as a shaman, in the first century Mediterranean world (Craffert 2008, 163). In doing so, it becomes important to draw a distinction between certain individuals within a particular culture who perform various functions within their respective societies *and* the shamanic figure. To be precise, shamanic figures are to be distinguished from prophets, healers, and the like since the former’s social identity is constituted by a *pattern* of features and functions that in many cultural contexts encompasses those of a number of other religious practitioners’ like prophets and healers. Put another way, while a prophet has a specific, recognizable function within the context of a particular community, a shamanic figure

may have the same function as the prophet, as well as a number of others including, for example, a healer, depending of course on the cultural context.

In any case, once the various features and functions are positioned in the world view of first century Palestine, it is possible then to identify such features in the FG, and focusing on those that are somehow related in the text to gossip events. Such identification will be made as the particular gossip texts in John are dealt with sequentially in the next chapter. At this point, it is enough to remember that what Jesus said *and* did, how these were experienced *and* how such experiences were told and re-told by witnesses, as well as what descriptors are ascribed to Jesus in the gospels, all together constitute who and what Jesus was as a social personage, namely, a shamanic figure.

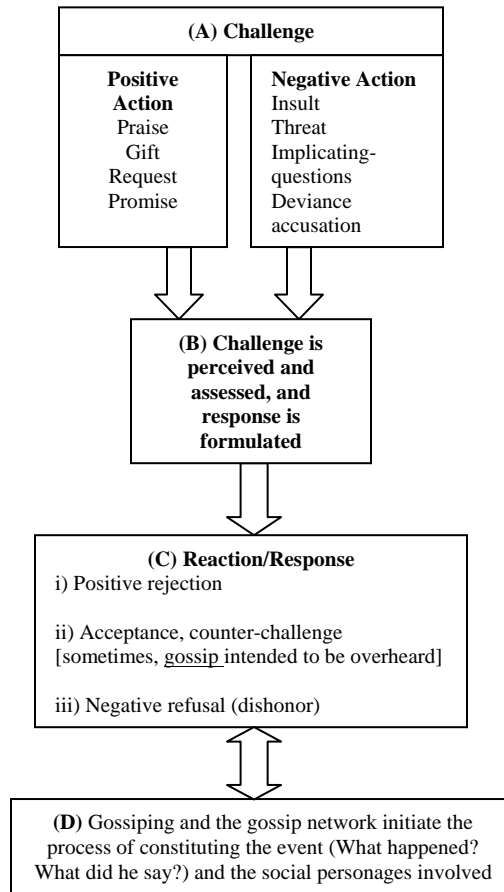
4.6.3 Gossip in an Honor-Shame Culture

Looking at modern ethnographies, it becomes clear that gossip was constituent of agonistic communities where honor and shame are pivotal values, and thus played a central role in structuring (hierarchical) society, and so inscribing the public behavior of persons in that social matrix.

It can be said that the social identity of each individual in ancient Palestine was constructed largely within the framework of honor as this was worked out within the social matrix. In other words, involved in the transaction (challenge-riposte) of honor or shame were a number of processes (stereotyping, deviance accusation, etc.) that encoded the information exchanged in the transaction with clues that constituted persons. It is suggested here that gossip may be plausibly seen as part of the initial process of

transacting encoded information as persons initially react to their experience of a social-cultural event, and the person(s) or subject(s) involved, and so construct both the generative cultural event and the subject(s) of the event, thus constituting a social-personage. The following graphic (**Figure 1**) illustrates how gossip may be seen operating within a challenge-riposte exchange, thus construing an event and the persons involved.

Figure 1: *Gossip and Challenge-Riposte* (Adapted from Malina 1981, 31)



Within the framework of challenge-riposte illustrated by *Figure 1*, the information that eventually provides fodder for the public construal of the person challenged is often articulated at the initial stage of the process (**A**), but can as well be conveyed in a riposte, or “counter challenge” that keeps the challenge-riposte “game” going (**C**). Whether the subject is ultimately construed as deviant, or otherwise labeled, depends on the content of the challenge, as well as how s/he responds to the challenge (**C**). Thus, if the challenge is met successfully, the one challenged maintains or gains honor. On the other hand, if the challenge is not successfully met, then the one challenged loses honor and acquires the negative information encoded in the initial challenge. In the gospels, the kind of information encoded in negative challenges that partially constitutes a person includes among other things, being deceptive, being demon possessed, being a sinner, being of questionable lineage or origin, or even possibly having (apparently) inappropriately claimed honor in a public setting. In any case, insofar as a public challenge constitutes a gossip-generating event (generative event), gossip may be seen (**D**) as both commencing the construction of the event (what happened?) and affirming the result of the event, that is, either the loss or gain of honor as well as any other details regarding the public identity of the individuals involved.

On the other hand, a gossip event may emerge as a response (**C**) to a challenge, that is, in the case of the Gospels, a response to strange words or deeds of Jesus that challenge the status quo. Indeed, in the ancient world, strange words or deeds often amounted to perceiving someone as “out of place” which thus, demanded social evaluation (Malina and Neyrey 1988, 36). In such cases, the response is leveled by obvious adversaries of Jesus, or even by a group or “crowd” ignorant of the meaning of

Jesus' words or deeds. Indeed, this is indicative in the FG of persons who are outsiders with respect to Jesus' in-group. Furthermore, gossip may emerge as a response to Jesus in the form of a counter-challenge. Again, it will be suggested that at some points in John, such a challenge/counter-challenge is actually embodied *in gossip* that appears intended to be overheard by Jesus, and is thus signaled by a particular group's body language (e.g., "The Jews said to one another," 7:35) or by the use of third-person speech for Jesus when he is apparently present (e.g., 6:42). Such gossip events themselves are encoded with information intended to constitute Jesus, usually in a negative manner by means of deviance accusations or negative labeling or stereotyping.

It is crucial to remember that Jesus is not portrayed in the gospels, let alone John, as always on the defensive, that is, as always the target of a challenge. Often times it is Jesus who initiates a challenge to the *status quo* (A) by means of his words or deeds in public. When this is the case, how Jesus is ultimately construed by the gossip network is informed by how Jesus' challenge is responded to by persons or groups who thus represent the established order of things.

4.6.4 Questions Emerging from the Framework

It is not simply a matter of identifying gossip events in John that report "features and functions" of a shamanic figure according to Craffert's model, although texts like that should be considered and included in the database for determining gossip's functions in constituting such a figure. What is more important is to first recognize gossip plausibly as a natural part of the experience of a shamanic figure. Then, to be attuned to any behaviors, words or deeds, of Jesus described in John's story-world that reflect or

correspond to any “features and functions,” and this with an eye on how such cultural stories about culture figures and events plausibly articulate how things may have been in-and-around the life of a shamanic figure. It will become evident that gossip about Jesus is sometimes clearly operative within the agonistic context of an honor-shame culture. At others, it is not. Ultimately, what we are looking for in the text are elements that connect features and functions of a shamanic figure to gossip as it construes both generative events and social personages emerging from such events, and this in an agonistic culture.

As mentioned earlier, the goal of this section is to construct a viable framework that can account for a number of factors that will together, suggest the role gossip plays in constructing Jesus as a shamanic figure based on the gossip events in John’s gospel. The definition of gossip and the model of challenge-riposte illustrated in *Figure 1* begin to do this. What needs to be made explicit at this point are the elements that the framework should account for, and this in the form of questions that may be brought to the FG’s gossip texts.

- (1) What is the cause of the gossip event? What is the generative event?
- (2) What features of the gossip event clarify it *as* a gossip event? Who are the participants/gossipers? How many participants are there? What features, if any, deviate from the provisional definition of gossip, and/or redefine gossip?
- (3) What information is conveyed about the subject of the gossip event? Is the information conveyed positive or negative? What social dynamics, values, or institutions are involved in conveying the information about the subject?

Of course, an over-arching question to be brought to the framework, and likely at every point is with respect to what elements of the entire gossip encounter relate it to the

shamanic complex, that is, what features and functions of the shamanic complex are either conveyed in the event, or somehow otherwise closely related to the event that ultimately go toward constituting Jesus as a shaman.

4.7 Flexibility in Identifying Gossip

The above discussion raises important questions about when a communicative event in the FG can be seen as constituting a gossip event. In other words, a number of texts relate exchanges between persons, or within groups of persons, that fall more precisely within the definition of gossip mapped above than do other texts. Thus, some texts identified as gossip in the forthcoming chapter, may indeed fall far enough away from the center that questions may legitimately be raised whether or not a gossip event is actually being related in the text.

This situation reflects a number of the concerns about utilizing social-scientific models that have been discussed earlier in this chapter. Since a constitutive part of social-scientific models is their abstraction that enables a wider vision of the text, there is inevitably present the danger of a model losing its explanatory power if too large a number of texts are embraced. In other words, if the definition of gossip results in the embracing of too large a number of communicative events in John's Gospel as gossip events, then the framework risks losing its explanatory power. One option would be to modify the definition of gossip that emerges from the model as such modification is dictated by the texts encountered. On the one hand, this may be wise insofar as it functions as a corrective that learns from the cultural-event imagined in the text, and thus

avoids imposing too rigorous a framework on the text. On the other hand, it runs the risk of contaminating the evidence by changing the definition to suit the case.

The perspective maintained throughout this project is that it is more useful to err on the side of a larger “fishing net” than a smaller one. Thus, presupposing the above mapped definition and framework for gossip to identify a communicative event in the FG as a gossip event, given this project’s exploratory and experimental nature, the project will be more lenient on embracing a text as relating a gossip event rather than more restrictive. This is done fully cognizant of the author’s historical and cultural distance from the text, as well as the methodology’s, and thus also the strengths and weaknesses of the use of social-scientific models. Thus, although claims are made regarding the classification of texts as gossip, such claims are not intended to imply any sort of final certitude. It is simply believed to be the case, that by working with a wider net, more helpful light will be shed on the cultural world of John’s Gospel than a smaller net would allow. To be sure, working with such a wide net when it comes to gossip is clearly suggested by du Boulay’s ethnographic research of a Greek mountain village: “In Ambéli, gossip implies almost any discussion of the other people’s actions behind their backs, for it can, according to the context and the intention, cover speculation, hypothesis, and the search for information, as well as condemnation and abuse” (1974, 201). While this should not give license to identify every example of public discourse or conversation as a gossip encounter, it does suggest the flexibility and fluidity of the phenomenon that calls for at least a conscientiously cautious, but wide, net.

CHAPTER FIVE

GOSSIP CONSTRUCTING JESUS IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to isolate and analyze gossip events from John's narrative to see the role gossip plays in constituting Jesus as a shamanic figure. An important presupposition of this work to bear in mind is that the gossip events described in John are seen here as social processes evincing cultural residue of a shamanic figure. In other words, the gossip in John is understood to be about a shamanic figure, so this is not something that needs to be proven, but is presupposed already. The goal here is to draw out how gossip in the FG, understood within the framework of a collectivistic, agonistic honor-shame culture of the first century Mediterranean, is portrayed as operating within that social-cultural matrix along with a number of other social-cultural dynamics in constituting Jesus as a particular social personage, namely, a shaman.

A number of steps will be followed to do this. The first step will be to identify the particular texts in the FG that report or are themselves gossip events. Thus, utilizing the provisional definition, as it is mapped in chapter four above, texts describing face-to-face communication between at least two persons (or groups), or amidst a group of persons will be located. Such communicative events must be evaluative in some way, positively or negatively, about a third party subject (Jesus) who is either actually or rendered absent. Once such a text is located and identified as gossip, the cause of the gossip – generative event – should be determined. Finally, the gossip event will be

situated within the social-cultural framework of the first-century Mediterranean, thus honor-shame (where appropriate), and any other social-cultural dynamics at work will be identified. The second part of the process will be to consider how the gossip construes the reality of the event and the social-personage who is the subject. This final step will involve connecting the gossip event to relevant features and functions of a shamanic figure.

It should be noted again at the outset of this chapter that the concern here is to see how gossip in John's gospel contributes to constituting Jesus as a particular social type (a shaman), and thus to illustrate gossip as a plausible feature of the life of such a figure. To be specific, the concern is *not* principally with Jesus in John's story-world. Rather, by looking at the stories in John reporting or describing gossip events as cultural stories about a shamanic figure, and thus as cultural fibers intricately connected to a particular kind of person, the concern here is to detail how gossip, as a realistic feature of the life experience of a shamanic figure, construes Jesus as such a figure. In other words, the cultural stories in John reporting or describing gossip are seen as cultural fibers intricately connected to the life of a Galilean shaman.

Although the principle concern of this project is not Jesus *in* John, it will be necessary to draw out important elements of John's narrative world in this chapter in order to situate the gossip events coherently in the social-cultural world implied by the text. This will at times entail consideration of narrative theme and structure, important vocabulary and some syntax. The texts under consideration here are texts embedded in a particular narrative, evincing a particular narrative-world, or "story-world." Thus, while the reading of the text is catalyzed by the social-scientific framework of gossip drawn out

in the previous chapter, it will be a reading of texts immersed in a narrative world. In other words, while the goal is to draw out of the texts an understanding of how gossip helps to constitute Jesus as a social personage, it is difficult at this point to imagine some implications with respect to Johannine themes, and even Christology as *not* implying themselves. Such implications will not be explicitly drawn out in this chapter, but left to any interested reader to do so.

5.2 Mapping Gossip in John

Rohrbaugh identifies three types of NT texts having to do with gossip (Rohrbaugh 2007, 144-146). First, there are texts *about* the topos of gossip such as those found in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim 3:11; 5:7, 13; Titus 2:3). Such texts, by-and-large reflect the ancient world's negative appraisal of gossip discussed earlier in Chapter Four.

Second, are texts that are reports about gossip actually occurring. Drawing examples from only one of the Synoptics (Mark 1:28, 45; 2:1, 16; 3:8, 21; 5:14, 20; 6:2-5, 14, 15, 16, 55; 7:24, 25, 36, 37; 9:14), Rohrbaugh notes the number of occurrences of this type of gossip text in the NT is striking as well as indicative of a peculiarly oral environment (Rohrbaugh 2007, 144). This type is important for recognizing the “gossip network” operative in the ancient world, and so in the story-world of John's gospel.

The third type of gossip text is that which is gossip. An unusual kind of text representing this third type, is that which occurs between the author and the reader, that is, the author gossips about a third-party subject with the reader (John 12:6). Again, Rohrbaugh only cites a few examples from Mark's gospel (2:18; 7:1-15) while emphasizing throughout how the NT is “in touch with its oral world” and commenting

how the “frequency with which gossip is evaluated, reported, or actually recorded is truly astonishing” (2007, 146). Indeed, this type of gossip text as it appears in John is the kind that is most often involved in constituting Jesus as a social personage and, as will become clear, most often emerges in conflictive situations in John’s story-world.

A number of observations can be made about gossip in John based on the distribution of gossip texts throughout the gospel (cf. *Figure 2* below). First, although John 2:23-25 and 4:42 may be exceptions (cf. 5.4.1 and 5.4.4 below), there are no texts explicitly about the topos of gossip, a detail best explained in terms of genre since the FG is not an epistle. In other words, since the FG is not an epistle like one of the Pastorals, and so not concerned with directly addressing a congregational issue or problem with “busybodies” or “gossips,” then it is less likely to contain direct comment about gossip.

Second, that the majority of gossip texts in John are of the type that are themselves gossip (or “embody” gossip), is indicative of not only the oral character of the first-century Mediterranean culture, but also the Evangelist’s awareness of gossip as a part of the social-cultural *experience* of Jesus, both when Jesus was alive and for the community of the FG. If correct, this implies that the cultural stories in John reporting and embodying gossip are cultural residues of the experience of a historical figure.

Figure 2: Mapping Gossip in John

Texts About the Topos	Texts Reporting Gossip	Texts that are Gossip
		1:35-36
		1:40-41
		1:45-46
2:23-25(?)		
	3:2	3:25-30
	4:1	4:28-29
	4:39	
4:42(?)	4:47	
		5:10-12, 15
		6:14
		6:41-42 (cf. 6:43!)
		6:52
		6:60 (cf. 6:61!)
		7:11-12
		7:25-27
		7:31 (cf. 7:32!)
		7:35-36
		7:40-43
		7:46-52
		8:22
		9:2-3
		9:8-12
		9:16-17
		9:24-34
	9:35	
		10:19-21
	11:3-4, 20, 28-29	11:36-37
		11:46-47
	12:9, 12, 18	12:29
		16:17-18

A third observation to be made is that the majority of gossip texts in John occur in what some scholars have identified as the “Signs Source,” that is, John 1-12 (e.g., Bultmann 1971, 6; Fortna 1970). Whether or not one thinks the Evangelist used such a source (cf. Barrett 1978, 18-19), it is in any case this portion of the gospel that much of

the public ministry of Jesus is related, thus the venue for public construal of Jesus as a social personage, and this, in relation to his signs of healing, controlling weather, and raising the dead – all of which subsequently imply features of the shamanic complex.

5.3 Gossip Among Jesus' First Disciples: John 1:19-51

The gossip texts in this section of John are preceded by the prologue (1:1-18) and John the Baptist's testimony relating (negatively) his own identity to priests and Levites sent from Jerusalem by "the Jews" (1:19-28), and his own ASC experience regarding Jesus' initiation as a holy man of God, and especially his being possessed by the Spirit. These two sections provide important contextual background for understanding not only the three gossip events that immediately follow, but the entire FG.

5.3.1 Jesus' Identity and Origin and the Baptist's Testimony

The prologue represents the beginning of a gospel deeply interested in Jesus' identity, making it clear from the start who Jesus is in terms of his relation to God and his origins: Jesus, "the Word" (1:1) was "with" God and was God from the beginning. Thus, the Word ("God the only Son" 1:18) and God enjoy an intimate communion (Barrett 1978, 170). Moreover, the Word was in the world that nevertheless, did not know the Word (1:10). How the Word got from where God is to the world is via the incarnation (1:14). In other words, it is made explicitly clear that the man identified in the FG as "the Word," is one who comes from the heavens where God is, and makes God known (ἐξηγήομαι; 1:18), that is, "interprets" and unveils the character of the Divine (Keener 2003, 424). "Making known" the Divine to human beings is common in ancient

Hellenistic religions encompassing the idea of “telling at length,” or “recounting a narrative” about the Divine (Moloney 1998, 47; Barrett 1978, 170).

John the Baptist’s negative testimony about his identity – he is *neither* the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor even “the Prophet” (1:20-21) – implies the identity of Jesus is related to such titles. The priests and Levites suggest to the Baptist that if he is not Messiah, then perhaps he is one of the end time prophetic, precursory figures – Elijah (cf. Mal 4:5; Sir 48:10-11) or “the Prophet” (Deut 18:15, 18), thus indicating that John’s behavior, specifically his baptizing, was something not expected of him in terms of his status; he was not Messiah (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 43-44). It is not insignificant that according to tradition (1 Kings 2:11), Elijah was taken up into heaven, remaining somehow alive (cf. 2 Chron 21:12) until his return before the day of the Lord (Mal 3:1; 4:5). Moreover, Enoch imagines Elijah’s eventual return, and even before the appearance of the apocalyptic lamb (1 Enoch 89:52; 90:31), which may be significant to the Baptist’s identification of Jesus (cf. Brown 1966, 47). “The Prophet” in mind at 1:21 is likely the prophet-like-Moses expected to come and perform various forensic and legislative duties (1 Macc 4:41-50; 14:1; Acts 3:22; cf. John 6:14; 7:40). Thus, being associated with, or identified as one of the prophets, implies the ability to journey between the heavens and the earth.

