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## Case study in the emotional and social benefits of joining a women's organization in Cedar Falls, Iowa

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CASE STUDY IN THE EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL BENEFITS OF JOINING A  
WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION IN CEDAR FALLS, IOWA

A Thesis Submitted  
in Participated Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Designation  
University Honors

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## **Abstract**

This research seeks to explore the main factors women in Cedar Falls become members of the Cedar Fall Woman's Club and what benefits they have gained in respect to their social and emotional health through this organization. The Cedar Falls Woman's Club has had an important presence in the community for over a hundred years and has been an active partner of both Sartori Hospital and the University of Northern Iowa. However, in recent years it has seen a decline in new members and a lack of participation from the current members. With other philanthropic organizations shutting down their chapters in Cedar Falls and throughout the country, it is important to understand why these organizations are becoming less popular and what do their members value about them and how can we emphasize that in recruiting initiatives. Better understanding these two aspects can help bridge a divide between the longstanding civic-minded baby boomers of the community, and the vibrant and results-driven millennials that make up a large percentage of Cedar Falls due to the presence of UNI. Research is based on archival records as well as two open-ended interviews with current members of the Woman's Club to gain an understanding of their own experience and perspective on the club's place in the wider Cedar Falls Community.

## **Introduction**

This case study explores women's organizations and their value to their individual members. In pursuit of this, I chose to focus my study on the Cedar Falls Woman's Club. Membership in women's organizations has been declining since the 1990s and those who are members are aging into retirement. Across the country, philanthropic and volunteer-based groups are struggling to bring in new, younger members, and many older members feel that young people are not interested in giving back to their communities. However, a lack of visibility and awareness may be factors in the declining membership, especially among young women. By recording the personal impact these organizations can have will help to highlight the emotional, social, and occupational benefits of participation and potentially serve as a basis for new recruitment initiatives.

## **Literature Review**

A review of the existing literature regarding women's organizations, revealed a significant lack of research into the interpersonal benefits of participating in these societies. What research is available focuses on two main areas: women's organizations as political forces and women's organizations as tools for economic development. Here I will review the significant conclusions from these two areas, as well as more thoroughly identify the gaps in the literature I intend my research to address. In addition to this, I will also look at the role women's organizations have played specifically in the history of Cedar Falls, so as to understand the context of the Cedar Falls Woman's Club.

*Women's Organizations as Forces for Political Change*

Women's organizations have a longstanding tradition of political activism. Without the proliferation and popularity of women's social clubs, the campaign for women's suffrage would have likely taken longer to gain popularity. Even before the suffragette movement, American women were organizing and working together to impact their communities.

Participation in voluntary organizations grew significantly in popularity among middle- and upper-class women at the start of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many of these early groups were closely tied to local churches, such as bible studies, rosary circles, and missionary groups. Due to the Christian emphasis on social justice, focusing on community engagement and political activism was a natural evolution for women's clubs. Women's organizations in the 1800s used both religious arguments as well as the perception of women as nurturing and motherly to effectively lobby for reform in areas such as prisons, hospitals and mental health institutions, and child protections (Wilson 1979, 91-92). Following the turmoil of the Civil War, changing social roles allowed women to organize and pursue at a local level political goals that went beyond that of the vote (Tetrault 2001).

Wendy Sharer (2004, 3-6) examined how two groups, the League of Women Voters (LWV) and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), continued to promote a greater role for women in political spheres after the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment. Through examining pamphlets, meeting minutes, and other source materials, she is able to combat the common perception of feminism occurring in the United States in "waves", by demonstrating how women's social clubs were a medium for political discourse from their inception and continued to be a training ground for women to gain the skills needed to enter the political realm. While political activism is most strongly associated with women's organizations during the suffragette movement, advocacy groups continue to work in the political sphere on the

behalf of women's rights. A study of 975 advocacy groups active in 1985 showed that the majority of organizations (46 percent) were dedicated to women's issues (Minkoff 1995, 19). Between 1925 and the emergence of the second feminist wave in the 1960s, the agendas of women's organizations focused on local and regional issues rather than pursuing legislation at the national level. According to Ethel Klein, this period in the history of women's organizations was crucial because, "it provided an organizational context for maintaining and increasing pressure for women's rights in the future" (Klein 1984, 18). This organizational context allowed women's organizations to focus their efforts on specific policy issues and use their influence over elected officials more effectively.

