

## \*The Gossip Hover

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What does gossip have that makes us all so inclined to indulge in it? No culture, no matter how ancient, has ever been free from some form of gossip. It has rooted into society and made itself a key element of human interaction, undergoing changes in time and evolution, with a penchant for social networks—either in face-to-face communication or in typed messages. We have fueled the gossip tradition with our enthusiasm about every little canard we come across, transmitting it and creating chains of unconfirmed knowledge. Fascinatingly, this habit has been transformed over the years, but it has also managed to keep its essence alive.

Small towns in the 17th century were the wellspring of this tradition. As in Jane Austen's novels, afternoon tea among neighbors was laced with the latest hearsays, and opinions were exchanged in long discussions. In every culture, whether sharing biscuits or the preferred infusion—tea, coffee, *mate*—people, especially women, tittle-tattled in living rooms sharing the collected information they had overheard or been told about, delighted to have it as a source of amusement for a few hours, and without needing any source of evidence of the facts. Along with the facial expressions and voice tones that reflected their true opinions, they would later share their discoveries with their husbands over dinner, with the cashier from the grocery store, and with whoever that was eager to listen. Thus, gossip would fly all over neighborhoods every time a new rumour arose: orally shared face-to-face gossip about the place where you lived used to be captivating.

Towards the 20th century, while some of these rituals remained active—mostly in small towns—, mass media was a milestone for the murmur habit. Gossip expanded from living rooms to glossy magazines and TV; attention shifted from local people to the latest fashion model, the ultimate sportsman, or the most scandalous actress or pop star. Each new piece of information was now delivered with colourful headlines or background music which would enthrall one's attention, turning gossip into some sort of audiovisual art. But there was one particular thing which made its evolution even more distinguishable: easier access to evidence, which, even while it had not seemed to matter in the past, made rumours juicier. Paparazzi pictures made it simpler for people to believe things, and aroused curiosity to explore a million possible explanations for each controversial picture that came up. Face-to-face gossip found itself endangered by screen-to-face transmissions and paper-to-eye disclosures.

Nowadays, our sources have become smaller, but only in size. Living rooms, TVs and magazines have been reduced to one single tiny device: a cellphone. In spite of their size, cellphones have been able to gather more gossip than any previous device ever has. Finding out about other people's lives has never been easier, and not only is it possible to learn about celebrities' lives, but also about people we see on a daily basis. It is almost as if living rooms and the roots of mass media—television, magazines, radio—had turned into the strongest source of gossip of all times. Information is no longer reduced to individuals taking part in a tea party: social media users make sure that each of us can learn everything about everyone, resulting in the greatest threat to privacy in history. Rumours spread so easily that in one single touchscreen and a few milliseconds, it can reach anyone and anywhere.

Still, despite all these technological advances, the roots of gossip still remain. Even if we have the option of simply sending a text, we stick as much as we can to its traditional form. While social media may be a useful tool for quick communication, in modern

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popular places such as cafes, nail or hair salons or bars, the original tradition remains immortal and untouched. The issue cellphones have is that they capture one of the elements that construct the gossiping habit: the information itself. However, it cannot transmit the emotions and reactions face-to-face communication involves, proving that gossip is not only about sharing information, but also about sharing moments and creating a sense of being in league with our fellow gossipers.

As years go by, we take up and drop out of activities. Yet, the only one we cannot seem to get rid of is gossiping. Naturally, the sources vary depending on the circumstances. Think, for instance, about a singer: their songs are not always about the same people who broke their hearts once. Likewise, gossipers change their lyrics according to the melody of the month, and their way of spreading it according to the latest technological discoveries. This undertaking does not leave anyone out, whether you are the singer or the muse, you are never free from becoming a link in the gossip chain. It is so naturally ingrained in our daily lives, that we find an overwhelming urge to go along with it and allow gossip to flow through our blood.