In any case, the Baptist denies all three appellations, thus implying a connection between them and Jesus. The important point here is the appropriation of various titles associated with Israel’s images of the expected eschatological/Messianic age. The Baptist’s negative affirmation of his own identity with the three figures, given the literary

context, implies that it is the Word, the Son, and so Jesus who deserves consideration of such titular honoring, not John.

John the Baptist's declaration (to who is not clear) of Jesus as "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," followed by a vivid description, out of the Baptist's mouth, of an ASC experience wherein he witnessed Jesus' possession by "the Spirit" (1:32), and this followed by a report of a heavenly voice (1:33), are altogether descriptive of Jesus' inauguration as a holy man of God (Malina and Rohrbaugh 2003, 35-36). John bears witness emphatically to this inauguration, which suggests Jesus enjoys God's unique and abiding favor (Neyrey 2007a, 53), as well as the important soteriological function of this Lamb, that is, to "take away the sins of the world" (cf. Isa 53:7).

5.3.2 Gossip Among Jesus' First Disciples

On the "next day" (Τῆ ἑπαύριον, 1:35; cf. 1:29, 43; also τῆ ἡμέρα τῆ τρίτη at 2:1), the Baptist is portrayed gossiping with two of his disciples about Jesus as he walks by: "And as he saw Jesus walking by he said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God.' And the two disciples heard him saying this, and followed Jesus" (1:36-37).

The narrative describes a face-to-face encounter between John the Baptist and two of his disciples about Jesus who is walking by, but apparently unaware of the gossip. What the Baptist conveys is something he said the previous day, that is, that Jesus is the "Lamb of God" (1:29, 36). Thus, the information articulated about John's ASC and so Jesus' identity as the Spirit-possessed Lamb of God "who takes away the sin of the world," and who is as well, the Son of God (1:29, 32, 34), is information about Jesus implied in the gossip event, and so affirmed by the gossip. The generative cause of the

gossip is not clear, but it may be inferred that it is the Baptist's knowledge about Jesus' identity gained via his vision (1:32), in corroboration with Jesus' identity and origins as developed by the prologue, that provides him with the information he needs and thus the impetus for gossiping about Jesus when he sees him coming.

The two disciples passively involved in this gossip event as listeners (ἀκούω, 1:37), leave John to follow Jesus. Such a quick exit from the Baptist's anti-society may indicate that the two disciples were only marginal members of John's group (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 54-55). Such a transfer of allegiance may as well be indicative of the background of honor-shame when John's words uttered to his disciples are considered in light of the preceding sections where he forcefully denies all of the honorific titles inquisitively brought to him from those sent by the Jews in 1:19-28. While responding to gossip about Jesus later in the text (3:26), the Baptist will reiterate these denials specifically drawing out his lower social status vis-à-vis Jesus as he explains the necessity of Jesus' increase and his (the Baptist's) decrease (3:30; cf. also John 5:36; 10:41; Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 49-50; cf. Neyrey and Rohrbaugh 2002). In any event, the gossip functions as part of a "catechetical process" whereby legitimating titles are applied to Jesus via gossip to potential disciples, acknowledging Jesus' honor, followed by Jesus' own revelations of profound significance (Neyrey 2007a, 55).

The next gossip event occurs at 1:41, and is preceded by another titular appellation extended from the two disciples now following Jesus – "Rabbi (which is translated 'Teacher')" (1:38). Although this title is a relatively limited one given the overall Christology of the FG (Moloney 1998, 60), it is not insignificant that the idea of discipleship governs Jesus' relationship with his followers, rather than the idea of

apostleship. The relationship implied is that between a teacher (Rabbi) and his students who seek the teacher out to learn and live a particular way of life focused on attachment to the teacher (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 48). Thus, the title “Rabbi” here is descriptive of the relationship the disciples are seeking to enter into and thus implies the social dynamics common to the social arrangement of factions or anti-societies (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 59-61; Malina and Pilch 2008, 193).

One of the two following the Rabbi is Andrew, who finds his brother Simon and gossips: “We have found the Messiah (which is translated ‘Christ’)” (1:41). This face-to-face encounter involves information, again, about an absent Jesus’ identity that is positive in character as it identifies him as “Messiah.” The generative cause of this gossip is again, unclear, but related to the disciples’ stay with Jesus “that day” (1:39). Indeed, to “remain” or “abide” (μένω), as well as to “follow” (ἀκολουθέω) implies loyalty to the one followed and remained with, and so denotes a new exclusive loyalty to Jesus on the part of these two former disciples of John the Baptist (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 55).

The title conveyed in this gossip event, “[w]e have found the *Messiah*,” is identical to one earlier refused by the Baptist, but now applied to Jesus by one of the Baptist’s former followers. This title, as such, is indeed greater than Rabbi, and here connotes not something in particular about Jesus *and* his group, but rather something about Jesus himself. In short, the results of the two disciples’ following and abiding with Jesus, are the beginnings of the formation of Jesus’ fictive kin-group/in-group, as well as the construction of Jesus’ identity vis-à-vis his in-group; Jesus, the Rabbi, is Messiah.

It may be helpful to offer summary observations of these first two gossip events (1:36, 41) before moving on to the much more intricate gossip encounter related at 1:45-

46. In terms of honor-shame, the Baptist's negative testimony as to his own identity serves to radically humble him (shame) while simultaneously honoring Jesus with titles important in ancient Israel. First, the Baptist denies that he is Messiah, Elijah, or the Prophet, which contextually implies that the Word, Jesus, may be. The Baptist then indicates that he is not worthy even to untie Jesus' sandal, which in the first-century Mediterranean articulated that he was not even as fit as the lowliest of servants, who could (at least) do such a thing (Keener 2003, 448 n.191).

Scholars have identified reasons behind the unusual relationship between Jesus and John (and their followers) in the FG as having to do with disciples of the Baptist persisting long after his death and involved with an emerging Johannine community (Brown 1979, 29-30; Beasley-Murray 1987, 22-23). In any case, this self-abasement on the Baptist's part in relation to his emphatic honoring of the Word, Jesus, prepares the reader for the information disclosed in the gossip events that follow. While the context emerging at this point does not appear particularly agonistic, honor-shame is clearly the backdrop to what is going on.

The constitution of Jesus' identity is also beginning here (apart from the clear assertions in the prologue), and is described in terms of his relation to his emerging fictive kin-group, and conveyed via gossip (1:41). Thus, not only does the gossip event engender the growth of the budding faction, but the constitution of its leader as a particular social personage as well.

The next gossip event occurs on the "next day" (1:43) and is prefaced by the leader of the emerging faction, seeking disciples. In this case, Jesus finds and calls Philip to follow, who apparently does so without question. Philip's following Jesus suggests

his loyalty to Jesus and the group, and results in his seeking out others. Philip's following Jesus, like the first two disciples', is seen here as the generative event of his gossiping about Jesus in a face-to-face encounter with Nathanael: "We have found the one whom Moses wrote about in the Law, as well as the prophets, Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth" (1:45). The information conveyed by Philip about the absent subject Jesus, is evaluative positively in an initial assertion about Jesus being the subject of prophecy, but somewhat ambivalently with respect to a second assertion about him being the son of Joseph from Nazareth. Unlike the previous two gossip events, the initial gossipers' information is not passively received by the listener, Nathanael. In this instance, and focusing on the second assertion about Jesus, Philip's initial assertion is undercut: "So Nathanael said to him, 'Is it possible for anything good to come out of Nazareth?'" (1:46). Thus, the information conveyed by Philip builds as much on Jesus' in-group identity as it creates tension. In other words, the one prophesied about by Moses and the prophets, is also of the mundane lineage of Joseph (cf. 6:42), and who is from Nazareth. Philip's identification of Jesus as "son of Joseph" and "from Nazareth" shows his perception of Jesus in terms of geographical stereotyping and family reputation. The reader is of course, aware of the tension given the prologue's appraisal of Jesus that involves not only his origin (with God; 1:1), but his identity as well (the "only Son" of God; 1:18). Nathanael's stereotypical response indicates that being the son of a village artisan, and from the village of Nazareth, are not indicative of someone of high repute.

The information articulated about Jesus at 1:45-46 is unusual in light of the tension it creates. On offer in this gossip encounter is information both positive *and*

negative about the leader of the emerging faction, and is therefore, somewhat ambivalent. Given the character of the information transacted (positive and negative), and this by means of what can be described as adjudication, a tension is created about Jesus' identity. The tension is not created by Philip's hosting disparate images of Jesus (Jesus the subject of prophecy *and* the son of Joseph from Nazareth), but rather by Nathanael's stereotypical summary of Nazareth and what (little) is to be expected from a native of that place that undercuts Philip's assessment. Nathanael is essentially suggesting that whoever it is that Philip thinks they have found (although Philip was found by Jesus; 1:43), this one is neither the subject of prophecy, nor one to be associated with prophetic activity.

It will be suggested that at several other points in the FG, this sort of "adjudicative gossip" occurs creating tension about Jesus' identity that is not relieved by the narrative, but allowed to stand (e.g., 7:12; 10:20-21). At this point however, the tension created by the gossip is relieved by Jesus' dialogue with Nathanael, underscoring Jesus' divine prophetic knowledge ("I saw you under the fig tree"; 1:48), that leads to Nathanael's identifying Jesus as "Rabbi" as well as "Son of God" and "King of Israel" (1:49). So, Nathanael articulates his newfound loyalty to Jesus and the emerging faction, as well as his status within the group, namely, the teacher's disciple.

Nathanael's "belief," generated by Jesus' divine knowledge, is responded to by Jesus with a description of a visionary experience that Nathanael is promised to receive: "And he said to him, 'Truly, truly I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man'" (1:51). This proclamation by Jesus is significant for the preceding gossip event insofar as it serves as a sort of rebuttal

to Nathanael's negative contribution to the gossip, and thus, to shape the construal of Jesus by the event.

5.3.3 Gossip Constructing a Shamanic Figure: 1:19-51

Before assessing how gossip in John 1:19-51 construes Jesus as a shamanic figure, it will be beneficial to reset this within the larger framework of the project. To be specific, the shamanic hypotheses that Craffert suggests is a presumption of this work. Thus, to understand gossip within the framework of cultural bundubashing, it is understood that gossip is about a particular social personage, that is, Jesus as a shamanic figure. Since what Jesus is reported as saying and doing in the FG, he says and does as a shamanic figure, and since such words and deeds uttered as a shamanic figure are the generative cause of gossip in John's gospel, it stands to reason that the content of the gossip, that is, the information transacted about the subject Jesus, is about a shamanic figure. Thus, since the goal of this project is to explore how gossip constitutes Jesus as a shamanic figure, it is necessary to recognize how Jesus' words and deeds either associated with gossip (generative cause), or as the content of the gossip events themselves, can be seen as residue associated with someone like a shamanic figure (cf. Craffert 2008, 328). As mentioned earlier, this will be done by seeing what features and functions associated with a shamanic figure are either conveyed in gossip, or somehow closely related to a gossip event. In this way then, the role gossip plays in constituting Jesus as a shaman, may be made apparent.

A total of three communicative events constituting gossip occur in this section (John 1:19-51), and have been here considered in light of what preceded from the

beginning (Ἐν ἀρχῇ). As far as particular features and functions of the shamanic complex go in this section, the following are involved: ASC experiences, spirit-possession, shamanic journeys, visions, shamanic sense of identity and divine sonship, divine knowledge, teaching, and prophetic activities. Perhaps the most obvious element of John 1:19-51 are the various titles applied to Jesus, each implying something essential about his identity. And while a number of scholars rightly recognize that the titles offered are of varying importance from a narrative-critical and Christological perspective (e.g., Moloney 1998, 55-57) so that, for example, the title “Rabbi” is lesser than “Messiah,” the perspective of cultural bundubashing does not require this sort of hierarchical arranging. Rather, each title applied to Jesus here is seen as a cultural fiber connected to the social personage *about whom* the tradition is speaking. In other words, the person about whom this narrative is speaking was someone to whom could be, and to whom were attached the legitimating titles “Lamb of God,” “Rabbi,” “Son of God,” “Messiah,” and even “Son of Man.”

5.3.3.1 Gossiping About the Lamb of God

The first gossip event about Jesus identifies him as the “Lamb of God,” an identification fleshed out in the preceding section by the Baptist’s description of the Lamb’s soteriological purpose, spirit-possession, and further identification as the Son of God (1:29-34): “The next day, John was again standing with two of his disciples, and seeing Jesus walk by, he said ‘Behold, the Lamb of God’” (1:35-36). John’s initial identification of Jesus as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” at 1:29 is accompanied by his telling of an ASC experience during which he witnessed Jesus

being possessed by the Spirit (1:32). The Baptist subsequently identifies him as “Son of God” (1:34). The information transacted in the gossip event that immediately follows, also identifies Jesus as the “Lamb of God” (1:36), thus connecting that information with the Baptist’s ASC experience in such a way that the description of the ASC experience preceding the gossip, is an elaboration of the gossip that follows. Therefore, in the Baptist’s gossiping about Jesus as the “Lamb of God,” the ASC experience involving Jesus’ spirit possession is constituted as an event, and Jesus is thus construed as the spirit-possessed “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” and the “Son of God.” Each of these four elements of John’s telling are here understood as cultural residue of a shamanic figure, and can thus be taken in turn.

The lamb came to be associated with the sacrificial cult of ancient Israel given that lambs were the primary sacrificial victims at the Temple (Exod 12:11-12; 29:38-42; Lev 16:21; Num 28:11, 16-19; 29:78, et al). In the NT, the lamb is seen similarly in a cultic context, and thus associated with the person of Jesus (e.g., Acts 8:32; 1 Pet 1:19; and mentioned 28 times in Revelation). At John 1:29 and 36 the Baptist combines the two ideas of the paschal lamb (cf. 19:29, 36; Exod 12:22, 46) and Jesus bearing sins (Isa 53:4, 12), and indicating that Jesus was a new sacrifice, superior to the present cultic sacrifice of the Temple and thus, a perfection of Judaism’s ordinances and institutions (John 2:19; 4:21; 5:17, 39, 47; 6:4; 10:1; 13:34; cf. Barrett 1978, 176-177). Thus, by referring to Jesus as “Lamb of God,” the Baptist’s gossip about him suggests Jesus’ mediating power with the divine world. Such mediating power to put things right between the Divine and the world is a function associated with a shamanic figure (Craffert 2008, 340-341), and is here (1:36) ascribed to Jesus by means of gossip.

John 1:32-34 is a scene recognized by scholars to account for Jesus' baptism (but not by John the Baptist!) in the FG (e.g., Bultmann 1971, 94; Barrett 1978, 170-171, 177), although it does not contain the elements in the Markan version of Jesus' baptism shared by Matthew and Luke (Mark 1:9-11). It is as well, recognized that Jesus' baptism is analogous to the initiation of a shamanic figure, and is thus accompanied by visions, auditions, and spirit possession (Craffert 2008, 214-215). Being possessed by the (Holy) Spirit is a cultural interpretation of a bodily possession experience that implied an impersonal force taking possession of a person and/or a person being filled with such a force, but was seen in the first-century Mediterranean view as a way of being (Craffert 2008, 231-232; cf. Matt 12:18; Luke 4:18).

Given the character of the description of Jesus' spirit-possession experience, it appears that this possession was looked upon favorably by the Baptist. Cross-cultural research has shown that ancient societies could view such possessions negatively or positively (Craffert 2008, 230). Positively, if the one possessed brings vital information or activities to the community, and negatively if the results are "insanity" or if the possession was not connected somehow to ritual (DeMaris 2000, 19-20; cf. John 7:20).

What is important is that at the center of the Fourth Evangelist's conveyance of the tradition (baptism or not), is Jesus being possessed by the Spirit, which implies that throughout his career, Jesus was in a state of spirit-possessed being (Craffert 227-229). Jesus' Spirit possession described by the Baptist and implied in his gossiping about the Lamb of God thus construed the event of Jesus' spirit-possession as a cultural event, and so ascribed to Jesus another component of a shamanic figure.

The Baptist's telling of his ASC experience plainly associates Jesus with transformational ASC experiences. In particular, the construal of Jesus as "Son of God" (1:34) calls attention to an "implicit shamanic indicator" ascribed to Jesus, namely, Jesus' sense of divine sonship (Craffert 2008, 238-241). The descriptor "Son of God" is applied to Jesus a number of times in the FG (1:18, 34, 49; 3:17, 35; 11:27; 20:31), while Jesus uses the title expressing his own sense of divine sonship (e.g., 3:18; 5:25; 10:36; 11:4). Jesus' sonship with the Father implies intimate interaction with the Divine as well as heavenly journeys, and visions (Craffert 2008, 240).

In sum then, this first gossip event ascribes to Jesus a number of features and functions associated with a shamanic figure. Jesus' spirit-possession (via the Baptist's ASC), Jesus' implied function as mediator between the divine realm and the world (Lamb of God), and the title "Son of God," are all together swept into a gossip event that conveys essential components of a shamanic figure.

5.3.3.2 Gossip About the Messiah

He first found his brother and said to him "We have found the Messiah (which is translated Christ)." (1:41)

The second gossip event involves Andrew ascribing to Jesus the title "Messiah," a title which does not appear on Jesus' lips anywhere in the FG. Thus, Jesus is ascribed by this gossip as the man (human being) anointed by God to help God establish God's rule at the end of time (Ashton 1991, 255).

What is significant about Jesus as Messiah in the FG is that at two places the title is associated with components of a shamanic figure. At John 4:29 (to be discussed further below), the Samaritan woman's gossip about Jesus is generated by his divine

knowledge about her life, and is comparable to Jesus' knowledge about Nathanael. Moreover, at 11:27, Martha calls Jesus "Messiah" and "Son of God," thus associating the two titles and implying the shamanic indicator of Jesus' sense of divine sonship.

5.3.3.3 Gossip About the Subject of Prophecy: Jesus Son of Joseph from Nazareth

Philip found Nathanael and said to him "We have found the one whom Moses wrote about in the Law, as well as the prophets, Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth." And Nathanael said to him, "Is it possible for anything good to come out of Nazareth?" (1:45-46a)

Philip's gossip that Jesus is prophesied by Moses in the Pentateuch is tenuous since there are no clear Messianic passages therein (Barrett 1978, 184). It is likely then that this information is a broad statement that Jesus is the fulfillment of Torah (Brown 1966, 86; Carson 1991, 159), and is proleptic of what Jesus will say at 5:34, 45-46. It is as well possible that Philip is identifying Jesus as the Prophet-like-Moses of Deuteronomy 18:15-18 (Brown 1966, 86). Indeed, for the FG the entire scriptures point to Jesus (e.g., 2:17, 22; 7:37-39; 12:15-16; 20:9) while the most constant function of Moses is to bear witness to Jesus (Keener 2003, 483). In any case, in the first part of Philip's gossip about Jesus, he is associated with prophetic activity.

The second part of Philip's gossip to Nathanael is ambivalent vis-à-vis the first part, and opens the door for adjudication over Jesus' identity ascribed by Philip, and this based on stereotypical information about Jesus' lineage and origin. As mentioned earlier, this gossip event creates a tension as it reflects gossip that is not linear and consistent in the information transacted. Such adjudicative gossip thus construes its subject ambiguously, at least suggesting that the subject's identity is under negotiation, and so

suggesting such gossip as a social dynamic plausibly connected to the life of a shamanic figure.

