

# Why Women Resist Community

How to help them connect.

Nancy Barton

**"But it's easy to build community in the women's ministry; women are so relational."**

That comment from a male colleague reflects a pervasive fallacy. While women may generally be more sensitive and verbal than men, we still struggle to develop relationships that foster true community.

Recently our church planned a weekend retreat, but many women didn't sign up because, we heard later, they didn't know who their roommates would be. Some of these women had been in the church for more than ten years. I've also had women threaten to leave an event simply because their one friend didn't show up.

Why do women, who seem so good at relationships, not feel at home in community? And how can we overcome those feelings in the church?

**1. "She's better than I ... "** A group of moms from our church were meeting for tea and conversation. As the afternoon waned, Cass began feeling more and more angry about her place in life. Raising two toddlers left her little free time. As she listened to Wendy talk about her new-found freedom now that her children were all in school, Cass grew frustrated. She didn't have time to read books. She couldn't remember the last time she had time away from her children. Cass confessed to me later that she had little desire to meet with the women again.

Women are tempted to compare season of life, children, husbands, hair styles, work, education, homesâ€”you name itâ€”and when we fall into this trap, we always come up short. We then tend to distance ourselves from those with whom we're comparing.

**2. "I don't fit in because ... "** As a single woman, I often walk into a group where I am the only one without a mate or children. Whether I enjoy community depends in part on whether I give in to the thought I am different; therefore I have nothing in common with these people, or whether I allow the Holy Spirit to fill me with his love so I can focus on others.

If we let discontentment rule, we will find something that sets us apart from any group.

**3. "I don't know if I can trust you ... "** Sue entered our small group with her guard high. Sue's painful relationship with her mother and with several female friends in the past had convinced her she could not trust other women. Her distant responses stifled the entire group. No one felt free to share beyond surface talk.

Most of us can recall a time our trust was broken. When we hold on to these hurts, we try to protect ourselves, and this fear creates distance.

4. **"I can't help competing ... "** Linda and Jan participated in the same small group for several years. The group prayed weekly for the Lord to give them children. Linda was 32, and Jan was 40.

Recently Linda found out she was pregnant and couldn't wait to tell the group. But wanting to be sensitive, she told Jan first. Jan was genuinely happy for Linda, but over time she withdrew from the group. The group felt the tension immediately.

When we compete this way, we allow God's blessings of others to devastate us.

5. **"I can't share who I really am ... "** Julie works hard in numerous areas of women's ministries. She appears to be in charge, a committed Christian. In her small group, however, Julie is more reserved. She requests prayer for others but never for herself. Many know what Julie does, but few know her heart.

Many like Julie have never dealt with soul issues. Many women wonder, *If I shared my real struggles, would others still accept me?*

### **How to overcome these challenges**

Whether speaking in front of a group of peers, doing a new ministry, or giving a personal prayer request, women can cling to their need to remain comfortable. My natural response as a leader is to make them feel "okay and comfortable."

*Women are tempted to compare, and if we fall into this trap, we always come up short.*

But that may only fuel their insecurities and shield them from true community.

I asked Karen to speak at a Bible study group about her infertility and how she saw God working in her life.

Karen questioned my judgment: "How can I share something so personal with so many women? How will I be received? What if I start crying?"

I asked Karen to pray about it and reminded her of all the women facing similar struggles who needed her encouraging words. I also reminded her that the Holy Spirit would give her the words to say. Karen pushed through her fears, and today, a year later, many women still comment about how her testimony affected them.

In addition to challenging women, I try to assist them in finding their true identity in Jesus Christ. Women often feel as if they need to have it all together.

Sandy, a success in the business world, told me she wanted to grow in Christ. "I'm a pretty good person," she said in our first time together for discipleship. Hidden behind her words was a belief system that equated her identity with achievement.

As we met regularly, I began to probe Sandy's self-identity: What would you do if you lost your job tomorrow? How would you feel about yourself? Would Jesus be enough?

Sandy slowly began to let go of her false security. Today she is moving toward loving Jesus more out of devotion than duty. She is still outwardly successful, but that doesn't hold the same power over her as before. She is recognizing how special she is to God. No longer needing to mask her weaknesses, she has truly found her identity in Christ.

Women establish community as we set aside our pretenses, identities, and prestige, and extend God's "needless" love to each other.

*Nancy Barton is director of women's ministries at Wheaton Bible Church  
Main St. at Franklin  
Wheaton IL 60187  
[whtnbible@aol.com](mailto:whtnbible@aol.com)*

**Copyright © 1999 by the author or Christianity Today/Leadership Journal. For reprint information call 630-260-6200 or e-mail [ljournal@leadershipjournal.net](mailto:ljournal@leadershipjournal.net).  
Winter 1999, Vol.XX, No. 1, Page 31**