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## The Future is Female? Evaluating The Utility of Female Professional Networking Organizations

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The Future is Female? Evaluating the Utility of Female Professional Networking Organizations

Lily G. Arbuckle

The University of Arkansas, Honors College

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### Abstract

In today's competitive global market, harnessing the individual strengths of all organizational members is crucial for success. Organizations across all industries need diverse representation and contributions. However, women and other groups continue to be disadvantaged, lacking the same representation that majority and advantaged groups enjoy. The prevalence of gender bias in the workplace not only hinders professional success for women, but also the success of their organizations. To combat some of these issues, networking organizations are forming to help support women through mentorship and relationship building. Most studies in the academic sphere investigate female networking organizations at the professional level. Little research examines similar organizations at the collegiate level. This study argues for the creation of a university-wide female networking organization geared toward freshmen women. By examining the lifespan of a failed collegiate female networking organization using the autoethnographic approach and a close review of the literature that does exist, this study creates a guide for best practices in founding a female collegiate networking organization.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to argue for the creation of a collegiate, female networking organization for freshman women at The University of Arkansas by investigating the utility of female professional networking organizations at the collegiate level. By creating a professional networking program for freshman undergraduate women, young women entering college have the maximum time possible to develop important professional competencies and market themselves for the workforce post-graduation.

It is a complex process to understand the utility of these organizations, requiring the investigation of numerous factors. The size of the networking organizations, the diversity of opportunities they provide, and the attitudes undergraduate women hold towards female networking organizations all contribute to the successful realization of their mission. Through creating an autoethnography of my experiences founding a failed female networking organization and reviewing the relevant literature, I present a “best practices” guide for creating a female networking organization on the University of Arkansas campus. Finally, this study provides sample survey and questionnaire materials for evaluating the utility of the proposed networking program and interest level among students.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

*Understanding Gender Bias*

This study first examines how both sex discrimination and gender bias create obstacles that hinder women's ability to achieve workplace equality. Understanding the challenges women face in the workplace provides a necessary basis for evaluating the utility of collegiate female networking organizations in overcoming them. Gaining knowledge about the nature of gender bias and sexual discrimination in the workplace is critical to exploring the utility of collegiate female networking organizations. The workplace has made great strides towards gender equality, beginning with the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*. This prohibited discrimination "on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin," effectively outlawing a superior's ability to allow sex to influence hiring, firing, and promotion decisions (The Civil Rights Act of 1964, n.d., para. 2). This act inspired the enactment of other similar legislation to promote gender equality such as Title VII and Title IX, which establish that intentional and unintentional discriminatory acts of covered entities may constitute illegal employment discrimination, providing women greater protection under the law (Ivancevich, 2004). One of the primary driving forces for gender equality in recent decades is the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). Born from the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the commission serves the sole purpose of eliminating discrimination in the workplace (D'Agnostino & Levine, 2010). The implementation of these laws marks a distinct shift in the fight for workplace sex and gender equality.

Women are increasingly participating in paid work "at all educational levels, of each racial and ethnic group, and across successive family statuses" (Cotter et al., 2004, para. 1). By 2000, only a "a small margin separated men's and women's presence in the labor force" (Cotter et al., para. 3); this is a significant finding given that labor force participation is seen as the prime

indicator of the shift in women's professional status. In addition, women are increasingly rising to management and leadership positions. For example, *The Workplace Gender Equality Agency's* 2017 report states that "the representation across all manager categories has grown consistently" within the four-year period of 2013-2017 (2019, p. 11). The report analyzes six Gender-Equality Indicators (GEIs): gender composition in the workforce, gender composition of governing bodies of relevant employers, equal pay between women and men, availability of employment terms and conditions relating to flexible working arrangements, consultation with employees about gender equality, and any other matters specified by the minister concerning sex-based harassment and discrimination (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2019, pg. 12). The reports indicate that many companies are acting in line with the precedents established by the Gender-Equality indicators. For example, as of 2017, the percentage of organizations with strategies and policies to combat sex-based harassment is 97.9%, suggesting that companies are effectively establishing policies to combat sex discrimination in the workplace (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2019).

Beyond the implementation of policies to prevent discrimination based on sex, there has been a significant change in gender stereotypes in recent decades (Eagly et al., 2019). Alongside the formal shifts in the gender-makeup of organizations, social roles based on gender have shifted since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century; previously established gender stereotypes relegated women to domestic work, but as women continue to enter male-dominated occupations, sex-segregation continues to decline (Eagly et al.). Moreover, some scholars predict that gender-stereotypes will continue to converge because of the growing similarities in the domestic and employment duties of both genders (Eagly et al.). However, the question persists whether these strides toward gender equality indicate that gender-based stereotypes are no longer a concern.

While there has been significant progress in promoting gender equality from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the durability of basic stereotypes about the differences between men and women limit the ability of women to succeed in the workplace (Haines et al., 2016). In fact, Haines et. al suggest that despite men and women having increasingly similar roles in the workforce, there remains “more support for stereotype maintenance via confirmation bias” and significant cultural lag (p. 8). Gradual progress towards true gender equality has not shattered seemingly durable stereotypes that hinder females’ progression in the workplace (Haines et al., 2016). The strong perceived differences between the role of males and females are supported by the widespread belief in the *differences model* (Hyde, 2005). Hyde argues that this model, heavily popularized in the media, incorrectly asserts that men and women differ greatly from a psychological perspective. In reality, Hyde’s *gender similarities hypothesis* suggests that men and women are similar on most psychological variables (2005). Theories such as the *differences model* reinforce gender stereotypes in society at large and hinder women’s ability to thrive in the workplace compared to their male counterparts.

The continued prevalence of gender stereotypes hinders females professionally in visible and subtle ways. Gender-based norms create and reinforce gender gaps in the workplace (*International Labour Organization, 2017*). Common examples of gender gaps include differences in “career advancement and pay, as well as gaps in hiring and opportunities for mentoring” (*International Labour Organization, p. 6*). Beyond obvious forms of gender gaps such as the wage gap and gender stereotypes subtly limit women. The second most-cited barrier to female professional success in the *Women in Business and Management: Gaining Momentum Report* was the differing “social roles of men and women” (*International Labour Organization, p. 3*). While policies are implemented within organizations to prevent sex-based discrimination,



common perceptions that “management is a man’s job” combined with a prevailing masculine corporate culture keep women from moving up the career ladder (*International Labour Organization*, p. 3). These types of sex-based discrimination do not violate legal policies and suggest the term “gender discrimination” is insufficient for explaining the issues women currently face. Instead, the term gender bias is increasingly more fitting.

Gender bias explains the unconscious behaviors and perceptions individuals associate with others based solely on gender. The Legal Information Institute clarifies this phenomenon as the event in which a person receives “different treatment based on the person’s real or perceived gender identity” (2020, para. 1). One of the biggest problems with gender bias is its subtlety compared to more obvious and transparent discrimination or harassment. While legal policies can protect women from more obvious forms of discrimination, gender bias “is implicit in our nature—molded by our culture, upbringing, and personal experiences,” making it difficult to eradicate in the workplace (Palacio, 2019, para. 1). A relevant example of subtle gender bias in the workplace, Palacio states, is when a “person refers to an individual by their occupation, such as ‘doctor’ or ‘engineer’, and it is assumed that the individual is male (Palacio, para. 1). While the individual may not intentionally be discounting women as viable doctors or engineers, the assumption that people in this career are male implies that males are somehow more competent or qualified for the position. Moreover, females of the same profession are referred to with a modifier in front of it such as the “female doctor” or “female engineer.”

