

The Gossip Issue

Hi, this is Joanna Goddard and welcome to the Big Salad podcast. Today, I'm talking to two friends, [Colby](#) and [Lina](#), about gossip and what we love about it. Here we go...

COLBY'S PART

joanna goddard

Do you think gossip is inherently unethical? Or do you feel like, no, this is part of being a human, you talk about each other in this way, no big deal?

Colby

I think it's 100% part of being human. I think it's one thing that separates us from the animals. And I don't think it's unethical. Obviously, if you cross a line — I don't think you should badmouth people too much. I don't think you should betray secrets, unless absolutely necessary.

Colby

But it's very enjoyable. I also think you could make the argument that communication is important. And I don't just mean, you know, overt, explicit communication. I feel like it's a way of society and groups of friends kind of staying transparent with each other but kind of *sotto voce*, if I'm using that expression correctly.

I personally love gossiping. I mean, I'm not going to pretend that I don't. I'm a hopeless gossip. It's fun.

joanna goddard

It's really fun. When I get a text from you, when you're like, *oh my god*. And then you see the three dots and you're like, what's coming?! I love it so much.

Colby

Could not agree more.

joanna goddard

I kind of think, especially as women — but I also think you fall into this category — like you spend so much of your life and friendships talking about things that go on in your life. There's not much that you keep from each other.

And talking about all these different ways people are doing things just normalizes it. It's like, great, it's all just a big mess and you're just embracing it.

Colby

I think that's very well put.

joanna goddard

Another thing that really helped me when I was going through my divorce is that you know when you're going through divorce and it's been quiet within your marriage for a while, just in terms of, what should we do? Are we going to end this marriage or not? It feels very insular and behind closed doors and intense.

And then when you get divorced, and, well, at least for me, I felt alone at first because my friends weren't getting divorced at the same time.

But then I started hearing from friends, even though they weren't getting divorced, they would tell me stories of their other friends who were getting divorced, what happened with the marriage, some scandal or not, or like what their friends had said was hard or not about the mediation, all these different things. They would give me all the secondhand info.

And for me, it felt like such a Greek chorus around me of people who are going through a similar thing, even though I might not know them myself.

And it felt so good.

Colby

I think when people, when people enjoy the gossip, it's because it's reflecting something, an insecurity, a fear, um, a sadness. that they feel themselves. So, then when you're trading stories like this about other people, you're saying, oh, they're in the same boat too. They would understand how I'm feeling. I feel less alone.

So, I absolutely agree.

joanna goddard

Okay, I'll tell you a funny story. I also told this story on a Substack Live that I did, but we didn't publish it, so I don't think that many people have heard it.

So, Alex and I, when we were married, as you know, would have people over to our apartment a lot. And so we had a games night.

And one of the guys was dating somebody new.

And it was like one of those things where it's like her social debut. You know, she likes to come to the game night. Everyone is like, oh, what's the deal? Like a fledgling relationship. And so everybody left, and our old apartment, it used to be the kitchen on one side and then this long hallway where the front door was and the living room on the other side. And the bathroom and the front door were in the hallway.

So, I was shouting to Alex, he was washing glasses or whatever and I was lying on the sofa. And I was like, what do you think of the new girl? And he was like, I don't know. I'm like, yeah, I

don't know either. Like I don't know if I can really see them together. And we're just talking about it, giving examples, talking about specific moments.

And all of a sudden, *we heard the toilet flush*. And we were like, oh my god, somebody's still in the house. His head pops out of the kitchen and is staring at me. And I like flipped my neck around on the sofa and we're like, oh my god.

And so I'm like, 'I think I hear baby Toby crying in his room.' And we run into Toby's room and hide until enough time has passed or this person must have left. We were so stressed out. It turned out that it was Maz's wife, Lee, who's so sweet and definitely wouldn't have cared.

But after that, we made a rule in our marriage that we had to wait 10 minutes after a party. I'd be like, 'So.....,' and he'd be like, '10 minutes!'

