

Have you heard? Gossiping isn't all bad

November 17 2017



Gossiping provides people a clearer sense of appropriate behaviour, UQ researchers found. Credit: University of Queensland

Gossiping helps a person develop a better understanding of their society's expected behaviours, researchers from The University of Queensland have found.

Dr Kim Peters and Professor Jolanda Jetten of the UQ School of Psychology have studied gossiping about deviant actions and found that it provides [people](#) with a clearer sense of what is typical and appropriate [behaviour](#).

In their study, unacquainted participants were paired and shown videos

of either positive or negative deviance, specifically, a person either dropping or picking up rubbish.

"People who witnessed the littering were very likely to spontaneously [gossip](#) about it with one another," Dr Peters said.

"The more they gossiped about it, the more they reported a better understanding of social norms.

"They also expressed a greater desire to gossip about the behaviour.

"This suggests that our everyday gossip helps us build social bonds and develop a better understanding of the social groups and societies to which we belong."

Professor Jetten said gossip has a wider range of social consequences, as can be seen in the current [sexual harassment](#) allegations in the American entertainment industry and the resulting #metoo stories on social media.

"Gossiping allows us to monitor the reputations of other people, and by learning about their behaviours we are in a better position to decide whether we should, or should not, trust them in the future," Professor Jetten said.

"The gossip about Harvey Weinstein has undoubtedly had [negative consequences](#) for him, such as the loss of his job and expulsion from a number of prestigious film societies, but it may also have had consequences for all of us who participated in it.

"Among other things, there seems to be an emerging consensus that sexual harassment at work is more common than many of us may have supposed and that it should definitely not be tolerated.

"When investigating the consequences of deviance for social change, it is important to consider the essential role that our daily gossip may play."

The study is published in *Psychological Science*.

More information: Kim Peters et al. Gossiping About Deviance: Evidence That Deviance Spurs the Gossip That Builds Bonds, *Psychological Science* (2017). [DOI: 10.1177/0956797617716918](https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797617716918)

Provided by University of Queensland

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