Women's organizations began with the purpose of broadly providing political literacy to women, and while the meetings of many women's organizations still cover a wide variety of topics that includes politics, the focus is no longer the same. Women's organizations have remained politically active and interested in community engagement, but the level of activism that was seen during the suffragette movement has been transferred into focused interest-groups rather than general social clubs. The result of this is that, "Women activists possess limited resources but relatively high status. They are professional activists who relate to mass constituencies that may be mobilized to demonstrate electoral (political) clout. Leaders and members are largely white, middle-class women who possess significant levels of technical competence" (Gelb and Paley, 208). That many of the visible women's activists coming from a white, middle-class background, this has in some ways limited the efficacy and scope of influence these organizations have. The lack of diversity in women's organizations has been a longstanding problem that has only recently been addressed in the development of multi-interest or intersectional-focused organizations.

In addition to their legislative influence, the collective actions of women's organizations have been shown to be an effective means for professional development and networking. While the greatest impact to gender equity in the workforce is done by organizations with this goal in mind, women's work unions or women's groups that participate in activism in popular movements more broadly have been correlated with drops in a gender-based pay gap (Akchurin 2013, 683). While women make up around 47% of the workforce, they are still under represented in leadership roles (US Department of Labor 2018; Warner and Corley 2017). One of the barriers to women gaining upper management roles is the lack of mentors and networking opportunities due to the lack of women in a given field. A study conducted by professional development firm Egon Zehnder found that only 54% of surveyed women have access to senior leaders as mentors (Egon Zehnder 2017, 7). Women tend to seek out more leadership positions and have an easier time balancing career and family needs when they feel supported in their work-life aspirations (Kossek and Buzzanell 2018, 819). Women's organizations can be an important source of support for career-oriented women by providing advice and mentorship, affordable childcare options, and opportunities to network beyond a single company or industry. In fact, one of the largest benefits that women's organizations can offer to working women is that they exist outside of any one company, and rather than being mandated by company policy or by a managerial decision, they are singularly focused on helping women improve themselves rather than helping a corporation's bottom line.

### *Women's Organizations as Tools for Economic Development*

Contemporary research on women's organizations has been primarily focused on the establishment of these groups in developing countries as opposed to American groups following second-wave feminism. Though the issues tackled by women's groups varies drastically across



the world, there are some underlying themes. When women are successful, the community is successful too (World Bank 2002, 4-11). Women are more likely to pay microloans back on time, are more likely to invest their money back into their families and educations, and when working together as a group, are less likely to receive pushback from men in the community (Soh 2017). From ancient women gatherers to the modern sewing circle, gatherings of women have universally been a source for economic development, and this continues to be true outside of the Western world as well.

In Kenya women's organizations achieved economic development for women first through education and secondly through microfinancing and supporting small businesses. Microfinancing is the "financial services, such as loans, savings, insurance and fund transfers to entrepreneurs, small businesses and individuals who lack access to traditional banking services." (Kiva 2018). Many organizations exclusively offer microfinances to women, as women not only make up the largest percentage in impoverished areas and are more likely to repay their loans (International Labour Office 2008).

Milena Gioia's (2012) study in India followed a grassroots self-help organization, Mata Balak Utkarsha Prathishtan (MBUP) which provide credit to impoverished women (Gioia 2012, 9). Through interviews, she looked at how this grassroots organization could effect social change and work to transform informal institutions such as, "oppressive marriage customs, the neglect of girl children, and absence of women from the public sphere" (Gioia 2012, 10). She found that while this organization and those like it are effective in raising awareness and educating women to improve their situations, they do not focus their programs on reaching men but rather on equipping women with the tools they need to change the culture themselves (Gioia 2012, 95). This reflects the importance of women's organizations as a location for support and education

and as a place where women can more freely discuss amongst each other than may sometimes be possible in the public or at home.