Colby

That's a great idea because I was going to say, alternatively, you could have just done a sweep of the apartment, like when you're leaving a hotel room to make sure you don't forget anything, make sure no one is under the bed.

I would do both. I would do a sweep and the 10-minute rule because what if someone is waiting outside the door.

By the way, I have some good friends in London, and you always have to take your shoes off when you go into their flat. So, when you leave, you have this little window where you have to put your shoes back on. But of course, if it's a boisterous party, you can hear people inside. So, it's very tempting because you're sort of eavesdropping unintentionally because you have to put your shoes on.

You start to realize, I could just stand here and listen in and hear what they're saying about me, which, of course, which, of course, is is a really bad idea.

joanna goddard

You know that old-school question, would you rather have the power of flight or the power of invisibility?

Instinctually, when I first heard that question, I was like, invisibility. You could eavesdrop. It sounds so fascinating. You could watch a couple at a dinner table and be like, you know, what is everybody like? It sounds like a sort of amazing psychological experiment.

But the more you think about it, you would start hearing things that people said about you sometimes. And I just think it's a ticket to madness. You'd spiral.

But that's kind of what movies are. Like other than an action film or something, it's like a movie like A Marriage Story or any of these dialogue-driven, character-driven movies are basically gossip.

It's basically like, 'this is what a life could look like. This is what a marriage can look like.' Kind of interesting when you think about it.

Colby

Yeah, I think, yeah, no, no, I think that's a, yeah, I think that's a great parallel, actually. Absolutely. Absolutely. And those are my favorite, and those are my favorite kinds of movies.

joanna goddard

Oh, if it's not dialogue driven, I don't want to watch it. Do you think some people you know are really good at gossip and other people are not?

Colby

I think if you have chemistry with another friend or a friend group, you're probably going to be good at it because you guys play off each other well.

You know, I once heard, Dennis Quaid was being interviewed on Inside the Actors Studio or something. And he was talking about his former cocaine addiction. James Lipton, the host was like, how would you get the drugs? And he said on every movie set, you can kind of just tell who's going to have a connection. You learn to sniff it out.

I think it's the same thing about gossip.

In my office, and me being a hopeless gossip, I could kind of tell who was going to be into it, you know? So I think you get kind of a gossip—dar for who you can start gabbing with and. who's going to be like, Oh, you know, I'm not that type of person.

joanna goddard

Yeah, no, 100%. It makes me laugh because like, have you been watching White Lotus? Of course, right?

Colby

I love White Lotus, but I have not watched the new season yet.

joanna goddard

It's really, really good so far. Three of the characters are female friends who are on a girl's trip.

Joanna Goddard

And it's really funny because one will leave the room and then the other two are like... *oh, she's the best. She really is. So great that we're all here together.*

joanna goddard

Yeah, she looks great. You know that they're just waiting for a second then they'll be like, will say.

Colby

Yeah. Yeah.

joanna goddard

Then you're like, yes.

Colby

Yeah

joanna goddard

Everyone knows that feeling where you kind of dip a tiny toe.

Colby

I think the term that I would like to use for that is 'a trial balloon.' You send up a little trial balloon and you see how the other person responds and then you're like, game on.

joanna goddard

Yeah. And you're like, dang.

Colby

Absolutely.

joanna goddard

I have this friend called Josh and he is really funny, really insightful. He's a novelist. He's like a great dad. Like he has so much to say. He's really, really fun to talk to.

joanna goddard

That said, he is the worst gossip. We went out to dinner a while ago and I told him a banger story about something.

joanna goddard

And he's like, oh my god, that's so crazy.

joanna goddard

And we talked about it. And then I was like, okay, Josh, I'm like, now you have to tell me some gossip. And he's like, I don't know any gossip, I don't know enough people to have good gossip. And I was like, you do. You only need to have one, you need to know one person to have good gossip. Like, think of something.

joanna goddard

He's thinking and he's thinking. He finally goes, oh, wait. He's like, I do have a secret. And he leans in... and I lean in... and then he's like, okay, it's about X friend — I won't say his name here —

joanna goddard

And I'm like on the edge of my seat, and he goes, He has bad taste in movies.'

joanna goddard

I laughed for like three days.

