

Abstract

STRUCTURE AND AGENCY IN THE ACADEMY OF NUTRITION AND DIETETICS

Kristin Smith

Community Development and Applied Economics

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND) is the leading professional organization for dietetics in the United States with approximately 74,000 members. The Academy consists of dietitians from a diverse set of professional fields, from academic to institutional and industry settings. Consequently, members provide nutritional advice to a wide range of public and private clients. The Academy's financial reliance on corporate sponsorships offers a relevant case study for exploring how the organization's structure enables and constrains dietitians, and how this structure then affects public health. Previous research suggests that Academy members have varying views about the appropriateness of corporate sponsorships, with the majority of members believing they should have an active voice in sponsorship decisions. This research builds upon previous surveys by using 30 in-depth, semi structured interviews with dietetics—both current members of the Academy and those who have chosen to end their membership—to understand the tension between the Academy's funding and finances, members' agency, and organizational communication. By understanding how an organization's structure empowers or disempowers members, best practices can be developed that encourage transparent decision-making and thoughtful, engaged participation throughout all levels of organizational membership.

Keywords: structuration theory, agency, organizational communication, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics