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Gossipmongers: Interest in Gossip as a Function of Gender and Mode of Transmission

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GOSSIPMONGERS:
INTEREST IN GOSSIP AS A FUNCTION OF GENDER AND MODE OF
TRANSMISSION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Psychology

Jennifer Lee Hambaugh

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Title: Gossipmongers: Interest in Gossip as a Function of Gender and Mode of Transmission

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The present study examined gender differences in interest in gossip transmitted among friends, or transmitted publicly. Women are stereotyped as gossips, yet empirical research on gossip is limited. Recent research on gossip emphasizes the functions of gossip, arguing that gossip is not trivial and is not necessarily negative. Both women and men were hypothesized to be interested in gossip, but women were hypothesized to be more interested in gossip than men, especially for private forms of gossip compared to public. Gossip about public figures conveyed through public forums was expected to be of interest to both men and women. Recall of themes and details was quantified and employed as a measure of interest in gossip scenarios. Undergraduate students read four gossip scenarios, completed a gossip consumption index, and then recalled details from the scenarios. A MANOVA revealed that there were gender differences in both themes and total units of details of scenarios recalled and specifically, women recalled more information from the adultery scenario than men. This experiment added to the limited empirical knowledge of gossip by demonstrating that women have more interest in gossip than men. As commercial gossip grows and the level of gossip importance increases, so will the need to be proficient in the ability to gossip and know gossip. Therefore, if women continue to be more interested in gossip and understand gossip's importance, than they may be in a more advantageous position compared with men who are less interested in gossip.