A Passing Acquaintance’s Impact: Interacting with Weak Ties affects Well-Being

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Introduction

Strong social bonds are pertinent to our happiness. However, little research has considered the role played by those whom we interact with more often, yet have less intimate relationships with.

Methods

Participants: First-year students, N = 60 (44 living on-campus, 14 living off-campus)
Procedure: Counted social interactions for 3 days in September and 3 days again in November; answered self-report questionnaires based on well-being

Materials

Strong Ties: close, know well, would confide in

Weak Ties: not close, don't know well, unlikely to confide in

Results – On vs. Off Campus

In a typical day, we have more interactions with “weak ties” than “strong ties”. Do the number of such interactions result in increased well-being?

Strong ties are stable over time, but weak tie interactions are prone to increase or decrease based on other factors.

Results – Well-Being

Changes (i.e. residuals) in the amount of daily weak tie interactions predict the level of one’s well-being or positive affect. The same pattern holds for levels of flourishing, a measure of life satisfaction. Also, marginally for a sense of community.

Conclusions

Did an increase in interactions with weak ties predict an increase in well-being?

Students who interacted with more weak ties during the day experienced more positive affect. Those who lived on campus also felt a greater sense of community and social support, and felt less loneliness. This effect is likely a result of the many social networks more readily available for those students who live in residence.

Implications and Next Steps

Why do tie interactions drop in November? We could research environmental influences and conditions such as midterms, flu season and weather patterns.

Changes in strong tie interactions are significantly correlated with more positive affect and less loneliness, however they are not associated with one’s sense of community or with flourishing.

Students who live on-campus have significantly more weak tie interactions, but no more strong tie interactions, than students who live off-campus.

Students who live on-campus have higher social well-being on several measures compared to students living off-campus.

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