*Women's Organizations in Cedar Falls, Iowa*

Sturgis Falls was founded in 1845, named after its founder William Sturgis. In 1850, the town merged with Cedar River and became the city that is still today known as Cedar Falls ("Sturgis Falls" 2019). Located in Black Hawk County in the Northeast quarter of Iowa, it is best known for being the home of the University of Northern Iowa. As of 2010, the city had a population of 39,260 (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Cedar Falls has a long history of prominent civic organizations, with the Cedar Falls Historical Society having source documents and records for over 100 different groups. One of these organizations, the Cedar Falls Woman's Club has been active since 1914.

Despite existing for over a hundred years, the history of the Cedar Falls Woman's Club goes back even farther. The establishment of this and many other women's organizations was the result of the efforts of many women decades earlier (Cedar Fall Woman's Club 2014). In 1868, the first professional women's organization in the United States was established. This club, Sorosis, was ridiculed by the male journalists of the time, but it proved to be very attractive to women and gained 89 members in its first year (Merrill 1893). The success of Sorosis led the way for women across the country to gather and create their own organizations. These early groups were dubbed the "Housewife's University" as they often began as literary clubs, but later expanded to cover a wide range of intellectual and cultural topics (Cedar Falls Woman's Club 2014). Eventually, these groups became more focused on bettering their communities through political action. In pursuit of this, the women's clubs federated in 1890 (Wilson 2009). In 1893, Iowa was the first to have a statewide organization join the National Federation of Women's

Clubs. Among the thirty-five clubs that originally signed the charter was the Cedar Falls Tuesday Club, which still exists today (Cedar Falls Woman's Club 2014).

While women's interest groups like the Tuesday Club were popular in Cedar Falls, in the 1910s the city still lacked a women's club that was democratic and open to all women and all pursuits. In 1914, a Mrs. H.H. Clay convinced the women of Cedar Falls to join the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs and the Cedar Falls Woman's Club was born (Cedar Falls Woman's Club 2014). Its first president was the wife of the university's vice president, starting a long relationship between the Woman's Club and UNI (Shoemaker 1915, 6). The founding mission of the Cedar Falls Woman's Club was to, "stimulate intellectual and social development and create an organized center of thought and action among the women of Cedar Falls for the best interests of the community" (Cedar Falls Woman's Club 2014). This mission has continued to drive the organization to this day and is what led me to choose it for my research.

### **Research Questions to be Answered**

The primary question that my research seeks to answer is, "What aspects of women's organizations benefit their member's emotional and social health?" While conducting my research I expect to gather evidence towards answering some secondary questions which are as follows:

- What factors motivate women to join women-only groups as opposed to other community clubs?
- Do women's organizations offer occupational or vocational benefits that cannot be found elsewhere?
- What value do women's organizations have in small communities such as Cedar Falls?

- What are the demographics and recruitment procedures of women groups today, and how do they differ from that of women's groups historically?

## **Methodology**

From the founding days of Cedar Falls, women's organizations have played a prominent role in the everyday lives of Cedar Falls citizens and the larger operations of the town. The Cedar Falls Historical Society has archival records for numerous historical and contemporary women's organizations. I chose to study one of these organizations—The Cedar Falls Woman's Club, which has been active for over a hundred years.

This study is based in qualitative data about the participants' experiences and attitudes toward their membership in this group, as well as materials from the Cedar Falls Historical Society's archives. Qualitative data is useful for contextualizing and bringing nuance to the subject's experiences, it “allows the researcher to acknowledge that she may not know enough to formulate meaningful hypotheses. It uses the research participants as a source of knowledge” (Auerbach & Silverstein 2003, 7).

In 1989, the Cedar Falls Woman's Club removed their historical documents from the clubhouse and began storing them in the archives of the Cedar Falls Historical Society, located in the Victorian Home next door (Yearbook 2018-2019). The Historical Society has in its collection a Cedar Falls Woman's Club from every year starting in 1914, as well as other materials pertaining to the restoration of the club house and the club's financial records. This collection of source documents gave me access to over a hundred years of the club's organization, members, and meeting topics. From these, I was able to look at general trends in the club and see how the member's interests changed and were influenced by current events.