Philip and Nathanael's gossip about Jesus, and what it ascribes to him, is intricately connected to the brief dialogue that follows between Jesus and Nathanael (1:47-51) because it is that exchange that relieves the tension generated by the adjudicative gossip at 1:45-46. In it, Nathanael is compelled to ascribe to Jesus the titles "Rabbi," "Son of God," and "King of Israel" (1:49), and this in response to Jesus' demonstration of divine knowledge (1:48). Moreover, Nathanael's response betrays his knowledge of the righteous Messianic branch (cf. the fig tree at Zech 3:8-10; Jer 23:5; 33:15), and thus makes further sense of Jesus' response to him as guileless Israel that will (soon) see the glory of God made manifest (Koester 1990, 30-31).

Thus, in two verses several elements associated with a number of features and functions of a shamanic figure are procured. To begin with, Jesus prefaces his response as one with divine authority might: "Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν," or, "Truly truly I say to you" (1:51). This is formulaic in the FG, occurring twenty times, and signaling when Jesus is about to say something important. It is as well a feature typical of shamanic figures who speak with authority based on their awareness of being a particular social personage (Craffert 2008, 344).

What is described to Nathanael by Jesus is typical of shamanic ASC experiences: "You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man" (1:51). The first element, the opening of the heaven, may be connected back to the Baptist's ASC about Jesus' spirit-possession experience, and thus perhaps filling out the rest of the details left out by the Fourth Evangelist that would be equivalent to the

Synoptic baptisms (Brown 1966, 91). The second element describing the angels of God going up and down on the Son of Man are crucial to this text's connection to Genesis 28:12, where Jacob sees a ladder stretching between the earth and heaven, and angels going up and down on the ladder. Thus, the entire scene (1:47-51) in fact, describes the newness of Jesus' movement within Israel. Nathanael represents Israel (the pronouns "you" are plural in 1:51) but without the guile of Jacob (1:47; cf. Gen 27), who will witness the imminent cosmic transformation, the likes of which are usually attended by angels (Gomes 1989, 286). The vision is similar to Jacob's: "And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the Lord said, 'I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac...'" (Gen 28:12-13a). The vision Jesus promises Nathanael imagines the attending angels going up and coming down not on a ladder, but on the Son of Man. In other words, Jesus is asserting himself as the Son of Man who is the "locus of divine glory" and the "point of contact between heaven and earth" (Brown 1966, 91). Indeed, Craffert shows that Son of Man sayings in the gospels are linked to (A) distinct features of a shamanic figure including experiences being a mediator of power and knowledge in people's lives, (B) self-understanding as a mediator figure, and to (C) cultural dynamics of a shamanic figure as divine agent, broker, or entrepreneur (Craffert 2008, 348). In other words, when Jesus talked about himself as Son of Man, he was talking about his own shamanic experiences and their impact (Craffert 2008, 349), and his experiences thus affirmed his identity. Keener sums it up well and in language that clearly articulates elements associated with a shamanic figure:

Jesus is the link between heaven and earth, the realms above and below, between God and humanity, throughout his entire ministry as he later explains to Nathanael's friend Philip (14:9)... Thus, he is not only the "Son of Man" who will come from heaven (Dan. 7:13-14), but is the mediator between heaven and earth, on whom the angels must travel... In short, Jesus is Jacob's ladder, the one who mediates between God in heaven and his servant Jacob on earth... (Keener 2003, 489)

Alternatively, O'Neill follows Joachim Jeremias in understanding the verb "come down" (καταβαινῶ) with the preposition "upon" (ἐπί) plus the accusative "Son of Man" (τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) at John 1:51 to call for translating the preposition "unto" rather than "on," thus moving away from Barrett's (Barrett 1978, 187) understanding of the "Son of Man" replacing the ladder in Jacob's dream (O'Neill 2003, 375). This is significant for seeing Son of Man in its shamanic function of linking the heavens and the earth, as it sees the Son of Man as the place on earth from which and to which the angels ascend and descend. Indeed, O'Neill agrees with Jeremias' suggestion that the Son of Man was the very stone at Bethel in the story, the very place of the presence of God, the house of God and door to heaven (Gen 28:17, 22; O'Neill 2003, 377). O'Neill's description is as appropriate as Keener's for construing a shamanic figure: "[W]here he was, the presence of God was; where he was, there was the gate of heaven; where he was, there the spirits of God were standing ready to serve and to bring the bread of life, the living word of God, down to earth" (O'Neill 2003, 377).

In sum, Jesus is further ascribed as a shamanic figure by means of adjudicative gossip regarding his identity which is, in this case, settled by means of Nathanael's re-ascription of Jesus in terms associated with a shamanic figure in light of a demonstration of divine knowledge, as well as Jesus' self-ascription of himself as the Son of Man, and this by means of the promise of a heavenly ASC to Nathanael, and so to true Israelite.

5.4 Gossip About Jesus Within and Without Israel: 2:1-4:54

The following section deals with two gossip texts significant for constituting a social personage, and two other texts – one a possible assessment of gossip and the other an implied report about the gossip network that connects Jesus to shamanic activity. These events happen under the light of the commencement of Jesus’ signs in the FG, which by their very nature imply a shamanic figure since Jesus’ signs involve the control of nature, healing, and other miraculous deeds (2:1-11; 5:2-9; 6:1-14, 16-21; 9:1-7; 11:38-44; Craffert 2008, 151-163).

The miraculous deeds, or signs in the FG serve a revelatory function, that is, to reveal the person of Jesus, and thus are an intricate element of the Christology of John, not only calling people to faith in Jesus, but interpreting his identity (Brown 1966, 103; Barrett 1978, 75; Keener 2003, 275). The newness implied in Jesus’ promised vision to Nathanael (1:51) is fortified by Jesus’ signs insofar as the FG connects the signs with the “new exodus” theme, thus portraying Jesus as greater than Moses – a detail of some significance to the gossip encountered in John 6 (cf. 3:14; 5:45-47; 6:32; 9:28; Keener 2003, 271).

The importance of Jesus’ signs lies especially in their implying Jesus as a shamanic figure who operated in an ancient world with mythic expressions that both allowed for, and were confirmed by particular experiences such as healings and the controlling of nature (Craffert 2008, 174-175). Jesus’ signs are clearly the backdrop of several gossip events in the FG, generating and being construed as cultural events by gossip focused on Jesus and thus construing him as a shamanic figure.

5.4.1 Johannine Assessment of Gossip: 2:23-24

Although John 2:23-25 is rightly recognized by most scholars as commentary on Jesus' assessment of faith based on his signs alone as inadequate (e.g., O'Day 2002, 11-15; Moloney 1998, 84-87), it is suggested here that it may also imply a distrust of the gossip network, and so constitute a glimpse of the Fourth Evangelist's assessment of gossip.

The report that "many believed in his name because they saw the signs he did" (2:23) implies the constituting of Jesus' signs as cultural events which, as mentioned earlier, was accomplished by means of the experiencing and telling about such an event. Since it is probable that gossip was involved in the initial constituting of cultural events as real events (He did what?), the same process was likely involved with miraculous deeds attributed to Jesus. In other words, people were experiencing and constituting Jesus' signs by sharing the experiences with one another; the word was getting around.

This understanding is reinforced by the juxtapositioning of 2:23-25 with 3:2 where Nicodemus offers his report from the grapevine: "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one is able to do things, namely, the signs you do unless God is with him." While Nicodemus' words reveal a connection between Jesus' teaching activity and miraculous events (cf. Craffert 2008, 338, 348), they also make clear that it is via the gossip network that the news about Jesus and his signs is making its way, and in this case, construing Jesus as one in an intimate relationship with the Divine. It is reasonable to suggest then, that 2:23-25 implies Jesus' signs as generative events, generating not only an inadequate faith (although 2:11!), but also gossip that was spreading the news about Jesus because of the signs.

5.4.2 “He must increase, but I must decrease”: John 3:22-30

The gossip described at John 3:26 emerges because of a discussion between John’s disciple and a Jew generated by Jesus and his disciples moving into the Baptist’s field of activity, that is, they were baptizing (3:22). The text reports that John’s disciple and the Jew go to the Baptist and gossip:

And the came to John and said to him ‘Rabbi, the one who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have borne witness, see, he is baptizing and all are going to him.’ John answered and said, ‘A person is not able to receive anything except what has been given from heaven. You yourselves are bearing witness to me that I said that I myself am not the Christ, but that I have been sent before him. He who has the bride is the bridegroom, and the friend of the bridegroom stands and listens, and rejoices greatly on account of the bridegroom’s voice. This then has made my joy complete. He must increase, and I must decrease.’ (3:26-30)

This is a face-to-face gossip encounter involving at least three persons. The content is obviously evaluative as it calls into question the motives of Jesus and his disciples. The subject of the gossip is not present.

The generative event and the content of the gossip imply that behind the gossip lies the smoldering issue of group boundaries as Jesus’ in-group invades the space of the Baptist’s in-group. Recalling the dyadic personality of the first-century Mediterranean person discussed earlier, wherein an individual perceived him/herself in terms of how others of their particular in-group perceived them in a sequence of embeddedness, it is easy to understand how high the stakes were vis-à-vis the actions of Jesus and his in-group in moving in on the Baptist’s territory. In other words, the incursion into the Baptist’s in-group’s field of activity, was an assault on the very identity of that group centered around a baptizing prophetic figure.

What is perhaps the most influential social-cultural dynamic at work in this dispute is the idea of limited good, thus implying the agonistic catalyst honor-shame. As mentioned earlier, in the first-century Mediterranean, all good things were perceived in limited supply, which led to a perception of access to goods as a “zero-sum game” (Foster 1972, 169; 1965, 296; Malina 1981, 75). Honor was as well, perceived as a limited good and so someone’s gain in reputation necessarily meant another’s loss. The words of the Jew “[S]ee this one is baptizing and all are going to him” implies envious concern over Jesus’ gain in status and reputation vis-à-vis the Baptist’s loss of status and reputation (Neyrey 2007a, 84; Neyrey and Rohrbaugh 2002, 466). Thus, as far as his disciples are concerned, the Baptist’s loss is as well, their loss.

John’s response is in keeping with his function as witness ascribed to him in the first chapter (1:6-8, 15, 19-34). He does not see the matter as having to do with limited good, and thus deflates his disciples’ envious reaction by first relating that Jesus’ gain is not his (Jesus’) own (Neyrey 2007a, 85). Behind this is the idea of maintaining a balance in the distribution of limited goods within the context of a community (Foster 1965, 302). Thus, when one experienced gain of some kind, the responsibility was deflected away from the individual to something else. In this case, the Baptist deflects responsibility for Jesus’ gain to God as the source (3:27). Therefore, since the source is the divine benefaction of the sovereign God, there is no concern over consequential loss or gain, at least as far as John is concerned. In other words, “Jesus’ success is his (John’s) own success as herald of, or witness to, the Lamb of God” (Neyrey and Rohrbaugh 2002, 482; parentheses mine).

The image of the relationship between bridegroom and his friend vividly illustrates John's self-understanding regarding his role in light of Jesus' (3:29). The friend of the bridegroom accompanies him until he takes possession of the bride. Such voluntary self-subordination reflects John's understanding which he bolsters by conveying the fulfillment of his joy over the whole matter (Moloney 1998 106). Then, finally, by means of an obviously counter-culture remark, "He must increase, and I must decrease" (3:30), the Baptist seals his subordination while displaying his unconcern for social convention.

5.4.3 "Come, see a man who said to me everything I have ever done": John 4:1-42

Jesus' encounter with a Samaritan woman has on offer one of the most complex dialogues in the FG. It is one of a number of "individual encounters" with Jesus that the author uses not only to underscore his origin from the heavens, "from above" (ἄνωθεν; 3:3), but also to illustrate the potential of persons who are "of the world" to grow in faith, or socially, to become a member of Jesus' faction. Some grow in faith and become insiders, while others apparently do not (e.g., the lame man at 5:2-15; Pontius Pilate at 18:28-38). Others still, respond to Jesus ambiguously (Nicodemus at 3:1-15; cf. 7:50-51; 19:39-40).

Scholars have recognized that the exchange between the woman and Jesus can be divided into two sections, 4:7-15 and 4:16-26 (e.g., O'Day 2002, 39, 46; Neyrey 2007a, 89; Moloney 1998, 115, 126). The first section is unique in that in it, the woman's misunderstanding of Jesus' words is the catalyst for the discussion. The second section

marks the end of the woman's misunderstanding as it describes a vigorous challenge-riposte between her and Jesus.

The intricate, two-part exchange entails a series of "testimonies" on the woman's part to Jesus' identity, each testimony reflecting an advance in her understanding. In other words, at the start the woman functions as an outsider with earthly categories and perceives Jesus the way any other Samaritan woman "of the world" would, that is, as a "Jew" who strangely asks her for a drink (4:9). By the end of the encounter, the woman is bearing testimony to Jesus by means of gossip: "Come see a man who said to me everything I have ever done. Can he be the Messiah?" (4:29).

This is a face-to-face gossip event involving a woman gossiping to "the people" (τοῖς ἀνθρώποις; 4:28) of an entire city, Sychar (4:5). The content of the gossip is evaluative since it ascribes to an absent Jesus, divine knowledge as well as the possible identification as "Messiah" (4:29). The use of the negative adverb μήτι however, anticipates a negative response to her question "Can he be the Messiah?", thus undercutting her initial assessment regarding Jesus' knowledge about her, and characterizing the content of her gossip as relatively ambivalent. Indeed, this gossip encounter can therefore be described as adjudicative although it encompasses information conveyed by a single gossiper to a number of listeners. The content of the woman's gossip also signals the generative cause, namely, Jesus' divine knowledge expressed at 4:17b-18, which at that point results in her ascribing to Jesus the title of "prophet."

Several details of the social-cultural framework of this text are important. To begin with, there is implied in the story the tension involved in every public meeting between two persons from two different groups. Jesus is an insider to his group, while

the woman is an insider to her group, the Samaritans. Thus, they were both “outsiders” to each other. Moreover, because of geographical stereotyping common in the first-century Mediterranean, the two persons likely knew what to expect from one another in a public encounter, and so would both be very suspicious of the other. In her response to Jesus’ request for water, the woman employs her own stereotyping, “You, a Jew” (4:9). As things unfold however, what they each get from the other is remarkable.

The fact that the woman was a Samaritan *and* a woman was a reality culturally overshadowed by the belief that as such (i.e. a daughter of a bastardized ethnic group), she was unclean “from the cradle” (cf. *m. Nid.* 4.1). So, Jesus’ encounter with her would have brought into play issues of purity in the eyes of observers. The fact that she is a woman alone in a public space and with a man who is not her husband was problematic given cultural notions of sexuality (Malina 1996, 48-51). The Mediterranean culture also saw that women belonged and operated in private space (the home), while men belonged and operated in public space (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 104-105). This corresponded with the public arena where honor was transacted among men, and the private arena where shame was maintained by women (Malina 1981, 44-47). Indeed, while in public, the woman’s wearing of a veil created a private space for her to operate. Neyrey summarizes the awkward (volatile!) social-cultural situation describing the woman as the “ultimate outsider” since she is female, apparently shameless (due to her numerous husbands), unclean, and a Samaritan (Neyrey 2007a, 94-95).

The background behind this encounter takes an interesting turn when the Samaritan woman engages the Jewish man, Jesus, in a game of challenge-riposte (4:16-26) given that challenge-riposte was a public interaction, usually engaged in by men

(Neyrey 2007a, 93). What is crucial about this is that the final riposte (of four exchanges) has Jesus revealing to her, quite plainly, his identity as Messiah (4:26), and he does this by affirming his identity to her with the words “I am” (ἐγώ εἰμί) which is the gospel’s major claim for Jesus’ identity (8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5) corresponding as it does to God’s name revealed to Moses and reflected on by the prophets (Exod 3:14; Isa 43:10; 45:18). In other words, the woman’s positive challenge to Jesus, is ultimately responded to rewardingly with a revelation of his identity (Neyrey 2007a, 93).

Whether or not Jesus words here can be construed as a generative cause (along with his divine knowledge at 4:17-18) of the gossip coming at 4:29 is not clear as the woman’s sudden departure from the scene after this highest of self-acclamations can be explained easily by the disciples’ arrival from the city (4:8, 27).

5.4.4 Gossip Constructing a Shamanic Figure: 2:1-4:54

There are clues embedded in the gossip at 3:26-30 connecting it to the shamanic complex which may be illuminated by Jesus’ earlier encounter with Nicodemus (3:1-13).

And they came to John and said to him ‘Rabbi, the one who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have borne witness, see he is baptizing and all are going to him.’ John answered and said, ‘A person is not able to receive anything except what has been given from heaven...I myself am not the Christ...He who has the bride is the bridegroom, and the friend of the bridegroom stands and listens...He must increase, and I must decrease.’ (3:26-30)

To begin with, the Baptist’s disciples ascribe to Jesus the title of Rabbi, which, as mentioned earlier, has already been associated with miraculous deeds in the FG: “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one is able to do things, namely, the signs you do unless God is with him” (3:2).

At 3:26-30, Jesus is associated as well with baptism which is a practice containing elements common to the shamanic complex including spirit-possession, visions, and soul flights (Craffert 2008, 217). The previous scene with Nicodemus highlights this: “No one has ascended into heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man” (3:13). Indeed, the entirety of the peculiar conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus comes into play here since it revolves around baptism described by Jesus using “heavenly” speech (John 3:12), that Nicodemus cannot understand, as an ASC experience of new life in Christ: “Unless one is born out of water and spirit...” (3:5). Such birth “anew/from above” (ἀνωθεν) by baptism results in one’s experience of Jesus as God’s Son who comes “from above” (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 83). Jesus’ heavenly speech about baptism is embodied in praxis, by his, and his disciples’ practice of baptizing (3:26).

Finally, the Baptist’s testimony that he is not the Christ (3:28) in response to his own disciple’s questioning gossip about Jesus’ baptizing “beyond the Jordan,” implies Jesus as such, thus associating the Christ with baptism. Therefore, the association between ascribing Jesus with the title of “Christ” and the practice of baptism which is as well linked with the shamanic complex becomes clear.

The Samaritan woman’s gossip with “the people” of Sychar about Jesus is generated by his divine knowledge of her life, specifically, her status with respect to the man she is living with, and those she has lived with in the past: “Come see a man who said to me everything I have ever done. Can he be the Messiah?” (4:29).

Her gossip recalls her earlier ascription of Jesus as “a prophet” (4:19), thus associating Jesus’ divine knowledge with another element of the shamanic complex, namely, spirit-possession (Craffert 2008, 228-229).

The gossip about Jesus by the Samaritan woman, like that between the Baptist and his disciples (3:26-30), ascribes to Jesus the title “Messiah,” or “Christ,” and therefore implies what has already been discussed above. What is significant is the woman’s inability to comprehend Jesus’ identity, despite his emphatic self-designation as “I am” (4:26), to such an extent that her inquisitive gossip raises suspicion whether Jesus is in fact, the Messiah (4:29). Thus, for the woman at least, Jesus’ identity is still under construction. The tension created by her adjudicative gossip about Jesus may partly account for the Samaritans’ explanation of their belief in Jesus as the result of what they heard for themselves from him, rather than her gossip: “We know that this man is truly the Savior of the World” (John 4:42). In any case, the Samaritans ascribe Jesus as “Savior of the World” which is significant given that Jesus has already announced his role as savior at 3:17, and because it shows the Samaritans’ acknowledgement of the salvation which is “from the Jews” (4:22). The title itself “savior” (σωτήρ) is certainly not exclusively Jewish as it was ascribed by pagans to various deities of the Greco-Roman pantheon who might act as benefactor by rescuing people from dangers or illness, and protecting them from harm (Neyrey 2007a, 99; cf. Moloney 1998, 147; Barrett 1978, 244). Thus, the “Savior of the World” can be associated with one who mediates between humans and the Divine rather than with Caesar or Zeus, namely, “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29, 34; cf. Carson 1991, 232; Beasley-Murray 1987, 65).