Gender Bias is typically divided into two categories: descriptive and prescriptive (Agarwal, 2018). Descriptive bias is defined by the labels individuals attach to certain groups while prescriptive bias denotes how individuals within these groups are expected to behave (Agarwal). When a woman acts outside the prescribed behavior for female professionals, she faces severe

repercussions; she is breaking the role assigned to her and violating the norms established by the prevailing organizational culture (Agarwal). For example, “when a woman is decisive, she might be perceived as ‘brusque’ and ‘abrupt’” while male-counterparts may be praised for showing effective leadership skills (Agarwal, para. 3). The result of gender bias is that women face a no-win scenario professionally, as women who do not exhibit traditionally masculine traits are not considered leadership material, but women who display traditionally masculine qualities are disliked (Agarwal).

The challenge women face in balancing both masculine and feminine leadership traits to be taken seriously is reflected by Traits-Based Leadership Theory which suggests that leaders “are able to influence others because of their extraordinary collection of attributes” (Fourie & Mystris, 2021, p. 116). However, traits associated with effective leadership are based on masculine features, causing “female leaders to be evaluated more negatively even when their performance is higher than that of their male counterparts” (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2019, para. 5). For example, men are seen as “more agentic and more competent than women, whereas women are seen as more expressive and communal,” traits not traditionally associated with leadership (Sczesny et al., 2004, p. 631). The association between effective leadership and masculinity reinforces an incongruity between females and leadership (Sczesny et al.). By labeling leadership traits such as assertiveness and competitiveness as inherently masculine, women face repercussions in the workplace when they step out of their traditional gender role.

Gender bias is best explained through the lens of existing research. Tajfel’s Social Identity Theory (1979) provides meaningful context for the discussion of gender bias. Tajfel proposes that as people form group identities, they inevitably categorize others as part of the “in-group” or “out-group” (Islam, 2014). To maintain a positive social identity, individuals differentiate their

in-group favorably in comparison to out-groups (Ford and Tonander, 1998). Though this is not an inherently negative phenomenon, issues arise when self-categorization leads to negative evaluations of members of the perceived “out-group” and emergent negative stereotypes (Islam 2014). Swan and Wyer (1997) justify the connection between Social Judgement Theory and gender bias by explaining the central role gender plays in determining group identities in their 1997 study. In the study, men and women were divided into groups where they were either the majority or minority of their gender; they were then asked to rate themselves based on gender-stereotypic traits and ultimately make “judgements of a hypothetical target person whose sex was unspecified” based on gender-ambiguous behavior descriptions (Swan & Wyer, p. 1266). The results of Swan and Wyer’s study suggest that while a man’s greater awareness of their sex makes them more confident in their high social status compared to women, women’s consciousness of their sex made them aware of their low social status relative to men (Swan & Wyer). Conclusions from extant research support that the key contributor to the persistence of gender inequality is gender bias towards women. However, women and their allies are finding new methods of countering gender bias through activities such as forming professional female networking organizations.

Young women possessing an understanding of gender bias and sex-based discrimination is a necessary pre-requisite for increasing membership in female professional networking organizations. The mass presence of successful women in the media leads many undergraduate women to “disregard the possibility of gender discrimination in organizational settings” (Sipe and Johnson, 2009, p. 339). Though women are victims of sex-based discrimination, they often have little awareness of organizational inequity. Women with greater work experience possess a greater awareness of sex-based discrimination while women with less professional experience

remain largely unaware of the inequity they face in the workplace. Therefore, it is critical to analyze and address gaps in undergraduate women's knowledge of gender bias and sex-based discrimination to better prepare them for the workplace.

### *Understanding Social Networks*

Understanding the relational process of networking is imperative to studying female networking organizations. Researchers define networking as “goal-directed behavior which occurs both inside and outside of an organization, focused on creating, cultivating, and utilizing interpersonal relationships” (Gibson et al., 2014, p. 1). Networking plays a critical role in professional success, which has led to an increased demand for services that help employees build their professional networks (Gibson et al.). Professional networking is best explained by Social Network Theory, which evaluates the relationships between actors in a network rather than individuals themselves (Borgatti and Ofem, 2010). Within a social network, these relationships form different connections, or ties, that can be characterized as weak or strong. The study of these factors generates valuable insights into organizations and network actors.

Social Network analysis provide a clear method for evaluating the utility of female networking organizations and understanding the behavior of organizational members. Through capturing “the intersection of both static and dynamic elements of organizations,” social network analysis provides a thorough conceptualization of organizations (Tichy et al., 1979, p. 508). An important step in the analysis of an organization's utility is to examine the quantity of weak and strong ties within the network (Sozen et al. 2009). The utility of different ties within a network are analyzed by their strength, or a combination of the amount of time, intensity, and intimacy that characterize a connection (Granovetter, 1983). Traditional social capital approaches stress the merits of strong ties in boosting “production of common social norms and harmony which

ease constitution of trust and trade” (Sozen et al., 2009, p. 25). However, newer approaches suggest that strong ties hinder the flow of information within a network (Sozen et al., 2009). Weak ties are essential for transferring technical and professional knowledge (Sozen et al., 2009). In addition, weak ties expose individuals to important information and opportunities by bridging social distance; though there may not be “lucrative job openings known to one’s own circle at a given moment, one may still take advantage of those known in other circles” (Granovetter, 1983, p. 209). This led Granovetter to coin the phrase: the strength of weak ties. A collegiate female networking organization with a large network of weak ties suggests a higher flow of information with greater access to external opportunities, making the analysis of weak and strong ties a key factor in understanding the utility of these organizations.

Another way that social network analysis can aid in understanding the utility of networking organizations is through examining the number of nodes, or individuals, and their ties, or connections within an organization. Network theory allows us to analyze clusters of communication within a network, effectively painting “a picture of an organization, or, perhaps more accurately, a variety of pictures, each capturing an aspect of organizational functioning” (Munsayac, 2013, p. 3). A large number of nodes and ties within a collegiate female networking organization suggests that the network provides a robust network of opportunities for female college students to take advantage of. These methods of analysis are important to understanding the structure of female networking organizations.

Analysis of network density is another way to indicate the utility of collegiate female professional organizations. High density within a network suggests an increased number of network connections, nodes, and interconnectivity (Luarn & Chiu, 2014). Moreover, high density within an organizational network facilitates greater levels of intimacy of familiarity and intimacy,

both of which are critical precursors to information diffusion (Luarn & Chiu, 2014). Rogers describes information diffusion as “information exchange through which an individual communicates a new idea to one or several others.” (1995, p. 17-18). A female professional network’s conductivity to efficient information diffusion plays a critical role in potential members’ decision to adopt novel information provided by the organization (Aral, Brynjolfsson, & Van Alstyne, 2007). Determining the density of a female collegiate professional networking organization illuminates how easily the organization spreads new information and reaches new individuals.

#### *Female Networking Groups.*

Networking opportunities promote female, professional success. Given that women managers must overcome far more barriers to achieve professional success than their male counterparts, women need more “psychosocial support than men do” in the professional workplace (Linehan & Scullion, 2008, p. 30). Networking organizations can help alleviate obstacles women face in the workplace by connecting females to other successful women, promoting both career-networking and female mentorship. While mentorship can be a valuable tool of support for women in the workplace, many women are afraid to ask for advice out of “fear of competition,” and even the fear that asking for help could be “construed as a weakness” (Hayward, 2005, p. 99). Existing networks at organizations face the consistent problem of homophily, or the tendency of people to connect with others similar to them in terms of race, gender, and education, hindering female professional advancement and reinforcing male dominance in networking resources (Webber & Guiffre, 2019). Men often discuss important business through informal networking such as “rugby clubs, football clubs, golf clubs, and so on” (Linehan & Scullion, 2008, p. 35). While men have access to this ready-made contact

system, women are often excluded from these opportunities, having to work harder to advance their career (Linehan & Scullion, 2008). By conducting an interview of 43 senior female managers, Linehan and Scullion found that “all interviewees expressed awareness of old boy networks and the difficulty associated with breaking into these” (p. 35). Female Networking organizations can combat the “old boys club” by connecting women to “a network of champions- including mentors and sponsors” (Leading Effectively Staff, 2021, para. 2). Access to female networking organizations “helps build relationships with others and may serve to extend women’s reach into the upper echelons of organizations” (Forret & Dougherty, 2004, p. 420).