Because of the open-ended and subjective nature of this project, I worked from a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is an approach that seeks to *generate* hypotheses rather than the traditional hypothesis testing (Charmaz 2000, 510). I went into the interviews not knowing what my participants would say about their experiences, and I developed my interpretation of the results according to the information they gave me, rather than my expectations. Using a grounded theory approach allowed me to root my research in the lived reality of my participants, rather than in the abstract. More specifically, I used a basis of constructivist grounded theory which, “assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretive understanding of subjects’ meanings” (Charmaz 2000, 510). This approach emphasizes the interpretive nature of qualitative research and recognizes the ability of multiple personal realities to exist at once.

To do this, I conducted in-person interviews, using a semi-structured question format. Because I am interested in the personal insights of my interview subjects, I framed my questions in an open-ended way as to allow them more room to expand on their experiences. Examples of interview questions can be seen in Appendix D. Because the nature of my research involves working with human subjects, I received training in ethical research practices and sought approval from the Institutional Review Board. I focused my study on the Cedar Fall Woman’s Club, as they have been a well-known, long-standing, and prevalent organization in the community. The president of the Woman’s Club supported this project, and the Club voted to work with me on October 3, 2018 (See Appendix A). Approval from the UNI Institutional Review Board was received on October 12, 2018 (See Appendix B). All participants received

and signed a consent form acknowledging that their interviews will be recorded (See Appendix C).

One of the unexpected restraints to collecting data was that many of the club members relocate further south during the fall and winter months when this research was being conducted. While I made every possible attempt to advertise my research and solicit participants, many of these potential participants were unreachable or otherwise uninterested during the course of this study. Many of the points my participants made were echoed in my other research. However, when writing my results, I have been careful not take this small sample and generalize the experiences of the overall club.

The interview portion of this study had two participants. The participants shared several similarities: both are retired, married, white women in their 70s. The women participate in multiple community organizations, the Cedar Falls Woman's Club being one of these, with one woman being in a leadership position within the club. They also have had a long history of living in Cedar Falls, although not necessarily continuously. Interviews were one-on-one and took place in two different settings—one at a participant's house and the other at a local restaurant over lunch. The locations were chosen based on the preferences of the interviewees, I wanted to give them the option of choosing wherever felt the most comfortable to them. While the setting may have influenced their behavior, I thought that giving them control over the location would put them at ease for the interview and make it more conversational.

Using the grounded theory approach, I used a semi-structured set of questions for the interviews. The questions were open-ended and designed to let the participants elaborate or expand upon them if needed. Follow-up questions were asked if the participant had a story or idea that I felt should be elaborated on or developed further. Some questions did not

automatically divulge much information but when expanded upon or reworded the participants provided a more in-depth answer. Some questions even when expanded upon did not have the intended response, as either the participant did have much to say about a particular experience or aspect of their membership, or more frequently, they took the question and interpreted it in a new and unexpected direction.

The recorded interviews were transcribed, resulting in over 10 pages. The interviews were then coded. Coding the transcripts made it easier to identify common themes and categories of responses, which were then used to draw connections between the interviews as well as archival records from the club's history and could be used to draw some general conclusions about the overall club atmosphere and its members' experiences.

## **Analysis**

### *Archives*

During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, churches were a popular source of women's organizations. Women were considered an important resource for furthering the Christian faith, due to their role as mothers and wives. Wives were responsible for guiding their husband's decisions towards a Godly purpose, and mothers were responsible for educating children on the Christian faith in the home. Women held a necessary supportive role to that of men, and Christian women's organizations were an extension of this role modeling and educational role. Later, the suffragette movement would use these same principals to argue women had a moral necessity to participate in politics.

