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**Power through information: Women's networking organizations**

**Gooch, Betty Louise Eppler, M.A.**

**The University of Arizona, 1993**

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**POWER THROUGH INFORMATION:  
WOMEN'S NETWORKING ORGANIZATIONS**

by

Betty Louise Eppler Gooch

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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the  
SCHOOL OF FAMILY AND CONSUMER RESOURCES  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS  
WITH A MAJOR IN COUNSELING AND GUIDANCE**

In the Graduate College  
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

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## APPROVAL BY THESIS DIRECTOR

This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

Betty J. Newlon  
Betty J. Newlon  
Professor of Counseling and Guidance

April 10, 1993  
Date

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES . . . . .	6
ABSTRACT . . . . .	7
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	8
Need for this Study . . . . .	9
Purpose of the Study . . . . .	10
Questions for Consideration . . . . .	11
Definition of Terms . . . . .	12
Assumptions . . . . .	13
Limitations . . . . .	13
Summary . . . . .	13
2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE . . . . .	14
3. METHODS . . . . .	28
Population . . . . .	28
Procedure . . . . .	29
Instruments . . . . .	30
Questions for Consideration . . . . .	31
Data Analysis . . . . .	31
Summary . . . . .	32
4. RESULTS . . . . .	33
Population . . . . .	33
Information from Questionnaires . . . . .	34
Information from Interviews . . . . .	39
Summary . . . . .	45
5. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS . . . . .	47
Summary of Findings . . . . .	47
Conclusions . . . . .	50
Limitations . . . . .	51
Recommendations . . . . .	51
Implications for Counselors . . . . .	52

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (Cont.)--

	Page
APPENDIX A: HUMAN SUBJECTS EXEMPTION . . . . .	54
APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE COVER LETTER . . . . .	56
APPENDIX C: NETWORKING ORGANIZATION QUESTIONNAIRE . .	58
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS . . . . .	60
REFERENCES . . . . .	62

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table	
1. Requirements for Membership . . . . .	35
2. Male Members Allowed . . . . .	35
3. Methods for Recruiting Members . . . . .	36
4. Funding . . . . .	37
5. Services Offered to Members . . . . .	38
6. Organizations Interviewed . . . . .	41

#### ABSTRACT

This study used both a questionnaire and personal interviews to gather information on women's networking organizations. The information was compared to a study of similar organizations in the United Kingdom.

The questionnaires did not support or disprove the results of the previous study. Personal interviews of 5 networking organization leaders supported some of the conclusions of the United Kingdom study. Organizations that limited their membership to members of a particular group or profession and focused on training were more apolitical. Those organizations with more inclusive membership policies were found to be more likely to promote change to benefit women in general.

Counselors who advise women clients to seek support in networking organizations should be aware that not all organizations promote goals that are in the best interest of women as a class.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Women, including those with children, have increasingly become employed outside the home since the Second World War. Their wages rose with their employment rate until the 1970's (England & Farkas, 1986). The employment rate has continued to rise, but wages have not. Some explanations for this trend include high divorce rates, rising monthly payments for houses and high unemployment rates for men (England & Farkas, 1986). Women have had to adopt innovative methods to get ahead both in the employment world and at home, and networking organizations are one of the strategies they have chosen.

Social expectations have also played a part in the use of networking organizations by women. As they have entered professions that were previously dominated by men, there has been tremendous pressure to perform well in order to prove their abilities (Yoder, 1985). This pressure can be lessened by the advantages offered by a network of women in similar circumstances.

Networking organizations are a support system made up of friends and colleagues that provide their members with information, resources, mentors and education (Rose, 1985). Men have historically used both formal and informal

networks to cultivate professional and political contacts and to pass on information. For women and other groups that were historically excluded from business, politics and academia, networks have become a means of solving some of the problems caused by their exclusion (Rose, 1985).

Women are not newcomers to the networking process. They have used informal networks out of necessity in order to survive. Carol Stack's (1974) description of the elaborate kinship-based exchange networks developed by poor African-American women strongly illustrates this point. In fact, women getting together for sociability and comfort in informal networks is mentioned often in accounts of the American colonial era (Kleiman, 1980). Since women's informal networks were usually based on survival instead of professional issues, they lacked the status of men's and received little attention or recognition (Stack, 1974) or were dismissed with derogatory terms such as "Kaffee Klatsch," or "hen party" (Kleiman, 1980).

#### Need for this Study

Women began to recognize the importance of networks after they realized that the legal gains of the Women's Movement did not necessarily ensure access to the traditional male domains (Epstein, 1970). It was apparent that a lot of business was conducted in civic groups, private men's clubs or during a friendly game of golf.

Access to previously all male organizations was demanded by women. Membership and participation in such organizations has benefitted professional women by allowing them more access to the system. However, many women have started their own networks with the purpose of empowerment for women by addressing their specific needs (Reed, 1992). Since the traditional male dominated structure has never accommodated non-professional working mothers, networks are even more important for them (Schuyler, 1992).

Because of the growing economic pressures in our society, women know that access to information and group support is crucial (Schuyler, 1992). They and minorities are often the first to go when businesses cut back. Since women have often been out of the formal power loop, they have been forced to devise innovative methods to survive, just as women did with informal networks in the past. Cultivating a network, professional or informal, is a tactic that an increasing number of women have adopted (Reed, 1992; Schuyler, 1992).

