

Women build less effective professional networks than men as they underestimate self-worth

November 15 2018



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Understanding why women are less successful at networking is vital for the development of gender equality in the work place. A study,

published by SAGE Publishing today in the journal *Human Relations*, contributes to this ongoing discussion, revealing that it is not only exclusion by men, but also self-imposed barriers including hesitation and gendered modesty that prevent women from networking as effectively as their male counterparts. The research, based on interviews with 37 high-profile female leaders in German corporations, revealed that women's tendencies to harbour moral concerns about 'exploiting' social ties causes them to under-benefit from networking activities. This tendency is further exacerbated by women's predisposition to underestimate and undersell their professional self-worth.

"These considerations provide a clear explanation for women's hesitations to capitalise on social ties and for the consequent ineffectiveness of their professional networking efforts compared to those of their male counterparts", commented the chief editor Prof. Olga Tregaskis.

Through the study, women were shown to be careful not to "over-benefit" from their connections and to emphasise the moral aspects of the network, whilst underestimating and poorly demonstrating their own contributions in a professional context.

Talking about personal hesitation one interviewee stated: "Women look at networks from a social point of view. [...] They do not ask the question "How will this benefit me?" Men, on the other hand, focus on the opposite, placing less emphasis on personal relationships and make networking decisions for egoistic and instrumental motives."

The researchers concluded:

"We hope that this paper's findings will motivate women to scrutinize their positioning in networks and encourage them to interact more proactively and less reservedly with powerful social contacts. Women's

tendencies to underestimate their value in professional networks and on the job market are at odds with the demand for qualified women. Instead women can be convinced of their qualities and of their resulting objective 'professional value' and engage proactively in the powerful networks that they are likely to benefit from and valuably contribute to."

More information: Elena Greguletz et al, Why women build less effective networks than men: The role of structural exclusion and personal hesitation, *Human Relations* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/0018726718804303](https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726718804303)

Provided by SAGE Publications

Citation: Women build less effective professional networks than men as they underestimate self-worth (2018, November 15) retrieved 8 August 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-11-women-effective-professional-networks-men.html>

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