Clubs like Sorosis in Cedar Falls were revolutionary because, unlike church groups, women could gather and socialize without male oversight or supervision. Jane Croly, the founder

of Sorosis, resisted giving the organization any set agenda. Instead the club was “to form a centre of unity, not upon the ground of conviction or philanthropy, but womanhood alone, and desire to know and be helpful” (Croly 1898, 19). As Shebby Lee (2009, 8) put it, “it is a tribute to the fact that women had been shackled to their homes for so long that the *mere act of leaving the home to do something on their own* (though certainly not to work) was considered liberating and enlightened”. These desires, to be free from the home and to learn, were at the core of the Cedar Falls Woman’s Club’s beginning and are values that continue to influence the club today.

When the Cedar Falls Woman’s Club began, women were leaving the home to attend meetings at local churches, where many of the women would have socialized or volunteered anyways. However, in 1929 they were able to raise enough funds to buy their own clubhouse, which is still in use today (Yearbook 2018-2019). To this day, the Cedar Falls Woman’s Club is the only federated Woman’s Club in Iowa to own and operate their own club house. Owning a house improved the Woman’s Club’s autonomy in several ways. First, it gave them a permanent meeting residence and legitimized their presence in the community. Owning a house transformed them from a simple social club into a legitimate philanthropic organization in the community. They also benefitted from not having to work around a church’s schedule when planning meetings and events. Most importantly, the house gave them a continual source of revenue through renting out the space for events. This ensured that even with the costs of maintaining and renovating the house, the club would still be able to keep dues low and continue to operate.

From the founding of Sorosis as a protest for the shut-out of female journalists, to the suffragette movement, the history of the women’s club movement always been very closely tied with the fight for women’s independence. Individually, women were making the choice to pursue their own interests outside of the home and organizing together to gain that freedom. One



way to infer how women's sense of individuality developed over time is by looking at the way they referred to themselves. Every year, the Cedar Falls Woman's Club published a yearbook to their members that outlines the meeting schedules and major events for the upcoming year. At the end of every yearbook is a directory of all the members, listed in alphabetical order by last name. Between 1915 and 1916, there was a little over 400 members listed in the yearbook. Of those ninety were given the prefix "Miss", so that their name would appear as "Doe, Miss Jane". Two women had the prefix "Dr." along with their first name. Twenty women gave their names as either "Smith, Mrs. Jane" or "Smith, Mrs. Jane (John)" to indicate that either they were married or specifically who their spouse was. The remaining 300 women were all listed in the form of "Smith, Mrs. John" (Yearbook 1915-1916). While letters and other documents indicate that some of the women did refer to one another by their first names, many other women continued to refer to one another in relation to their husbands (Yearbook 1947-1948). This was the most common way women were listed up until the 1980s (Yearbook 1953-1954; Yearbook 1964-1965; Yearbook 1983-1984). The yearbook from 1983 and 1984 did away with prefixes altogether, listing just first names, though some women continued to put their husband's name or initials in parentheses following their own (Yearbook 1983-1984). In the late 2010s there was an unexpected drift back towards the use of prefixes, although very few women used their husband's first name (Yearbook 2018-2019). This pattern of reducing or entirely omitting the names of women is a common issue when using historical documents and has made it difficult to learn about women as they were perceived by society (McGarvey 2016). The voices of women from the past have often been removed or spoken-over, and when these voices were seen, it was largely in relation to their husbands (Carter 2006, 223). Even in the women-only space of the

Woman's Club, where women had much more freedom to express their thoughts and opinions, their experiences are still contained by the men around them.

### *Interviews*

The interviews began with several questions about the subject's background and how she came to be involved with the Woman's Club. The subjects lived in Cedar Falls for a significant portion on their lives, and they indicated that the Woman's Club was just one of several organizations they were involved in. According to these women, becoming a member of the Cedar Falls Woman's Club was part of a larger social interaction. The subjects were initially invited to attend a meeting or chair an event by another friend and their membership in the club grew gradually as they became more involved. One participant described it as, "[a friend] invited me to come to a meeting and then I joined because I wanted to get involved in the community again [...] she's called me more than once going, 'Will you chair this or chair that? Will you be a part of this or a part of that?' because she knows that I will say yes." (Personal interview February 28, 2019). Likewise, another participant said, "my very, very good friend whose good friend is *really* dedicated to the Woman's Club, impressed upon *her* that she needed to get *me* to join" (Personal interview November 14, 2018). In every case, the women were sought out because they had a reputation in the community for being dependable and giving back, and so other members knew they could count on them to help with an event or plan a meeting and eventually they became integral to the club's operations.