#### Purpose of the Study

Women's efforts to establish and participate in networks that provide exchanges of information, resources, support and other benefits have generally been viewed as positive. A study in the United Kingdom (Brookes, 1990) suggested that women should examine carefully their

expectations when choosing a networking organization. The study proposed dividing women's networking organizations into three categories: those that encourage individual change through training, those that encourage societal change through lobbying and those that encourage both.

Feminist counseling theory has long recognized that traditional therapy's emphasis on individual change has not served women well, especially since women have often been encouraged to adjust to social conditions deemed desirable by men (Russell, 1984). If women's networks are encouraging this same adjustment, it might be counterproductive to their goals of improving women's opportunities.

The purpose of this study was to (a) determine if the networking organizations examined fit into the three categories described above, (b) determine if the members felt their networks matched their professional, political and personal needs and (c) contribute to the general body of knowledge about women's networking organizations.

#### Questions for Consideration

During this study, the following questions were taken into account:

1. Do women consider their organizations political, professional or both?
2. Is the focus of the networking organization

training, lobbying, a combination or unclear?

3. How are the needs of minority and working class women best served in networking organizations?

4. Do women prefer to network exclusively with women? Why?

5. How important is income in determining membership?

6. What factors determine/are shared by successful networks?

7. Are nonprofessional concerns (such as caregiving) addressed by professional networking organizations?

#### Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms were defined as follows:

Networking: The exchange of information or services among individuals in a group.

Networking organizations: An organized group that includes in its goals the promotion of information or service exchange among its members.

Informal network: A group loosely organized around the sharing of resources or support, often based on kinship or friendship.

Formal network: A group based on professional or political ties as well as friendship.

Minority women: Women who are not Caucasian; women of color; non-heterosexual women.

### Assumptions

In this study, the following assumptions were made:

1. The sample of networking organizations was representative.
2. The participants understood the questions as intended by the interviewer.
3. The participants were representative of women members of networking organizations.

### Limitations

This study may not generalize to all women's networking organizations because the participants were selected from a convenient sample in a specific city in the southwestern United States.

### Summary

Networking organizations are seen more and more as necessary options for women in dealing with economic and social pressures. While these networks may be patterned on those men have used historically, it is important to note that women have specific needs that certain networks may not address. An examination of women's networking organizations was undertaken to determine if the networks chosen fit the three categories determined by a similar study in the United Kingdom (Brookes, 1990).

## CHAPTER 2

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The social movements of the 1960's caused expectations of many groups to rise. The Civil Rights legislation of the period was supposed to guarantee free access for women and minorities to full membership in American society. Cynthia Fuchs Epstein (1970) researched and analyzed the actual situation of women in order to counter the prevailing view that women themselves were responsible for their absence from positions of prestige and responsibility. Epstein reports that the common assumption was that women must not desire those positions. If all formal and legal barriers to their access to education and professions had been eliminated, what other explanation could account for their inability to break into what had formerly been men's domain? According to Epstein (1970) no evidence of a "conspiracy" or "grand design" to keep women in their traditional domain existed. However, much evidence did exist that explained the difficulties women were having in spite of the important legal gains they had made.

Epstein (1970) began by examining the role expectations of our society and the career consequences of women's socialization. She then looked at how professions

were structured. New recruits were typically drawn from the same racial, ethnic and sex status groups as those of the predominate group in the profession. This group was normally white, Protestant and male. According to Epstein (1970) many professions could be compared to communities and she described them as follows:

They tend toward homogeneity and exercise exclusionary practices which deter the participation of persons or groups who do not possess characteristics defined as appropriate. They are characterized by shared norms and attitudes, which make for and perpetuate informal relationships. The work of the profession depends greatly on mutual understanding among its practitioners, on common standards of behavior which permit them to control their sphere, and on the use of particularistic criteria without much intervention from the public or the state. Since the preferred and prestigious professions are dominated by males, there is a tendency to assume that women do not share, or do not have the capacity to share, the common norms. (p. 167-8).

Epstein (1970) felt that women's entry into the professional communities was met with resistance at almost every point of their careers. Included in this resistance

was a reluctance to allow women access to the informal interaction of the profession.

A great deal of professional interaction, according to Epstein (1970), occurred in an informal context. This interaction took place at faculty clubs, in bars, on the golf course, at sporting events and during poker games. These informal networks served to provide access to professional knowledge and information and were, for the most part, closed to women. At the time of Epstein's (1970) study, women occasionally were allowed into private men's clubs, where business was often conducted over lunch, by way of separate women's entrances. She compared those accommodations to the separate "white" and "colored" doors of our formerly racially segregated society. Many women were limited professionally because they chose not to subject themselves to such degradation.

Although Epstein (1970) urged women to continue the fight to overcome the structural and informal barriers to their professional success, her endorsement of women's organizations was somewhat ambivalent. She felt that parallel women's organizations might serve to "deflect" participation in professional groups and deplete the pool of women's leadership for these groups. She did note, however, that women's professional networking organizations

did provide mutual support and information exchange without the "intrusion of the sexual component."

Many of the structural barriers that Epstein (1970) examined in her work are cited as being factors in women's unequal treatment in employment by Christine Brookes (1990) twenty years later in the United Kingdom. Brookes (1990) points out that despite legislation to improve their lot, women are still segregated into low paying "women's occupations" such as clerical, education and health and welfare. Women occupy only about 10% of management and professional positions.

