**Linking Up: Examining Students’ Experiences and Anxieties with**

**Professional Networking**

**Elyria Kemp**

**University of New Orleans**

**Bridget M. Bordelon**

**University of New Orleans**

**Kim H. Williams**

**University of North Texas**

**ABSTRACT**

Acquiring effective networking skills is important for business students because of its value in helping them secure internships and employment. However, students may experience insecurities and anxiety about participating in networking events. The purpose of this research is to examine college of business students’ perceptions about networking. It also explores apprehensions students have about attending networking events and how to best manage negative emotions or anxieties they may experience at these events. Findings from a two-part study offer insight into how colleges of business can take a proactive role in preparing students for developmental interactions through professional networking.

**INTRODUCTION**

Networking is an important part of growing a career. It can especially be valuable for college students in securing internships and employment. Researchers suggest that at least 60 percent of all jobs are found through networking rather than traditional job searching (Doyle, 2018). Networking activities can include joining professional organizations and clubs, participating in social events and engaging in behavior aimed at shaping future career outcomes (Forret and Dougherty, 2004). Networks enable students to learn from employers what they are seeking in potential candidates. Thus, ensuring that students have opportunities to participate in such developmental interactions, which foster learning and personal growth, is vital (D’Abate, 2010). Ultimately, students who have career knowledge and are better informed about the job market and employment trends, are able to make better career-related decisions (Gunkel & Schlaegel, 2010).

However, for many people, networking may be a daunting endeavor. It forces them out of their comfort zone, which can be intimidating initially. Some individuals even experience intense levels of anxiety known as social anxiety. Social anxiety involves a specific fear of being negatively evaluated by other people. This fear is usually linked to negative beliefs or self-deprecating thoughts that the sufferer has about himself or herself. Furthermore, general anxiety has become a growing problem for many young people. The National Institute of Mental Health estimated that 31.9% of young people have had an anxiety disorder (National Comorbidity Survey, 2017), and in a recent survey, 42% of young people revealed that they often **feel stressed** (GenYouth, 2018). Although not all individuals experience anxiety levels requiring medical attention, many people experience some level of anxiety in social situations.   
 Nevertheless, individuals can manage and even overcome anxiety in social situations. Networking is a skill that can be learned, and such a skill can be cultivated in students on college campuses. As students work to “market” themselves to external entities (Smith, 2004), networking can be instrumental in the information exchange process. However, some students may experience insecurities and anxiety about participating in such events. The purpose of this research is to examine how college of business students feel about networking, including its importance in helping them “market” themselves for career success. It also explores potential apprehensions students have about attending networking events and how to best manage negative emotions or anxieties they experience at these events.

Thus, the research that follows provides an overview of networking in the context of university career development efforts and addresses how students might work to manage insecurities and negative emotions concerning networking. Specifically, a study using a mixed methodology is enlisted to further examine students’ efforts and emotions regarding networking. In part one of the study, in-depth interviews were conducted with business students to examine their sentiments concerning professional networking. Next, students’ experiences with professional networking, including how they manage negative emotions, are examined at an actual networking event using survey methodology. Finally, implications for colleges of businesses in providing opportunities for developmental interactions through professional networking and helping students to manage anxieties associated with networking is discussed.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Professional Networking Events on College Campuses**

A growing number of colleges are creating opportunities for students, graduates and alumni to interact and gain career assistance through networking events. These events may have a clear career networking aim or another social or cultural intent which might include a visit to a gallery, happy hour, or a presentation by a prominent alumnus. Moreover, such events may vary in structure. Some events connect members by areas of industry and may be themed; others may involve “speed networking.” In addition, students are encouraged to consider other options for networking, including joining professional groups, attending association meetings and chamber of commerce events.

As networking events create engagement opportunities for students across all professional areas, they also build on the educational foundation of students. Relationships formed through networking provide individuals with opportunities to share information about potential jobs as well as connect people to new contacts with specialized career insights (de Janasz and Forret, 2008). Forret and Dougherty (2001) found that extraversion is positively related to attending networking events. In addition, individuals with higher self-esteem are more inclined to participate in extracurricular networking events. However, Butler (2014) suggested that students can apply foundational marketing knowledge to develop professional networks. According to Butler (2014), developing professional networks forces students out of their comfort zone by requiring them to meet professionals face-to-face in a professional setting. Although networking is an activity that will be an integral part of a successful business professional’s career, students might initially experience anxiety about engaging in professional networking. Subsequently, learning to manage anxieties that may accompany pursuing networking activities is paramount. The regulation of emotions can provide to be very beneficial in social settings.