There was a consistent message about the importance of giving back to the community. Each woman felt that she had received support from the Cedar Falls community in the past and that it was important to give that support back to others. In one woman's case, joining the Woman's Club was more about giving back to the community rather than meeting any of her

personal needs or desires. She said, “I really wasn’t interested, but she [a friend] said, ‘Well think of it as supporting the Woman’s Club,’ the Cedar Falls Woman’s Club. Ah, I can do that” (Personal interview November 14, 2018). Support was a consistent theme through the interviews, at the community level as well as the interpersonal one as well. One participant described this interpersonal support as, “these ladies are older, a lot of them are widows, and like our publicity lady whose husband is sick with cancer, it’s like ‘What can I do? Can I give you a hug?’ A lot of times that’s all that’s needed, to let her know that I care, and send cards that I care—that you’re not forgotten” (Personal interview February 28, 2019). For the participants, membership in the Woman’s Club was viewed as continuing to support the longstanding history of the Woman’s Club in Cedar Falls, and as a way of remaining in touch with current issues in the community and staying socially connected.

The most consistent theme throughout the history of the Cedar Falls Woman’s Club is their focus on educational programming. This was also stated as being the most valuable part of being a member according to my interview subjects. These programs have historically had a wide range of topics—some are focused on current events and issues in the community, while others cover artistic and literary subjects. Examples of previous meetings have included programs about horse therapies, scarf-tying, the art of Latin America, and the state of orphanages in Iowa (Yearbook 2018-2019; Yearbook 1947-1948). This emphasis on programming has led the Cedar Falls Woman’s Club to be a, “well-versed, very active, and proactive community... which means people are doing, people are acting!” (Personal interview February 28, 2019).

The final theme from these interviews was that of change and looking towards the future of the clubs. The participants expressed confusion as to why young people are less involved in their communities, with one saying, “You know if you want to study something you find out

why, why young people don't get involved." (Personal interview November 14, 2018). One participant said she believed that young people are only interested in making a onetime commitment and not continuing to stay involved with an organization (Personal interview November 14, 2018). The participants also expressed some anxieties about modern life and technology. One participant believed that young parents weren't willing to put their own interests and activities before their kids (Personal interview February 28, 2019). Due to this perception that young people are *choosing* to turn away from the community and giving back, these women were of the belief that it was young people who need to change and decide to rejoin these organizations. According to one participant, "You know, once these organizations die off, where's your culture, where does that come from? Where does the playground equipment in the park come from? You name it, where's that going to come from? The quality of life is going to drop drastically if the status quo isn't taken care of over the years" (Personal interview February 28, 2019).

## **Discussion**

### *Generational Differences in Philanthropic Endeavors*

Almost every philanthropic organization, from women's clubs to food banks, has seen a decrease in membership in the last few decades (Comas 2016; Mark 2015; Steinhauer 2010). The Cedar Falls Woman's Club has gone from a starting membership of over 400 members to a current membership of only around 80 members (Yearbook, 1915-1916; Yearbook 2018-2019). With numbers decreasing so rapidly and with some organizations being forced to close chapters, it is no wonder that these organizations have a vested interest in discovering the reasons for this decrease and have contributed a considerable amount of research into the topic.

A study by Fidelity Charitable conducted major studies in 2016 and 2017 over both generational and gender differences in giving practices. These studies showed that millennials typically give more spontaneously, making what one participant said about young people making one-time commitments somewhat true (Fidelity Charitable 2017, 16). However, millennials (born between 1981-2000) are still in school or in the earlier parts of their careers compared to baby boomers, meaning that they are more limited in both time and money they are able to dedicate to other activities. This doesn't mean that changes to an organization can't help: one of my interview subjects mentioned that the Cedar Falls Lions' Club now meets at a bar on evenings, and likewise other organizations have had more success adding meetings that meet during after-work hours (Personal interview February 28, 2019; Scovil Dove 2013, 20-21).