Networking is indicative of career outcomes. Forret and Dougherty’s study, which explored the relationship between networking and career outcomes, concluded that networking behaviors led to increased visibility within an organization and greater engagement in professional activities, leading to greater compensation, increased promotions, and a sense of perceived career success (2004). Networking organizations give women the opportunity to form connections to expose themselves to external career opportunities and develop their social capital (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). The potential of female networking organizations to empower women professionally suggests they can serve as a valuable resource for women as they enter the workforce.

The benefits of female networking organizations have been corroborated through numerous research studies. The Turknett Leadership group reported the results of a recent study which analyzed the impact of women’s network in promoting female success. The study, which collected data from over 300 women relating to the utility of female networks, revealed that female networks lead to “higher levels of career-related social support, a greater sense of well-being and more positive attitudes toward the organization or company for whom the woman

works” (Turknett Leadership Group, 2012, p. 1). These benefits greatly improve females’ professional success. The findings shared by Turknett leadership Group are echoed by existing research. For example, Loomis (2006) examined a case study of the *IBM San Jose Women’s Interest Network*, an organization that hosted events for female professionals within the company to discuss career obstacles for women and ways to maneuver them. The casual networking events hosted by the organization, such as wine-tastings, happy hours, and potlucks resulted in the formation of “several individual mentoring relationships” between women at the conference and assisted in building stronger bridges between women within the organization (Loomis, p. 5). These examples highlight the utility of female networking organizations in promoting females’ professional success. Furthermore, these findings indicate that female professional networking organizations could be instrumental in combatting persistent gender bias, suggesting a need for further research on the subject.

While female-networking organizations offer numerous benefits, potential obstacles present challenges for optimizing the utility of these organizations in promoting female professional success. In Forret and Dougherty’s (2004) study, there were significant differences in the benefits of networking for males and females. While networking behaviors are beneficial to both males and females, they result in greater career success for males compared to female counterparts (Forret & Dougherty). Moreover, increased visibility as a result of networking behaviors was related to a greater number of promotions for men, but not for women (Forret & Dougherty). One potential explanation for this finding is that while women gain greater visibility through networking, they often still “have less access to influential individuals and powerful coalitions within organizations” (Forret & Dougherty, p. 432). The gender differences in the



career outcomes for men and women resulting from of networking present an obstacle in optimizing the benefits of female professional networking organizations.

These concerns are echoed by the research of Yang and Chawla, who find significant differences in the networks of successful males and females. For men, the size of their network was less important compared to their centrality, or their access to multiple “hubs” in the network (Uzzi, 2019, para. 3). While women also benefitted from being in a central position within the network, they also “had to have an inner circle of close female contacts, despite having similar qualifications to men” (Uzzi, para. 6). One potential explanation for this challenge women face when networking is the additional cultural and political hurdles women encounter in the workplace t (Uzzi, 2019). To combat these challenges when networking, women need “an inner circle of close female contacts that can share private information about things like an organization’s attitudes towards female leaders” (Uzzi, para. 15), which help women as they search for jobs. These unique challenges for women as they attempt to build their professional network present disadvantages to female networking organizations, suggesting the need for female networking organizations to adapt to the networking needs of females specifically.

#### *Female Networking Organizations: Does Time Matter?*

Time is an important factor to consider when examining female networking organizations. Individuals experience greater benefits from networking organizations the more time they spend in them, allowing young professionals the ability to substantially foster career development and success” (Ansmann et al., 2014, p. 133). Participating in networking organizations for greater periods of time exposes individuals to more opportunities to progress their careers and form valuable connections. Networking functions similar to compound interest; while there may not be immediate results, doing “it at regular intervals, it eventually starts to pay off” (Staugaitis,

2017, para. 4). Therefore, it is imperative that individual's network early on in their careers to maximize its impact on promoting career success.

Given the positive correlation between time spent in networking organizations and career success, networking is extremely beneficial for collegiate students specifically. Networking allows them to exchange valuable professional resources with others and receive professional support (Bondes-Raacke et al., 2017). Connections made through networking play a vital role in helping students secure their first job out of college (Georgina, 2019). A prime example of the benefits collegiate students gain through joining networking organizations is reflected in Priest and Donley's (2014) research on the relationship between leadership development and participation in a student-alumni mentorship program at Kansas State University. In their case study of the impact the *Wildcat Leadership for Life* mentorship program had on students' leadership skills, Priest and Donley found evidence to support the conclusion that mentorship programs develop important career, leadership, and confidence skills. The results of the case study reinforce how mentorship and networking programs expand students' professional network, enable them to achieve career goals, and teach them valuable life skills.

The general benefits of collegiate professional networking organizations suggest networking clubs on college campuses are a valuable resource for collegiate women, particularly freshmen. As women increasingly participate in the workforce, professional networks have become a means of solving some of the problems caused by previous exclusion and discrimination (Gooch, 1993). While traditional professional networks are catered to males, female-only networking organizations empower women by addressing their specific needs (Gooch). The goal of these organizations is to "deliver relevant programming, offer mentoring opportunities, promote successful women as role models, and connect women through

networking opportunities” (Loomis, 2006, p. 1). The impact of collegiate female networking organizations is exemplified in Leudtke’s (1992) research on maximizing female representation in college aviation programs. Leudtke’s presented recommendations for improving gender equality in aviation, such as sponsoring women’s aviation organizations, providing young women female role models within the field to learn from, and designing mentorship programs. Leudtke’s findings on increasing representation have meaningful implications for how female networking organizations at the collegiate level are instrumental to increasing proper representation in the professional space. Beyond the quantifiable merits to female-only networks in college, networks provide a means of nurturing positive female relationships (Gordon, 2012, as cited in Pynchon, 2012). A women-only network removes uncertainty that exists when they walk into a room full of men (Pynchon, 2012). Female-only networks on college campuses provide young women with a space to be authentic with others who share their unique experiences.

However, encouraging collegiate women to join these organizations can be difficult. Many collegiate students do not spend ample time in college preparing for the workforce because they believe themselves to be adequately prepared, with 90% of students in a study conducted by the *National Association of Colleges and Scholars* considering themselves proficient in important competencies for professional success such as professionalism, communication, and leadership (Are College Graduates ‘Career Ready’?, 2018). Collegiate students’ perception of their readiness for the workforce is problematic given the perceptions of employers’ perceptions towards undergraduates’ readiness for the workforce. The study conducted by NACE found that while students consider themselves ready to enter the workforce, only 40% of employers agree (Are College Graduates ‘Career Ready’?, 2018). One potential cause for the substantial gap

between students' and employers' perceptions is the differing ideas of what career-readiness means. While collegiate students may feel that they have proficient skills in areas such as communication because "because they connect well with fellow students and professors," (Riklan, 2018, para. 3) the realities of workplace communication and other skills are very different. Networking organizations help resolve the dissonance students experience as they enter the workforce and can teach collegiate students valuable skills for professional success. Motivating undergraduate women to join female networking organizations is an important step in alleviating the dissonance students feel when entering the workforce, particularly for women who already face disadvantages.