5.4.5 Johannine Assessment of Gossip: John 4:42

Earlier it was suggested that John 2:23-25 may account for a Johannine assessment of gossip that was negative in character, and thus consistent with the prevailing opinion in the ancient world. The words of the Samaritans directed to the Samaritan woman after their coming to believe in Jesus, may account for another clue to the author's assessment of gossip.

When the townspeople of Sychar speak about their belief in Jesus, they are careful to point out that it was “no longer on account of your word that we believe” (4:42). In the Greek text, the word used for the woman's “word” (λαλιάν) is one that is often associated with gossip (Rohrbaugh 2007, 136; Moloney 1998, 147; contra Barrett 1978, 243). Thus, the Samaritans' words to the woman that they no longer believe because of her λαλιάν may be understood as a tacit negative assessment of her gossip. In other words, since the woman's gossip to the Samaritans about Jesus (4:29) is illustrated by the Samaritans (4:42) with a word often used to describe gossip negatively, λαλιάν (Moloney 1998, 147), the story can be read as a negative appraisal of gossip. In any event, it was the woman's gossip among the Samaritans that brought them to Jesus.

5.5 Gossip at the Feasts of the Jews: John 5:1-10:42

This section in the FG is marked by its organization around a number of festivals – Sabbath (5:1-47), Passover (6:4-71), Tabernacles (7:2-8:59), the “last day” of Tabernacles (9:1-10:21), and Dedication (10:22-42). This large section of text also marks a decisive increase in the tension between Jesus and “the Jews” in the FG from “mere reservation” to “outright and sometimes official opposition” (Carson 1991, 240). Thus

the increase in hostility is first noted at 5:16: “And on account of this the Jews persecuted Jesus, because he did these things on the Sabbath.” The hostility between Jesus and the Jews comes to a head at chapter 8 which contains the most venomous exchange between them in the gospel.

This section can be described as narrating the collision of two different ways of experiencing and celebrating the presence of God via the festivals. Throughout, Jesus says or does things that point to him as the fulfillment of each festival, and emphasis is consistently placed on the propriety of Jesus’ way of celebrating festival, as well as on the new priority of Jesus mediation between God and Israel over Moses’ former role as mediator (cf. 5:46-47; 6:32-33, 48-51). Imagining this heightening of conflict socially, one understands how the narrative evolves into a series of challenges launched at Jesus, and thus at his group, by other rival groups intent on bringing him into disrepute. Noticeably present throughout most of this section are a number of gossip events that are adjudicative in character, and that result in division among members of rival groups opposed to Jesus. As such, the identity of the person of Jesus can be seen as ambiguous, or at least “under construction” from the standpoint of outsiders. Moreover, several gossip events are intricately entwined with challenge-riposte so that gossip even plays a role beyond merely constituting a cultural event, or reporting and confirming the results of challenge-riposte and the transaction of honor or shame. Indeed, it will be suggested that at a number of places, gossip plays a very direct role in negatively challenging Jesus. Significant too, is the role gossip plays in constituting Jesus as a social personage drawing on elements of the shamanic complex.

5.5.1 “It was that man who made me well who said to me...”: 5:10-12, 15

The story of the healing of the paralytic at the pool of Bethzatha in Jerusalem, one of Jesus’ signs, is relatively opaque compared with the other narratives describing individual encounters with Jesus. How the lame man receives Jesus appears awkward and unclear, similar to Nicodemus. Indeed, the paralytic is often described by interpreters as lazy, self-pitying, complaining, passive, and/or overly concerned to avoid blame (e.g., Talbert 1992, 122; Culpepper 1998, 150-151), specifically because he is questioned by Jesus whether or not he wants to be healed. The man responds, keeping focus on the healing potential of the pool while indicating no one helps him when the water is stirred (5:7).

An obvious element of the sociological framework of this text involves group affiliation and in-group/out-group dynamics, since the story entails an encounter between a man who is group-less, one who is the leader of an emerging faction, and a group opposing Jesus’ faction. It is thus, a fitting introduction to a section (John 6-7) where the competition between groups will be characterized by incessant challenge-riposte encounters and negative gossip.

A sociological angle on the story provides as well, additional backdrop to the healing and the subsequent gossip, as it sees the man’s dilemma in terms of group affiliation, or lack thereof. From this angle, some scholars understand the reason why the man never makes it into the pool is because he is apparently unattached to any group, and so without any friends or companions to help him into the pool (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 111). Subsequently, his social situation is indeed dire on several levels, and may even get worse if he continues to isolate himself (5:14). Although it may be quite hard to imagine an individual in a collectivistic culture, as utterly bereft of kinfolk or friends that

he cannot get to the pool, it is sufficient that the man's situation is indeed, desperate (Pilch 1999, 128).

To get a clearer picture of the social dynamics implied by the paralytic's lonely situation in this story, consideration of the relation between honor-shame, sinning, illness/sickness and healing/curing as it was imagined in the first-century Mediterranean is in order. To begin with, sinning was understood as an act of dishonoring or shaming. Thus, sinning against God's Law was not only seen as an act of dishonoring or shaming God who provided Torah, but also dishonoring or shaming any persons harmed by the trespass, thus damaging social relationship. Sinning against God, and so shaming God, meant that God would take satisfaction to defend God's honor by exercising God's wrath, often in the form of illness (Malina and Pilch 2006, 408-409). Because trespassing against God's Law also often meant trespassing against one's friends, kinfolk, neighbors, or fellow in-group members, the result could as well entail the social consequence described by the paralytic in John 5 – he had no one to help him into the pool (5:7).

Such a complex understanding of illness incorporates as well ideas out of the ancient world view that the body, mind, and culture were not distinct or unconnected entities, but quite intricately related:

If the human organism is viewed as composed of a number of hierarchically organized subsystems (particles, molecules, cells, organs) and itself belonging to larger systems (family, group, organization, society, nation, ecological environment), with each system relating reciprocally to the others, health will be understood as a dynamic balance of the systems and illness as a disequilibrium. (Craffert 2008, 262)

Thus, there is much more implied in the entire situation narrated at 5:1-9a than merely that a man was sick and Jesus cured his sickness. In the high context culture of the first-century Mediterranean, sickness was experienced on multiple levels including the

physical, psychical, and social. Social-scientists describe this as a biopsychosocial framework (Craffert 2008, 260-299).

The gossip reported at 5:11-12 is generated by both Jesus' healing a lame man and the man's carrying his mat on the Sabbath (5:9b) as a result of the healing. After the text announces (suddenly) that it is the Sabbath, the Jews see the man walking alone with his mat and point out the unlawfulness of his action (5:10; cf. Exod 20:8-11; Jer 17:19-27). The man's response is to gossip about Jesus: "But he answered them, 'It was the one who made me well who said to me take up your mat and walk'" (5:11). The Jews respond to the gossip with a question inquiring about Jesus' identity (5:12). These two verses alone do not constitute the entire gossip event as the man, not knowing it was Jesus who healed him, reports back to the Jews at 5:15 that it was Jesus who "made him well," thus offering a response to their initial inquiry into Jesus' identity. The character of the information transacted in the gossip is negative since the man, being told that he was breaking Sabbath, directs responsibility to Jesus, thus suggesting that Jesus breaks Sabbath (Neyrey 2007a, 104) and implying he is a sinner (cf. John 9:24b).

5.5.2 Gossip Constructing a Shamanic Figure: John 5:10-12, 15

In the Synoptics, vocabulary for healing is associated with Jesus fifty times (Pilch 1999, 119). Conversely, Jesus of the FG is portrayed healing sickness/illness only three times (4:46-54; 5:1-18; 9). Gossip is involved with all three episodes in John, and at various levels. This comes as no surprise given that from the perspective of a shamanic figure, rumor and gossip are normal social processes involved with the life experience of such a figure in the first-century Mediterranean world (Craffert 2008, 342). Indeed, as seen

earlier, according to John's narrative, Jesus' growing reputation can be accounted for given the healthy gossip network implied (cf. 1:35-46; 2:23; 3:2; 4:28, 47; 6:2; et al), and there is little doubt that part of that reputation was as a healer.

Jesus' association with healing in the Synoptics and John indicates the traditioning processes constituting him as a shaman given that healing is one of the essential functions from the normal variety of functions associated with a shamanic figure that were practiced by the shaman on behalf of a group or community (Craffert 2008, 159). In the FG, it is the crowd or "the people" who not only constitute and maintain the gossip network, but who also help constitute Jesus as a social personage by means of the gossip network (e.g., 2:23; 6:2; 7:12, 25; 9:8). In other words, the crowds or "the people" are to be seen in the FG as carrying the news conveying the communal and community-driven healing processes that occurred wherever Jesus went (Craffert 2008, 297). To put it differently, the gossip network conveyed information about Jesus' effectiveness as a healer in a communicative activity that simultaneously constructed the healing event as a real cultural event, *and* constructed Jesus as a particular social personage. Associating Jesus with healing abilities, the gossip network provided both the vitality behind such reports that motivated the healings by nurturing and communicating Jesus' reputation as a "great shamanic healer," as well as the symbol of confidence behind him as a powerful healer (Craffert 2008, 296-297). When Jesus' healings are viewed within the context of the shamanic complex, and thus associated with the variety of other features and functions of a shamanic figure, the healings reported in the FG are thus seen as clues to how Jesus healed as a shamanic figure.

Apart from the healing itself, there are a number of clues in the story of Jesus healing a paralytic by the pool of Bethzatha (John 5:1-18) that when seen through the lens of the shamanic complex, inscribe Jesus as a shamanic figure. For instance, the text reports that Jesus *knew* that the man had been at the pool for a long time, indicating divine knowledge. Moreover, the detail that eventually drives the bulk of the story and sets up a lengthy discourse for Jesus (5:19-47) is not the healing as such, but rather the fact that Jesus healed the man on the Sabbath (5:9b). Given that a wandering shamanic figure would naturally drift toward rural communities that often gathered in synagogues, it is no surprise that many of Jesus' activities, including healing, would likely occur in such Sabbath-gathering scenarios (Mark 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17; John 9:1-12; Craffert 2008, 341). Thus, since Jesus was raised in such a rural setting – Galilean peasant society – he would likely have held a different view of cultic proscriptions in Torah, and thus a significantly different view of Torah-keeping than Judean Jews, and certainly Pharisees. Additionally, the depiction of Jesus in controversy with authorities over Sabbath Law implies that he was a “master of God’s day,” thus acting like someone with a sense of authority and mission and who could be inscribed as “Son of God” (Craffert 2008, 341).

5.5.3 Gossip About the Bread of Life at Passover: John 6

The intensity of the hostility directed at Jesus by the Jews since the beginning of the FG has become increasingly acute (1:19; 2:13-22) and takes a radical turn in John 5 as they now seek to kill Jesus (5:18). Indeed, Jesus' description of his healing as God's work (on the Sabbath) is enough to garner the accusation of blasphemy from the Jews (cf. Gen.

3:5; Isa 14:14; Dan 11:31-36). With this radical turn, the narrative as well takes on explicit characteristics of a trial seeking to determine the identity of Jesus (5:12; Moloney 1998, 170).

The gossip about Jesus in chapter six of John (6:14, 41-42, 52, 60) is either positive or negative, and is couched amidst the growing hostility against him. Thus, within the narrative, the character of the gossip begins to take on a more aggressive quality, and, as it will be suggested, is utilized by Jesus' opponents as a tool of aggression, challenging Jesus' claims to honor implied by his words and deeds that generate the gossip.

5.5.3.1 Gossip About God's Surplus: John 6:14

The story of Jesus feeding five thousand is prefaced by a report about Jesus' growing reputation, fortified by the gossip network, in light of the miraculous deeds he was doing, particularly his healing the sick (6:2; Craffert 2008, 296-297). Jesus performs the sign while "up the mountain" (6:3), thus setting up a comparison between himself and Moses who received the Torah on the mountain (Exod 19:20; 14:1-2; Isa 34:2-4) and led the Israelites through the wilderness where God provided manna from heaven (Exod 16:8, 12, 16, 18, 21). This is corroborated by the detail that there was a surplus left over after the feeding which Jesus directs his disciples to "gather up" (συνάγω; 6:12). This gathering of the fragments (κλάσματα) is particularly remarkable when compared with the gathering up of the manna directed by Moses (Exod 16:16), which eventually faded away (Exod 16:21). Thus, the comparison implies what has been hinted at until now in the FG narrative, that Jesus surpasses Moses and what Moses provided via the Torah.

Jesus' sign of multiplying the loaves and fish to feed the crowd (6:11), generates gossip among "the people" (οἱ ἄνθρωποι) who witnessed it and thus begin to construe the event by gossiping about his identity and origins: "When the people saw the sign that he did, they said that 'This is truly the prophet who is to come into the world'" (6:14). The communication, in the third person, (Οὗτός ἐστιν) is face-to-face amongst a group of people (οἱ ἄνθρωποι) about a third party subject who is present. What is not clear is whether Jesus hears the gossip or not, although his knowledge of the group's intentions implies he may have been aware that they were gossiping about him (6:15). In any case, the gossip is positive in character, ascribing to Jesus the acclamation that he is "the prophet who is coming into the world" (cf. 1:45; 4:19).

5.5.3.2 Gossip About the "Bread Come Down from Heaven": John 6:41-42, 52

Before treating the gossip events in this section, it is important to consider the narrative context (6:22-40) as it provides relevant information not only about Jesus' identity, but also sets the gossip firmly within an agonistic context of an honor-shame culture characterized by challenge-riposte.

After Jesus feeds five thousand and evades the people who want to take him forcibly to be king (6:15), the narrative describes him walking on the Sea of Galilee (6:16-21). While this event is vital to inscribing Jesus as a shamanic figure, it places Jesus and his disciples on the opposite side of the sea away from the crowd, which leads to "the crowd" (ὁ ὄχλος) pursuing, literally "seeking" after (ζητέω), Jesus to the other side (6:22-24). Seeking after Jesus recalls 5:18 where such seeking (also ζητέω) is for a violent purpose, thus raising the tension. When the crowd finds Jesus, they immediately

issue a challenge to him, thus initiating a series of challenge-ripostes between them and Jesus (challenge 6:25, riposte, 6:26-27; challenge 6:28, riposte 6:29; challenge 6:30-31, riposte 6:32-33; challenge 6:34, riposte 6:35-41; cf. Moloney 1998, 207-208). Remarkable about this section is the way it describes how outsiders (the crowd) are challenging Jesus in light of his miraculous deeds. The crowd is seeking Jesus and challenging his claims implied by what he says and does. It is also significant that the crowd is not able to understand Jesus' words, much like the Samaritan woman (cf. 6:34; 4:15), thus implying the use of anti-language that only makes sense to members of Jesus' in-group. Moreover, the fact that Jesus surpasses Moses is explicitly described in terms of God's provision of Jesus, the "bread of God" from heaven, vis-à-vis Moses who did not even provide the manna which perishes (6:32). Additionally, Jesus' description as the "bread of life" "from heaven" which provides eternal life, is in contrast to the life promised by the Torah:

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. (Gen 30:15)

Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. (Gen 30:19b-20)

He bestowed knowledge upon them, and allotted to them the law of life. (Sir 17:11)

He allowed him to hear his voice and led him into the dark cloud, and gave him the commandments face to face, the law of life and knowledge, so that he might teach Jacob the covenant, and Israel his decrees. (Sir 45:5)

The contrast between Jesus and Moses – Jesus the Bread of Life and manna in the wilderness, Jesus the food that gives life and the Torah that does not – is important as it not only provides the basis for the tension between Jesus and outsiders, but also because

it illustrates the black-and-white mindset of an anti-society asserting its own innovation using its own anti-language that leaves those of the prevailing consensus, confused (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 46-48).

Jesus' words "I am the bread of life" at 6:35 is the first of his twenty-four emphatic "I am" (Ἐγώ εἰμι) statements in the FG (e.g., 4:26; 6:20, 41, 48, 51; 8:12, 18, 23, 24, 28, 58; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; et al), and is weighted with Christological significance (cf. Barrett 1978, 291-293; Bultmann 1971, 225-226). Moreover, Jesus' anti-language claims that he is the "bread of life" (6:35), the "bread of God" come down from heaven (6:33; cf. 6:38) is received by his audience with expected recalcitrance in the form of gossip: "Then the Jews murmured about him because he said 'I am the bread come down from heaven.' And they were saying, 'Is this not Jesus the son of Joseph whose father and mother we know? How does he now say that 'I have come down from heaven'?" (6:41-42). This face-to-face communication among the Jews is generated by Jesus' unusual words that are basically honor claims with respect to his identity and his origin (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 134). The Jews who emerge from out of the crowd at 6:41 may be the leaders of the synagogue at Capernaum as 6:59 suggests (Carson 1991, 292), and are described as "murmuring" (γογγύζω) about Jesus. Rohrbaugh includes γογγύζω in his lexicon of vocabulary words signaling gossip, a word which interestingly appears three times in this chapter alone at 6:41, 43, and 61 (Rohrbaugh 2007, 136). The murmuring of the Jews recalls that of the Israelites in the wilderness, even utilizing the same verb γογγύζω in the Septuagint (Exod 15:24; 16:2, 7; 17:3), and so indicates recalcitrance in the face of Jesus' Christological claims (Smith 1999, 155). The murmuring in the FG is over Christological claims while that in Exodus is over the

provision of sustenance in the wilderness. For the FG it is Jesus who sustains life (3:16, 36; 10:10), while for the Israelites it was angels' food (Wis 16:20) that sustained life (Keener 2003, 680). In any event, the Jews' gossip puts Jesus under direct scrutiny as they stereotype him based on his lineage first, and then his origins by questioning his ability to come from the heavenly realm. In other words, since they know (οἶδαμεν) Jesus' lineage, he cannot possibly come down from heaven.

Another element of the Jews' gossip at 6:42 is remarkable, specifically because it appears to be gossip among a group about a third-party subject that is intended to be overheard by the subject (Handelman 1973, 213). In cases like this, the subject, although actually present, is rendered absent by various means, in this case, by the use of third-person speech (cf. Bergmann 1993, 79-80). If this sort of gossip is indeed what is being described at John 6:42, then it demonstrates a peculiar function of gossip within the framework of challenge-riposte. In other words, the Jews challenge Jesus' claims implied by his anti-language speech about his identity and origin as the bread of life from heaven (6:35-40), not by a direct question or counter claim, but rather by gossiping about him so that he will overhear. Thus, the challenge is laid – will Jesus respond, or not, and if so, how?

Jesus' response is up to the task and quite direct as he first chides the Jews because of their gossip: "Do not murmur among yourselves" (6:43). Then Jesus reasserts his honor claim by reaffirming his origins from the Father while emphasizing that it is the Father (not Jesus) who does the drawing: "No one is able to come to me unless the Father who sent me, draws them" (6:44a; cf. Jer 31:3; Hos 11:4 LXX). Thus, Jesus' honor claims with respect to his identity and origin are not fortified by earthly categories,

as the Jews attempt to assert, but by heavenly categories so that his claims are backed by the Father in heaven (cf. Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 134).

After rounding off his response to the first challenge leveled by the Jews via gossip, Jesus reasserts his identity as the bread of life (6:48), and in such a way that emphasizes again the superiority of himself and what he has to offer over Moses and the manna in the wilderness (6:49-51). Yet again, Jesus uses anti-language that only increases the tension: “Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread which I will give so that the world will live is my flesh” (6:51b). Such anti-language, which makes sense to Jesus’ in-group (but 6:60! below), makes no sense to the Jews who respond by quarrelling (μάχομαι) “among themselves” (πρὸς ἀλλήλους): “How is it possible for this man to give us his flesh to eat?” (6:52b).