**Regulating Emotions**

The experience of emotions is an integral part of human existence. Emotions can direct attention to key features of the environment, optimize sensory intake, as well as facilitate decision making can; yet yielding to emotions can also result in impulsive and destructive behavior (Gross, 2014; Troy et al., 2018). Often, it is important to regulate emotions. The psychology literature deﬁnes emotion regulation as the process of diminishing, intensifying, or simply maintaining an existing emotion (Gross, Richards & John, 2006; Barańczuk, 2019). One of the most common forms of emotion regulation involves down-regulating negative emotions (Gross & John, 2004; Tamir, Halperin, Porat, Bigman and Hasson, 2019). Lazarus (1991) suggested that when experiencing negative emotions, people try to improve their emotional state. Cialdini, Darby and Vincent (1973) postulated through the negative relief model that negative emotional states can be relieved by introducing a positive reinforcing state. Similarly, Fredrickson et al. (2000) suggested that positive emotions have the ability to “undo” the effects of negative emotions.

Core features of emotion regulation include the activation of a regulatory goal, the engagement of regulatory processes and the modulation of the emotion trajectory (Gross, 2014). The activation of an emotional goal may be intrinsic, such that an individual works to regulate his/her own emotions. Further, emotion regulation involves the engagement of the processes that are responsible for altering the emotion trajectory. These processes may be conscious or unconscious. Finally, emotion regulation may impact the emotion trajectory, or emotion dynamics, in that the magnitude, duration and responses of an emotion are affected.

Ultimately, emotion regulatory processes may be automatic or controlled, conscious or unconscious, and may have their effects at one or more points in the emotion generative process (Gross, 2014). Individuals can use emotion regulation strategies to promote subjective well-being. These emotion regulation strategies occupy several points within a process model of emotion regulation (Gross, 2015). Adaptive emotion strategies that enhance subjective well-being include cognitive reappraisal, situation modification, acceptance and mindfulness (see Figure 1). Subsequently, students might work to regulate or manage negative emotions before and during networking events by using adaptive emotion regulation strategies.

**FIGURE 1   
 ADAPTIVE EMOTION REGULATION STRATEGIES**

A screenshot of a cell phone

Description automatically generatedCognitive reappraisal is an emotion regulation strategy that involves changing the meaning of a stimulus. In the process model of emotion regulation, it entails cognitive change or appraisal, where a potentially emotion-eliciting situation is construed in such a way that changes its emotional impact (John & Gross, 2004; Ford et al. 2019). For example, if having to make repairs to a home due to a flooding incident, one might view the event as an opportunity to do some decorating and give a home a facelift as opposed to lamenting over what was destroyed in the home. Because reappraisal occurs early, it should be able to modify the entire emotional sequence before emotion response tendencies have been fully generated. Cognitive reappraisal is an emotion regulation strategy that often accompanies greater emotional well-being (Gross, 1998a; Aldao & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2012).

Similarly, situation modification is another adaptive emotion regulation strategy. It involves changing aspects of a situation to influence emotions (Gross, 1998a). Specifically, active efforts are made to directly modify a situation to alter its emotional impact. An example of situation modification might involve telling a joke in a tense situation to ease the tension.

Experimental studies of anxious participants have shown that individuals with anxiety disorders derive benefit from enlisting acceptance as an emotion regulation strategy (Eifert & Heffner, 2003). Acceptance entails allowing oneself to experience emotions without attempting to alter or suppress them ([Kashdan et al., 2006](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6188704/" \l "R40); Hamill et al. 2015). It encourages individuals to be aware of and accept how they feel rather than trying to actively change how they feel. Acceptance promotes increased self-awareness, self-compassion and behavioral flexibility ([Kashdan et al., 2006](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6188704/" \l "R40); Van Beveren, 2018). Studies have shown that the use of acceptance in daily life is associated with decreased negative affect ([Shallcross et al., 2010](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6188704/#R66)).