*Studying and Creating Collegiate Female Networking Organizations.*

The first step in evaluating methods for persuading undergraduate women to join these organizations is examining the extant research on collegiate female networking organizations. However, this is a difficult task as most research on female networking organizations focuses on the utility of female networking organization at the young professional level as opposed to college students. This gap in research presents challenges in understanding and evaluating the utility of female networking organizations. One study examined the long-term benefits attendees of a women's professional conference and found that "in the year after connecting with peers at the Conference for Women, the likelihood of receiving a promotion doubled" (Burkus et al., 2019, para. 4). The findings of this study are exemplified by the results *Forbes* has witnessed after founding the FQ lounge, an organization which connects 17,500 female professionals (Zalis, 2019). *Forbes* found that the women's lounge was extremely successful in helping female professionals identify their individual strengths as members recognized the power of supporting other female professionals (Zalis). One reason that females benefit from the opportunities

networking organizations provide is that women benefit from collaboration over competition when trying to achieve professional success (Zalis). Female networking organizations have proven to be instrumental in supporting the careers of young professionals. However, insufficient research on female networking groups at the collegiate level make it difficult, if not impossible, to determine if these groups yield the same results in promoting professional success.

Though little research has been conducted on the utility of female-networking groups, the presence of female networking organizations on campus is growing. These organizations can be localized to a singular campus, though widespread networks are gaining nationwide recognition. For example, the *Women's Network*, founded at Syracuse University, empowers collegiate women professionally through hosting guest speakers and organizing workshops on important subjects like networking and resume building (Rivera, 2021). Collegiate females evidently discovered the value of the organization, as the Women's Network now has 25,000 members over 42 chapters nationwide (Rivera). One key advantage to collegiate, female networking organizations is their diverse membership, welcoming "women from all academic and professional backgrounds" (Fisher, 2020, para. 6). The diverse opportunities collegiate female networking groups provide appeal to women from all backgrounds and provide collegiate women access to a myriad of career fields. The immense opportunity these organizations provide suggest a need for further research on them.

While nationwide collegiate female networking groups are well-established, localized networking groups for women are on the rise at different college campuses. Individual female networking organizations on campus allow collegiate women to participate in niche networking organizations catered to their interest. For example, the University of Arkansas' *Future Women Business Leaders*, a registered student organization on campus, "connects student members with

faculty and industry mentors to encourage success as a woman business leader” (*HogSync*, n.d. para. 1). The organization is open to all women, business majors and minors, allowing women to connect with a robust group of women who share similar career interests. Collegiate female networking organizations provide the young women the chance to connect with other female students and female professionals who share a passion for their chosen field. Participating in these collegiate organizations is socially and professionally beneficial, helping women support and form relationships with other like-minded young women while also providing access to important career-building opportunities. Therefore, studying the utility of these organizations and exploring this topic of limited research is critical. To examine these factors, this study will analyze a failed female networking organization, *Women of Tomorrow*, at the University of Arkansas.

Understanding the utility of collegiate female professional networking organizations is a complex process. It is easier to determine persuasive appeals that motivate the collegiate women by assessing their attitudes toward these organizations to join. The Rational Model of Persuasion asserts that people make decisions based on the combination of individual beliefs and values, making their behavior rational and predictable (McGaan, 2013). Therefore, understanding the attitudes of individuals can aid in determining ways to persuade individuals to change their behavior or pursue a specific course of action. The Elaboration Likelihood Model provides a framework for understanding the development and change of attitudes through examining two routes of persuasion: central route processing and peripheral route processing (Bitner & Obermiller, 1985). Central Route processing requires high cognitive elaboration and relevance while peripheral route processing denotes attitudinal change based off cognitive shortcuts known as heuristics (Bitner & Obermiller).

The foundation of the Elaboration Likelihood Model is instrumental when determining how best to persuade women to join collegiate female networking organizations. It is possible to determine factors relevant towards persuasion such as level of involvement, level of relevance, and level of motivation when analyzing the attitudes of collegiate women toward these organizations. If undergraduate female attitudes toward collegiate female networking organizations and gender bias seem disengaged with low relevance, peripheral route persuasion tactics will be more effective in persuading undergraduate women to join. In contrast, if undergraduate women perceive female networking organizations and gender bias as an issue of high relevance, central route persuasion tactics will be more effective at motivating them to join.

In short, through the examination of a defunct undergraduate female networking organization and related communication theories I create a guide for future women to establish the same type of association. In addition, I provide survey and interview questions to facilitate this process. All of this answers the following research question: How do you best establish an female undergraduate networking organization?

## CHAPTER 3: METHOD

This study argues for the implementation of a university-wide female professional development and networking program for women in their freshman year and beyond. This study also provides guidance on best practices for promoting the success of such a program through analyzing my own experience founding a failed female networking organization on campus. Finally, this study provides survey and interview materials for evaluating and measuring the utility of the potential program pre- and post-implementation.

I conducted an autoethnography to document my own experiences founding a collegiate, female professional networking organization at The University of Arkansas. By documenting all actions taken to create and promote the club, I share the triumphs and struggles I encountered when founding this organization. Through conducting an autoethnography, I consider the reasons why my organization failed and methods for promoting successful organizations of this nature.

*Autoethnography.* Autoethnography is a reliable research method in the social sciences and humanities, recognized for its ability to cultivate a cohesive “self-narrative that places the self within the social context” of an event, organization, or experience (Reed-Danahay, 1997, as cited in, Butz and Besio, 2009). Autoethnography is unique in its ability to increase the researcher’s understanding of the self and the world around them by encouraging rumination on one’s own fieldwork experiences (Butz and Besio). The process of writing an autoethnography requires the researcher to document “epiphanies,” or meaningful experiences in their own research and analyze them for common themes and patterns (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 275).

In this study, I document a timeline of key moments in the formation and promotion of the failed female professional networking organization, *Women of Tomorrow*. I then compile my experiences to analyze best practices and mistakes made in the founding of *Women of Tomorrow*.



This method allows me to further examine how best to approach implementing a similar organization at The University of Arkansas based on my reflections.

*Theoretical Approach.* My experiences as a feminist undergraduate at the University of Arkansas, professional experience through internships, and familiarity with gender bias guide my research as an engaged scholar. This research is influenced by the feminist approach to organizational communication, which considers how organizational members both consciously and unconsciously reinforce traditional gender ideologies through both their relationships with other members of the organization and their environment (Buzzanell, 1994). Moreover, this study builds off the foundation of feminism, which rejects gendering of organizational members and suggests that organizational context plays a significant role in the subordination of women (Buzzanell).

## CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

*Organization Description.* *Women of Tomorrow* was a female professional networking organization formed in 2020 with a mission to empower the next generation of women leaders to facilitate their achievement of their professional goals upon graduation. The registered student organization existed with the goal of combatting gender bias through mentorship, professional development, and networking opportunities. Organizational events consisted of guest speakers across a variety of industries, networking events, and professional workshops to develop essential skills for workplace success. Guest speakers consisted of both young and seasoned women professionals across business and finance, fashion, and STEM. Guest speakers were arranged to mentor women on subjects spanning resumé building, networking, interviewing, and identifying professional purpose.

*Description of Organizational Members.* Members consisted of women, undergraduate students across all majors and colleges at The University of Arkansas. All members had to meet the criteria of maintaining a 3.0 GPA, participating in 10 community service hours a semester, and remaining enrolled as full-time students at the University. The organization had approximately 15 members ranging from freshman to junior class distinction.

*Organizational Setting.* The organization was founded at the University of Arkansas (UofA) in Fayetteville, AR in the Fall 2020. The UofA is the premier public university in Arkansas and is a research-based land-grant institution with a student population of 27,562 as of 2020 (Serving Arkansas and Beyond, n.d.). This setting informs the study methodology for several reasons. Previous research on collegiate female professional networking organizations predominantly focused on private institutions.

Ivy league institutions invest a substantial amount in researching female networking organizations. For example, the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania conducts significant research into understanding gender inequality in the workforce, stating that while 47% of the workforce is female, only 21% of executive positions are held by women. University of Pennsylvania promotes female networking organizations as a valid method of combatting gender bias, presenting 11 different female networking organizations to join related to the field of business (University of Pennsylvania, 2021).