Colby

Wow.

joanna goddard

I was like, *what?* Like, *okay, sure. Yeah.*

Colby

That's hilarious. He's self-aware, I guess.

joanna goddard

I'll coach him up. I'm working on him.

Colby

Have you ever accidentally heard people gossiping about you?

joanna goddard

Um, I'm sure the answer is yes, but I'm trying to think... I do know that feeling when you walk into a room and it suddenly is very quiet, and you're like, guys, it wasn't just like a coincidence that your conversation ended tensely right when I walked in.

Colby

Yeah, totally.

Colby

But again, I think when that happens, you know, you can either be sensitive about it and kind of hang on to it and let it fester inside you. Or you can realize, in all likelihood they weren't shit talking me, these are my friends. They're just being human.

Colby

They're not being nefarious. And we all do it.

joanna goddard

I mean, I have to say within families, it's major

Colby

In families, gossip is a blood sport. And what's that famous line? Tolstoy, who said, all happy families are all alike, but all unhappy families gossip or something.

joanna goddard

It's the opening line of Anna Karenina. Wait, 'All happy families are alike. Each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.'

joanna goddard

Ahh, this was very fun. I love gossiping with you and I trust that you will tell me the next time something crazy happens to anybody in your life, and I'll do the same.

LINA'S PART

Joanna: As a therapist, do you have certain takes on gossip? Like, do you approve of it?

Lina: I do have feelings about it. Number one, I love it. It actually gives me joy to gossip, and celebrity gossip is just a straight up part of my life that I don't want to let go of.

Lina

So, I think I've had to think about, is it a good thing? Is it a bad thing? My job is to help people not engage in maladaptive behaviors to some degree. So like, what's my take?

Lina

Sometimes gossip is this sort of healing form of validation. My example of this would be, you know, when you're a kid and your parents are being particularly nuts, there's something very wonderful about being able to turn to a sibling, make a face, and then later just be like, can you believe the way mom was being?

Lina

And then your sibling is like, whoa, that was crazy. There is a reparative healing aspect to that sort of gossip that is healthy.

Lina

I think the sibling dynamic around gossip is actually very valuable and curative.

Lina: Siblings who can do that and have that sort of bond, they're able to differentiate their parents' reaction to them from their identity. It's not like, *Dad's mad at me. I must be bad. And I've done something bad.* You can be like, you know, dad's mad at everyone every Saturday. Wonder what that's about.

joanna goddard

My dad can't tolerate it if somebody moves slowly through a security line at an airport. His brain absolutely explodes and it's like a personality defect of the person. And my sister and I joke about it.

Lina
Yeah.

joanna goddard

And it's nice because it's like, okay, that's just like dad's efficiency tick. It's not about me being lazy or slow or disorganized.

Lina
Exactly. Exactly.

Lina

So, it can be good. I think that if it becomes an outlet where instead of speaking up directly to somebody, you're constantly running to sort of passive-aggressive vent to others, you know, then it becomes problematic, right?

Lina

Maybe what you should be doing is speaking up to whoever's annoying you and saying like, hey, it really bothered me when you did X.

joanna goddard

Do you think gossip makes people closer? I do think sometimes when you moved into your college dorm or you are in a class, and you find someone, and then you can both talk about how the teacher's hot and how this like one kid never stops yapping and stuff.

joanna goddard

I think it does make you feel like you're instant friends.

Lina

Absolutely. I think it is a way to connect. It does cross the line into toxic when it's being used to hurt others, exclude others.

