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THE GIFT OF Gab

BY EVA SYLWESTER
NEWS REPORTER

A study finds that negative gossip takes a back seat in conversation popularity to who-was-doing-what-with-whom chit-chat

Verbally ripping people to shreds in their absence has been a widespread human pastime for hundreds of years. While some people may feel guilty for taking part in gossip, some social scientists claim it's part of the species' evolutionary heritage.

"Juicy" or "hot" gossip, which tends to travel fast, is almost always about bad behavior, not good behavior," associate professor of psychology Holly Arrow said in an e-mail

interview. "It is useful to pass this information on to others because learning that a person can't be trusted to behave properly warns all who hear the gossip to beware of this person. This provides some social protection against others who might try to take advantage of us."

Arrow added that, from an evolutionary perspective, it makes sense that information about forms of cheating such as stealing, sexual misbehavior and political corruption, are frequently shared.

According to the book "Grooming,

Gossip and the Evolution of Language" by psychologist Robin Dunbar, around two-thirds of human conversation is taken up with matters of social import. However, a study by Dunbar and her colleagues, which was cited in the book, found that only 5 percent of conversation was related to criticism and negative gossip, and that the most-commonly discussed topics were who-was-doing-what-with-whom and personal social experiences.

Dunbar's study also found few

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■ In my opinion

This liberal has been won over by the Oregon Commentator

I do it in the morning, sometimes at the breakfast table. I do it in bed, in the bathroom, in the kitchen on the counter, and sometimes, when I'm feeling really naughty, I'll clear off a desk at the Oregon Daily Emerald office and do it right there, in front of the entire staff.

That's right, I read the Oregon Commentator, front to back and usually more than once.

But given my ultra-liberal, politically correct upbringing, my affinity for the O.C. isn't just absurd, it's downright offensive.

I grew up in one of those poster multi-racial family households. My mom is from Lebanon, Ore. (and needless to say, is white) and my dad immigrated here from the Philippines when he was 7. Between civil rights, women's rights, worker's rights and student's rights, I would guess both earned FBI files during their '70s college heyday.

So, naturally, my household was



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PC. Name-brand clothing, sugary cereals, video games, violent movies, television (except for PBS, of course) and pretty much everything else that makes an 8-year-old cool were off limits. The justification was that they promoted consumerism, sexism, racism and a whole lot of other -isms. We were encouraged to "accept everyone," which meant I always ended up inviting those social charity cases that nobody liked to my birthday parties.

By the time I reached high school, my political correctness radar had kicked into high gear. To make

matters worse, I attended a private Catholic high school where you could get expelled for promoting birth control, where the Inquisition was glazed over and where homophobia was acceptable. Just about everything incensed me, from a student erroneously assigning his blue pen a sexual identity to my world religions teacher broadly concluding that "Islam is a violent religion."

I'm not really sure what happened, but I guess I got tired of being angry all the time. I also simultaneously discovered that my breasts, the modest B-cups that they are, harnessed an enormous amount of power if I only allowed myself to become a little less principled. Free drinks and unfettered access to fraternity parties were among the perks.

This lengthy journey of self-discovery led me to the Oregon Commentator. In my job, I'm inundated with

BALINGIT, page 14B

■ In my opinion

Devoted Internet addicts reap vast rewards, like how to kill a goldfish

Did you know the most humane way to kill a sick goldfish is to put it in a freezer baggie and slap it against a wall? That the Raleigh Record bicycle of 1968 was offered in both Competition Blue and Bronze Green? That training a cat to use the toilet rather than its litter box is easy, safe and natural?

If you didn't spout a triumphant "yes" to at least two of these questions, you're obviously not an Internet junkie.

For most people, the Internet is a tool to be used for research, communication and downloading grainy porn. These casual Internet users probably have jobs, friends, families or other responsibilities they deem important. These people are really missing out.

My life on the Web began when I was a pimply junior high schooler, and I have only become more obsessed since. Once online, I chatted with friends from exotic places such as Illinois and Texas. I made shaky animated pictures and posted them on my Web site. If I didn't have anything else to do, I surfed and surfed. I sent e-mail messages and waited anxiously for replies. The Internet gave me the social high I didn't get at school,



ADRIENNE NELSON
404 NOT FOUND

and it had the added bonus of raising my intelligence level. Oh, and I also occasionally used it for a school assignment.

If I had to guess, I'd say the most powerful Internet tools for individuals are search engines. Type in any word or combination of words, hit enter, eat another handful of Fiddle Faddle, and the information will be at your fingertips. No physical activity necessary. You can even find reliable sources for that term paper that was due 15 minutes ago. (Bonus quiz: How many erotic images are returned when one types "peanut butter" into the Google Images search bar?)

Less Internet-savvy folks may ask why anyone would want a personal Web page. The blatant answer: because they can. There are hundreds of services clamoring to

get users' personal information in exchange for a few measly megabytes of Web space. Most companies have programs that don't require the user to actually know anything about how a Web page works. Now everyone can display blurry frat party pictures and bad poetry to the world, all from the comfort of his or her underpants. The new trend of writing Web logs, more irritatingly known as blogs, allows the same pajama-clad individuals to share profound thoughts and deep, mushy feelings without coding a single line.

Alas, having advanced into a pimply college student, I've mostly outgrown the use of chat programs such as ICQ and AOL Instant Messenger. I still have a Web site, and I still use e-mail, albeit mostly to talk with my mom. My obsession with the World Wide Web has branched into a full-out computer fetish, helping me with everyday digital dealings and securing a few employment opportunities. (Did you know when using a CRT monitor, the user is immersed in a constantly fluctuating electro-magnetic field?)

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