

## **ABSTRACT**

**DISSERTATION:** A Collective Biography of the Founders of the American Association of University Women

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This archival study used constructivist grounded theory to document the educational and professional lives of seventeen women who founded the Association of Collegiate Alumnae (ACA) in 1881, which later became known as the American Association of University Women (AAUW). This study resulted in a collective biography of the seventeen women which describes how they gained access to higher education; how they developed careers in higher education; the relationships between the subjects; and what lasting contributions they made to education for women and women's place in American society. Several of the subjects struggled to afford higher education as well as gain access to institutions of higher learning. They worked within the established system to create space for women by focusing on areas of learning that were of little interest to their male counterparts. The data revealed that the women were connected through their volunteer work in women's organizations and through their duties as faculty and administrators in institutions of higher education. By strategic use of their positions they advanced access to educational and professional opportunities for women by developing a

network of women in the field of education including colleagues, students, and women's organizations. This network was, in part, developed by teaching practices that included extensive mentoring of students who eventually became colleagues within the network.