This doesn't mean that millennials haven't found ways to contribute—millennials are far more likely to adopt alternative and technology-based forms of philanthropic giving. Almost half of millennials in the Fidelity Giving survey (2017, 18) said that technology influenced their giving decisions, and this can take form in a variety of ways (Dietz-Kilen 2017). Various sites have begun offering to donate earned rewards points to a chosen charity, or automatically made a donation when you purchase from the site (Fromm 2017). The development of web-based donations and charities has also made it easier to donate towards global causes, which millennials cite as being the most important issue to them (The Center on Philanthropy 2008, 5). This is perhaps one of the reasons millennials choose to be less involved in their local communities.

Another important factor when looking at philanthropy differences between millennials and baby boomers is what kinds of issues are important to them and how they approach societal problems. Millennials tend to have a more global outlook and are therefore more focused on

global issues such as climate change (Fidelity Giving 2016, 7). They also value transparency in their charities, and typically give to organizations they feel will make the most direct impact on an issue (Hartnett & Matan 2014, 2-3). This is not to say that local community-based organizations like the Cedar Falls Woman's Club can't make an impact, only that they typically are less transparent than web-based organizations who utilize social media, and that they may put donations towards renovations or events that younger people feel are less precise in their focus. Millennials also tend to have a higher belief that solutions to societal problems should come from all sectors, including more of a government role in philanthropic causes. Overall, they seem to be choosing more carefully and cautiously where they donate their time and money too and are more likely to look for other solutions before looking towards charities for support.

### *The Importance of Social Support in Old Age*

Members of women's clubs are becoming increasingly older, and these groups are often sought out specifically by women in retirement (Bowles 2011). Of the many reasons why women join these organizations, one is that it provides older women with a strong social network in their local community. Staying socially connected is not only good for our emotional health but can also have affects on our physical health as well (Tuohey & Cooney 2019, 5). Studies have shown a positive correlation between health and social connectedness (Ashida & Heaney 2008). Participating in social groups in particular is shown to improve physical and mental health in older adults (Ni Leime & O'Shea 2010; Koutsogeorgou et al. 2014; Radina 2008).

These social networks are particularly important for women, as women are more likely to live longer than men and more likely to experience serious illnesses in their old age (European Commission 2014). Woman's organizations are an excellent resource for older women by

providing this emotional support as well as being available to help each other when they are in need. This illustrates the important theme of support that my interview subjects spoke about.

## **Conclusion**

Despite my research on the importance of women's clubs, there is still a large gap in the existing literature, especially when it comes to examining the emotional bonds these clubs create and how they can improve a woman's social wellbeing. I believe that my case study was an important contribution to the conversation by outlining the reasons women become involved in these organizations and what benefits they feel are important to them. In the future I would love to expand my archive study over the use of names to other organizations and areas and to complete more in-depth research on that topic. I believe that this research has made a strong argument towards millennials for why these organizations are important to the community, and have also explained some of the reasons why these organizations are becoming less popular. I hope that creating a dialogue between generations can help bring about change from both that will help women's organizations continue to flourish in the coming years. With the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women's suffrage approaching, there is no better time for women everywhere to rededicate themselves towards fighting for equality and protecting and preserving the spaces that allow them to be freely and fully women.

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Appendix A

Cedar Falls Woman's Club  
304 Clay Street  
Cedar Falls, Iowa 50613  
Jean Richardson, President [richardsonj@cfu.net](mailto:richardsonj@cfu.net)

October 4, 2018

Dear Hailey Lorenzen [lorenzeh@uni.edu](mailto:lorenzeh@uni.edu)

The Cedar Falls Woman's Club is pleased to collaborate with you on your project for your honor's thesis researching the benefits women derive from belonging to women's organizations.