In addition to enlisting cognitive reappraisal, situation modification or acceptance to manage negative emotions, mindful meditation is a response-based technique used to aid in mitigating negative feeling states. Mindfulness is the human ability to be fully present and aware through the senses without being overly reactive or overwhelmed by what is going on in the environment. It constitutes an individual’s ability to consciously focus on the sensations of the present moment with openness and acceptance (Bishop et al., 2004). Mindfulness meditation is a mental training practice that involves focusing the mind on existing experiences, emotions, thoughts and sensations. It can involve practicing breathing, using mental imagery and muscle and body relaxation. Mindfulness-based training programs have been found to be effective in promoting affective well-being and overall health (Barnhofer et al., 2009; Hayes, Strosahl & Wilson, 2012). Bamber and Schneider (2016) studied a college population and concluded that although there are differences in mindfulness practices and techniques, overall mindfulness meditation has the potential for reducing stress and anxiety in college students.

In summary, students can employ adaptive emotion regulation strategies to alleviate feelings of anxiety and negative emotions while pursuing professional networking activities. Specifically, these techniques can be taught to students before a networking event. Importantly, it is paramount that students acquire the skills necessary to engage in successful networking. However, as colleges host opportunities for students to engage with professionals outside the University, understanding the needs and sentiments of students toward such activities is important. The first part of the study in this research examines the sentiments and concerns of students about networking.

**STUDY METHODOLOGY**

**Part I**

Qualitative research uses a wide range of methods in an attempt to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). Qualitative research insists that researchers assess each unique situation and select the most effective tools to tap into the bounded phenomenon. For part one of this study, qualitative methodology, including in-depth interviews were conducted with 14 students at a university in the southern part of the United States to learn about their dispositions and experience with networking. In-depth interviews allow the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the subject’s experiences and feelings (Wright, 1996).

All students were from the university’s college of business. Seven of the students were at the undergraduate level and seven were at the graduate level (see Table 1). Participants were garnered using convenience sampling. They were contacted via email by the researchers through a student subject pool to which they belonged. Ages ranged from 21-49 (***M*** =29; ***S.D.*** = 9.34) and eight participants were male and six were female. Each interview was of a semi-structured nature where participants were asked open-ended questions developed by the authors of this research. All participants were presented with the same sets of questions to lessen differences between responses while increasing consistency during data analysis. The open-ended nature of the interviews allowed participants to describe their feelings concerning networking. For example, students were asked questions such as “Have you ever attended a professional, networking event? What was it like? Do you think networking events are important? Do you ever feel nervous/anxious or uncomfortable in social, professional settings?”

Interviews lasted approximately 20-30 minutes and focused on narrative and context related to the students’ experiences with professional networking. All interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed. Participants received extra credit points in their respective classes for participating. Responses were organized, coded and analyzed using a thematic approach. Thematic analysis is a flexible research tool that has the potential to provide detailed and meaningful accounts of qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Such an approach allows for a more comprehensive discovery of individuals’ thoughts, feelings and behaviors (Thompson, 1997; Wong and King 2008).

Views and opinions were reviewed and interpreted for major themes by the authors of this research. The analysis required each researcher to read the interview and identify relevant and recurring themes emerging across interviews. Similarities, differences and inconsistencies among participants’ views and opinions were collectively discussed by the researchers. Emergent themes were finally agreed upon.

**TABLE 1**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **STUDY PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS** | | | | | | |
| **N = 14** | | | | | | |
|  |  |  |  | | |  |
| **Name (Alias)** | **Gender** | **Age** | **Ethnicity** | | | **Classification** |
| Sharon | Female | 27 | | African American | Undergraduate | |
| Bob | Male | 30 | | European American | Graduate | |
| Karlie | Female | 49 | | African American | Graduate | |
| Michael | Male | 49 | | African American | Undergraduate | |
| John | Male | 36 | | European American | Undergraduate | |
| Tim | Male | 24 | | African American | Graduate | |
| Jessica | Female | 24 | | African American | Undergraduate | |
| Diane | Female | 19 | | African American | Undergraduate | |
| Esther | Female | 25 | | Latin American | Graduate | |
| Marsha | Female | 29 | | African American | Graduate | |
| Dean | Male | 23 | | European American | Undergraduate | |
| Matthew | Male | 27 | | Asian | Graduate | |
| Carl | Male | 24 | | European American | Graduate | |
| Jason | Male | 22 | | European American | Undergraduate | |