The inquisitive quarrelling of the Jews “among themselves” at this point may be understood as a gossip event like 6:42 given that it continues the same theme of “murmuring,” thus evoking Exodus 16 again (Moloney 1998, 224). If so, then it may also be seen as a further challenge to Jesus’ words received by outsiders as an absurd invitation to anthropophagy (Bultmann 1971, 235), which becomes offensive by Jesus’ exhorting the drinking of his blood, a notion explicitly forbidden by Torah (Gen 9:4; Lev. 3:17; Deut 12:23). On the other hand, for members of Jesus’ anti-society, life that resides in the flesh and blood of Jesus is something that they can more than just have, but can have in themselves (ἔχετε ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς, 6:53; Bultmann 1971, 235). For them, the demand to eat his flesh and drink his blood is an invitation to welcome, accept, receive, and believe into Jesus, so that language of eating Jesus’ flesh even replaces conventional language signaling dyadic inter-relatedness common to collectivistic in-group relations

and membership (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 134-135; Moloney 1998, 222). Indeed, Jesus' words indicate this is the case: "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them" (6:56). The language of "abiding" (μένω) is significant as it describes the relationship between the Father, Son, and Spirit (1:32-33; 14:10; 15:10), thus implying as well, the dyadic relationship of believers (Carson 1991, 298; cf. Smith 1999, 159; Barrett 1978, 299; Bultmann 1971, 236).

The Jews' reaction to Jesus' words, first to the crowd, then the strange words about eating his flesh, provoke public evaluation. First, he is labeled as far as his lineage and origin go by means of aggressive gossip intended to be overheard, and so intimidate. Then eventually, as Jesus continues to speak in the anti-language of his in-group, the Jews are left wondering "how?", much like Nicodemus did earlier (cf. 6:52 and 3:9). Jesus responds to the aggressive challenge, and in a way that underscores his loyalty to his in-group, and that leaves the Jews wondering.

5.5.3.3 Gossip About "Hard Teaching": John 6:60-71

The gossip reported at John 6:60 is significant insofar as it suggests that even apparent members of Jesus' anti-society, may not be able to host the teachings of their leader. Provoked by Jesus' words about eating and drinking his blood, "many" of Jesus' disciples gossip: "This word is difficult. Who is able to hear it?" (6:60). Such misunderstanding and inability to accept Jesus' words is characteristic of those who hear without faith (Keener 2003, 693), that is, outsiders who are not part of Jesus' in-group.

That this constitutes a gossip event is indicated by the narrative's description of Jesus' awareness that many of his disciples were "murmuring" (γογγύζω) about his

words, and his inquisitive response: “Does this scandalize you?” (6:61b). This challenge on Jesus’ part comes in light of his claims regarding his identity and origins as the unique revelation of God (Bread of God) from heaven, the latter of which he backs up with another question: “Then what if you were to see the Son of Man going up to where he was before?” (6:62). In other words, if Jesus’ coming down from heaven (incarnation), along with his words of revelation cause outsiders to stumble, how much more will his going back up to heaven (resurrection) cause them to stumble. Jesus’ challenge here recalls the words to Nicodemus at 3:13 that the Son of Man has come down from heaven, and implies that they will see him going back up, as was the case with the ascent of other revealers such as Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, and Enoch (Moloney 1998, 228). In any case, the result of Jesus’ anti-language is the loss of a number of his followers (John 6:66).

Jesus then turns to those who remain, issuing a challenge to their in-group loyalty and expecting “yes” as an answer: “Do you also wish to go away?” (6:67). In sharp contrast to the many disciples leaving, Peter testifies not only to Jesus’ identity, but to his (Peter’s) and the remaining disciples’ enduring embeddedness in the in-group: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And we have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” (6:68-69). But Jesus’ response to Peter unhinges things, thus unsettling Peter’s testimony by keeping things fixed on the immanent betrayal (6:70-71). Jesus’ words are ominous and suggestive of the possibility that even in-group members, chosen especially by the in-group leader, are as capable of misconstruing Jesus as outsiders are, and even to the point of betrayal (cf. 1:46; 4:33; 6:7-9; 9:2): “Did I not select you, the twelve? And one of you is a devil?” (6:70).

5.5.4 Gossip Constructing a Shamanic Figure: John 6

Although the gossip in this section does not necessarily reflect the gossip network as in the previous section, it does convey information about Jesus' heavenly origin as well as his relationship with the Father. At 6:41-42, Jesus' origin from the heavens and relation with the Father, is contrasted with an outsider, earthly understanding of the same from the perspective of the Jews. Their gossip, generated by Jesus' anti-language, ascribes Jesus as a shamanic figure by means of the contrast between a heavenly and earthly origin, and a heavenly or earthly lineage.

The association of Jesus with the Father who sent him, and who is from above is an emphasis of chapter six (6:29, 33, 38, 39, 44, 51, 57). Thus, the ascription of Jesus as a shamanic figure in John 6 centers around his origin from the heavens, that is, the Father who *sent* him, and his lineage – he is from the *Father* who sent him. Jesus is from the one who sent him, the Father (6:44a, 46), and is associated with prophetic figures who prophecy the content of the new knowledge or teaching, as Jesus (6:45) who is in the end, the teacher (6:59; cf. Craffert 2008, 344). Knowledge of Jesus' identity and origin is the content of the new learning taught by God, and thus the new knowledge associated with Jesus as a shamanic figure who teaches. The new knowledge that the shamanic figure provides via anti-language, is misunderstood by the outsiders (the Jews), and is also “difficult” to hear and accept by even many of the insiders of Jesus' group (6:60) who eventually end up leaving the group (6:66). Eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus is difficult, but not compared with seeing the Son of Man return from whence he came (6:62). Once again, Jesus is associated here with shamanic journeys.

In contrast to the prophetic figure of Moses, and the heavenly provision of manna associated with him, stands the subject of gossip, Jesus, who is “bread of life” (6:48), that comes down from heaven (6:33, 49), the “living bread” (6:51) that is “true food” (6:55) and thus, by which one “will live forever” (6:58). This true food comes down from whence he came (3:13), and thus reflects the shamanic journey between the realms (cf. 1:14; 1:51). Thus, it can be said that when looking at the text from the perspective of the shamanic complex, Jesus is ascribed as the heavenly provider of nourishment that gives life for/to his in-group, and who is in fact, that very nourishment.

Thus, gossip offers clues as to how Jesus could have been understood as a shamanic figure whose origin was from the heavenly realm, and who as well had a unique relationship with the divine, and was thus able to provide the community (or group) with new knowledge as well as life. In the memory of his followers, Jesus’ teaching merged not only with the wonderful things that he did (Craffert 2008, 338), but also with his words (teaching) that, while strange and even subversive to outsiders and the *status quo*, were words that imparted new knowledge to believers, that is, members of Jesus’ in-group. Such words ascribed Jesus with features and functions associated with the shamanic complex, including origin and lineage, and did not go unchallenged by outsiders who were inert because of their embeddedness in earthly categories of thinking. Thus, when seen through the shamanic complex, the generative cause of the gossip, and the gossip itself, constitutes Jesus as a shamanic figure.

5.5.5 Gossip About Jesus During Tabernacles: John 7

John 7 is closely connected with John 8 as both narrate episodes of Jesus in Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles. John 7 is treated here separately from chapter eight because of the concentration of gossip events in the former compared with the latter (8:22a). Moreover, chapter seven marks a significant change of venue for Jesus, from Galilee to Judea, and while Galileans were unwilling to follow Jesus, “the Jews” were seeking to kill him (John 5:18; 7:1; cf. Keener 2003, 704). Thus, the conflict emerging in chapter six, begins to build in chapter seven as Jesus, a Galilean peasant, once again is in Judea where relations between him and the Jews have been historically troublesome. Indeed, interaction between Judeans and Galileans would have been distrustful in the first place given the likely “mentality of mutual distrust” common between groups in peasant societies (Foster 1960, 175; 1965, 302). The resultant anxiety-producing situations would have provided fertile soil for gossip to emerge as interlocutors attempted to make sense out of unfamiliar and unexpected words uttered in conflictive situations (Botha 1993, 211-212). Conflict is in fact, the driving force behind the interactions of John 7. Moloney offers an outline (1998, 236):

- (a) 7:1-9: *Before the Feast*. A *schism* (σχίσμα) arises between Jesus and his brothers about going to the feast.
- (b) 7:10-13: *At the feast*. In Jerusalem there is a *schism* about Jesus: is he a good man, or does he lead the people astray?
- (c) 7:14-36: *About the middle of the feast*.
 - i. Vv. 14-24: Jesus teaches in the temple and *conflict* emerges.
 - ii. Vv. 25-31: The question of Jesus’ messiahship and his origins create *schism*.
 - iii. Vv. 32-36: A *conflict* arises over the destiny of Jesus.
- (d) 7:37-8:59: *On the last day of the feast*.
 - i. 7:37-52: Jesus’ self-revelation as the living water leads to *schism*.
 - ii. 8:12-30: Jesus reveals himself as the “light of the world.”
 - iii. 8:31-59: Jesus and “the Jews” in *conflict* over their respective origins.

Moloney's outline discloses the presence of conflict and schism that stands out in this section of the FG as Jesus is at odds throughout with outsiders who do not understand his words, and who simultaneously articulate their misunderstanding and construct sense via gossip about him. Gossip can thus be understood here as a reactive social dynamic (to Jesus' words and deeds) emerging out of conflictive contexts, as well as the inevitable product of a clash between two different symbolic worlds – between Jesus' and his group's symbolic world, and that of the Jews and the crowds. It makes sense then that gossip is situated right in the thick of this conflictive narrative (7:12, 15, 25-27, 31, 35-36, 40-43, 46-49), and at the points of heightened tension, which occur according to Moloney's outline at the "middle of the feast" (7:14-36).

When reading John 7 with an eye toward gossip about Jesus, and with the presupposition that the gossip in this chapter is about a shamanic figure, it is important to remember that the goal is to see the role gossip plays in construing Jesus as a shamanic figure along with other social-cultural processes. It is quite noticeable in chapters one, four, and five that Jesus is not only construed as a shamanic figure by various social-cultural processes, including gossip, but that the narrative of the FG evinces various features and functions of the shamanic complex on a rather consistent basis apart from gossip events. Thus, the narrative of the FG, since it is about a shamanic figure, is noticeably to this point, involved in transmitting early believers' memories of Jesus that constitute him as such a figure. The task here is to try and keep the principle goal at the forefront, namely, to articulate the role gossip plays, along with other processes, in constituting Jesus as a shamanic figure.

While dealing with the gossip in chapter seven, a different procedure will be used due to the concentration of gossip events within the span a just 52 verses, as well as the coherence of the events described in the chapter that seemingly cohere because of the level of adversity. Thus far, the procedure utilized with each individual gossip text has been to establish the text as a gossip event, understand social-cultural processes at work (honor-shame, labeling, in-group/out-group dynamics, etc.), and then to show how the gossip constitutes Jesus as a shamanic figure by relating the text to the various features and functions associated with such a figure. This section will begin by illustrating how all of the texts under consideration constitute gossip. Then, in acknowledgement of the gossip's reactive character (reactive to Jesus' words), the analysis will juxtapose Jesus' words with the gossip that emerges in reaction to those words. Thus, the gossip events will be contextualized vis-à-vis social-cultural processes. Finally, the gossip will be observed through the lens of the features and functions associated with a shamanic figure.

5.5.5.1 Third-Person Speech and Gossip

Before examining the gossip events in John 7, a word is in order about the relation between gossip and third-person speech since such speech is used in this section. When reading the text carefully, it becomes apparent that most of the gossiping about Jesus is done using third-person speech. This would seem obvious since gossip is about an absent, third party subject. But recalling the definition of gossip offered at the end of Chapter One and mapped in Chapter Four, the subject of gossip is indeed absent, but at times only *rendered* absent. Thus, the subject of a gossip event may actually be present, but unaware of the gossiping, let alone the content of the information conveyed.

We already have however, come across a peculiar kind of gossiping wherein the subject is not only rendered absent by the gossipers speaking amongst themselves (πρὸς ἀλλήλους; 6:52), but is also able to overhear the gossip (6:41-42). Subsequently, it was suggested that such gossip is intended to be heard by the subject, and thus functions as a challenge to Jesus since the gossipers wait to see and hear how Jesus will respond. Not surprisingly, the gossip in such cases is third-person speech. Interestingly, a number of times where the text does not indicate that gossipers are physically changing positions or turning toward one another, but only that they are speaking critically about the subject in the third person, Jesus hears and responds, which the text reports in formulaic fashion: “Jesus answered them...” (6:43; 7:16); “Jesus said to them...” (6:53, 61; 8:23); “Jesus cried out...” (7:28). This may give the impression that a typical dialogue in direct address is occurring. It is however, suggested here that these episodes do not constitute a dialogue between Jesus and his opponents, rather that his opponents are reactively gossiping about him, and that Jesus overhears the gossip and responds to it. Thus, these do not constitute direct address. The fact that Jesus is depicted as engaging in direct address on a number of occasions with persons or groups in both John 6 and 7 that also incorporates the formulaic “Jesus answered them...” (6:5-7, 25-26, 28-29, 30-32, 34-35; 7:20-21) strengthens the plausibility that third-person speech in similar situations can reasonably be seen as gossip that Jesus overhears. Indeed, in John 8 Jesus engages not in gossip, but in direct address dialogue with his opponents (8:12-13, 19, 25, 31-34).

It is significant that in chapters six, seven, and eight, much of the third-person speech about Jesus that constitutes gossip is engaged in by those who are clearly Jesus’ opponents, or at least outsiders. What this may suggest is that the gossip in John, by-and-

large is imagined as something negative and so engaged in by opponents of the subject. This implies a generally negative appraisal of gossip on the part of the Fourth Evangelist, even though there are instances in the FG where the gossip is positive, or at least neutral in character (e.g., 1:36, 41, 45-46; 4:29).

5.5.5.2 Gossip in John 7

Between chapters six and seven, the FG narrative moves Jesus to Judea during the Feast of Tabernacles extending from John 7:1 all the way through 10:21. Notable in chapter seven are the time indicators for the middle and the last day of the festival (7:14, 37) that contextualize Jesus' words as well as the other characters' reactions to those words in the tension anticipated from the start. The chapter begins with Jesus in Galilee (7:1-9) and moves him to Judea and Jerusalem for the festival only after underscoring the concern for secrecy inherent in the social dynamics of competing groups, which his brothers are representative of (Neyrey 2007a, 135-137). Thus, the pervasive agonistic social framework that serves as the backdrop of John 7 is marked by a concern over limited good as this is perceived from a group(s) perspective, and which can account for both Jesus' concern for secrecy (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 141-142), and the gossip emerging in reaction to Jesus' teaching. In fact, the chapter is constituted by a series of challenges to which Jesus responds. The attempts to arrest Jesus in this chapter (7:30, 32; cf. v.44-45) can be seen as a tacit admission of loss as far as the challenge-riposte exchange goes (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 148). In sum, the agonistic character of the entire episode sets and instigates the gossip.

The number of instances of gossip in this chapter is astonishing, as well as the number of participants which includes “many in the crowds” (7:12), “the Jews” (7:15, 35), “some of the people in Jerusalem” (7:25), “many in the crowd (who) believed in him” (7:31), “some in the crowd” (7:40), “others” in the crowd (7:41), “some” (from the others) in the crowd (7:41), “the police” (7:46), and “the Pharisees” (7:46). This clearly reflects an oral culture engaged in construing what are strange, unexpected words. While most of the gossip involves discussion “among” or “amidst” a group (7:11-13, 14-16, 25-27, 31, 35-36, 40-44), one episode involves a rather linear exchange between two groups, that is, the police and the Pharisees (7:46-49). The content of all of the information suggested or conveyed in each event is evaluative. Four events can be characterized as adjudicative gossip (7:11-13, 25-27, 40-44, 46-49) since all four reflect division among the gossipers over Jesus’ identity. One of the four explicitly states that a schism (σχίσμα) occurred (7:43; cf. John 9:16; 10:19). The range of possible construals of Jesus on the part of outsiders or opponents is a constituent element of a realistic portrait of early Judaism, and certainly of ancient Jerusalem during Tabernacles as many Jews from various backgrounds and places around the world would be there (Keener 2003, 710). The adjudicative gossip is thus, quite understandable in such a social-cultural climax.

The initial gossip event of the chapter is generated by Jesus’ apparent absence from Jerusalem during the festival. The scene can be imagined as the people expect him to be there because of the reports circulating about him via the gossip network (7:3; 3:2; 2:23): “Then the Jews were seeking him at the festival and saying, ‘Where is that man?’ And there was much murmuring about him among the crowds. On the one hand, some were saying that ‘He is a good man,’ but others were saying, ‘No! He leads the crowd

astray” (John 7:11-12). This gossip event reflects the expectant festival crowds working out whether Jesus is a “good man” or if he “leads the crowd astray” (7:12), and although generated by his absence, it is not clear whether the alternative appraisals of Jesus are reached because of his absence. In any case, the gossip involves positive labeling (“he is a good man”) and deviance accusation (“He leads the crowd astray”). Indeed, the entire chapter seven is a working out whether Jesus is a “good man” or deviant (Moloney 1998, 240). This is confirmed since the last gossip event of the chapter (7:47-52) forms an *inclusio* with 7:12, as the Pharisee’s ultimately label Jesus a deviant who has not only led the crowd astray, but the police as well (7:47): Some...“he is a good man,”...others... “He leads the crowd astray.” (7:12); Pharisees...“Have you been deceived too?” (7:47). Leading the crowd “astray” implies that Jesus’ teaching is deceptive (πλανᾶω). Since this is language found in rabbinic Judaism and associated with a pseudo-Messiah, and eventually works itself out in the face of Jesus’ being associated with a Messianic figure by means of gossip that is primarily adjudicative in character (7:26-27, 31, 37-41a, 41b-42; Moloney 1998, 254-255), the seriousness of the accusation is clear as it is an attempt to undercut Jesus’ growing reputation. Thus, while outsiders are divided about whether Jesus is good or leads astray, implying that at least some outsiders do think he might be good, members of Jesus’ in-group and the reader are not.

