

Research Perspective

Using the name Carl Withers, James West wrote *Plainville, USA*. Published in 1945, West's book is about the time he spent in a small Midwestern town researching gossip. West found what he called "gossip cells," people who grouped together by such characteristics as age, gender, occupation, and hobby. Some of the cells Withers found included:

- Old men
- Old women
- Young married women
- A "wild set"

West found that the biggest gossips were the old men. Art Gallaher, Jr. visited the town where West did his research. In his book, *Plainville Fifteen Years Later*, he came to the same conclusion that old men were the biggest gossips.

Life Experience Perspective

Both James West and Art Gallaher, Jr. failed to recognize the reason that old men were the biggest gossips – they had the time and opportunity to gossip. At every stage of their lives, women face expectations that they take care of daily chores – cooking, cleaning, laundry, childcare, etc. Even old women face those expectations. Therefore, old women don't have the free time that gives them the same opportunities old men have to gossip. The most striking example I know of comes from my childhood.

A minister and his wife lived next door to my family. The minister retired and spent his time gossiping. He expected his wife, Alice, to continue to do all of the cooking, cleaning, and laundry by herself. Alice also took in other people's laundry to help pay bills while her retired husband gossiped. The retired minister even prevented Alice from gossiping when he allowed her to leave the house. The minister would drive the two of them to a restaurant. The minister left Alice in the car alone while he went inside the restaurant for pie, coffee, and gossip. Everyone in the neighborhood was relieved when the minister died first. Alice was able to enjoy a few years of doing what she wanted to do, including gossiping with friends.

The biggest gossips in any population are likely to be the people who have the time and opportunity to gossip.