We understand that participating in this research will include audio recording interviews with our members. We had ample opportunities to discuss the research with you and to ask for clarifications. According to our agreement, project activities will be carried out as described in the research plan reviewed and approved by the University of Northern Iowa Institutional Review Board.

We look forward to working with you, and please consider this communication as our Letter of Cooperation.

Sincerely,

Jean Richardson  
Cedar Falls Woman's Club  
Appendix B

Your project is approved under the expedited review procedures (45 C.F.R. § 46.101, category 6).



Please let me know if you have any questions. Please contact Anita Gordon if you make any changes to your study.

My review is complete, you may begin your research. Have fun conducting those interviews! Your project sounds fascinating.

## Appendix C

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA  
HUMAN PARTICIPANTS REVIEW  
INFORMED CONSENT

Project Title: Case Study in the Personal Benefits of Joining a Women's Organization in Cedar Falls, Iowa

Name of Investigator(s): Hailey Lorenzen

You are invited to take place in a research opportunity conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate.

This study is being conducted to learn about the benefits provided to individual members of women's organizations. It seeks to gather the personal accounts of former or current club members in order to understand the influences that lead women to join these organizations. From these personal histories we may better understand the impact these groups have on the overall Cedar Falls community.

The research for this study will be conducted through oral interviews. Participants will be asked a series of questions relating to their membership with a women's organization and their perceived enrichment as a result of that membership. Interviews will take 1-2 hours, depending on detail of the answers provided. These interviews will take place at the Cedar Falls Woman's Club, unless the participant would prefer to meet at a personal residence instead. Interviews will be recorded, only for the purpose of note taking. Recordings will not be shared with any individuals other than the one conducting the research. Files will be kept in a locked filing cabinet for the duration of the study, after which they will be destroyed.

Any information collected in this study will be kept confidential and anonymous. The findings will have no identifying factors such as name or address associated with them. Direct quotes may be used in publications, but they will be free of any information that could be connected to a single individual. These anonymous results may be presented in an academic or scholarly conference.

Any risk associated with this research will be minimal. The main risk will be an inconvenience to time, since interviews may take over an hour. Any risk associated with the project is comparable to day-to-day risks associated with other aspects of daily life.

No direct benefits to participants are expected, but this project may generate important information for recruitment-purposes for women’s organizations, as well as serve to fill a significant gap in the existing research on women’s movements and social organizations. Information from this study will be publicly presented and provide you with the opportunity to impact the Cedar Falls community through sharing your perspective. No compensation will be provided for participating in this study.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time in the interview process. You also have the right to withhold any information you are not comfortable sharing in this study. If you decide to withdraw from the process at any time, there will be no consequences and you will not experience any loss to potential benefits.

If you have questions regarding your participation in this study or about the study generally, please contact Hailey Lorenzen at 563-275-0234 or through email at [lorenzeh@uni.edu](mailto:lorenzeh@uni.edu). You may also contact the project investigator’s faculty advisor Anne Woodrick at the Department of Anthropology, University of Northern Iowa, [anne.woodrick@uni.edu](mailto:anne.woodrick@uni.edu). For answers to questions about the rights of research participants and the research review process at UNI, please contact the office of IRB Administrator at 319-273-6148.

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

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(Signature of participant)

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(Date)

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(Printed name of participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of investigator)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of advisor)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

## Appendix D

### General Script for Interview Questions

*Follow-up questions may be asked when relevant.*

How long have/were you a member of this organization?

How did you become involved with this club/ what led you to join?

Tell me about your overall experience as a member of this organization.

Did joining this group result in any benefits to your social life?

Did you feel like you benefitted emotionally or intellectually from participating in this group?

Did being a part of this group have any impact on your occupational life or help you in any way with your life goals?

Were there any drawbacks or negatives to being in this group?

Did you participate in any other community service groups or clubs in addition to this one?

Do you think its important to have a club exclusive to women only? Why or why not?

What have been some of the biggest challenges while being a member in this group?

Do you think younger people will continue to join these types of groups or do you feel it has become less popular?