Brookes (1990) lists three strategies available to women to combat the barriers and inequalities that are present. They are the use of individual coping techniques, legal action and a variety of forms of collective action. Coping strategies of individuals do not address the societal causes of the problems, according to Brookes (1990), and legal action is usually a last resort because of its enormous costs in terms of finances, time and energy. The method that Brooks (1990) sees as most promising is that of collective action. Because trade unions have lost much of their power in recent times, she cites the benefits of women's organizations.

Brookes' (1990) choice of collective action instead of reliance on individual coping strategies mirrors current

feminist counseling theory. Fedele and Harrington (1990) emphasize the healing power of validation, mutuality and empowerment offered by women's therapy groups and feel these factors can carry over into professional and political women's groups. They point out that women often see authority figures as more powerful than they actually are and themselves as virtually powerless because of past socialization and experiences. The collective power of women's groups helps to overcome this view. In fact, power itself can be redefined in women's groups according to Fedele and Harrington (1990). They state:

Power in the traditional sense means having power over people and events that affect us. A relational view of mutual power differs from this traditional one in that it emphasizes the capacity both to be moved by and to move the other person. Both (or all) participants have impact on each other and on the interaction. Each allows the other to have impact on her. Thus, from a relational perspective, power emerges from and enhances connectedness. (p. 4)

Kleiman (1980) cites similar benefits of women's groups. She feels that many of the support groups of the early 1970's that sought more power for women resulted in more self-esteem, confidence and awareness for women in general. Many of the informal support groups of that time

evolved into more formal networks as women entered professions. The best type of formal networks, according to Kleiman (1980), are those that not only increase individual success but also raise the overall impact level of women as a class.

Russell (1984) discusses the ways in which traditional counseling often conveys the message that individual change and success will resolve women's difficulties. She asserts that feminist counselors need to assess the social and cultural restraints that are factors in the difficulties and encourage clients to not only take personal action but to also consider group action that will make changes beneficial to all women.

Some resistance to organizing as women instead of members of a particular professional group is seen in Suzanna Rose's study (1989) of women and men scientists. While she found that men were actively encouraged to join informal networks by their academic advisors, few women were similarly recruited. These informal networks often led to contacts in national networks. The information exchanged in national networks is vitally important to the scientific profession and exclusion from this information can have serious career consequences for women. According to Rose (1989), the perceived power differential between men and women gives more prestige to men's networks, so

women need to actively work at increasing their own network's power. Unlike women in the behavioral sciences who have become powerful special interest groups within their national professional organizations, women in the natural sciences have been reluctant to identify themselves as women instead of scientists. Waiting for recognition by men has not proved effective for most women. Therefore, Rose (1989) recommends that they strengthen bonds with other women and actively promote their visibility within the profession through their own networks.

Rose's (1989) discussion of some women's reluctance to promote their cause as women instead of as members of another group is a good example of misconceptions that surround the issue of women's organizations and their perceived lack of status. Historically, women and other minorities have banded together for support and protection. Kaufman (1978) points out that in professions where women were statistical rarities, they, like members of minority religious and ethnic groups, tended to "reduce conflict for themselves and their role partners by surrounding themselves with others who were similarly deviant." She found that unmarried women were most likely to be permanently excluded from male networks because of their "triple deviant" status. Their primary deviant status resulted from being born female and outside of the dominant

class; then they added two more stages of deviancy by becoming professionals and not marrying. While Kaufman (1978) admits that research is unclear on the matter of the status and value of women's networks in contrast to men's, many women may be excluded permanently from male networks anyway. The most obvious strategy for women may be to work to strengthen their own networks instead of wasting time and energy trying to prove themselves to and be accepted by men. This strategy follows that of the urban poor found in another study.

An elaborate exchange network based on kinship and the domestic authority of women was described by Stack (1974) in her report on residents of an urban housing project. She pointed out that while the poor shared many values with mainstream society, they "stretched" their values in order to accommodate the reality of their own circumstances. They were committed both to the values of their own culture and those of the mainstream culture. However, they came up with their own survival strategies, many of them involving help and support of each other, because mainstream strategies often did not work for them. Women in professions who find themselves excluded from the mainstream (male) networks often have to look to each other for alternative strategies as well.

Non-professional working women and poor women are very unlikely to have access to mainstream networks for men or women. Their needs were largely ignored by the early Women's Movement, but these women are increasingly using the same strategies professional women have adopted. According to Schuyler (1992), a variety of support and networking groups have emerged from what is termed the Poor Women's Survival Movement. Their movement goals have been recognized and are now being addressed by many of the more established women's groups. Kleiman (1980) sees a growing concern with many women's networks that the elitism of the "old boy" networks not be duplicated. While men continue to network mainly with others of their same age and status, women's networks tend to be more open to a mixture of ages and interests. This acceptance of diversity within the group, according to Kleiman (1980), reflects her belief that women feel more accountable to other women and seek more power for all women. The growing willingness of professional women's group to address the needs of low-income and minority women further dispels the myth that women cannot be counted on to help each other.