While the first gossip event is generated by Jesus’ absence, the rest of the gossip in chapter seven is generated by Jesus’ teachings at the Temple that seem strange to those not part of Jesus’ in-group, thus drawing fire from auditors in the form of aggressive gossip. The narrative moves back-and-forth between gossip and Jesus’ words, underscoring how the gossip, in third-person speech, functions as a repetitive challenge to

Jesus. In other words, woven into a long agonistic text, are a number of gossip events that function as challenges to Jesus' words or deeds, and so challenges to his identity implied by such words and deeds. The challenges issued at Jesus via gossip are generated principally by the peculiar anti-language he uses. Such use of anti-language about Jesus' relation to the Father, about his origins and destiny, and his invitation to drink, is thus portrayed in the narrative as provoking a rhythmic, relentless pattern of challenge-riposte (7:25-44):

Gossip: Then some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, "Is this not the man whom they seek to kill? And see, he speaks openly and they say nothing to him. Do the authorities truly know that this man is the Christ? But we know where this man is from. When the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from." (7:25-27)

Jesus: Then, while teaching in the Temple, Jesus cried out saying, "You know me and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own behalf, but the one who sent me is true, whom you do not know. I know him, for I am from him and he sent me." (7:28-29)

Gossip: And many from out of the crowd were believing in him saying "When the Christ comes will he do more signs than this man has done?" (7:31)

Jesus: Then Jesus said, "I am with you still for a short time, and then I go away to the one who sent me. You will seek me and you will not find me, and where I am, you cannot come." (7:33-34)

Gossip: Then the Jews said to one another, "Where does this man think he will go that we will not find him? Does he intend to go in the diaspora of the Greeks to teach the Greeks? What does he mean by saying 'You will seek me but will not find me,' and, 'Where I am, you are not able to come'?" (7:35-36)

Jesus: And while Jesus was standing, he cried out saying, "Anyone who is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. The one who believes in me, just as the scripture said, from that one's belly will flow rivers of living water." (7:37b-38)

Gossip: Then upon hearing these words, some in the crowd said, “This one is truly the prophet.” Others said, “This is the Christ,” but others said, “Will the Christ come from Galilee? Has not scripture said that the Christ is descended from David and comes from the village of Bethlehem where David was from?” Then there was a division among them. (7:40-43)

Jesus responds to the challenges, bewildering outsiders with anti-language that generates more challenges sequentially. These challenges, found in the form of gossip, construe a particular view of reality with respect to Jesus in reaction to his words, thus, daring (i.e. challenging) him to suggest an alternative construal. Of course, as the narrative unfolds, Jesus’ responses do offer an alternative construal, but certainly not the one expected.

Since Jesus’ teaching is the generative cause for the bulk of the gossip in chapter seven, it makes sense that at least some of the challenges issued in response have to do with his nurture and training, thus implying questions over the source of his teaching, and so, Jesus’ authority: “Then the Jews were amazed saying ‘How does this man have knowledge without learning?’ (7:15), and again at 7:46 “The police answered ‘Never has a man spoken thus’” (7:46). These challenges to Jesus’ teaching are informed by the *progymnasmata* and the concern over nurture and education, and are affirmed by stereotypical expectations of inhabitants of Galilean villages (Malina and Neyrey 1996, 23-24; Moloney 1998, 242). Jesus, son of a village artisan (6:42), is not expected to be able to teach as he does because of his origins. This reflects again, the concern over limited good since a village peasant who exhibits such learning, is understood to have gained it somehow at the expense of others (Foster 1960, 177; 1965, 302). Jesus’ response to the gossip, intended to be overheard by him, is to deflect the notion that he acquired the learning at someone else’s (earthly) expense by asserting that the source of his teaching is God (7:16-17).

5.5.6 Gossip Constructing a Shamanic Figure: John 7

A number of characteristics, the combination of which constitute elements of the shamanic complex – features and functions – are evident in chapter seven. In some cases (e.g., 7:11-12, 31, 46-48), the content of the gossip does not make any associations directly with the shamanic complex, while others do (e.g., 7:15, 25-27, 35-36, 40-43). This indicates that it is not always the case that gossip's role in constituting Jesus as a shamanic figure involves the direct transmission of information associating Jesus with a shamanic figure. Thus, it is necessary to see how such gossip is operative with the particular words (teaching) or deeds that it emerges in reaction to – either directly affirming, or underscoring via contrast – thus ascribing elements of a shamanic figure to Jesus.

To begin with, what is likely the most obvious shamanic function in John 7 is Jesus' teaching. All of the gossip in chapter seven, with the exception of 7:11-12, emerges in direct response to Jesus' teaching, while only two gossip events directly associate Jesus with the shamanic function of teaching (7:15, 46). Jesus is associated with teaching as he is portrayed speaking in the Temple, and with words that agonistically goad his auditors because of their strangeness. One interpreter recognizes a repeating pattern in 7:14-52 wherein the peculiar words of Jesus' teaching results in people seeking to arrest him (Culpepper 1998, 166-170). What is initially seen as strange about Jesus' teaching is that there is no obvious reason for him to possess the knowledge he articulates since he is a Galilean peasant (7:15). Jesus' response however, underscores by contrast, the shamanic function of teaching implied in the gossip as he responds by

associating his words with the Divine: “My teaching is not my own, but of the one who sent me” (7:16). Such association features the shamanic function as mediating teacher, or communication-exchange between the Divine and human that is essential to the creation of new knowledge (Craffert 2008, 160-161). Such new knowledge, that may as well be seen as knowledge privy to members of Jesus’ in-group, is knowledge that conveys the will of the Divine according to which insiders experience reality and live their lives alternatively to the social convention, that is, like Jesus, they walk and talk the new reality (Craffert 2008, 339). Much of the new knowledge that Jesus expresses is about himself, specifically his origins from above and so, from the Father (7:28-29, 33-34). Thus, Jesus’ teaching is, in the minds of his followers, associated with his origins from the heavenly realm above, and from the Father.

Another function of a shamanic figure ascribed to Jesus is prophecy, which is arrived at by the crowd in response to Jesus’ teaching: “Then upon hearing these words, some in the crowd said, “This one is truly the prophet” (7:40). Later on, Jesus is associated negatively, but in a way ascribing him nevertheless as a prophetic figure: “Consider and see that a prophet arises not from the Galilee” (7:52b). Again, the peculiar words of Jesus’ teaching (7:37b-38), result in his being associated with characters in ancient Israel known at least for speaking their minds if not uttering mysteries about the gift of “living water” (7:38) that recall the prophet Moses’ gift of water in the wilderness (Craffert 2008, 228; Keener 2003, 730).

The rather obvious relation between Jesus’ teaching as generative cause of gossip associating him with features and functions of a shamanic figure, such as prophecy, is significant for understanding the role gossip sometimes plays in challenge-riposte as this

is the rhythmic framework dominating chapter seven that moves back-and-forth between Jesus' teaching and the gossip it generates (7:33-43!). Thus, again, gossip does not simply play a role in reporting the results of honor-shame transactions via challenge-riposte and so bolstering reputations in public, but can play a rather direct role in the agonistic social game itself.

Jesus is here also associated with the shamanic feature of possession, albeit in the form of a deviance accusation (7:20). The text here stands as residue of a cultural interpretation of a cultural experience of possession, and whether the possession is positive or negative, at bottom, it implies spirit-possession which is associated with the shamanic feature of ASC experiences and the function of prophecy (Craffert 2008, 228-231).

The most notable shamanic feature that Jesus is associated with in chapter seven is the shamanic ASC journey which is implied directly by the content of much of the gossip over Jesus' origins. Knowing where Jesus is from (7:27, 41b, 42) and where he is going (7:35-36) are important thematic concerns of the FG (Smith 1999, 76; Culpepper 1998, 124-125). Outsiders have trouble knowing where Jesus is from, or settle with knowledge based on earthly categories usually expressed in terms related to various aspects of stereotyping – some of the people of Jerusalem know where Jesus is from (7:27), and the crowd knows he is from Galilee (7:41). Jesus' followers, members of his in-group or faction (hence, the reader), know where Jesus is from and where he is going. From the narrative's perspective, the knowledge of Jesus' origins is worked out through irony, but from a cultural perspective, discussion of his origins implies knowledge of that, and thus Jesus' mediation between the human and the Divine, as well as his movement

since the beginning, from the heavens to the earth and back again. This is of course, language of incarnation (1:14) and resurrection/glorification/ascension (3:13-14; 20:17a). Thus, knowledge of Jesus' origins signals an insider's understanding of Jesus and association with heavenly, shamanic journey's to God. That this is the case may be confirmed by the dichotomy between the heavens above and the earth below as the backdrop of every discussion about Jesus' origins. Jesus is from above, and will return to the Father in heaven.

5.5.7 Gossip About the One "From Above": John 8:22

The Jews' gossip at John 8:22 is generated by Jesus' words: "I am going away, and you will seek me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going you are not able to come" (8:21). The gossip amongst the Jews is third-person speech intended to be overheard by the subject: "Will he kill himself, since he says 'Where I am going you are not able to come'" (8:22). The gossip is critical speech insofar as it implies something either positive or negative about Jesus by their wondering if he will commit suicide. In other words, since in the ancient world, the judgment on suicide was not uniform – it could be positive or negative – it isn't clear which way the Jews may be evaluating him (Keener 2003, 743). What is clear is that they are mocking him (Keener 2003, 743; Schnackenburg 1982 vol. 1, 198), and thus publicly challenging him. Jesus responds to the challenge by clarifying to the Jews his origins and the vast difference between his and theirs, and in terms already familiar to the reader. Jesus is from above (8:23; cf. 3:13, 31), he knows where he is from (8:14), and that he is sent by the Father who will not leave him (8:27, 29).

By underscoring Jesus' origins vis-à-vis the Jews, as well as his "going" where they cannot come, the text evinces vital features of a shamanic figure, specifically the ASC induced heavenly journey (cf. 1:14, 51; 6:62; 7:27, 35-36). Thus, in this brief gossip, the Jews are seen attempting to construe some sort of reality implied by Jesus' anti-language about going where they cannot follow. Thus, the gossip associates Jesus with this particular feature of a shamanic figure.

5.5.8 Gossip About Jesus During Tabernacles: John 9:1-10:21

The ninth chapter of John offers a peculiar narrative about Jesus due to the fact that Jesus is not present during most of the story (9:7b-35) while his identity and origin are powerfully evinced. Indeed, the bulk of the narrative is comprised of a string of gossip events about a conspicuously absent third party. The knowledge that is generated about Jesus involves his identity (9:11, 17, 22, 24b) and origins (9:12, 16, 29-30, 33) and proves again to be divisive.

The sense unit of this story has consistently been recognized as an intricate narrative, and is often divided into seven parts that sees John 9 separate from John 10. However, John 9:1-10:21 form the entire sense unit and so may be divided into nine parts following the Johannine pattern of miracle/dialogue/discourse, and a number of gossip events, even one to close out the unit (O'Day 2002, 65).

- I. The healing (9:1-7)
- II. Immediate response to the healing; Adjudicative gossip about the man born blind (9:8-12)
- III. Man born blind and Pharisees; Adjudicative gossip about Jesus and explicit schism (9:13-17)
- IV. Blind man's parents and the religious authorities; Gossip about the man born blind (9:18-23)
- V. Man born blind and Jews; Adjudicative gossip about Jesus (9:24-34)

- VI. Jesus and man born blind (9:35-38)
- VII. Jesus and Pharisees (9:39-41)
- VIII. Jesus' Good Shepherd discourse (10:1-18)
- IX. Adjudicative gossip among the Jews – explicit schism (10:19-21)

The generative cause of the gossip is the restoration of sight to a man “blind from birth” (τυφλὸν ἐκ γενετῆς; 9:1-7). The discussion between Jesus and his disciples over how the man came to be blind is crucial to how the story develops as it sets up dual categories of understanding the source of the blindness. How one understands the source of the man's blindness reflects where one stands vis-à-vis Jesus' in-group. The conventional (earthly) notion (3:12) sees the man's blindness as a result of sin – either his sin, or his parents' sin (9:2) in congruence with the rule of “deeds and consequences.” Blindness is thus understood as a result of either individual sin, or collective sin (Exod 20:5; cf. *1 En.* 98:5; *T. Job* 15:9/10), and would as well, have social effects such as separation from, or loss of place within the community. From the start, the disciples understand the blindness in terms of “deeds and consequences” which suggests distance from Jesus asking whether it was the blind man's sin or his parents' sin that caused his blindness (cf. 6:60). Therefore, even the closest of Jesus' group members are again, shown understanding things not as insiders should (6:60), but as outsiders would. Jesus' reply circumvents the category of “deeds and consequences” held by the disciples, contextualizing the healing in his self-identifying claim to be the light of the world (9:5b) and begins the blind man's step-by-step initiation into Jesus' group.

The subsequent healing of the blind man unhinges the order and routine of the settled world of the neighbors first, then the Pharisees, and thus gives rise to attempts to (re)construct reality in acceptable terms (Botha 1993, 211-212), hence the string of gossip that follows. Such attempts come in the form of four sequential gossip events (9:8-12;

9:13-17; 9:18-23; 9:24-34), three of which are adjudicative in character (9:8-12; 9:13-17; 9:24-34). The information conveyed in each event is critical or evaluative in nature regarding the subject. The subject of the gossip at 9:8-12 and 9:18-23 is apparently, the man born blind, while the subject of the gossip at 9:13-17 and 9:24-34 is the absent Jesus. In both instances where the man born blind is the subject, the gossip is carried on in third-person speech.

5.5.8.1 Gossip About the Man Born Blind I: The Neighbors

The neighbors try to put their world back in order again, attempting to make sense of the healing by gossiping about the man in the third person over his identity, whether or not he is in fact the formerly blind man who used to sit and beg (9:8-9a). The content of their gossip is adjudicative as they are divided – “Some” (ἄλλοι) were saying it was him, while “others” (ἄλλοι) were saying it was not (9:9). Such adjudicative gossip over the formerly blind man’s identity anticipates the same over Jesus’ identity, thus raising the possibility that the interrogation of the man is actually an interrogation of the apparently absent Jesus. Indeed, a number of parallels may be drawn between Jesus and the man born blind in the first scene following the healing. The neighbors’ are divided over the formerly blind man’s identity, as are many throughout the FG over Jesus’ identity (cf. 3:17; 7:12). Jesus, the one *sent* from God, directs the formerly blind man to wash at Siloam “which means sent” (9:7a; Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 170). The formerly blind man’s response to the neighbors saying ἐγώ εἰμι, or “I am (him)” (9:9b; cf. 8:58), draws another parallel between the man and Jesus who makes such claims throughout the gospel (cf. 5.5.9). Such parallels imply what is finally made explicit by the neighbor’s

direct interrogation of the man (9:10-12), that is, that Jesus, despite his absence from the scene, is the actual subject of the neighbors' gossip.

5.5.8.2 Gossip About Jesus I: The Pharisees and the Man Born Blind

After receiving his sight from Jesus, and vigorously defending his own identity to the neighbors, the man born blind is brought to the paradigmatic outsiders, the Pharisees, in order to help make sense of the unhinging event that has just occurred (9:13-17). After interrogating the man about the mode of his healing (9:15), “some” (τινές) of the Pharisees gossip about Jesus, assessing the absent third party with respect to his origins, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath” (9:16a). The confidence displayed by the Pharisees' knowledge concerning Jesus' origins is conspicuous in its evading the actual healing itself (Keener 2003, 786). Not all of the Pharisees are as confident as “others” (ἄλλοι) who gossip saying “How is it that a man who is a sinner can perform such signs?” (9:16b). The Pharisees' gossip is disputatious in that the question raised by the “others” implies over-against the assertion of “some” that Jesus, in light of his signs, may after all, be “from God.” Thus, the attempt here to construe Jesus in light of the healing of the man born blind, results in a dissonant construal. On the one hand, Jesus' signs imply positively that he is not a sinner (ἁμαρτωλός), and thus, contrary to “some” of the Pharisees, that he is from God (cf. 3:2). On the other hand, since he does not keep the Sabbath, he is not from God, and thus a sinner (9:24). The negative gossip here construes the subject in typical terms concerned with origins, and by means of deviance labeling, attempts to encode Jesus' identity

negatively given the apparent out-of-place character of the healing of a man born blind presumably because of sin.

The Pharisees' quandary at this point is acute and should not be overlooked since the healing of the blind man has unhinged their understanding of "religious order and propriety" (O'Day 2002, 77-83). On the one hand, Jesus healed a man "*blind from birth*" which for the Pharisees, indicates the sinfulness of the man (9:2, 34; cf. Ezek 18:20; Ps 89:33). On the other hand, Jesus was able to *heal* by breaking the Sabbath, that is, *mixing* mud on the Sabbath, although God "does not listen to sinners" (9:31; cf. Isa 1:15; Pss 66:18; 109:7; 145:19; Prov 15:8, 29; Job 27:9; 35:13). At a loss since their religious world is turned upside down (Schnackenburg 1982 vol. 1, 248), it is understandable that the Pharisees' gossiping about Jesus is argumentative. The result of their dissonance over whether or not Jesus' origin is from God, and whether or not Jesus is a sinner therefore, results in schism that is explicitly stated (καὶ σχίσμα ἦν ἐν αὐτοῖς; 9:16b).

In sum then, a number of the paradigmatic outsiders are here portrayed as coming close to construing Jesus from an insider's standpoint, suspecting that because of the signs he does, Jesus may be from God. The adjudicative character of their gossip vividly portrays the constructive vitality of the communicative event and the plausible divergence of opinion that emerges in gossip, and in this case, results in schism. The division among the Pharisees has the further outcome of their inviting the formerly blind man in on the gossip, who then suggests that Jesus is a prophet (9:17; cf. 7:40). Thus, taken in its entirety, the construal of Jesus comprises a number of elements toward constituting him as a social personage, but without offering a clear, unified portrait. The outsiders who do not know Jesus are divided over how to construe him in light of the

healing; some focus on Sabbath violation, ignoring the sign itself, while others focus on the sign and move closer to an insider's perspective. The stumbling of the "others" toward insider knowledge of who Jesus is stands in contrast to the man born blind who is clearly moving closer to understanding Jesus' identity, beginning first from the position of an outsider (9:12). The epistemological crisis regarding Jesus' identity is the catalyst for the entire FG, and is plainly illustrated at this point as the objective goal of the gossip. The knowledge about who Jesus is, is conveyed by Jesus' signs that reveal him (2:11; 3:2), and by the knowledge he imparts by his teaching (7:46). Jesus knows who he is, as do members of his in-group, while outsiders either do not know him, or construe him inadequately (7:27-29, 49, 51; 8:14, 27-28, 32, 43, 52, 55). While this crisis is not resolved until John 10, it is brought to the fore here, and portrayed as a crisis capable of unsettling group unity.

5.5.8.3 Gossip About the Man Born Blind II: The Jews and the Parents

Conspicuously, "the Jews," rather than the Pharisees, call on the parents of the man born blind, since they were incredulous about whether the man had actually been blind from birth. The text at this point is not clear whether the man born blind is present or not. Given that 9:24 indicates the man had to be "called back," it is clear that he is not present to overhear the gossip about him between the Jews and his parents.

The disbelief behind the Jews' inquiry to his parents about whether the man was blind from birth, and thus that a healing even took place is in striking contrast to the previous scene when the Pharisees (here "the Jews") invited the man into their gossip encounter to offer his construal of Jesus in light of their division over his identity. There,

they affirmed that his eyes were opened by Jesus (9:17), while here (9:18) they are in disbelief that the man was born blind in the first place, let alone that there was a miraculous healing. The man's parents express that their son was indeed blind, thus positively assessing him and the validity of the miraculous event (9:20), despite the line of the Jews' interrogative gossip about the man. The information they offer to this point is safe, but when considering how their son came to see and who it was that opened his eyes, they are much more cautious given the potential consequences of speaking about Jesus openly – expulsion from Synagogue (9:21-23; cf. 7:13; Carson 1991, 369). The seriousness of expulsion from the Synagogue is considerable given that separation from a group vital to one's self-identity and livelihood often had dire consequences in the ancient world. Moreover, since it is likely that the parents were impoverished given they allowed their son to beg (9:8), for them to be found unattached to the group was an intolerable fate to be avoided (Keener 2003, 787; Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 112). Thus, the parents shift the onus from themselves onto their son since he is "old enough and can speak for himself" (9:21).

5.5.8.4 Gossip About Jesus II: The Jews and the Man Born Blind

Eventually the desperate situation of the Pharisees (the Jews) brought on by the healing is exacerbated when during their final interrogation of the man born blind (9:24-34), which is an extended scene of adjudicative gossip, the formerly blind man uses their own logic to underscore how dislodged their religious world-view has become because of the healing. This gossip event involves the conveyance of information regarding the absent subject's character (absent since 9:7), his ability to heal, leadership, and his origins.

