

Let's Talk About Sex: New Research From University Of Leicester
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A University of Leicester researcher has proved that men are as interested in gossip as women-and that women are more interested in gossip about other women.

The postgraduate research project by Dr. Charlotte De Backer, of the Department of Media and Communication at the University of Leicester, also found:

in gossip about girls, it was whether someone was pretty or not that was the most important feature – for boys and girls alike

in gossip about boys it was his wealth status that was the cue most picked up upon –by both men and women

people already in relationships were just as keen as single people to hear gossip about potential romantic partners

The study, published online, demonstrates that gossip is a key resource used by boys and girls to find and assess potential partners.

Dr De Backer said: “Although gossip dominates a great deal of everyone’s daily life, it is a topic that does not get the same attention in the scientific field. Studies on gossip are not very common, studies on sex differences in gossip are scarce and so far no one has investigated the use of and sex differences in gossip concerning potential romantic partners and potential rivals.

“It is not because we might consider ‘gossip’ as a trivial habit that it should not be studied scientifically. Gossip is present in everyone’s life, almost everyone gossips –some more than others of course-, and we all become subject of gossip at some point.

“Gossip is no idle chatter: it has clear functions, as previous researchers have shown -and this is an extra study that reveals the function of gossip in every day life.”

Dr De Backer said the study yielded some unexpected results:

“We had expected that respondents who reported being in a relationship would not be as interested in gossip about potential future romantic partners, but our results show that they are as interested as the respondents who reported being single.

“We also expected that girls overall might show a greater interest in gossip, and remember more gossip, but our study shows that boys are as interested when it concerns gossip about potential romantic partners. This does imply that girls are more likely to be gossiped about than boys.”

In the context of this study, gossip was used to determine who would be a good potential mate- and who would not.

Dr De Backer added: “This research allowed us to learn more about the gossip behaviour of both girls and boys in the context of romantic relationships. It shows that both sexes have an interest in learning about potential mates, regardless of their relationship status. It also showed us that girls might be more

interested in gossip about other girls than boys are interested in gossip about other boys.

“Our results also clearly suggest that relationship status has a negligible effect. In light of research on infidelity and mate poaching, which remain threats to individuals who are involved in long-term relationships, this lack of an effect is to be expected. Moreover, studies on jealousy have shown that both men and women are aware of the existence of infidelity and mate poaching, and thus they actively maintain their relationships.

“The current study provides additional evidence in support of the idea that people in relationships are aware, to some degree, of extradyadic individuals who may serve as potential mates and as threats. This awareness may direct one’s attention to the forms of gossip that can function as critical sources of relevant, mating-related, information.”

Dr De Backer’s study is now looking at the impact of celebrity gossip on society. She said: “I believe celebrity gossip replaces interpersonal gossip for a great deal. Celebrity gossip is becoming the new social cement of our societies. We might not have mutual acquaintances to gossip about, but we all ‘know’ Paris, Britney, Madonna and The Beckhams to gossip about.”

The study was part of a doctoral dissertation on interpersonal and mass media gossip which can be found at: http://www.ethesis.net/gossip/gossip_contence.htm