

Differences Between Men & Women Gossips

© Paula M. Kramer, 2018 to the present

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 "most visible loafing group" was the old men. The old men loafing group are also "Old Men," "Club," "Story Tellers," "real loafers here", and "Spit and Whittle (or Argue) Club." They spend the summer "on two iron benches under a shade tree in one corner of the square." They move into stores for inclement weather.

Old women gossips sit inside the Notions Store; "Old Women," "Widows even though they're not all widows and not all widows gather at the Notions Store," "Gossips," "Old Gossips," "Busybodies," "Snoops."

Attributing "gossip" to women continues.

Art Gallaher visited the town where West did his research. In his book, *Plainville Fifteen Years Later*, he came to this conclusion about the old men:

"This group, more than any other, is a living link with Plainville's yesteryears, and their presence, plus the things they talk about, is a constant reminder of the past to younger men and boys who drop by the 'cort' for short visits during the day."

Because women gossip in private, no one can control them. Uncontrolled women can only mean trouble.

"Most people believe that deliberate distortions are not as 'vicious' in the male cliques as in the women's groups."

"In addition, Plainvillers believe that women are inherently more 'vicious' gossipers than are males."

Prejudice carries the day in both books.

Differences Between Men & Women Gossips

© Paula M. Kramer, 2018 to the present

Plainville, USA

Pages 99-107

Plainville Fifteen Years Later

Pages 134-139

Life Experience Perspective

Both James West and Art Gallaher, Jr. failed to recognize the reason that old men were the most visible and supposedly more important 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.