



Monday Monday

Connecting the Dots with Karen Kaplowitz



*Helping you create and reinforce the habits of successful career building,
gleaned from my work as a business development strategist, trainer and coach*

Volume 9, Issue 9

May 4, 2015

Women Lawyers: Don't Give Up on Networking Just Yet. In [The Careerist on April 20, 2015](#), Vivia Chen advised women lawyers to “chuck all that female bonding stuff” based on the conclusion of a new study that “women don't get much of a boost from networking”. The [study](#) on which *American Lawyer* relied tried to evaluate the effect of “connections” on male and female Wall Street analysts. The study concluded that men got more impact in their careers from their “connections” than women did. *American Lawyer* then reasoned that women lawyers are sufficiently similar to women analysts to warrant the conclusion that women lawyers' connections are worth less than men's connections and that networking does not help women lawyers.

But the underlying study did not in fact measure anyone's actual connections or relationships. To compare the connections between male and female analysts, the study used a proxy for actual connections. The study simply looked at data on the schools each analyst attended and the schools attended by officers and directors of the companies the analysts covered. The study then assumed that if an analyst and a director or officer of a covered company had attended the same school, that they were “connected”. The study also noted a finer level of “connection” if an analyst and an officer or director of a covered company had the same type of degree from the same school ([study](#))

The study seems flawed in its basic premise. The fact that two people have attended the same school or received the same degree from the same school is not necessarily equivalent to having a connection, let alone a relationship. If common alumni and degree status alone created instant “connections”, business schools and law schools would be able to cut back significantly on their development and alumni staffs.

It is admirable that the researchers cited by *American Lawyer* are trying to understand gender bias. Gender bias, especially unconscious bias, impacts the many subjective evaluations which play a large role in career success in the professions. But even if the study had established that “connections” do not pay off as well for women as for men in business or the professions, the *American Lawyer* conclusion, that women's initiatives to enhance women's networks and networking skills are useless, is not obvious. Consider some alternative conclusions from the same assumptions:

- Women lawyers need more training and experience, through women's initiatives or otherwise, on how to get the most value from their connections and networks.
- Women lawyers need to encourage women in power to help facilitate more opportunities for other women.
- Women lawyers need to make better use of alumni networks to access men and women alumni.
- Women need more male mentors and sponsors to help them learn from male bonding skills.

We don't need a study to tell us that even though women lawyers have come a long way that women have a long way to go. But advising law firms to cut off their investments in women's initiatives and advising women to give up on their networking efforts is not a good start.