Lina

Or I've seen this in marriages of people I've worked with. Sometimes people align so strongly in their 'it's us against the world, everyone else sucks' emotion, that it actually becomes toxic and sort of isolative. And I don't think that is a healthy dynamic. That's not serving you. I think that's like a real thing in relationships that people describe to me in their marriages or in their relationships with their parents where they're like, the only way I can bond with this person is through...they're baiting me into talking negatively about someone else and it's starting to feel bad.

Lina

There is a moment when it starts to feel toxic.

Lina

It's like drinking with someone and you're like, okay, wait, now I'm hungover. It went too far.

joanna goddard

Yeah.

Lina

It went too far.

joanna goddard

So, I had this friend, Yoko, who grew up in Japan, moved to Brooklyn, got married to an American, had a child, and then moved back to Japan with all of them.

joanna goddard

And she said that a major difference between her time in New York and now her time in the countryside of Japan is that people don't speak as freely.

joanna goddard

So, she said when she would go — and I think every parent in New York knows this, especially moms, like when you go to a playground, you sit beside a mom and you turn to her and you're just like, oh my God, I hate my husband.

joanna goddard

Like you don't even know her name. Or you're like, oh my God, like my mom is driving me insane.

Lina

Right.

joanna goddard

Or like, oh my God, whatever. And the mom will turn to you and she'll tell you everything about whatever it might be.

Lina

Yeah.

joanna goddard

And it's just incredibly open, like normalizing, like it just feels like nothing's off limits. And she said that in Japan, she couldn't get that going with anybody. And it was really hard for her at first. She just felt like it took a really long time to build a friendship and then like finally, finally get to that point.

joanna goddard

I guess my question is, like, do you feel like there are cultural components to this?

Lina

Yeah, I'm sure. I mean, look, I felt that way when I went from New York to the Midwest for college. There is also a way in New York that people talk with a certain openness.

Lina

I didn't even realize it and brought that to certain people in the Midwest. And I found it felt completely flat. I had a tough time. I think I was perceived maybe as messy or too open, or that was the feeling I got.

joanna goddard

Interesting.

Lina

There's cultural, like going to Japan and there's cultural, like going to Chicago. And sometimes they can feel the same.

Lina

There's also the culture of a family. You know, some families bond around this and some families really don't.

joanna goddard

I have a friend who with her brother, when her mom is really annoying them and the brother will do the same, they text just the lemon emoji to each other. And then they don't even have to explain like what went down, what did you do this time? They're just like lemon and the other one will just like thumbs down the lemon

Joanna:

Watching reality shows is essentially just like watching a gossip feed

Lina

You can do that with anything, though. Like, I got, I'm really into tennis. And it's partially because I watched a bunch of those shows on Netflix where they go behind the scenes with tennis people. They give you the whole backstory. So now when I'm watching a tennis match, like sometimes I'll call my friend Maddie and we'll literally be gossiping about the players.

joanna goddard

That's so funny. I feel the same. Toby, when he first started getting really into sports, I was like, I don't know if I can join you in this. Like, I mean, I'm his mom, so I have to be involved to some extent.

joanna goddard

But he told me all the scandals. He'd be like, 'This guy needs to play a good game tonight or he's going to be moved down to the G League.'

joanna goddard

'This guy, his wife's expecting a baby. You can follow her on Instagram here.' He really met me where I was.

Lina

Oh my God, yes.

Lina

That is exactly, exactly how it works in my house. I can't make myself get excited about football or basketball, but Joel understands this hack — he will find some piece of juicy gossip and he'll give it to me. And then, I'm like, wait, what happened? Like, right now there's this whole scandal you know between like,

Lina

the Lakers in Dallas because Dallas traded Luka Dončić to the Lakers.

Lina

And nobody knows why, because it doesn't make sense because he was like the greatest player in the league. Like, why would you trade him away?

joanna goddard

Yeah.

Lina

And like, literally every time he'll be watching basketball, I'll come in. I'll be like, what is going on with Dončić? Like, have they figured it out? Like, what is it???

Lina

I just love a good goss sesh. What can I say? It just feels good.

joanna goddard

Feels so good.