

Gossip is talk and writing about people
– both other people and ourselves –
in family, social, workplace, and public settings.*

*Based on research by both men and women starting in the 1940s.

Origin Of Gossip

Going back to the 1300s, the original form of the word gossip was “godsibb”. It brought together the words “god” and “sibb” to mean a close relationship through God. Godsibb referred to the relationship between a family and the circle of people who were close enough to the family to be considered part of the extended family.

Evolution Of Gossip

By the 1500s, gossip referred to relationships between individuals, including:

the relationship between male drinking partners

the relationship between women gathered at the home of a woman about to give birth.

By the 1600s, people used the word gossip more when describing women than when describing men. As the word became more associated with women, the meaning of gossip changed from a relationship between individuals of either sex into idle talk between women.

By the 1900s, the word gossip almost exclusively applied to women. The activity of gossip became a female trait. Men who gossiped were accused of acting like women. Women's gossip came to be defined as trivial talk because men feared what women said to each other about men. The label of triviality was meant to discourage women from developing ties with each other that might disrupt male dominance.

Gossip: The Inside Scoop
Jack Levin and Arnold Arluke
1987