This misconception about women not helping each other is addressed in a study by Yoder, Adams, Grove and Priest (1985). They state that the few women who "made it" in male professions and institutions often found themselves

under pressure, like other minorities, to serve as mentors or sponsors for other women. If they failed to uphold their responsibilities as sponsors, they were termed "queen bees." The implication was these women had achieved success on their own and felt others should do the same. Their lack of compassion for those who came after them was often cited as evidence that women were too competitive and selfish to work together. The study found that the explanation for the "queen bee syndrome" was actually due more to the situation than the individual.

The subjects of the study were the first group of women cadets at West Point. Because of the small proportion of women in the total cadet group, these women were defined as a token group. The situational pressures of being a token within a large group prevented the women from acting as mentors to women in the cadet classes that followed theirs. They related having so many problems of their own that they had neither time nor energy to act as sponsors. The constant scrutiny and attention the first group of women cadets had to endure contributed to their appearance as "queen bees" uninterested in the new group. It was all most of the original group could do to try and serve as role models. It was the situationally created restraints of their positions as tokens, not individual selfishness that caused these women to fail to mentor other

women. The study suggested that women, like other minorities, have to get beyond the token stage in order to effectively organize and serve as mentors for other women.

Women also must get beyond the messages received through the childhood socialization process that encourages them to devalue other women (Burden & Gottlieb, 1987; Loden, 1985). Encouraging competition among women and other minorities serves to keep them isolated and unorganized (Burden & Gottlieb, 1987). Women's groups can counter this isolation and disprove the misconceptions that women cannot get along and are uninterested in helping each other get ahead. Helping women recognize the political as well as personal sources of their difficulties is also an essential function of women's groups (Russell, 1984; Burden & Gottlieb, 1987).

Once the misconceptions about women and networking organizations have been addressed, the positive functions of networking can be examined. Rose (1985) feels that networks fulfill five basic functions for women: (a) socialize the novice, (b) support both the individual and the solidarity of the group, (c) establish the individual's reputation (d) provide contacts, recommendations and information and (e) supply informal information about developments in the field. In order to maximize their effects for reputation building, Rose (1985) advises that

women also develop individual career strategies that include attending national conferences in order to network among the larger profession and protecting their time by limiting service commitments. She found in her study that men seemed to be less likely to overextend themselves with projects that did not directly benefit their careers.

Other studies (Welch, 1980; Kleiman, 1980; Stern, 1981; Loden, 1985) recommend women's networking organizations as essential for overcoming the traditional exclusion of women from "the good old boys" networks of the past. Some women have taken this recommendation even further and have organized networking businesses where "dues buy services" (Reed, 1992). Paying to join such a network completely bypasses formal networks established by men and gives women the opportunity to benefit from their own network without having to participate in committee work or fund raising. Reed (1992) shares a detailed plan for starting a networking business in her guide promoting and describing her own business.

Because of the popularity of women's networking organizations, Brookes (1990) studied various aspects of several in the United Kingdom and concluded that some types may be more beneficial than others in meeting women's needs. She used questionnaires mailed to a variety of women's networking organizations to analyze their origins,

objective, membership policies, source of funding, successes and failures and their political stance. Three main benefits of the networks were cited in her study: (a) the support and pooled expertise they offered their members, (b) training opportunities for individual improvement and (c) their ability to lobby political and business institutions on behalf of change that would benefit all women.

The political stance of particular networks was found to be predictive of two important aspects of the organizations. It usually determined whether the main focus of the organization was training or lobbying. Those organizations that tended to support the status quo usually stressed individual improvement through training opportunities offered by the networking group. Organizations that advocated societal change that addressed the needs of women in general were more likely to engage in lobbying. The former type of groups were also found to have more exclusive membership policies (only members of a particular profession, for example) and the latter type tended to be more inclusive in the membership.

The conclusions drawn by Brookes (1990) from her study of networking organizations in the United Kingdom form the basis of my study of networking organizations in a southwestern city in the United States. Understanding the

political stance of women's groups seems to be an important factor in matching women's expectations to a particular type of networking group. It can also be useful for groups in clarifying their own goals.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

The purpose of this study was to determine if the women's networking organizations chosen for consideration fit the three categories suggested by a previous study in the United Kingdom (Brookes, 1990). Furthermore, this study sought to ascertain if women in the organizations felt their needs were being met by the organizations. Contribution to the knowledge about women's networks and their value to women was also a consideration of this study. This chapter will describe the methods used to achieve these aims.

#### Population

Women in a specific community in the Southwest who were identified in media advertisements or notices as leaders of networking organizations were contacted initially by telephone and were asked if they would be willing to complete a questionnaire for this study. Eighteen leaders indicated they would be willing and were sent questionnaires. In addition, 9 questionnaires were passed out to networking leaders attending a meeting of a women's information exchange organization. Sixteen questionnaires were returned.

Among the 16 questionnaires returned, 14 contained complete and usable information. Five leaders of networking organizations were chosen from this group for personal interviews.

The methods and research described above are exempt from review by the University of Arizona's Human Subjects Committee. A letter stating this exemption was received and is included as Appendix A.

#### Procedure

##### Selection of Subjects -- Questionnaire:

A list of women's organizations was compiled using advertisements in local media, the Information and Referral book, telephone conversations with women in local social service organizations and convenient sources. Some of the organizations contacted by telephone were no longer active or had changed leaders. After a brief explanation of the study, 18 women contacted by telephone agreed to participate by completing the questionnaire. The same explanation of the study was announced at a meeting of an information exchange group where an additional 9 questionnaires were distributed. The total number of questionnaires given out was 27. Sixteen organization leaders responded by returning the questionnaires. Of those, 14 were complete and usable for the study.

