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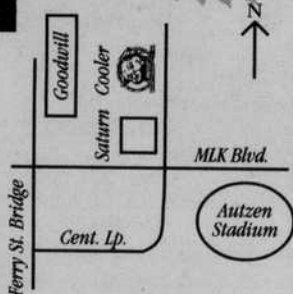
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# Experts say gossip acts as instrument for social guidance

Several professors contend gossiping is nothing new and that it helps some people fulfill their social obligations

By Ayisha Yahya  
News Editor

Many people have done it at some point of their lives. In fact, some people do it every day. Gossiping is a practice that human beings indulge in on a constant basis. It ranges from harmless comments about someone's new shoes or latest date to vindictive diatribe on who stole whose girlfriend, or how so and so only got a 4.0 GPA through incessant cheating.

So why do people gossip?

"I would attribute part of it to habit," University senior Erin Lebow-Skelley said. She said gossip is something people may learn when they're young.

Associate psychology Professor Holly Arrow said there is an evolutionary psychology perspective on gossip. "Juicy gossip" is usually about people breaking societal rules.

"It transmits quickly information of those who are violating the norm," she said.

People are usually more eager to share news on those cheating on the rules of a particular society than those who are following them.

"It helps people detect and punish bad behavior," Arrow said.

From this perspective, sharing news on the rule-breakers may benefit the group, she added.

Frank McAndrew, a psychology professor at Knox College in Galesburg, Ill., has written on the evolutionary psychology of gossip.

"People fulfill their social obligations to others and avoid 'cheating' at least in part because they fear that they will be gossiped about, that their reputation will suffer and they may ultimately be excluded from the group," he said in an e-mail interview.

McAndrew said people gossip because "they cannot help it."

"An irresistible interest in gossip is an evolutionary adaptation exactly like our taste for sweet foods and our attraction to people and places with

just the right qualities," he said. "In order for our prehistoric ancestors to be successful, they had to be up to date on the comings and goings of their allies as well as their rivals."

However, gossip can be used in malicious ways.

"It can be negative," Lane Community College freshman Ani Larson said, adding that gossip is usually considered to be information that is "none of your business."

"If it ever got around to the person you're talking about it might hurt their feelings," she said.

Arrow said one might take advantage of people's tendency to spread information and start a negative rumor, and it may be hard for the victim to know where the information came from and to retaliate.

"It can be a relatively low-cost form of personal damage," she said.

McAndrew said gossip can be harmful to people and to relationships depending upon how it is used.

"At its worst, gossip is about the manipulation of other people's reputations for the purpose of furthering an individual's own selfish interests," he said.

People not only gossip about those close to them, but also about celebrities.

Arrow said people may be interested in powerful people because they may want to be powerful themselves.

"People who are powerful may have an impact on your life so it's useful to have information on them," Arrow said. "Knowing what popular people do may be intrinsically interesting if we might want to be more popular ourselves."

Perhaps gossiping is just a natural part of being human.

"We are very social species, so information about other people is inherently interesting to us," Arrow said.

McAndrew has similar sentiments.

"Becoming part of a gossip network can increase the cohesiveness of a group and help to quickly socialize newcomers into the life of a group," he said.

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## MEAT

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require certain preparation before they are considered kosher to eat.

Pork is not OK (to eat) and shellfish is not OK — it depends

how strict you are," Oregon Hillel Jewish Campus Service Corps Fellow Laura Don said. "There are different degrees of keeping kosher."

She said it is certainly acceptable to eat meats, such as chicken or beef, once they are ritually cleansed, and that dairy and meat products are not meant to be consumed together in one meal.

"In our Torah it says not to eat all of those things," she said, referring specifically to Leviticus.

According to the Journal of the American Dietetic Association, a vegan diet — or "pure vegetarian" diet — offers several nutritional benefits.

"Well-planned vegan and other types of vegetarian diets are appropriate for all stages of the life cycle, including during pregnancy, infancy, childhood and adolescence," the June 2003 article said. "Vegetarian diets offer a number of nutritional benefits, including lower levels of saturated fat and cholesterol."

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