**Part I Results – Emergent Themes**

Much insight was gleaned from participants regarding their sentiments and experiences with networking. Several themes emerged from the data from the students. Overall, students acknowledged the importance of networking, conceded to certain challenges they might encounter when networking and addressed some of the anxieties and emotional reactions they have about engaging in the activity. These themes are further delineated and discussed next.

*Importance of Networking*

There was a consensus regarding the importance of networking. Students acknowledged that networking could help them secure internships and jobs. They also recognized the value of seeking good mentorship through networking efforts.

* *The more people you actually meet is how you get your job, and that's the biggest issue, getting your foot in the door. Yes, experience gets you to a certain point, but you need to know people because they're going to be the ones who are going to recommend you for these jobs--who tell you about the jobs that are coming up... –John, undergraduate*
* *Mentorships cannot be understated. I had an opportunity to have a mentor. It was great, particularly for a person of color. Being advised as a student is a very big thing for me. — Michael, undergraduate*

Students also prioritized how important it is to develop good verbal communication skills to facilitate the networking process. This was an essential skill that students expected to acquire in the course of their business educational experience.

* *It's one of the things in business you learn: how to communicate, you get to meet more people, try to talk to more people. It's just one of the most important things, to make a good network with people.— Matthew, graduate*

Although many of the students expressed how important they felt networking was, some indicated that they had not attended networking events, despite the university providing opportunities. One student deduced that the lack of motivation to attend networking events might be related to the lack of desire for in-person contact, which he attributed to the digital age.

* *How do you motivate people to try something new? And sometimes as soon as they're done (with class), they're out the door, or they just turn on their phones and just kind of tune everybody else out. We've lost that kind of communication--peer to peer contact.— John, undergraduate*

*Challenges of Networking*

Many of the students shared potential problems they face with networking. Several cited obstacles related to communication and reservations about starting conversing with strangers. Others simply indicated they were shy.

* *The only problem with me is my communication skills. I'm still working on it. I'm not so good with communicating and initiating the conversation. I can talk when someone comes up to me and starts talking, but I cannot go up to people and start the conversation… Now that I'm here and I'm in a different country with so many new people, I want to talk to as many people as I can. I don't want to feel like I went to the United States and I barely talked to people. –Matthew, graduate*
* *I've always been really shy when it comes to any kind of career fairs. I've pretty much avoided them all of my life. I've gone to one my entire life because sometimes you don't really know what to say. -- Karlie, graduate*

However, at the core of most of the challenges cited, feelings of insecurity were referenced. Participants questioned their adequacy and whether they would be acceptable to potential employers.

* *In professional settings, sometimes I can get really in my head and I start to think that I don't meet-up, or I am not good enough. Am I a good candidate? Are these people way above my head? Am I enough? -- Bob, graduate*

Many participants ultimately shared apprehensions about their communication skills, whether they measure-up, shyness and their overall competence as challenges to networking. Some cited these as reasons for avoiding networking opportunities all together. Unfortunately, the challenges shared by participants in many cases were precluding them from partaking in an activity they unequivocally knew would be very helpful for their overall career development and success.

*Emotional Reactions to Networking*

Negative emotional responses to networking were common among respondents. Anxiety and fear were the primary emotions participants indicated they experienced while networking. In some instances, the anxiety was so debilitating for participants that it affected their performance. Some participants specifically cited having a fear of being negatively evaluated. In some cases, this fear was associated with disparaging thoughts about oneself.

* *I would feel anxiousness, fear of saying the wrong thing, fear of not saying anything at all. I'm more of an introvert, so I find it hard to communicate freely. –Sharon, undergraduate*
* *I'm tripping over words for the most part. I feel myself being talked over by the people around me, and that is something that I don’t necessarily feel comfortable with, because I'm not putting my best foot forward at that point. I can see myself stumbling and just kind of tripping over words that I wouldn't normally trip over.— John, undergraduate*

At times, this anxiety resulted in both physical and psychological reactions. Participants indicated that they would break out in sweats, tremble and develop an inability to maintain focus.