#### Selection of Subjects - Interview:

Some of the completed questionnaires represented the three types of networking organizations cited in the study done in the United Kingdom (Brookes, 1990): organizations that focused on individual change or improvement, organizations that stressed societal change and those that combined the two. An attempt was made to identify a variety of subjects from this group in terms of inclusiveness and income level. Five subjects from these organizational categories were selected for personal interviews. They were contacted by telephone and appointments were set up for the interviews. The interviews were tape recorded in order to provide accurate quotations and information for analysis.

#### Instruments

In order to gather information on the networking organizations, a questionnaire (Appendix C) was designed specifically for this study. The questionnaire included sections on: demographic data, open-ended questions and rank order questions. As stated above, the questionnaire and a cover letter (Appendix B) were mailed together to organization leaders. The organization leaders who received questionnaires at the information exchange meeting did not receive cover letters.

The interview questions (Appendix D) were also designed specifically for this study. They provided more information on the organizations' leaders' opinions and beliefs about their organizations and their purposes.

#### Questions for Consideration

The questions outlined in Chapter 1 were taken into account during the personal interviews. They included:

1. Did the networking organization leaders consider their organization political, professional or both?
2. Did they consider the focus of their organization to be training, lobbying, a combination of the two or something entirely different?
3. Did they feel the needs of minority and/or working-class women were served in their organization?
4. Did they prefer to network exclusively with women?
5. Were non-professional concerns (such as caregiving) addressed by their organization?

#### Data Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaires and personal interviews was analyzed using non-parametric procedures. It was organized to examine the following characteristics of networking organizations:

- (a) organizational structure, (b) membership policy,

(c) dues and funding, (d) the main focus of the organization (training, lobbying, both or unclear) and (e) types of services offered to members.

#### Summary

The networking organizations in this study were examined using the criteria described above to determine if indeed three distinct types of networks existed. The study also considered whether women seem to be in networks that fit their political as well as professional needs and if a certain type of network might be more beneficial to the needs of minority and working-class women.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine if the women's networking organizations that responded to the questionnaire and agreed to personal interviews fit the three categories suggested by a study in the United Kingdom (Brookes, 1990). It also sought to ascertain if women in the organizations felt their needs were being met by their organizations and to contribute to the general body of knowledge about women's networks and their value to women. This chapter presents the findings that developed from the methods described in Chapter 3.

#### Population

Eighteen leaders of women's organizations in a specific community in the Southwest agreed by telephone to participate in the study and were mailed questionnaires and cover letters. In addition, nine women attending a meeting of a women's information exchange organization agreed to complete questionnaires. A total of 16 questionnaires were returned; nine that had been mailed to organization leaders and seven that had been distributed at the women's information exchange meeting. Fourteen of these questionnaires contained complete and usable information.

### Information from Questionnaires

The questionnaires revealed information about the networking organizations including the requirements for membership in the organization and how new members are recruited, information on dues and funding and the types of services offered to members and their perceived importance. Questions pertaining to organizational structure were frequently not answered or answered unclearly or incompletely. These questions were addressed more clearly in the personal interviews.

Nine different requirements for membership in the various networking organizations were cited in the questionnaires (Table 1). The most frequently cited requirements were (1) to be a member of a particular group (ethnic/racial, professional, sexual orientation) and (2) have an interest in the group's goals.

The organizations were split in their membership policies regarding men with the majority stating men were allowed as members (Table 2). One organization was unsure of the policy. Since no males had applied for membership, the question had never been addressed. Another organization admitted men only as associate members.

Table 1

## Requirements for Membership

---

<u>Requirement</u>	<u>Times Cited</u>
Desire to join service organization	1
Age 18 or over	2
Work outside home	1
Member of particular group (racial/ethnic, professional, sexual orientation)	7
Interest in organization's goals	4
Own business	1
Pay dues/fee	2
Have children	1
Submit references	1

---

Table 2

## Male Members Allowed

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Undecided</u>
7	5	2

---

Most of the organizations listed several methods for recruiting new members (Table 3). The most popular method was that also used in informal networks: personal contact or word of mouth. Media sources such as newspapers,

flyers, radio and television were second in frequency of use.

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Table 3  
Methods for Recruiting Members

<u>Methods</u>	<u>Times Cited</u>
Solicit by mail	2
Media announcements	7
Public speakers/presentations	2
Personal contact/word of mouth	12
Contact other organizations	1
Invitation/Membership Drive	3
Social events	1
Organization's publication	1

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Organizations that charge dues outnumbered those having no dues by a large margin (Table 4), and the only organization offering a sliding scale for dues stipulated it applied only to unemployed members. The amounts listed for basic dues (excluding meeting or dinner fees) ranged from \$10 yearly to \$215 yearly. The main source of organizational income other than dues was fund raising events.

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Table 4  
Funding

<u>Source</u>	<u>Times Cited</u>
Dues	10*
Government funds	1
Grants	1
Fund raising events	7
Seminars/conferences	3
Contributions	1
Sales of organization's publications	1

\*Regular dues range from \$10 year to \$215/year. Sliding scale offered in one organization to unemployed members.