The gossip in this scene is initiated by the Jews who again, draw the man into the event by charging him to take an oath, “Give glory to God!,” and then labeling Jesus as a sinner (9:24). The way the Jews seek to constitute Jesus in light of the healing, and the surrounding circumstances that have together upturned their understanding of how God is operative in the world, is to assert what they think they know about his origins, identity, and character, and thus to attempt to control the flow of information in the exchange. Such an effort at information control, and thus control of the construal of the subject Jesus, does not go unchallenged. The formerly blind man’s response (9:25) is driven by the Jews’ negative assessment of Jesus (a sinner) implying the man was not blind from birth or that a healing did not take place, or both. The man’s initial response is in stark contrast to the Jews’ as he asserts again what he does not know about Jesus (9:25a; cf. v.12b), and then what he knows, that is, that a healing has taken place (9:25b). The demand of the Jews to know how Jesus healed the formerly blind man reveals that their world remains unhinged (9:26), and as well, constitutes a challenge. The man’s response that he has shared the information enough already, plus his incisive question whether the Jews want to be Jesus’ disciples (9:27), does not reflect a naive hope on his part that the Jews may actually desire to become Jesus’ disciples (so Keener 2003, 790), given that hearing the story about Jesus’ works is part of the process of becoming one (Moloney 1998, 294). Rather, the man’s question is preceded by a negative particle in the Greek indicating that he expects a negative response. Thus, the man’s question reflects a counter-challenge to the Jews. The Jews’ riposte, iterating that he (not the Jews) is Jesus’ disciple is proleptic of the formerly blind man’s very near future. He has already construed Jesus as a prophet, which suggests he is getting closer to becoming an insider,

but he is not yet a disciple. On the other hand, the Jews aver their discipleship to Moses, thus drawing out their in-group identity over-against Jesus and his group (9:28). The Jews then articulate their discipleship to Moses in terms of their knowledge of Moses' mediatory relationship with God who has spoken through him. What they do not know, is where Jesus is from (9:29). The healed man responds by using the same principles evinced by the Pharisees to disparage Jesus (9:16, 24; cf. 9:21), thus making a case for Jesus' origins from God (9:30-33). In other words, the man born blind takes on a teaching role in this gossip event (9:34), by imparting knowledge about Jesus' origins and identity in the face of the challenge leveled by the Jews in their gossip. This is another example of how the story draws a parallel between Jesus and the healed man, who not only functions as an advocate for the absent Jesus, but also very directly represents Jesus in his absence as ultimately the subject of all of the gossip in the chapter. Like Jesus, the man born blind is sent (9:7), is "I am (him)" (ἐγώ εἰμι; 9:9b), and teaches (9:30-33). In other words, throughout John 9, Jesus is the actual subject of the gossip, even when the man born blind is the apparent subject.

The Jews' response to the man's teaching, casting him out of the synagogue, is a tacit admission that they have lost in the verbal jousting about Jesus. This element of challenge-riposte characterizes much of the exchange of information in the gossip event, suggesting that gossip, when it involves the transactional concern of controlling information about the subject (cf. Paine 1967, 280, 283), may take on characteristics of a challenge-riposte exchange. Indeed, Jesus' reputation as well as his social personage is under construction in this text as the man's character is too.

5.5.8.5 Gossip About Jesus III: The Jews Divided Over the Shepherd

Eventually, the formerly blind man is brought fully into Jesus' group once Jesus finds him and the man worships Jesus (9:35-38). The man born blind has served as the surrogate subject of gossip about Jesus, and participated in gossip about Jesus. His new knowledge and standing as a part of Jesus' group stands in stark distinction from the knowledge and standing of the Pharisees (the Jews) with who sin abides (9:41). Indeed, their confident claim to knowledge is contrasted with the humility of the man born blind (9:12b) who is open to receiving revelation. To be sure, the Pharisees' knowledge is disclosed as that which keeps them in the very situation that they consistently construe Jesus as being in, namely abiding with sin (9:41; cf. vv. 16, 24).

Jesus' declaration that sin abides with the Jews because of their self-confidence in their own knowledge is the beginning of a long discourse (10:1-18), the meaning of which escapes the Jews (10:6). In it, Jesus' anti-language describes the character of the relationship between group members, his relationship to them, and his role as leader of the group. Jesus is the "sheep gate" (ἡ θύρα τῶν προβάτων), the very way into the group (10:7). Jesus is the good shepherd (ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός), the leader of the group protecting his flock from the wolves (10:11; cf. vv. 1-5). As the "sheep gate" Jesus functions as broker between the Divine patron in the heavens and his clients the disciples. Neyrey's description is pertinent: "In one direction, he (Jesus) serves as a bridge between them, as a go-between, a person whom God sends to mediate knowledge, power, loyalty, and material benefaction to God's clients; correspondingly he brokers the interests of the clients by praying for them and urging them to pray 'in my name'" (Neyrey 2007b, 272). Jesus as the "good shepherd" situates his identity deeply within the cultural world of

honor-shame as the adjective “good” (καλός) is likely best understood as the opposite of “shame” (αἰσχρός) rather than “evil” (πονηρός). Labeling himself as the “good” or “noble” shepherd, Jesus unites his identity with the notion of a “noble death” (10:11) that was part of the rhetoric of encomia in the ancient Hellenistic world (Neyrey 2001, 268). Thus, both labels used by Jesus are operative within the social-cultural world of the first-century Mediterranean and imply information about his relationship with both his Father and with his followers. The labels therefore, serve to secure boundaries as well as to affirm group identity and loyalty to the group and its leader by describing the contours of the dyadic relationship between Jesus (the shepherd) and the Father (10:15), the shepherd and the sheep (10:14), and between the sheep (10:16; Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 179-181).

Considering the literary context, the reception of the man born blind into Jesus’ faction described from 9:1-38, is followed by a discourse describing the crucial relational dynamics of the faction, and the way into the faction, and this in language reflecting the agonistic honor-shame culture of ancient Palestine where group membership, identity, and loyalty were paramount. The discourse serves as the generative event for gossip by the Jews (10:19-21) who are again, unable to come to agreement on how to construe Jesus in light of his words. The adjudicative gossip recalls that which has preceded (7:12, 25-27, 46-48; 9:8-9, 16, 24-34) as it offers a dissonant construal of Jesus that on the one hand, labels Jesus deviant by demon-possession (10:20), while on the other hand affirming the healing of the man born blind, thus undercutting the deviance accusation (10:21).

5.5.9 Gossip Constructing a Shamanic Figure: John 9:1-10:21

The number of elements ascribing Jesus as a shamanic figure in John 9:1-10:21 are considerable, and are contextualized from the start by associating him with two crucial functions of such a figure. First, Jesus is ascribed as a teacher, “Rabbi” (9:2) who in this case, imparts new knowledge to his community of disciples with respect to the connection between “deeds and consequences” regarding sin (9:3-5). The new knowledge he seeks to impart to the disciples does not constitute a rejection of the traditional connection between sin and unfortunate events (cf. 5:14), but rather a non-universalizing of the principle (Carson 1991, 362). So, in the case of the man born blind Jesus instructs that the blindness of the man does not involve sin, but the will and work of the one who sent him, and so functions for revealing himself as the “Light of the World” (9:5). This is the perspective “from above” and is important in the end of the pericope for situating Jesus’ opponents as outsiders (9:34).

Secondly, Jesus is described functioning as a healer. Although the manner in which Jesus instigates the healing makes him vulnerable to deviance accusations given that mud-accompanied anointing was generally connected with the practice of magic making it suspect within Judaism (Barrett 1978, 358; Beasley-Murray 1987, 155), the association of Jesus with healing is important. Indeed, the narrative of 9:1-7a constitutes the intersection of three vital functions of a shamanic figure that are linked together, namely, teaching, healing, and divine mediation (Craffert 2008, 338-339). In other words, Jesus the teacher (Rabbi) imparts new knowledge to his disciples regarding the works he does (healing and other signs) that are the works of the one from whom he is sent (divine mediation). It is thus, the activities of a shamanic figure – the work of

healing done by a divine mediator in behalf of the one who sent him – that is the generative cause for the entire episode described in John 9.

It has been suggested here that the gossip about the man born blind in John 9 is essentially gossip about Jesus who, although conspicuously absent from the scene, is nevertheless made present by a number of clues associating him with the formerly blind man. Thus, the content of the gossip about the man can be seen as implying information about Jesus' identity. The first gossip event occurs among the neighbors and is adjudicative in character as they are divided over the identity of the formerly blind man who is now able to see: “‘Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?’ Some said, ‘This is him,’ but others said, ‘No, but he is similar to him.’ He said, ‘I am’” (9:8b-9). The second gossip event about the man involves his parents and the Pharisees who, having been called on to make sense of the miraculous event in the first place, now seek information from the parents, but do so by means of gossip that implies their son is deceptive, and so deviant: “‘Is this your son who you say was born blind? How then is he now able to see?’ Then the parents answered and said, ‘We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind. But how he now sees, we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him, he is of age, he will speak for himself’” (9:19-21).

The first gossip encounter begins construing the formerly blind man's identity by raising questions about it. Thus, the evangelists' irony, since just as the identity of the conspicuously absent Jesus is a driving motif of the gospel, so it is here even though it is the man's identity that is under scrutiny. The man's response to the gossip employs the phrase “I am” (ἐγώ εἰμι) used elsewhere by Jesus in an absolute sense (John 4:26; 6:20; 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19; 18:5, 6, 8) asserting that “Jesus belongs to the eternal, heavenly

world” (Barrett 1978, 342). Thus the man’s response “ἐγὼ εἰμι” advocates not only for his own identity, but for Jesus’ as well, and in such a way that creates schism (Moloney 1998, 297).

As with the other “ἐγὼ εἰμι” sayings of the FG, within the man’s claim “ἐγὼ εἰμι” implicitly advocating for Jesus’ identity may be seen an indication that Jesus experienced ASCs and from them, developed a “shamanic sense of identity” that resulted in his speaking with divine authority and power in the traditions ascribed to him in John (Craffert 2008, 235-236). Moreover, the “ἐγὼ εἰμι” sayings may be indicative of spirit-possession since speaking in this way about one’s self “make sense as elements in Jesus’s life story precisely because they naturally belong to the typical transformational ASC experiences” (Craffert 2008, 236). Thus, in the gossip events about the man born blind, Jesus is the implied, rather than the apparent subject, who is constituted as a shamanic figure by association both with shamanic journeys, given his belonging to the “eternal, heavenly world,” and with a “shamanic sense of identity” that emerged from spirit-possession experiences.

After hearing the man describe his experience of being healed (9:15), the Pharisees’ adjudicative gossip asserts information about Jesus’ origins and whether he is a sinner or not: “Then some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.’ But, others said, ‘How is it that a man who is a sinner able to perform such signs?’” (9:16). In a second gossip event about Jesus later in the chapter, the Pharisees (the Jews) engage in gossip with the man born blind. This adjudicative gossip event again asserts information about Jesus’ origins, how that relates to his ability to heal the man, and whether he is deviant or not:

“Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.” Then he answered, “I do not know if he is a sinner. One thing I know is that I was blind, now I see.” Then they said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” He answered them, “I told you already and you did not listen. Why do you wish to hear it again? Do you wish to become his disciples?” And they insulted him saying, “You are that man’s disciple. But we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken in Moses, but we do not know where this man is from.” The man answered and said to them, “This is an amazing thing, that you do not know where he is from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if one is devout and does his will, he listens to him. It has never been heard that someone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man was not from God, he would not be able to do anything.” (9:24b-33)

The first gossip event about Jesus (9:16) associates him with keeping the Sabbath in unusual ways. Indeed, the making of mud with spittle was understood to be an infringement of Sabbath (cf. *m. Sanh.* 10.1). However, Jesus seen as a shamanic figure, exercises a shamanic sense of identity and authority when doing the works of the Father (9:3-4) on the Sabbath, and thus acts as the Son of Man (9:35) who is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28; Craffert 2008, 235-236, 341).

The second gossip encounter is another good example of a transactional sort of gossip that seeks to control information about a subject, as the Pharisees (the Jews) assert what they think they know, that is, that Jesus is a sinner (9:24b; Paine 1967, 280, 283). Moreover, the Pharisees’ assertion of their ignorance about Jesus’ origins (9:29) followed by the man’s testimony connecting Jesus’ origins with the healing, associates Jesus with shamanic journeys implied by his origins from above, as well as the function of healer. Indeed, the shamanic function of healing connected with origins from above is a dominant motif in Chapter Nine, and is as well conspicuously connected with teaching. This is strikingly portrayed in the way the man born blind, in another parallel drawn between him and Jesus, teaches the Pharisees new knowledge about the relation between origins and healing, and in a way that finally asserts Jesus’ origins from God (9:30-33).

Thus, this extended gossip scene may be seen constituting Jesus as a shamanic figure as it links various functions of a shamanic figure (teaching, healing, divine mediation) in a way common within the shamanic complex (Craffert 2008, 338-339).

The final gossip event following Jesus' assertion of his role as broker between humans and the Divine, as well as the form and fashion of the dyadic relationship to the Father and to his followers, once again conveys a schism between the Jews: "Again, there was a schism among the Jews on account of these words. Some of them were saying, 'He has a demon and is crazy. Why listen to him?' Others said, 'These words are not those of a demon-possessed man. Is a demon able to open the eyes of the blind?'" (10:19-21). The adjudicative gossip is transactional as some (πολλοὶ) attempt to control the information, asserting what they think they know. The information conveyed is a deviance accusation implying that Jesus is possessed by a malignant spirit, and so should not be listened to (10:20). Such a "cultural interpretation of a possession experience" (Craffert 2008, 230) could have had serious consequences as far as Jesus' reputation goes, even leading to banishment from the community (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 183). Indeed, the fact that the Jews suggest he should not be listened to, implies that his public reputation is exactly what they were seeking to undercut.

Although "some" asserted Jesus as demon-possessed in this gossip event, "others" (ἄλλοι) were more cautious, recognizing the problem associated with linking the ideas of (malignant) demon-possession with the healing of a blind man, thus raising understandable questions about the initial claim. In any case, what is significant about this and other instances reporting Jesus being spirit-possessed is that such experiences were a part of Jesus' life since they were obviously interpreted by his followers in

culturally conventional ways (Craffert 2008, 230). In this instance, it is as well notable that the charge of demon-possession is countered by a referral to Jesus' healing a man blind from birth, thus construing Jesus by means of both a shamanic feature (possession) and function (healing).

5.6 Gossip Raising Life Unto Death: John 11:1-57

In the previous section of the FG (5:1-10:42), tension between Jesus and his opponents has been on the increase, with many of them deciding that Jesus should be arrested or killed (5:18; 7:30, 32; 8:59; 10:31, 39). Indeed, Jesus' impending death has been part of the backdrop of the entire narrative thus far (2:4; 3:14; 7:6; 8:28). Although most of his opponents have been portrayed over-against Jesus, some outsiders have been portrayed as either coming to some sort of faith in him, or at least are cautious in their construal of him – an element emphasized in many of the adjudicative gossip texts (7:12, 25-27, 31, 46; 8:30; 9:16b; 10:21).

The story of the raising of Lazarus functions as the climax of the other signs that Jesus performs even as it follows bitter confrontation (Schnackenburg 1982 vol. 2, 325). As the climax of Jesus' signs, it is peculiar in that it follows a different pattern than the others. Previous signs are first briefly described, and then followed by a discourse that interprets the meaning of the sign. In John 11, the sign (vv. 43-44) is preceded by three conversations – with the disciples (vv. 7-16), with Martha (vv. 17-27), and with Mary (vv. 28-34) – that interpret the sign before it happens (Culpepper 1998, 185). The key text for understanding the theological significance of the sign comes as Jesus exclaims "I am the resurrection and the life. Any one who believes in me, even if they die, they shall

live” (v. 25). Moreover, an *inclusio* is formed around the story that is framed on the one hand by Jesus’ words indicating that the purpose of what eventually occurs is to glorify the Son of God (v. 4), and on the other hand by the prophetic utterance of Caiaphas (vv. 49-50) concerning Jesus’ impending death (Moloney 1998, 325). In other words, the *inclusio* indicates that the Son will be glorified through the resurrection of Lazarus, not because of the miraculous event itself, but because the event will eventually lead to Jesus’ death by crucifixion which is, according to the Fourth Evangelist, his glorification (3:14!).

While the presence of a vital gossip network is indicated a number of times in the story (vv. 3-4, 20, 28-29, 46), there are only three gossip events described in any detail, all three of which imply an agonistic context of honor-shame and reputation (vv. 36-37, 46-47, 56).

5.6.1 Gossip Among the Jews

A face-to-face gossip encounter occurs immediately after the third interpretive conversation between Jesus and Mary (vv.28-34). The gossip occurs amidst “the Jews” and is generated by their observing Jesus crying, presumably because of Lazarus’ death (v. 35). The gossip is adjudicative since the information conveyed from the start, that Jesus loved Lazarus (v. 36) is immediately rebuffed by “some” (τινῶν) of the Jews who raise an interesting question: “Then the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him.’ But some of them said, ‘Could not this one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man might not have died?’” (11:36-37). The text implies that the gossip network has carried the news about Jesus’ healing the man born blind. The

negative adverb in the Greek text (οὐκ; v. 37) indicates that “some” of the Jews expected Jesus to be able to raise Lazarus, thus the gossip at this point expresses their frustration over his absence. This accounts for the negative appraisal offered in response to the information about Jesus’ love for Lazarus, targeting Jesus’ “dynamic dawdling,” that is, his reluctance to act immediately upon hearing the news of his sick friend (v. 6; cf. 2:4; 4:48; 7:6-9; Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 68, 193), and not targeting his reputation as a healer since he “fails” to save Lazarus because of his delayed arrival (Moloney 1998, 331).

This adjudicative gossip event therefore, attempts to construe Jesus’ display of mourning in two distinctly different ways. Most of the Jews present construe Jesus as mourning the death of a loved one, like the other Jews present (vv. 32, 33). But “some” of them see Jesus as someone rather indifferent to his friend (v. 11; cf. 15:14), which calls into question his group loyalty (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 197). Both constructions of Jesus miss the mark however, since Jesus’ “crying” at 11:35 (δακρύω) is not like the “crying” (κλαίω) of the rest of the Jews present (vv. 32, 33), since he is apparently expressing sadness over Mary’s earthly construal that she shares with the Jews (Moloney 1998, 331).

5.6.2 Gossip Among the Chief Priests, Pharisees, and the Council

Upon raising Lazarus from the dead, the narrative reports that while many of the Jews believed in Jesus (v. 45), “some of them” (τινὲς δὲ ἐξ αὐτῶν) informed the Pharisees about what Jesus had done (v. 46). Being thus informed about the raising of Lazarus, a

meeting of the council (συνέδριον) is called, and is the occasion of a face-to-face gossip encounter about the absent subject, Jesus:

Then the Chief Priests and the Pharisees gathered the council together and said, “What are we to do since this man is performing many signs? If we let him go on thusly, all will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy us and our place and our nation.” But one of them, Caiaphas, who was High Priest that year, said to them, “You know nothing. You do not reckon it is better that one man die on behalf of the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed.” (11:47-50)

It is clear that the generative cause of this gossip encounter is not the raising of Lazarus as such, since the raising was not the source of Jesus’ impending glorification. Rather, the cause of the gossip is the concern that many of the Jews who witnessed the raising of Lazarus, believed in him because of it (v. 45). Such belief (πιστεύω) signals the addition of new members into Jesus’ in-group, thus, instigating the concern over his growing reputation, and that of his faction (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 202).