* *My palms get super sweaty. I'd be super shaky. I'd think of all of these questions to ask, and then when I get there, I would just be speechless… like a deer in headlights.--Carl, graduate*
* *I try to just focus before I speak because otherwise, I will stutter . . . or I'll just sit back and let the other person talk, and they think I'm listening, but really, I'm just like--I just can't talk. --Marsha, graduate*

One individual harbored feelings of insecurity and anxiety which was partially attributed to cultural differences. Specifically, this individual expressed misgivings about not always being familiar with the norms imposed by the majority group. In social environments, this can also be a barrier that individuals in minority groups experience. According to the minority stress model (Meyer, 2003), minority status can often be associated with adverse social conditions that put stress on minority group members.

* *Speaking from a person of color... we are still a minority in this country, and we are even more a minority in the professional arena. When you're not as familiar as you would like to be, you may feel a bit vulnerable. As a minority, you might be more apprehensive because the norms for the group—because the norms for the group may not be a norm for you. –Michael, undergraduate*

*Managing Negative Reactions/Emotions*

Although the majority of the participants indicated that they experience anxiety while networking, some did not allow such negative feelings to deter them. Instead, they shared how they made active efforts to manage or regulate negative emotions. These techniques included deep breathing, role-playing with family and friends, speaking thoughts of affirmation and simply praying for peace. For example, one participant acknowledged that he possessed a high level of generalized anxiety. He shared some of the techniques he enlisted to manage his anxiety and how he also solicited social support.

* *I'm just an anxious person in general. I do breathing…deep breaths, calming my breathing, calming my surroundings. I realize I am there for a reason. I control my breathing and engage in a lot of positive thinking….Also, going to the other students that may be there, and just kind of talking to them for a little bit and maybe getting that little extra support." –Jason, undergraduate*

Positive affirmations or “coping thoughts” were helpful to many of the participants; additionally, some participants found comfort in coming to terms with negative feelings. This self-awareness created a level of comfort.

* *You try to encourage yourself, you try to get encouragement from others… Practicing with family members, friends…-- Sharon, undergraduate*
* *I use words of affirmation…Also, it's like having that pep talk with myself to say, "Hey, I know that I have these feelings." Acknowledging that they're there and being aware of them is key. –Bob, graduate*

Finally, some participants relied on spiritual assistance to invoke inner peace.

* *I just pray. I just pray, "Lord, give me peace," I just pray. I'm spiritual, that's the only thing that works for me. I also have a little pep talk with myself, like, "Okay, calm down," "you got this.” I pray for God to help me get through it and give me the right words to say, and just to kind of take away any kind of fear or anxiety that I have.– Karlie graduate*

Findings from the in-depth interviews with participants offer insight into students’ perceptions of networking. All the students agreed on the value of networking. However, some had not taken advantage of the opportunity to engage in networking. Many students had reservations about networking, obstacles that included lack of confidence in communication skills, shyness and questions of competency. However, feelings of anxiety and fear pervaded many of the students’ thoughts about networking. The students felt that often these negative emotions contributed to less than stellar performance during networking. Nonetheless, there were some students who were learning to manage or regulate negative emotions. Each had varied strategies for doing so.

Research indicates that anxiety disorders affect close to 40 million adults in the United States or 18.1% of the population every year (Anxiety and Depression Association of America, 2019). Many people experience this anxiety during social situations. Learning to manage negative emotions is an important skill that young professional adults can work to acquire. The second part of the study in this research examines how students learn to manage negative emotions in an actual networking setting. Mastering emotion management skills can help to contribute to the success of the burgeoning professional.

**Part II**

Part two of the study in this research examined whether students might reduce the experience of negative emotions during networking by enlisting emotion regulation strategies. A small, intimate group of students were invited to participate in a networking event sponsored by the college of business at a university in the southern part of the United States. The networking event was industry-specific. Participation from students was encouraged by indicating that students “would have an opportunity to network with management professionals in [specific industry] and receive professional advice in an intimate, social setting.” Students were also informed that they would have an opportunity to (1) introduce themselves to invited industry professionals at the event (2) talk about different paths in [specific industry] (3) learn about additional skills needed in the field and (4) build their network. Students were instructed to have an elevator speech prepared, which summarized their work history and professional aspirations in 30-60 seconds and to wear business professional attire.