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The most frequently listed services offered to members (Table 5) were information, support and mentors. The least mentioned services were scholarships and political clout. Only half of the respondents indicated the service they considered most important for their members, but, of those that did, support was most frequently cited as being the most important service.

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Table 5  
Services Offered to Members

<u>Service (on Questionnaires)</u>	<u>Times Cited</u>
Scholarships	5
Social events	9
Political clout	5
Information	14
Contacts	9
Training	10
Support	12
Mentors	11
Prestige	9
Visibility	10
<u>Service (Written in)</u>	<u>Times Cited</u>
Job assistance	2
Equality for women	1
Networking	3
Public Service	1
Community awareness	1
Charitable causes	1
Teach American way of life	1
Discounts on services	1

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### Information from Interviews

Five of the organization leaders who returned usable questionnaires were chosen for personal interviews. These five were chosen because they represented a diversity of organizations. Organization A was a group of mothers who owned their own businesses. Organization B was open only to women of a particular profession. Organization C was a support and information exchange group for minority women. Organization D welcomed women of all income and employment levels, and organization E advertised it promoted both professional and personal growth.

The leaders of each of these organizations were contacted by telephone and appointments were scheduled for interviews. The interviews were 30-45 minutes in length and were held either at the leader's offices or their organization's meeting place.

The five interviews were tape recorded in order to provide accurate quotations and information for analysis. The questions listed in Chapter 3 were taken into account during the personal interviews. They included:

1. Did the networking organization leaders consider their organization political, professional or both?
2. Did they consider the main focus of their organization to be training, lobbying, a combination of the two or something entirely different?

3. Did they feel the needs of minority and/or working class women were being served in their organization, and if so, how?

4. Did they prefer to network exclusively with women?

5. Were non-professional concerns addressed by their organization?

Political in Nature. The interviews revealed that only two of the organization leaders considered their groups to be political in nature. One was organization C, which encouraged members to participate in all facets of lobbying and political activity as advocates for its minority group and women's issues in general. Organization D was described as nonpartisan, but definitely political, because it advocated political action by and for women. Members felt free to report on and advocate for legislation they favored during meetings. Organization A and Organization E were considered somewhat more professional than political. They occasionally had guest speakers who might discuss political issues. The organizations themselves did not advocate a particular political stance, however. Organization B indicated that it was prohibited by its national organization from making political endorsements. Its professional focus was strictly maintained.

The organizations that identified themselves as political charged no dues in order to remain as inclusive as possible to a wide variety of members. The other three organizations charged both yearly dues and a fee for lunch or dinner meetings.

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Table 6  
Organizations interviews

<u>Type of Group</u>	<u>Dues?</u>	<u>Political?</u>
A. Mothers who own business	Yes	No
B. Members of specific profession	Yes	No
C. Minority women	No	Yes
D. Information forum open to all women	No	Yes
E. Promote professional and personal growth	Yes	No

---

Main Focus. As the questionnaires indicated, the organization leaders most often cited support as the most important service of their group. Three of the interviewees also rated support as their group's main focus. Organization B, however, considered training to be its top objective. Its members received continuing education credits for attending meetings, and these credits were required for certification within the profession. A recent attempt to provide more socialization and networking

at the meetings was not successful, and the importance of training to the members was underscored. Organization D also did not rate support as its main focus. Instead, providing a forum for information of interest to women and lobbying for women's issues were highest on its list of priorities.

Minority/Working-class Women. Organizations A and E felt that support of minority and working-class women was of importance for their groups and did so through community outreach projects and keeping dues as reasonable as possible. Organization A sponsored a family at a women's transitional housing agency and is looking for more community projects that benefit women. A local agency that works with displaced homemakers is the recipient of fund raising activities sponsored by Organization E. It also reserved two memberships for the agency so that some of the displaced homemakers who completed the basic job skills workshop could attend meetings. These displaced homemakers were able to experience firsthand the benefits of networking and mentoring within a women's organization.

Organization C indicated that needs of minority and working-class women were of great importance to its group. It readily addressed issues of class, race, gender and sexual orientation and their effects on all women. This

group has supported other groups in political actions and demonstrations that addressed these issues.

Organization D shared this concern by remaining involved with issues of concern to all types of women. In addition to not charging dues in order to make the group as inclusive as possible, it has tried to include program speakers who are actively involved with issues of concern to poor and minority women.

Although Organization B had minority members, its group leader indicated it did not specifically deal with issues related to minority or working-class women. Their focus on professional issues precluded other groups' concerns.

Network with Men. The issues of networking with men seemed to be a non-issue for most of the interviewees. Men seldom indicated an interest in attending the organizations' meetings. Organization C had worked closely with minority men on shared interests, but stated that if it had to choose between minority or women's issues, the women's issues would win out.

Non-professional Concerns. Four organizations indicated that non-professional concerns were addressed by their groups. Group B again cited its specific focus of professional training as the reason that it did not address non-professional issues. The other four groups, however,

were equally specific in their acceptance and encouragement of members bringing up non-professional concerns.

Organizations C and D emphasized that all concerns of women were open to discussion at their meetings. The fact that women deal not only with work but with many other issues was mentioned by Organization D as reason for not limiting the group's forum to strictly professional concerns. The leader of Organization E stated that the group had begun as a strictly professional one, but had evolved into one in which members' personal issues were addressed as well. The need for support in non-professional areas of the members' lives was apparent and had become very important to the group. Many of the members of Organization A, according to its leader, belong to other networking groups, but they valued the recognition of their needs as mothers by Organization A very highly. Exchange of information and advice on children was as much a part of the organization as the exchange of professional information.