This gossip event may as well, be seen within the context of what Neyrey calls the “sociology of secrecy” that involved, among other things, the control of information and dissemination of knowledge by means of espionage (Neyrey 2007a, 205-206). Thus, the narrative indicates that spies of the elite group, who witnessed the raising of Lazarus and the concomitant growth in Jesus’ popularity, report the disconcerting information to the Pharisees and the Chief Priests (cf. 5:15). The reaction of the council reflects the first-century Mediterranean social concern over “limited good” proscribing that Jesus’ growth in reputation comes at their expense. Thus, injured by Jesus’ success, the council engages in envy, which when directed at Jesus, turns into violence plotted according to Caiaphas’ design, and “calculated to cause Jesus shame, cause the scattering of his followers, and the restoration of their (the council’s) honor” (Neyrey 2007a, 206; parentheses mine).

5.6.3 Gossip Constructing a Shamanic Figure: John 11

The first gossip event (vv. 36-37) conveys information about Jesus associating him with the shamanic function of a healer. The direct reference to the healing of the man born blind, couched in a question anticipating a positive response, “Could not this one who opened the eyes of the blind man have done something so that this man might not have died?” (v. 37), expresses that Jesus was positively considered able to perform such healings, even though ascribing to him the dishonorable characteristic of disloyalty to his friend Lazarus. The question raised by the Jews at this point is not whether one who opened the eyes of a blind man could raise someone from the dead, but rather if such a one could keep a sick person from dying, thus maintaining focus on Jesus’ ability to heal. The salient point however, is the association of Jesus with the shamanic function of healing as this is evinced by means of gossip.

The generative cause of the second gossip encounter (11:47-50), like the first, ascribes the shamanic function of healing to Jesus, while the gossip event itself is concerned with Jesus’ growing popularity among the people because of the “many signs he is doing” (πολλὰ ποεῖ σημεῖα), thus associating Jesus more generally with “signs.” As seen earlier, many follow Jesus because of the signs he does even though such “faith” in him is considered inadequate (cf. 2:23-24). Indeed, even outsiders are attracted to him because within the religious context of ancient Israel, performing such signs implies a special relationship with God (3:2; 9:3-5). Thus, this gossip event conveys information that positively construes Jesus as a shamanic figure given his association with signs that include miraculous events such as controlling nature and the elements (2:9; 6:11, 19), as

well as healing (5:8-9; 9:1-6). While the content of the second gossip event reflects concern over Jesus' growing reputation because of his "signs," this does not imply that the raising of Lazarus from death was not the generative cause of the gossip as that is clearly indicated at 11:45.

Since the gossip about Jesus here concerns signs generally rather than specifically mentioning "raising" Lazarus, it may be best to see this extraordinary event as a healing since similar events in the Gospels (Mark 5:35-43; Luke 7:1-17) have been analyzed socially from that angle (Malina and Rohrbaugh 2003, 168, 253). To be sure, within the context of the first-century Mediterranean world view, it was granted that nonhuman/divine beings influenced many aspects of human life to such an extent that sickness was seen as caused by such an agent such as a spirit or demon. Moreover, within the first century shamanic world view, shamans were known to travel to other worlds that they know to encounter spirits and other entities in the mythological system in behalf of sick individuals in order to "rescue" them from the malady (Craffert 2008, 159, 181-182, 185). It stands to reason that Lazarus was rescued thusly and so the story may be plausibly imagined within a healing framework along with other texts describing Jesus raising persons from death. Additionally, since the shamanic figure, travels to other known worlds to execute the healing, this further implies the shamanic function of heavenly journeys.

5.7 Gossip About a Voice from Heaven Implying a Shaman: John 12:29

After Jesus has entered Jerusalem, and uttered the Johannine version of his agony in the garden (12:27), the text reports that a voice came from heaven (φωνὴ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ; 12:28). Interestingly, at 12:29 the text also reports that the crowd heard the voice (ἀκούσας) and gossiped. Thus, the generative event of a heavenly voice prompts the crowd to begin making sense by gossiping amongst themselves about what has just occurred.

The character of the gossip is adjudicative as the construal of the generative event by the crowd is dissonant. On the one hand, the crowd said it was thunder (ἡ βροντή), but on the other hand, “others” (ἄλλοι) said that “an angel has spoken to him” (12:29). The crowd is uniform in its misconstrual of the heavenly voice (Moloney 1998, 360) which affirms their standing as outsiders vis-à-vis the disciples (though the text reports nothing about their understanding of what happened) as well as the implied reader. On the one hand, the crowd identifies the sound as thunder, while on the other hand, “others” recognize the sound as an angelic voice, thus missing the source of the voice as being the Divine. Indeed, Barrett points out the emergence of the **בַּת קוֹל** as significant, recalling as it does the Rabbinic traditions about the Divine voice (Barrett 1978, 425). In any case, what is significant here is the way the gossip associates Jesus with the voice.

The dissonant construal of the heavenly voice thus, associates Jesus with the critical shamanic feature of mediator between the earthly realm and the Divine, whereas such mediation as well as the hearing of heavenly voices, are connected to ASC experiences (Craffert 2008, 340-341). Indeed, what is reported at John 12:28 can be described as a stress-induced ASC experience on Jesus’ part that is somehow shared with

the crowd. Jesus' corrective to the crowd's misunderstanding of the experience, that is, that the voice was for their sake (12:30), further associates him with fundamental components of a shamanic figure as he relates the necessity of his being "lifted up" (ὑψάω; cf. 3:14-15) "from the earth" (ἐκ τῆς γῆς), thus implying shamanic heavenly journeys, and indeed his crucifixion as the launching point.

5.8 Gossip at the Farewell Discourse Implying a Shaman: John 16:17-18

During the Farewell Discourse, the evangelist reports a gossip event among the disciples generated by Jesus' words about his going away and returning at 16:16. Hearing that in a short time they will not see Jesus, but that again in a little while they will, leaves the disciple's befuddled:

Then some of his disciples said to one another, "What is this he says to us 'in a little while you will not see me, and again in a little while you will see me,' and 'because I go to the Father?' They said "What is this that he says, 'a little while?' We do not know what he is saying." (16:17-18)

The content of the gossip implies their concern not only over Jesus' leaving and returning, but also over his origins from the Father (16:17). Their eventual frustration (οὐκ οἶδαμεν τί λαλεῖ), expressed similarly to Nicodemus' (3:9), is over the time factor involved (16:18).

This gossip event again, construes Jesus as a shamanic figure as it associates him with the shamanic function of divine mediation, implied by the to-and-fro leaving and returning since the place where he is going is to the Father (cf. 16:17b; 14:28). Implied as well are the shamanic features of ASC induced heavenly journeys. Thus, this final gossip event considered here, ascribes to Jesus critical features and functions of a shamanic figure.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

6.1 Gossiping Jesus Into Being

Since the principle concern of this project was gossip, particularly how gossip in John's gospel construes Jesus as a social personage, it was necessary first to focus on establishing a viable theoretical framework based on gossip research. This was accomplished by surveying recent studies of gossip as well as studies of traditional Mediterranean cultures whose social fabric is marked in some way by gossip. It was then possible to create a viable theoretical framework highlighting the features and functions of gossip that could be utilized heuristically to see John's gospel in a unique way.

Looking at the FG through the lens of gossip proved surprising since it became clear that the peculiar social process is reported or described a considerable number of times in John, and is concentrated in the first half of the gospel. When reading John through the framework of gossip, it became necessary to test how gossip constitutes Jesus by securing a social type from the outset – in this case, a shamanic figure. That gossip in John constitutes Jesus as a social personage was not in question. Building on Craffert's work (2008), and so utilizing the features and functions of an established cross-cultural social type – a shamanic figure, it was possible to see how the gossip construes Jesus in terms of the particular social type and in conjunction with other social values and processes common in the first-century Mediterranean world. The results clearly indicate that gossip is intricately operative with other social processes and values, and in

surprising ways all toward constructing a social personage thoroughly and believably embedded in his social-cultural and historical world.

In the end, this research offers a significant contribution to NT studies because it 1) represents an exploration and appropriation of a social phenomenon that has still barely been exploited in the field, 2) provides a viable theoretical framework for positioning gossip vis-à-vis other pivotal social values and processes, 3) models a new way to see and understand John's gospel, and 4) is suggestive of an alternative to the received assumption of conventional historical Jesus research in that it involves linking literary features about oral phenomena in John to a culturally and historically plausible figure thoroughly embedded in his social, cultural, and historical world.

6.2 An Under-Exploited Social Process

There are a number of social processes common to the first-century Mediterranean that have already been carefully scrutinized by biblical scholars such as patron-client relations, challenge-riposte, and labeling. This project spotlighted a social process that to date has been relatively neglected by scholars. In doing so, the importance that gossip played in Jesus' world – constructing reality and constituting social personages – has been brought into clearer focus.

This project thus, stands as a further contribution to the growing knowledge about the world behind the text of the NT as seen through gossip, and stands on its own when seen before the backdrop of previous work. On the one hand, there has been groundbreaking exploration in seeing gossip in the NT, defining and lexicalizing it (Rohrbaugh 2007, 125-146), and examining how rumor and gossip may bring light on the traditioning

process (Botha 1993). On the other hand, there have been very skillful efforts at utilizing knowledge about gossip to actually interpret NT texts meaningfully by drawing out details of social mechanisms implied in the ancient texts (Botha 1998; Kartzow 2005; Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 2003; Neyrey 2007a). What the present project offers that others do not is a sustained attempt to see a particular NT text through the lens of gossip in a way that carefully draws out the intricacies of the phenomenon as it emerges in John's gospel. Subsequently, features and functions of gossip were seen operative in their social context, as well as the deep dynamic relation between gossip and other social-cultural processes of the first-century Mediterranean world.

6.3 A Theoretical Framework

Surveying modern gossip research as well as culturally sensitive treatments of extant traditional Mediterranean cultures, made it possible to see gossip as a heuristic category that could be brought to bear on the FG text to see how the process was involved in the social construction of Jesus. The survey yielded a working definition of gossip that takes into account important features of a gossip event such as the fact that it emerges in response to a generative event (words or deeds challenging the social-cultural status quo), that it involves at least three persons or groups of persons (two gossipers and one subject), that it conveys information about the subject that is either positive or negative, and that gossip is involved in the assertion or (re)construction of social reality. Implied by the definition therefore, is gossip's role in constructing social personages who are thoroughly embedded in their social-cultural context and indeed, their historical context.

Constructing a theoretical framework also involved seeing gossip operative within the social-cultural context of both ancient and modern traditional cultures. What became apparent is how gossip is typically disparaged by communities – seen basically as a way to convey negative information about a subject – all the while being part-and-parcel of the fabric of social life. The same sort of dynamic is of course, observable in first-century Mediterranean contexts as this was made apparent by looking at ancient Greco-Roman literature regarding gossip that by-and-large takes a negative view of the process, and seeing gossip operative in the NT. Indeed, as Rohrbaugh put it regarding the NT, “the frequency with which gossip is evaluated, reported, or actually recorded is truly astonishing” (2007, 146). Again, the irony is that gossip as such was denigrated in the ancient world, as it is in our modern Euro-American culture, even though it was practiced on a regular basis, as it still is today.

Another important aspect of the project was linking the social process to key social values and dynamics of Mediterranean traditional cultures. Gossip was seen as operative vis-à-vis a number of social processes such as kinship, in-group/out-group dynamics, self-identity and dyadism, and deviance labeling. The research also bears out how gossip is intricately involved with envy as this evolves in agonistic cultures driven by the idea of limited good, thus implying a connection to the pivotal value of honor, and so the transaction of honor and shame by means of challenge-riposte. To be sure, this was corroborated in John’s gospel too. Gossip is observed in the text not only *reporting* the outcome of challenge-riposte, and so the transaction of the pivotal limited value honor (or shame), but also as an *integral part* of the process of challenge-riposte in that gossip was often utilized aggressively to initiate a challenge to the subject Jesus, who was

rendered absent by various means, but intentionally able to overhear the talk (e.g., 6:42). If this is an accurate understanding of a peculiar function of gossip, then this constitutes important new knowledge about the intricacies of challenge-riposte while bearing witness to the versatility and pervasiveness of gossip in the agonistic culture of the first-century Mediterranean. While gossip is evaluative speech about an absent third party subject, it is sometimes intended to be overheard by the subject, and thus constitutes an act of aggression in an attempt to control information. The examples of this sort of gossip examined above in Chapter Five describe attempts to constitute Jesus negatively.

6.4 A New Way to See John's Gospel

The primary contribution this project has to offer is another way to look at Jesus in John's gospel. The perspective adopted for the project is firmly grounded in the social sciences, cultural anthropology, and is thus a contribution to the emerging perspective of anthropological historiography. Indeed, understanding the features and functions of gossip in John's gospel implies a great deal about who Jesus – the generative cause of much gossip – was, and how Jesus might have been experienced. Thus, creating a theoretical framework and utilizing abduction as a methodological process – pre-understanding Jesus as a shamanic figure – much has been learned about how gossip in John constitutes Jesus as a shamanic figure.

6.4.1 Gossip Constituting Jesus as a Shamanic Figure

The analysis of gossip texts in John's gospel bears out that Jesus was directly or by association ascribed as a shamanic figure either by gossip portrayed as conveying information about the subject, or gossip that was adjudicative and so dissonant in terms of the construal of the subject. The analysis was carried out by first identifying texts in the FG that describe gossip about Jesus, or gossip closely associated with him. The generative cause of the gossip was then identified as well as the social-cultural dynamics that served as constant back-drop and/or as particular catalysts for the gossip. Generally speaking, the majority of gossip events considered in this project are portrayed in the FG as emerging in response to Jesus' words and/or actions that both constitute a challenge to the *status quo*, and that often ascribe to him various features and functions of a shamanic figure. Subsequently, gossip's role in constituting Jesus as a shaman was seen as closely operative with the social phenomenon of challenge-riposte.

Culturally encoded information conveyed by gossip about Jesus was then isolated and subsequently compared with the features and functions associated with a shamanic figure. This step was taken again, with the understanding that gossip is portrayed in the narrative emerging in a culturally particular context, in reaction to culturally specific events, and thus constructing the reality of those cultural events. This is seeing gossip as implying questions like "what happened?" and/or "what did he say or do?" followed by the actual social construction of cultural events (reality) by means of the gossip that erupted in light of the events themselves. What Jesus either said or did was thus shown to imply various features and functions of a shamanic figure that was then ascribed to Jesus by means of the gossip.

In sum then, gossip in the FG functions as a reactive sense-making social process wherein an attempt is made to domesticate Jesus' unexpected words and deeds – that is, generative events that challenged the established social-cultural *status quo* – so that they fit within the social-cultural *status quo*. At times, gossip was observed as simply reacting to Jesus, thus ascribing to him certain characteristics (good man, deceiver) or various titles/labels (prophet, Rabbi, Messiah, sinner), while at others times gossip was seen as issuing a direct challenge to Jesus while simultaneously ascribing him negatively. In any case, the gossip was seen as associated with, and/or ascribing to Jesus various components of the shamanic complex, that is, features and functions associated with a shamanic figure. In this way, gossip is vividly seen as contributing to the social-cultural processes that constituted Jesus as a shamanic figure in John's gospel.

6.4.2 Constructing Jesus in John's Story-World

This project is suggestive of another way to see the narrative of the FG insofar as the narrative world of John implies the social-cultural world of the first-century Mediterranean that was Jesus'. Indeed, such consideration has its own implications for other aspects of John such as Christology, but at this point, it isn't difficult to imagine how reading the gospel through the lens of gossip, sheds light on the narrative's interest in advancing certain themes of the FG.

For example, John's gospel is operative around the theme of knowing-not knowing. In other words, what one knows about Jesus with respect to his identity is a key component to illustrating who comes to full faith (not based on signs) in Jesus in John's story-world. Since the narrative focuses on a number of extended encounters

between Jesus and individual persons like (to mention only two) Nicodemus (2:1-11) and the Samaritan woman (4:1-42) wherein the characters wrestle with Jesus' identity, gossip's role in construing Jesus' identity is important. Indeed, such encounters like these prove to entail gossip either indirectly (3:2) or quite directly (4:29).

Another example involves how Jesus' character proves elusive throughout John insofar as his identity goes. When seen through the lens of gossip, such elusiveness is confirmed a number of times in examples of gossip about Jesus described in this project as "adjudicative gossip," that is, gossip that does not transmit straight information about Jesus, but is marked by dissonance that often results in schism among the persons gossiping about him (1:45-46; 7:12, 25-27, 40-43, 46-52; 9:8-12, 16 et al). In any case, since gossip was a vibrant social process in the first-century Mediterranean world, it makes sense that the social world operative as the background to the FG would include gossip.

6.5 Christology "From the Side"

Implied by the narrative development of Jesus' identity in John is his Christological identity as this would have been imagined by those who experienced him. This is indeed, different from high Christology "from above" or the low Christology "from below," focusing as they do on titles applied to Jesus or his human characteristics. Instead, this angle accounts for the social-cultural context, or the social in-group that first experienced his words and deeds, as well as the communities that would emerge later in light of the same social personage. This is not a claim for (or against!) the narratives describing gossip in the FG as eye-witness, verbatim accounts. It is rather, a claim to the social-

cultural embeddedness of the first followers and subsequent communities that emerged in light of the words and deeds of an extraordinary historical figure, and particularly because of the talk about such a figure that no doubt burst forth in sense-making and reality-constructing reaction to his words and deeds.

Such an interest in the process by which Jesus is evaluated, or more precisely *constructed*, may be seen as “Christology from the side” (Malina and Neyrey 1988), that is, from the perspective of his contemporaries as deeply immersed in the same social-cultural context as Jesus was.

6.6 Gossip Constituting a Historical Figure

It was suggested at the beginning of this project (cf. 1.5 above) that the principle concern was with the historical figure of Jesus insofar as the gossip in the FG presents a plausible portrait of how the phenomenon was experienced by, and functioned in-and-around the life of a shamanic figure. It is believed that the research embodied here, bears this out convincingly. It was as well, suggested that the literary angle onto the FG, that is, narrative-critical considerations, would not be ignored given that the gossip is in fact, embedded in a narrative construct, or rather, the world within the text – John’s story-world. Thus, this exploratory and experimental project represents an attempt to bring together two perspectives that have most often been considered separately in biblical studies. To be precise, this project addresses the dichotomous relation between the literary reading of ancient texts and historical construction, and is thus suggestive of a different way of doing historiography. In other words, what is suggested here is a different way of doing historiography involving the connection of literary features about

oral communicative phenomena (gossip in John's story-world) to the life of a social personage, namely, a shamanic figure – Jesus. Thus, the project implies that historical Jesus research may be taken to the level of the social-cultural processes and dynamics presupposed by the Gospels, as it imagines such processes and dynamics reported or described in the texts, as vestiges of plausible historical situations, and so of a historical figure.

The extent to which this project is “historical” can be seen in terms of the degree to which it seeks to see events described in the text in their social, cultural, and historical contexts and to make sense of them (Malina and Neyrey 1988, 142-143). To be sure, this project was not intent on generating historical facts or details as such products are imagined by the reigning paradigm. Rather, this work was intent on operating self-consciously out the context of anthropological historiography and therefore, sought to make sense out of cultural stories reporting/describing cultural events (gossip events) surrounding a social figure. It is thus believed that this project offers a heuristic framework for gossip that holds reasonable explanatory power for making sense of narratives in John's gospel describing details of a particular social process's role in constituting Jesus plausibly as a shamanic figure firmly embedded in the first-century Mediterranean social, cultural, and historical context.

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