While the institution's investment in researching female networking organizations is mirrored by other private institutions, particularly in the Northeastern region, very little research has been conducted on this subject at public, southern institutions. Therefore, the location of this study provides a novel perspective on founding collegiate female networking organizations.

#### *Timeline.*

##### June 2020: The Concept

I created the concept for Women of Tomorrow in Summer 2020. As a transfer student, I was anxiously looking for opportunities to make connections and acclimate to the University of Arkansas campus. In the first few months of the pandemic, I decided to explore potential career paths by networking with professionals in different fields including public relations, corporate responsibility, and talent acquisition. Through creating professional connections, I discovered the power of relationship-building in facilitating professional development and gaining greater exposure to career opportunities. Though most of my initial contacts worked at "Big 4" financial services firms, I saw the value of creating a broader network of industry professionals where women can learn valuable professional skills and connect with other high-achieving women.

I looked to the University of Arkansas website to find existing networking and professional development registered student organizations that were tailored to women. While I found a few different organizations within the women's networking genre, most existed as industry-specialized communities which catered to personalized career fields such as finance, business, and engineering. Though these communities provided industry-specific insights to networking and job-searching, no community existed to serve women across departments and colleges on campus. This gap in student involvement presented a valuable opportunity to engage undergraduate women by providing professional development resources that proved so valuable to my career.

#### July 2020: Building the Foundation and Creating Connections

In July 2020, I decided to create "Women of Tomorrow", a registered-student organization that would promote undergraduate women's career success through mentorship, networking, and professional development opportunities. While I had developed the official concept, I knew I needed to get specific about how to enact the organization's vision and what steps were necessary for establishing the organization.

An effective method for learning how best to run an organization is asking people who have successfully run an organization about their experiences. In July 2020, I discovered GenHERation, an organization where young women and companies connect, through a contact in my professional network. I attended several events hosted by the organization and appreciated the organization's broad network, diverse array of events, and leadership. I decided to email the CEO and COO of the organization, asking for a few minutes of their time to gather insights on founding a women's networking organization.

#### August 12, 2020: The Meeting

On August 12, I met with the CEO of GenHERation to discuss her experiences founding GenHERation in college and best practices for founding Women of Tomorrow. This proved to be an excellent meeting in which I further developed my own professional network and learned tips for getting an organization started. The CEO emphasized the importance of social media for marketing, relating how social media branding has played a large role in promoting the GenHERation brand. In addition, she proposed creating partnerships with similar organizations on campus to bolster support and publicity for the organization. I remain in contact with her today, as well as the COO of GenHERation, both of whom became an important resource for establishing “Women of Tomorrow”.

August 15, 2020: Establishing the Brand

Before creating club social media, I spent time designing Women of Tomorrow’s brand. On August 15, I designed the burgeoning organization’s logo and brand kit on canva to create cohesive, visually appealing content on social media. Blue and orange were chosen as the official brand colors of the organization, and the branded hashtag #uarkWOT was made to track engagement and attendance at events.

August 18, 2020: Created Organization’s Social Media

On August 18, I made the first post on Women of Tomorrow’s social media platforms. After conducting extensive research on PR Industry websites, I determined Instagram and Twitter would be the primary focus for social media marketing. I created a content calendar which detailed every post that would be shared during the first semester of the organization. After studying GenHERation’s social media and other companies’ social media, I created a wide variety of content using strategies proven to boost engagement.

I launched Women of Tomorrow's social media presence with the #mondaymotivation series, a tactic in which I shared a motivational quote each week by a different inspirational woman. This series proved to be a success, often receiving the highest consumer engagement in key performance indicators such as number of likes and comments. Eventually, multiple series would be launched on the platform, including the #feministwarrior series which highlighted a different feminist activist or professional each week who was doing amazing things for women. Social media would prove to be a strength of the organization which boosted awareness and interest in the organization.

#### September 2020: Creating the Team and Gathering Resources

To officially found "Women of Tomorrow", I first had to recruit two officers and a faculty advisor. I reached out to friends I had made at the university to determine their interest in officer positions for the organization. Two friends agreed to serve as treasurer and secretary of "Women of Tomorrow". Other friends expressed interest in joining the organization once it was founded. After recruiting officers, I proceeded to search for a faculty advisor. A trusted professor in communication recommended I reach out to a fellow professor in the communication department. The woman my professor connected me to cared deeply about promoting women's equality and hosted a podcast each week about different women's issues. I reached out to her via email and on September 18, 2020, announced her as the official faculty advisor for the organization on social media. "Women of Tomorrow" was officially ready to be registered.

#### October 1, 2020: Registered

On October 1, Women of Tomorrow was officially registered as a Registered Student Organization on campus and received funding from the university to recruit members, host events, and manage other expenses. The organization's registration was advertised on social

media, and club leaders were announced through grid posts on Instagram. This strategy boosted engagement on social media and resulted in the recruitment of 10 club members. After a complicated registration process, I finalized and scheduled events with contacts in my network who agreed to serve as guest speakers for the organization.

Six different guest speakers were arranged for the 2020-2021 schoolyear, spanning an array of industries including financial services, fashion, STEM, and corporate responsibility. Each woman was seasoned in her field and would present insights on an important topic related to women's networking and professional development. Resume workshops, networking events, and job-searching are a few examples of the diverse programming coordinated for women of tomorrow. With the club founded and events planned, it was time to create strategic partnerships and advertise upcoming events.

#### October 15, 2020: The Birth of A Strategic Partnership

I kept in touch with GenHERation following my initial Meeting with the CEO. In early October, the COO reached out with me, asking me to conduct an Instagram takeover on their social media detailing a "day in my life" as a college student. In addition, they asked that I dedicate some content in my takeover to discussing Women of Tomorrow and events we have planned. I did the takeover and advertised it on both the GenHERation account and Women of Tomorrow's social media. The takeover was a massive success, resulting in high engagement for both GenHERation and Women of Tomorrow. This event resulted in the acquisition of three new members for women of tomorrow.

Following the success of the takeover, my contacts at GenHERation proposed a strategic partnership between Women of Tomorrow and their organization. The partnership entailed mutually advertising each other's events, bringing in GenHERation for a "how-to" panel on

navigating networking, and hosting an exclusive VIP GenHERation event on the University of Arkansas campus. After agreeing to the partnership, Women of Tomorrow saw increases in membership and benefitted from GenHERation's large social media reach.

#### January 2021: Recruitment Strategies

Though Women of Tomorrow garnered high engagement on social media and recruited 10+ members, it was difficult to foster engagement beyond social media interaction amongst members. After speaking with a resident hall assistant about my club, I created a movie night event hosted at Gibson Hall where women could watch a movie, drink hot cocoa, and learn more about Women of Tomorrow. Gibson hall was the ideal location to host this event, as the women-only dormitory enabled me to reach my target audience.

The event resulted in a few new members and briefly engaged current members to participate in club events. Boosting engagement would be a critical challenge for this organization, particularly with the first workshop approaching in February.

#### February 10, 2021: Launching the "Find Your Why" Workshop

After collaborating with officers and guest speakers, it was determined that all club events for the 2020-2021 school year would be organized around finding and cultivating professional purpose. Women in the club would benefit from learning how to identify what career path suits them and best practices for achieving success in their chosen industry. This theme appealed to organization members, many of whom expressed anxiety over not knowing what their professional passions were.

Members would be asked to read Simon Sinek's critically acclaimed professional development book, Find Your Why, which provided insights and strategies on finding professional purpose. There would be a mixture of professional development workshops, guest



speakers, and industry panels throughout the semester to enable undergraduate women to pursue a career they are passionate about.