The most structured of the five groups was the professionally focused Organization B. The least structured were Organizations C and D who shared a concern with creating an inclusive atmosphere for their membership. The other two groups, Organizations A and E, had some structured aspects of their meetings as well as regular opportunities for more open exchanges. Organization A

featured an "open forum" every fourth meeting so members could address business or family concerns.

All of the interviewees indicated that the needs of their members were being met by their organizations. However, they did mention ways in which the organizations had adapted to their needs. Organization B had tried to steer its members into more social and networking activities, but found they preferred a strict training focus. Organization E evolved over time into a less professionally focused group in order to address its members' non-professional concerns. The other three groups indicated an openness to the diversity of their members' needs and a willingness to remain flexible in order to fit those needs.

#### Summary

The 16 completed questionnaires and personal interviews with five organization leaders provided information about membership policies, dues and funding, types of services offered to members, issues of importance to minority and working-class women and the ways in which non-professional concerns were addressed by the organizations. Organization B seemed to be the most structured and was strictly focused on its main priority, professional training for individual members. Organizations C and D were the least structured and valued

their abilities to address non-professional concerns of members as well as issues of importance to working-class and minority women. They were also the most political and advocated lobbying for changes to benefit all women.

Organizations A and E were more professional than political, but demonstrated a concern for minority and working-class women through community outreach activities. Their structure was flexible enough to allow non-professional concerns to be readily addressed by members when needed.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The literature reviewed for this study indicated that women recognize the benefits of using both formal and informal networks. The power of collective action was mentioned as one of the main benefits of women's networking organizations. Specific needs of women seemed to be of equal importance to women in those organizations. While women may have borrowed some ideas from the "old boys" model of networking, they have developed models that better reflect their individual needs and also address issues of importance to women in general.

The purpose of this study was to determine if the networking organizations examined fit the categories described in Brookes' study (1990) of women's networks in the United Kingdom (groups that stressed training and individual improvement, groups that focused on lobbying for change to benefit women as a group and a combination of these). In addition, this study sought to determine if the members felt their networks matched their professional, political and personal needs.

#### Summary of Findings

The three main benefits of networking organizations cited in the Brookes study (1990) were (a) support and the

pooled expertise they offered members, (b) training opportunities and (c) the ability to lobby political and business institutions on behalf of change that would benefit all women. Responses both from this study's questionnaires and personal interviews supported the high value placed on support and information by networking organization members. Training opportunities were also among the top five services offered to members. The interviews revealed that training was most important to highly structured groups open only to members of a specific profession. Lobbying or other political activity was low on the list of services offered to members as reported on the questionnaires. The interviews revealed that one organization was prohibited from taking political positions or lobbying as a group. Two of the interviewees cited lobbying and political activity as very important to their organizations.

Brookes' study divided women's networking groups into three categories: those that stressed training and individual improvement, those that focused on lobbying for change to benefit women as a group and a combination of these two. The questionnaires in this study did not reveal a division of organizations into these three types. The interviews, however, did show a division into similar categories for some of the groups.

The interviews revealed that Organization B (a group of women working in a specific profession) stressed training as its focus. Like similar groups in Brookes' study, it had a fairly exclusive membership policy, was highly structured and did not address issues of importance to women in general. Organizations C (minority women) and D (no dues and open to all women) were emphatic in their support of lobbying and political activities that addressed the needs of all women. Like groups in Brookes' study, both were concerned with remaining accessible to a wide variety of women by not charging dues and providing a forum for all women's issues. Their meetings were loosely structured to allow maximum access to this forum.

The other two groups, Organization A (mothers who owned their own businesses) and Organization E (a group for professional and personal growth) did not seem to fit the combination category. While they did not actively encourage their members to pursue political activities or endorse legislation as a group, they offered a forum where members would feel comfortable expressing their political concerns and asking individual members to call or write legislators. Both of these groups were concerned with the needs of other women and addressed these needs through community outreach projects. They were both concerned with

keeping their groups accessible to lower income women. Training, however, was not a priority for either group.

The question of whether women in the networking organizations preferred to network exclusively with women was not a priority with the women's organizations studied. Other issues were of more importance. The needs of minority and working-class women were considered important by four of the five organizations interviewed. The same number felt that it was appropriate and important for their organization to address members' non-professional concerns.

#### Conclusions

The analysis of the data gathered in this study led to the following conclusions about the women's networking organizations.

1. Organizations that focus on training for a specific profession are more exclusive in their membership policies and do not place a priority on addressing issues of importance to women in general.
2. Organizations that are concerned with the needs of women in general engage in more political activities or are more accepting of political opinions of members.
3. Women's networking organizations, with the exception of those focused on training, are open to addressing issues of importance to working-class and

minority women and non-professional issues of their members.

4. Women choose networking organizations that address their specific needs and interests.

#### Limitations

The results and conclusions of this study may not generalize to all women's networking organizations, because the participants were selected from a convenient sample in a specific city in the southwestern United States.

