**Women, Political Science, and Networking**

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**Assumptions**

* Universities are gendered institutions.
* The current environment delivers a triple whammy to contemporary women political scientists (the commercialisation of the universities; the institutional demands that reputation must be international; and the exaggeration of the importance of quick-fire publication).
* Academic departments, the organisational units that could most effectively deliver productive working environments for women, are inadequate in almost every respect.
* The institutional and cultural problems facing women political scientists mean that we need to be strategic about our career decisions.
* Involvement in academic networks leads to recognition, which leads to invitations to present and write papers, which leads to publication and further involvement, and so forth. This is the way that the old boys’ network has always operated.
* The many groups and networks formed by women, for women and about gender issues in political science, provide fine models of women’s activism in the profession. They have changed the profession and the discipline. We can build on and learn from these models.

**What sorts of networks matter to us as women political scientists?**

1. *Personal networks and friendship bonds*

These are what keep us going. Friends tell us when we are working too hard and they encourage us to apply for a job or promotion. You can grump with friends, they will sympathise with you even when you are over-reacting, you can sniffle without losing face, and indiscretions are treated with reciprocal discretion. Most friendship bonds will be with other women, for friendship is itself a gendered social relationship, but, just as some women make selfish friends, some men make excellent advisers and friends. Having non-academic as well as academic friends provides us with distance and perspective.

1. *Institutional (Intra-University) Networks*

Performing selected ‘service’ roles in the university can build acquaintanceships and respect across academic and administrative boundaries. Women scholars can thus stop being faceless and names can be put to faces when decision-makers read research funding and promotion applications. Knowing the rules of a culture helps you to work those rules in your favour.

It is a mistake to spend too much time building these networks, and it is all a bit like playing men’s games. Nevertheless, to take the game analogy a little further, unless you make an absolute disaster of sitting on a committee or speaking at a meeting there is a ladders rather than snakes effect when it comes to developing an institutional profile. Develop these networks but severely constrain the time and energy to which you devote to them. Choose the ones that will help your profile and that you will enjoy for their own sake. Do not exhaust your energy. Remember that on the whole the rewards in academia go first to the selfish.

*(3) Institutional (Non-University) Networks*

The importance of these varies according to the branch of the discipline in which one works. For many political scientists, developing personal and institutional links with governmental, political, media and NGO organisations can be fruitful and can contribute to your research profile. Talking and working with non-university experts can provide new sources of ideas. Meeting smart people who will give you feedback on your writing can be productive. You can gain ready access to information, and people to talk with and interview. Contact with expert outsiders can make your research efforts seem worthwhile. Contact with expert ‘outsiders’ can also be great fun. These sorts of contacts can lead to invitations to speak. And they impress those who make decisions in universities. Again, be selective.

*(4) Specialist Networks*

These provide the direct pathways to local and international recognition and publication. Going to national and international conferences, delivering papers, and then publishing them is of course important but is not always as effective as taking part in specialist academic networks.

Regular contact with the same group of people means that they become familiar with your work. Regular contact with the senior members of specialist groups gives you a wider range of possible referees for research, job and promotion applications. (You must have international referees to get anywhere). You can also learn more from these groups than from big conferences.

These networks are important, so important and obvious that we tend to take them for granted and fail to make strategic decisions about how to develop and use them.

**Using Specialist Networks**

* Use national and international conferences to identify and communicate with specialist groups. Offer to present papers in sessions organised by existing specialist groups.
* Choose networks that:

1. consolidate your existing research programme (rather than diversify it);
2. have MONEY;
3. have a history of publishing their papers. Don’t make the mistake of spending time and energy on specialist groups that don’t publish their papers with respected publishers and journals. Peruse the publication records of the main people involved to find out about their track records.

* Prepare to take recognised leadership, not servicing, roles. (Chair sessions but don’t do the minutes at business meetings.) Being involved in commenting on papers is also helpful.
* Achieve those writing deadlines. Get that paper or chapter or article in on time.
* Create your own groups/networks if necessary. These can be very rewarding but they involve an enormous amount of time, a great deal of patience, and MONEY. But this strategy might be necessary.
* Communicate with other women scholars in your expert area.
* Promote yourself, and be confident of your own abilities and what you have to contribute (but we all know the perils of behaving like men …)
* Distance, as always, provides barriers to our involvement in worldwide networks, although the internet has improved our situation immeasurably. Consider time and distance when fostering networks when long-distance travel costs too

much (in every way).

**How can our institutions help us to develop our networks?**

* Good departments of politics help staff develop their expertise networks through providing resources and conference leave. They encourage women staff to develop their intellectual networks and enable them to seize the opportunities that these offer.
* Supportive departments ensure that their staff members have appropriate senior mentors.
* Supportive departments meet collegially to exchange views, discuss research plans and hear ideas.
* Structure matters!

What if those concerned with the status of women in the profession looked beyond hiring records and numbers and examined whether departments created an environment where women could flourish? (Anonymous and Anonymous, ‘Tenure in a Chilly Climate’ *PS: Political Science and* Politics, 32:1, March 1999, p. 93).