The first workshop in the “Find Your Why” series was held February 10, 2021. The event was advertised on Women of Tomorrow social media and the social media accounts of other similar organizations on campus. The high level of interest expressed on social media for the event and support from on-campus partner organizations suggested the event would be a massive success. However, few showed to the workshop, and no officers were present. This event would mark the beginning of Women of Tomorrows struggles to engage members and ensure attendance at events.

February 12, 2021: Adopting New Tactics

Following an underwhelming “Find Your Why” workshop, I focused on developing new strategies for engaging current and potential club members. I researched more clubs on the University of Arkansas campus, broadening my search from women’s networking clubs to a multitude of student organizations who share the common mission of promoting diversity and inclusion both on the University of Arkansas campus and in the workplace. This strategy resulted in new partnerships which served as a valuable asset for promoting Women of Tomorrow events and boosting engagements. Strategic partnerships proved to be an essential strategy for increasing engagement during Women of Tomorrow’s lifespan.

I also reached out to officers to set expectations for their roles. While I had chosen friends for these positions, I recognized I needed to clarify the responsibilities associated with officer positions and state expectations regarding participation, attendance, and engagement. After clearly stating what was expected of officers, I hoped that officers would now show up to future events.

### February 24, 2021: A Cancelled Guest Speaker

Throughout the month of February, Women of Tomorrow and its partner organizations extensively advertised the first guest speaker scheduled for February 24. Numerous posts, tweets, and newsletters were made to advertise the upcoming event. This event was believed to be critical for ensuring Women of Tomorrow had a chance to thrive in its infancy. While numerous people RSVP'd to the event, most canceled at the last minute. Ultimately, I was forced to cancel the event, fearing that it would only waste the guest speaker's time.

This failed event started a noticeable trend of low attendance and engagement at club meetings, with officers even failing to attend club events. While I was hopeful partnered events and new marketing strategies would solve the problem, this trend would only continue for the club. These problems were worsened by the nature of the pandemic, which prevented members from meeting in-person.

### March 2021: Pivoting and Refining Marketing Strategy

In March, existing marketing strategies were increased in quantity and new methods of promotion were integrated into social media strategy. Newsletters were increased from monthly to bi-weekly to provide more updated information on meetings and advertising for events occurred well in advance to ensure maximum awareness.

New series were added to social media, including a "Q+A" series on Instagram where different members, professionals, and partner organizations could answer questions about professional development, job-searching, and networking. We continued to advertise GenHERation events and found that while members were willing to engage on social media, few were willing to attend club events. It became increasingly clear that Women of Tomorrow in its current form would not be sustainable.

### April 2021: A Failed Networking Organization

By late April, it was clear that members were not going to engage in club events. While partnerships created high engagement on social media, there was insufficient participation and attendance at meetings to continue hosting guest speakers. Ultimately, the club faculty advisor and I determined that the best course of action would be to retire Women of Tomorrow, recognizing that we would be unable to re-register for the following school year in our current state. The decision to end the club was announced on social media and the remaining events were canceled. Despite extensive efforts and a compelling mission, Women of Tomorrow had failed.

### *Best Practices and Lessons Learned*

Reflecting on Women of Tomorrow's failure provides valuable insights into best practices for founding a women's networking organization on campus and lessons learned. While marketing and outreach strategy proved excellent on social media, attendance and engagement among members suggested different strategies may prove more effective for founding a women's networking organization on college campuses.

There were components to founding Women of Tomorrow that proved extremely successful in boosting awareness and engagement. Public Relations and marketing for the club appealed to collegiate women, particularly on social media. The dynamic, consistent, and strategic content produced on social media saw quality engagement in terms of likes, comments, and reposts. Using branded hashtags ensured easy tracking of engagement metrics, as every time someone tagged #uarkWOT in their post, it would be documented. This proved to be an easy method for analyzing increases in Women of Tomorrow's digital footprint and community interest in the organization.

In addition, strategic partnerships proved to be the backbone of Women of Tomorrow's success with digital engagement. The partnership with GenHERation boosted engagement in key performance indicators for both organizations and connected club members to a vast network of female professionals. By partnering with GenHERation, Women of Tomorrow created insightful professional development workshops and provided members with additional resources for job-searching and networking. Partnerships with on-campus registered student organizations proved important for marketing which spread knowledge of Women of Tomorrow to women across a variety of majors and departments. The success of these partnerships suggests that the formation of partnerships is essential to the marketing plan of a women's networking organization.

Women of Tomorrow also benefitted from a clear mission statement and vision. Every event, post, and partnership served the central goal of supporting undergraduate women as they pursue their professional goals through mentorship, connection, and networking opportunities. The clear mission of the organization allowed women with the same mission to form an authentic connection with the organization and fulfill their desire to develop themselves professionally. This created a unique community of like-minded women who share a determination to empower women to achieve their professional goals. Though Women of Tomorrow did not last another school year, it existed as an important space for women to embrace their skills and pursue their passions.

Events were based on proven strategies for professional success, combining guest speakers, professional development exercises, and networking events to create a space for learning and growth. All events focused on mentorship and relationship-building which serve as essential prerequisites to professional success. By focusing on proven strategies for professional success

tailored to the unique needs of undergraduate women, Women of Tomorrow created an important space for growth, support, and success.

Women of Tomorrow was extremely well branded. All posts and content were created using the brand colors of blue and orange to ensure uniformity across platforms and mediums. This helped establish Women of Tomorrow's identity and distinguish it from other similar organizations on campus. A unique logo was designed and placed on all content, digital or otherwise, to boost awareness of the organization and help the organization stay in potential members' memory. A brand kit was designed on Canva to ensure a cohesive aesthetic for all social media content. This strategy created visually appealing social media profiles that attracted digital consumers to the organization. Finally, language emphasized equality and empowerment to ensure the firm establishment of Women of Tomorrow's brand and mission.

Finally, Women of Tomorrow showed the importance of excellent event coordination for a collegiate women's networking organization. Events were a combination of workshops, guest speakers, and industry panels. Events appealed to women across all majors and departments, with panels showcasing a diverse array of industries including business, finance, technology, and fashion. The diverse topics and industries highlighted by Women of Tomorrow distinguished it from other organizations on campus which catered to specific fields and industries. Broadening the scope of women's networking clubs to many industries makes professional development resources accessible for all women, rather than just women interested in a niche industry.

However, there are also important lessons learned from Women of Tomorrow's failure. The central struggle I encountered when founding this organization was maintaining engagement among organizational members. While the organization's social media platforms saw high engagement, it was not reflected by members' participation or attendance at meetings. Though a

variety of events were arranged throughout the school year, many were canceled due to members and officers failing to attend. Even partnerships with other organizations on campus failed to bring in attendees to events. In retrospect, providing incentives, such as free food or refreshments, for attending club events would have been a viable strategy for boosting engagement.

Lack of engagement among Women of Tomorrow officers proved to be a significant obstacle to the organization's success. Officers were placed in leadership roles and were expected to fulfill their administrative duties, as well as set an example for participation in the club. As officers failed to attend meetings or uphold their duties, members also failed to see the necessity of attending meetings. Since participation in the organization was voluntary, it was difficult to enforce officer participation. Instead of choosing friends for officer positions out of convenience, I should have picked officers who were aligned with Women of Tomorrow's mission and showed a passion for building the club. This is an important lesson for building a collegiate female networking organization, as leadership sets the tone for the rest of an organization.

With little participation from officers, it was difficult to manage all club responsibilities by myself. I had to play the role of founder, secretary, event coordinator, treasurer, and publicist. It became increasingly difficult to manage these competing duties and increase engagement for a delicate organization in its infancy. Women of Tomorrow's failed launch highlights the need for delegation and collaboration amongst administration in order for a female collegiate networking organization to excel.