#### Recommendations for Further Study

Most of the networking organizations chosen for this study were formal networks. Future studies might focus on informal women's networks and what needs they meet that are not addressed in more formal networks. Another area that merits more study is that of networking businesses. What are the advantages and disadvantages of paying for networking services?

Since men's networks served as early models for women's formal networking organizations, it would be valuable to examine whether the evolution of women's networks has affected those original models. Have women's networks produced change that might benefit men, such as the willingness to address non-professional issues of their members?

### Implications for Counselors

In assessing client strengths, we usually take into account their support systems, both formal and informal. Counselors working with women should be aware of the wide variety of both formal and informal networks available in their particular community. They should further keep in mind the needs of the individual client when recommending a support group or network. While professional training may be valuable for a client, the benefits of collective political action that impacts all women also need to be considered.

Networking is often associated with well educated professional women, so counselors should also keep in mind the advantages it offers minority and working-class women. This study has shown that the issue of inclusiveness is one of importance to many women's groups. As one of the organization leaders interviewed for this study recommended, women should try out a variety of networking organizations until they find one that fits their particular personal, professional and political needs. Counselors can aid clients in this search by becoming aware of the ongoing evolution of women's networking organizations.

**APPENDIX A**

Human Subjects Committee

1690 N. Warren (Bldg. 526B)  
Tucson, Arizona 85724  
(602) 626-6721 or 626-7575

February 22, 1993

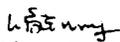
Betty L. Eppler Gooch, B.A.  
Department of Counseling & Guidance  
Education Building, #218  
Main Campus**RE: POWER THROUGH INFORMATION: WOMEN'S NETWORKING ORGANIZATIONS**

Dear Ms. Gooch:

We received documents concerning your above cited project. Regulations published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2)] exempt this type of research from review by our Committee.

Thank you for informing us of your work. If you have any questions concerning the above, please contact this office.

Sincerely yours,

  
William F. Denny, M.D.  
Chairman,  
Human Subjects Committee

WFD:sj

cc: Departmental/College Review Committee

**APPENDIX B**

College of Agriculture  
School of Family and Consumer Resources



Family and Consumer Resources Bldg.  
Tucson, Arizona 85721  
Telephone: (602) 621-1075  
FAX: (602) 621-9445

February 5, 1993

Dear Networking Organization Leader,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study I am conducting about women's networking organizations in Tucson. Your assistance will contribute to the body of knowledge about women's networks and their value to women.

The brief questionnaire that is enclosed has been designed to take a minimum of your time. It should take about 10 minutes to complete, and you can return it to me in the addressed envelope provided.

As we discussed on the telephone, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. The information from the questionnaire is confidential and will be used for research purposes only.

After I receive your questionnaire, I will be contacting organization leaders who would be willing to take part in the second phase of my project. This phase will involve a personal interview.

I would appreciate your completion of the questionnaire as soon as possible. They need to be returned no later than February 22, 1993 in order to be included in the study.

Again, thank you for your willingness to help me with this research project.

Sincerely,

*Betty Eppler Gooch*

Betty Eppler Gooch  
M.A. Candidate  
Education Building, Room 218

**APPENDIX C**

**NETWORKING ORGANIZATION QUESTIONNAIRE**

The information you provide on this questionnaire will be used for this academic study only. Completing and returning this questionnaire is strictly voluntary; you may choose not to participate. If you return this questionnaire completed, it is understood that you are consenting to participate in the study.

1. Name of Organization \_\_\_\_\_
2. Is your organization part of a larger group? \_\_\_\_\_  
If so, what? \_\_\_\_\_
3. When was your organization founded? \_\_\_\_\_  
By whom? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How often do you meet? \_\_\_\_\_  
When and where? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How many members do you currently have? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What are the requirements for membership? \_\_\_\_\_  
Is the group open to men? \_\_\_\_\_
7. How are new members recruited? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What are your sources of funding? \_\_\_\_\_  
Do you charge dues? \_\_\_\_\_  
If so, how much? \_\_\_\_\_  
Do you have a sliding scale for dues? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What types of services does your organization offer members?  
Please check all that apply and circle your organization's most important service.
 

scholarships _____	training _____
social events _____	support _____
political clout _____	mentors _____
information _____	prestige _____
contacts _____	visibility _____
other _____	
10. Please attach a copy of your organizational structure including titles of officers and/or committees.
11. What are the main goals of your organization? \_\_\_\_\_  
Do you feel they are being met? \_\_\_\_\_
12. Please check one:  
 \_\_\_\_\_ I would be willing to be interviewed about my organization.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ I would not be willing to be interviewed about my organization.

APPENDIX D

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The information you provide in this interview will be used for this academic study only. Since your participation is strictly voluntary, you may choose not to participate and end the interview at any time.

1. Would you describe a typical meeting of your organization for me?
2. Is your organization more political, professional or both? What do you feel is the political stance of your organization?
3. Would you say the main aim or objective of your networking organization is to socialize, to provide training for individuals in the organization, to lobby for change or a combination of these?
4. Describe your membership.
5. Does your organization address issues of importance to minority and working-class women?
6. Are non-professional concerns of your members addressed by the networking organization? (personal problems, caregiving responsibilities, working both inside and outside the home.)
7. How has your organization been helpful to you personally?
8. Please describe some of your organization's successes.

9. What hopes do you have for the future of your organization?
10. What advice would you give women who are looking for a networking organization?

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