Twelve students were marked to attend the event, along with 11 industry professionals. Since the event was industry-specific, organizers of the event were interested in keeping the event small and intimate to enable students to have sufficient opportunities to interface with industry professionals. A week before the event, students were sent an information piece which included tips about how they might manage or regulate any anxiety or negative emotions they might experience regarding the event (see Figure 2). In the information piece, students were encouraged to handle these feeling states in the following ways: (1) accept and acknowledge any negative emotions, (2) reframe the situation (take a positive perspective on the situation, (3) modify the situation (adjust or change aspects of the situation to make it more comfortable) and (4) reflect and meditate. Examples of how to carry out each of the strategies were provided. Reframing the situation was akin to employing the emotion regulation strategy of cognitive appraisal, whereas modifying the situation was commensurate to situation modification.

There was full participation from the 12 students slated to attend the event. Seventy-five percent of the students were female and 25% were male. The ages of the students ranged from 21-34, and the average age was 24.7 (***S.D.*** = 3.28). Thirty-three percent of the students were European American, 33% were African American, 26% were Asian American and 8 % were Latin American. Eighty-three percent of the students were graduates and 17% were undergraduates.

The networking event lasted two hours. Following the event, each student was asked to complete a survey. In the survey, students confirmed that they had received the information piece with the tips on how to manage their emotions. Next, students were asked, “Do you feel like you made efforts to manage or reduce any anxiety or negative emotions you may have experienced because of this event?” This item was anchored by “made no effort” to “actively made efforts” and was measured on a 5-point scale. Students were then asked about the effectiveness of the information received. This was measured using three items: “the information”…”made me feel calmer,” “made me feel better,” “made me think about things in a positive way.” These items were anchored by “not so much to “very much so” and was measured using a 5-point Likert scale.

Next, students were asked if they recalled using any of the approaches delineated in the information they received a week before the event. Again, these techniques included acceptance, reframing the situation, modifying the situation and meditation/reflection. Finally, students were asked to share comments about their experience at the networking event in an open-ended question.

**FIGURE 2**

**EMOTION REGULATION TIPS**

A screenshot of a cell phone

Description automatically generated

**Part II Results**

All students confirmed that they had received the information which provided tips on how to manage negative emotions. The mean score for the effort expended on managing anxiety or negative emotions was 3.5 ***(S.D***. = 1.51; 5-point scale). On average, the students rated the effectiveness of the information they received at a 3.7 (***S.D.*** = 1.39; 5-point scale).

Findings indicated that 50% of the students engaged in 2 or more of the four emotion regulation techniques suggested (see Figure 3). Specifically, 67% of the students engaged in acceptance, 33% reframed the situation, 33% enlisted situation modification and 42% practiced meditation (see Figure 4).

Several students shared comments about their experience at the networking event. Below are representative comments:

* *Everything was just so perfectly aligned and set the perfect mood for the occasion…..the food, wine... Going to career fairs has always been utterly stressful and intimidating for me. [I have been] brought out of my shyness. I’m so excited about what the future holds for me...*

**FIGURE 3**

**EMOTION REGULATION TECHNIQUES**

**FIGURE 4**

**NUMBER OF EMOTION REGULATION TECHNIQUES USED**

* *Thank you so much for putting on the event tonight. I really enjoyed meeting…professionals in the community. I also loved the tip sheet you gave us regarding anxiety in social situations. It helped a lot.*
* *…This event was very helpful, I feel I am almost free from the fear of talking to new people now, and also learned how to build connections and communicate well.*

**DISCUSSION**

Networking plays an integral role in the “marketing” of a business professional. Acquiring effective networking skills is important for business students. This research examined college of business students’ perceptions about networking and explored ways in which they regulate negative emotions experienced during the networking process. Findings from part one of the study in this research indicate that students recognize the value of networking but experience challenges when engaging in such activity. For example, many students acknowledged that they lacked confidence in communication skills and had misgivings about their competence.