While Women of Tomorrow's broad scope served as an asset, it also raised numerous challenges for recruiting organizational members. When Women of Tomorrow was founded,

there were already a number of similar female networking organizations on campus. Though these clubs focused solely on one industry, their organization offered tailored advice for their specific niche, reducing potential members' interest to seek out Women of Tomorrow. Since these niche organizations were already established, it was difficult to compete with their thriving engagement as a new female networking organization on campus. Collegiate female networking organizations will have to identify strategies for generating interest in a market oversaturated by major-specific networking clubs.

The timing of Women of Tomorrow also played a critical role in the organization's failure. While there are many lessons to be learned from this failed organization, an analysis of this organization would not be complete without acknowledging the profound impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on registered student organizations' engagement. In September 2020, college had undergone the shift from in-person learning to virtual education. Students no longer physically interacted on campus, as remote learning and university-wide COVID restrictions limited students' ability to participate in normal campus life. As a result of the pandemic, Women of Tomorrow had to start as an online community rather than an in-person support network. This presented severe problems for promoting engagement, as students were less likely to join a new club when they cannot attend in person. The unfortunate impact of the pandemic on Women of Tomorrow highlights how important finding the right timing is equally essential to successfully starting an organization.

Finally, it is important to examine how the lack of institutional support from The University of Arkansas led to the failure of Women of Tomorrow. While Women of Tomorrow received minimal funding from the University, there simply were not enough financial and administrative resources to sustain the organization. A university-wide collegiate female

networking organization would provide greater funding and support for professional development, more networking resources, and better partnership opportunities. Moreover, creating a women's networking organization targeted to freshmen undergraduate students allows women students the maximum amount of time in college to develop key professional skills to market themselves for the workplace, and engage with the organization.

While Women of Tomorrow failed, there is promising opportunity for a university-wide female networking organization. Through harnessing greater institutional support, strategic partnerships, in a time less riddled with uncertainty and regulations pertaining to the pandemic, a women's professional networking organization can grow the next generation of female leaders. I conclude this study by presenting a guidebook with best practices for starting a university-wide women's professional networking organization on campus. Through building off the lessons learned in my experience developing a women's networking organization, the university can create a successful, support network for undergraduate women and develop them into the women of tomorrow.



## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The above analysis yielded valuable insights for forming a successful collegiate female networking organization. The best practices and lessons discovered in this study were organized into a series of guidelines for future women to create their own networking associations. I then used these guidelines to create a comprehensive guidebook for women to reference throughout the formation, development, and maintenance of their organizations' lifespans. This guidebook (Appendix A) is essential for promoting the success of female networking organizations and acts as a novel resource for future women, based on first-hand experiences from a fellow woman. The guidebook provides an overview of female networking organizations, a thorough index of best strategies for future founders, and examines the potential impact female networking organizations can have on collegiate women's long-term professional development and success.

*Analysis of Potential Members.* I also created supporting materials created to evaluate interest by potential club members and to determine the best methods for organizational recruitment. I designed an initial fifty-question survey to gauge interest from target demographics and learn what recruitment strategies best reach this audience. Future women should disseminate this survey to undergraduate women, freshmen and older, three months prior to founding their organization to inform their approach. By conducting the provided survey prior to the organization's formation, future women will learn demographic knowledge about target demographics, audience perception of gender bias in the workplace, level of interest in the organization, and best methods of promotion and outreach. This survey can be found in Appendix B of this document. The sample survey asks female students to share their attitudes towards female networking organizations and various methods of recruitment. One of the most effective surveys for the evaluation of attitudes is a Likert scale survey. Likert scale surveys

consist of a series of ordered scales in which participants choose one answer that best aligns with their view (Losby & Wetmore, 2012). The range of answers provided by a Likert scale have the advantage that they “allow for greater degrees of opinion, and even no opinion at all” (McLeod, 2019, para. 11).

In addition, Likert scale surveys can measure important factors such as frequency, importance, quality, and likelihood, allowing for greater analysis of how likely undergraduate women will be to join collegiate female networking organizations based on their responses (McLeod). Through conducting a Likert-scale survey of undergraduate females’ attitudes toward collegiate female networking organizations, this sample survey provides a valuable framework for evaluating the utility and potential success of a female networking organization on campus.

The first ten questions of the survey are nominal-level questions relating to general demographic questions such as age, class year, GPA, political identification, and racial identity. Demographic questions were important for determining the descriptive statistics of the sample (Wrench et al., 2016). The remaining forty questions consisted of interval-level questions that followed the four-point Likert scale model. Questions were grouped into four separate categories based on topic. The first category measured participants’ familiarity and perceptions of gender bias. The second grouping of questions evaluated participants’ competency, experience, and level of comfort with professional networking. This was an important category of questions as it provides insight into the pre-existing networking behaviors of undergraduate women. The third grouping of questions asked participants about gender differences in networking, perceptions on the usefulness of female networking organization, and participants’ likelihood of joining these organizations. The fourth and final grouping of interval-level questions asked participants to evaluate different recruitment tactics for promoting collegiate female, networking organizations.

Participants report their willingness to learn of new female networking organizations on campus, what media formats would be most effective at promoting these organizations, and what persuasive tactics to join these organizations would resonate most strongly with them.

*Interview Questions for Post-Evaluation of Organization.* Finally, an additional interview questionnaire is provided for evaluation of future female networking organization's success. The ten-item questionnaire should be provided to club members and officers to investigate the quantity and quality of connections existing within the organization's network. By analyzing factors such as network strength, size, and the number of existing ties, future founders will gain a comprehensive summary of their organization's success and its diversity of opportunities. This interview measures key factors for determining a network's utility and member satisfaction. This survey should be disseminated to club officers beginning one semester after the organization's creation. Future women founders will conduct the interview with club officers first, and then reach out to additional members of the network named by those interviewed. This process will continue until the completed construction of the organization's social network. The post-creation interview questionnaire can be found in Appendix C of this document.

The network data relies, in part, on nominal data collection strategy and requires a pre-conceptual framework for classifying members of a network, often based on formal leadership requirements (Knoke & Yang, 2020). Based on the nominalist theoretical foundation, the full roster list of the potential organization would be collected.

Egocentric network construction uses a single-name generator method to analyze the relationships within a network (Knoke & Yang, 2020). Knoke and Yang report that the first step of egocentric network construction requires interviewing a single member of an organization or

providing the participant a questionnaire to answer about with whom the member interacts within the organization. The central member is then asked about the strength of their relationships within the organization and members they know outside the organization (Knoke and Yang). Alters provided by the member are then interviewed through the same process. This method provides a holistic view of the relationships within the organization and beyond the organization's formal boundaries.

However, Knoke and Yang (2020) state that single-name generators only produce a small amount of alters compared to multi-name generator methods. The social network analysis of the new networking organization should then adopt the multi-name generator method of data collection. The officers of the organization will serve as name-generators and construction of the network will stem from alters provided. Alters will then be interviewed with the same set of questions continuing until a full network of the organization is constructed.

Analyzing the utility of a potential female networking organization at The University of Arkansas requires additional data collection beyond the number of nodes and ties within the organizational network. Nan Lin's Social Resources Theory, which suggests that social structures are hierarchical formations in which network resources are embedded, informs the methodological approach of this future study (Knoke & Yang, 2020). To measure the social resources of organizational members, positional resource generators could be presented to respondents inquiring as to what external organizations, positions, and professionals they had an established relationship.

These questions will provide insight into the extent of members' professional connections made through the potential organization (Yang et al., 2017). Yang et. al, express the importance of these measures in understanding how social networks can perpetuate and alleviate existing

equality particularly for women, citing Erickson's 2004 study on gendered social capital in Canada. Erickson (2004) found that men tend to know more women in female-dominated fields than women know men in male-dominated fields, likely due to men positioning themselves in social networks differently than women. This series of interview questions provided necessary insight into the external connections and resources available to organizational members. Finally, resource generators were used to further evaluate organizational members' social resources, asking questions about whom they know outside the organization that can assist them with professional development and job-searching.

*Research Questions.* Before utilizing the above resources, founders must first consider the following questions, which will be answered by both the interest survey and evaluation interview materials. These exploratory inquiries will provide necessary insights into the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of future female networking associations. After answering the following questions, women founders will use an informed approach to founding their organization, referencing the guidebook as needed. The preliminary research questions are as follows:

RQ 1: To what extent do young college women perceive gender bias to be an obstacle in achieving gender equality in the workplace?

RQ 2: Within female networking organizations, are network ties predominately weak or strong ties?

RQ 3: How dense is a collegiate female professional networking organization's network?

RQ 4: What is the overall centralization of the network and who are the central actors?

RQ 5: What connections does the collegiate female professional network have with external professionals and networking organizations?

RQ 6: How likely are undergraduate women to join and participate in female networking organizations early in freshman and sophomore year of college?

RQ 7: What are the attitudes of undergraduate women toward the usefulness of collegiate female networking clubs and what do young women find these clubs useful for?

RQ 8: Is there a difference between freshman-sophomore undergraduates and junior-senior undergraduates toward female professional networking organizations and likelihood to join these organizations?

RQ 9: Are undergraduate women more likely to be persuaded to join female professional networking organizations by central route persuasive tactics, such as influencing understanding through extensive information about these clubs, or peripheral route processing tactics, such as the use of heuristics?

Women need networks to advance in their careers. However, waiting until after college graduation puts them at a greater disadvantage. The steps outlined in this thesis provide young women with the tools they need to begin creating the networks that will launch their career and lead to a successful future.

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Appendix B

Interest and Recruitment Survey Questionnaire

*Demographic Questions*

<i>Question #</i>	<i>RQ #</i>
1. I am a (select 1: freshman, sophomore, junior, senior).	#8
4. I identify as (select 1: male, female, non-binary, prefer not to say).	
5. I identify as (select 1: Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, more than one, prefer not to say).	
6. What is your political orientation (select 1: liberal, conservative, independent, libertarian, other, prefer not to say)?	
7. What is your age (select 1: Under 16, 17-20, 20-23, 24+, prefer not to say)?	#8
8. In what college is your primary major (select all that apply: Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences, Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food, and Life Sciences, Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design, Sam M. Walton School of Business, College of Education and Health Professions, College of Engineering, Honors College, prefer not to say)?	
9. What is your current GPA (select 1: under 2.0, 2.0-2.4, 2.5-2.9, 3.0-3.5, 3.6-4.0, prefer not to say, not applicable)?	
10. What is your enrollment status (select 1: full-time student, part-time student, prefer not to say)?	

*Gender Bias (Questions 11-50 are likert-scale survey questions)*

<i>Question #</i>	<i>RQ #</i>
11. I have an understanding of what gender bias is.	#1 (11-18)
1- Completely agree	
2- Generally agree	
3- Generally disagree	
4- Completely disagree	
12. I have experienced gender bias.	
1- Completely agree	



2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

13. I could explain gender bias to another person.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

14. Gender Bias is a serious issue.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

15. Gender bias limits women professionally.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

16. Women are at a disadvantage in the workplace.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

17. Women are perceived different than men in professional settings.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

18. Gender bias is a common occurrence.

- 1- Completely agree
  - 2- Generally agree
  - 3- Generally disagree
  - 4- Completely disagree
- 

*Networking*

Question #	RQ #
19. I frequently spend time networking with established professionals in my desired field.	#6 (19-24)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- Completely agree</li> <li>2- Generally agree</li> <li>3- Generally disagree</li> <li>4- Completely disagree</li> </ul>	
20. I have experience networking.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- Completely agree</li> <li>2- Generally agree</li> <li>3- Generally disagree</li> <li>4- Completely disagree</li> </ul>	
21. I understand how to build a professional network.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- Completely agree</li> <li>2- Generally agree</li> <li>3- Generally disagree</li> <li>4- Completely disagree</li> </ul>	
22. Networking makes me anxious.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1- Completely agree</li> <li>2- Generally agree</li> <li>3- Generally disagree</li> </ul>	

4- Completely disagree

23. I feel unsure of how to develop a professional network.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

24. Professional Networking is essential for job-hunting.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

*Female Networking Organizations*

Question #

RQ #

25. Networking is harder for women than men.

#7 (25-38)

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

26. There are not enough networking resources for women.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

27. Mentorship and Networking are essential for women's success in the workplace.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

28. Organizations dedicated to building professional networks are helpful.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

29. There need to be female-only networking organizations.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

30. Men network differently than women.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

31. There are more networking resources for men than women.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

32. Women require greater mentorship on how to network than men.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

33. It is easier for men to network than women.

---

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

34. Networking is important in college.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

35. I would benefit from learning how to network during college.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

36. No one has taught me how to network.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

37. Networking clubs should be on college campuses.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

38. It is important to start building a professional network as an underclassman in college.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

---

- 3- Generally disagree
  - 4- Completely disagree
- 

*Motivation*

---

Question #

RQ #

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39. I would like to learn about female networking organizations on my campus. #9 (39-50)

- 1- Completely agree
- 2- Generally agree
- 3- Generally disagree
- 4- Completely disagree

40. I would be interested in joining female networking organizations on my campus.

- 1- Completely agree
- 2- Generally agree
- 3- Generally disagree
- 4- Completely disagree

41. I am aware of what female professional networking organizations are on my campus.

- 1- Completely agree
- 2- Generally agree
- 3- Generally disagree
- 4- Completely disagree

42. I would like to receive emails discussing female networking events and organizations.

- 1- Completely agree
- 2- Generally agree
- 3- Generally disagree
- 4- Completely disagree

43. I would join a female professional networking organization.

---

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

44. I would like to see posters with information about female professional networking organizations.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

45. I would be persuaded to join a female professional networking organization by hearing others' positive experiences.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

46. I would like to see social media posts advertising female professional networking organizations on my campus.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

47. I am more persuaded by social media advertising than newsletter advertising.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

48. I join student organizations based on the testimonials of friends.

---

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

49. I prefer virtual events to in-person events.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree

50. I am more likely to attend club events where incentives are provided.

1- Completely agree

2- Generally agree

3- Generally disagree

4- Completely disagree



Appendix C

Member Interview Questionnaire

<i>Question #</i>	<i>RQ #</i>
1. I am a (select 1: freshman, sophomore, junior, senior).	#6
2. How long have you been a member of this organization?	#5
3. What is your role in the organization (club member, club officer)? If officer, state specific role.	#5
4. List up to 3 professionals in the business industry with whom you have a personal or professional relationships?	#3
5. For each professional, rank your level of closeness from 1-5 (1 means not close at all, 5 means extremely close)	#2
6. List up to 5 different members of your organization with whom you've developed a relationship	#3
7. For each person, rank your level of closeness from 1-5 (1 means not close at all, 5 means extremely close)	#2
8. Have you met anyone through this organization who can:	#4
a. Assist you with online professional profile development (yes/no)?	
b. Refer you to potential job openings (yes/no)?	
c. Review your resume and cover letter (yes/no)?	
d. Facilitate the development of your professional network through making introductions, referrals, etc. (yes/no)?	
e. Provide you a reference for job searches (yes/no)?	
9. If yes, what is their relationship to you for each answer? (club member, club officer, personal connection, organizational connection)	#5
10. What are some of the key events you've attended for this organization (select as many as apply)?	#4
a. Resume Workshops	
b. Industry Panels	
c. Executive Guest Speaker	
d. Networking events (e.g. Job fairs)	

e. Mentorship Program

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