One of the most considerable obstacles students discussed was the feeling of anxiety and fear that often accompanied their networking experience. They felt that these negative emotions impacted their overall success. As a result, the second part of the study in this research addressed some of the anxieties and emotions experienced by students during networking. It examined how students learn to manage negative emotions in an actual networking event. Specifically, students were encouraged to enlist adaptive emotion regulation strategies, including acceptance, cognitive reappraisal (reframing the situation), situation modification and meditation. Findings indicated that 50 percent of the students used two or more of the four emotion regulation strategies. The strategies that were used the most were acceptance and meditation. Perhaps, acceptance was a frequently used emotion regulation technique because it was easy to implement. Acceptance encourages the individual to be aware of and accept how they feel rather than trying to actively change how they feel. It promotes increased self-awareness and the nonjudgmental aspect of acceptance may decrease the metacognitions that often accompany negative mood states—such as negative evaluations of the self ([Keng et al., 2016](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6188704/" \l "R42); [Troy et al., 2013](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6188704/#R76)). Subsequently, students may have been able to accept their emotions and not berate or render themselves incompetent for having such feelings. Furthermore, meditation may have also been an effective emotion regulation strategy because it allowed students to consciously focus on the sensations of the present moment (Bishop et al., 2004). Practicing techniques such as deep breathing and muscle relaxation may have been activities which the students could easily carry out. Nonetheless, implementing emotion regulation strategies to manage emotions proved to be fruitful for students. Several students even commented on the positive experience they had at the networking event and that the tips they were encouraged to use to manage negative emotions were helpful.

Since learning to develop networks is essential to becoming a successful business professional, colleges must ensure they are providing opportunities for students to network with professionals outside the university. According to recent data, over 80% of students indicate that the prospect of a job is a major factor in their decision to enroll in college; however, only 34% feel confident about their ability to participate in the job market (Gallup and the Strada Education Network, 2017). While 46% of students say their academic advisers provide helpful guidance about course selection, only 28% report academic advisers are helpful in identifying career options. However, students who speak with faculty or staff at their school about career options have more confidence in their preparation for the workforce (Gallup and the Strada Education Network, 2017). Colleges can help to bridge this gap by providing career-specific support to university students. This will enable them to exhibit greater confidence in their future workforce prospects.

However, it is not simply enough to provide networking opportunities for students. Findings from this research indicate that many students lacked confidence in communication skills and had reservations about their competence. This could be an opportunity for faculty and staff mentors to reach out and engage students. Furthermore, colleges must also work to ensure that students have the necessary skills to be successful. Helping students to prepare the proverbial elevator speech and providing advice on communicating in such environments is also important. In addition, colleges should be candid about encouraging students to manage feelings of anxiety and negative emotions concerning these events. Providing information to students and coaching them on how to handle emotions is paramount.

**LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Several potential areas of fruitful research might be pursued concerning student networking. The first part of the study in this research focused on students’ perceptions of networking. Future studies might explore the thoughts of industry professionals who participate in networking events. For example, industry professionals might be asked to share their views on the value of such events and how students might best prepare for them. In addition, other qualitative study designs might explicitly investigate the use of the emotion regulation strategies highlighted in this research (i.e., acceptance, reframing the situation, modifying the situation and meditating) by participants to determine if and how such strategies are used.

The second part of the study in this research was performed during an intimate networking event which made only a small sample size available. Future research might investigate the use of emotion regulation strategies at a larger networking event where a larger sample of students can be obtained. Subsequently, an experimental methodology might be employed where a control group can be utilized, and the various emotion regulation strategies could be compared for their efficacy. Personality traits could also be examined in relation to the use of specific emotion regulation strategies (Barańczuk, 2019); differences between outcomes might also be compared between students’ majors or courses study within the college of business. Furthermore, results from part two of the study indicated that students at the networking event were more inclined to use passive emotion regulation strategies such as acceptance and meditation. Before the networking event, individuals were sent information that included tips about how they could manage negative emotions during the networking event. Additional research might include interpersonal training regarding the various emotion strategies. This would provide a “personal touch” for students and might increase and improve the efficacy of using the various types of emotion regulation strategies.

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