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The Strength of Weak Ties

In *The Strength of Weak Ties* by Mark S. Granovetter, the author discusses the spread of information in a social network. Strong ties are people that the central person knows well, and who know each other. Weak ties are people that the central person is acquainted with, but does not socialize with to the extent of the strong ties. Absent ties are characterized as “nodding” relationships. These include people that you would nod to on the street but have no more extensive conversations. These definitions are evaluated based on the amount of time, emotional strength, mutual confidence, and reciprocal services between the two people. For the purpose of this paper, Granovetter defines relationships as symmetrical, in order to reduce complexity.

Absent ties are almost never characterized separately from nonexistent ties in the analysis, which I find to be a detriment. These relationships are often formed between people who have something in common, and could distinguish someone from another who is either unknown or even disliked.

I found it interesting that the first people who use a new product or concept are often on the fringe of society. To diffuse throughout the rest of the population, the product or concept must first be accepted by a central person who has strong positive connections with others. I had not previously considered that social networks could affect how and when something could diffuse through a population.

One thing that I would do differently is in the categorizations for frequency of contact. For a study on how people got their job information passed on to them, Granovetter used three classifications. Often was at least twice a week, occasionally was more than once a year but less than twice a week, and rarely was less than once a year. These statistics are very skewed. There should be at least one more division, or extend the range for often. I feel that the people I see once a week, or a few times a month are very different than those I see twice a year. Also, the ranges provided are very different, and twice a week is a very small sample, especially compared to yearly amounts. Personally, the only people I see more than twice a week are people I have classes with or work with. People are not likely to receive job information from people they work with, so that eliminates most of a category. The statistics found are still interesting, especially since 27.8% were in the “rarely” category. However, the findings could be much more meaningful with more divisions in time, or with detailed descriptions of each person's social networks.
In *Visualizing Social Networks* by Linton C. Freeman, the author provides a history of imagery in social analysis.

In the 1930s social networks were drawn by hand. Jacob L. Moreno revolutionized the field by using directed graphs to show the networks. He used color, shape and location to emphasize different characteristics. Moreno also introduced a general rule for creating sociograms, “The fewer the number of lines crossing, the better the sociogram.” I find this rule to be useful for both clarity and simplicity of a diagram. It is interesting that although technology has advanced so much from this period, diagrams often still use the same concepts that were introduced 70 years ago. Moreno also had positions on a graph correlated with positions of the actual people in physical space (ie. locations of football player positions on a field). This can introduce a new idea to a graph, or reinforce an idea that is already portrayed in a different manner.

In 1938 Lundberg and Steele introduced a new component to social visualizations. They added size to their diagrams, using it to stress importance of a quality. These ideas introduced by Moreno and Lundberg and Steele are still in use today, and compromise the most important physical characteristics of a social image.

The advent of computers added two important things to social visualizations. Animation, especially from the user's choice, is a great benefit to displaying different types of information. I think that animation is especially useful to show changes over time, as it is a self explanatory and understandable visual depiction of time passing. Showing things in three dimensions is another thing that is made easier by the advent of computer technology. Personally, I find that three dimensions can often confuse images. Three dimensions work best if you take into consideration the previously defined rule of no crossing lines. Three dimensional diagrams almost always have crossing lines which I find confuses the intended depiction. Animation can be used to navigate a three dimensional environment. While this is better than a static picture, if you rely on the user to navigate an environment you cannot depend on them to notice the same results that you may have found. For example, they may not look at the image from above, which may show a useful image.
In The Network Community: An Introduction by Barry Wellman, the author discusses the commonly repeated fallacy that “things aren't what they used to be.” Wellman argues that people see the past as idealistic, when the past was just as fraught with troubles as the modern era. He mainly discusses this in context of community. People throughout time have worried that community is disintegrating, while in actuality community may change and morph but it is just as strong now as it ever was.

There are two basic types of community studies. You can either base a study off an area, or off a person. By basing a study off an area you can examine a large number of connections between many different people. However, you don't see relationships that extend beyond the locality. This can lead to fears that people aren't as connected, if there aren't as many relationships in the specified area, while in actuality the people could be well connected with many people outside the area. This is especially true in modern society with telephone and internet to ease the trouble of long distance communication. If you base a study off of a person, you can see these widely spaced relationships, but you do not get the analysis of the relationships between more than one person.

In the paper, the author describes the interpersonal ties with a person in an example of the usual use of a personal community study. He describes the central person as a “typical North American.” I found this particularly striking, as people can be defined by many characteristics. For example, a 20 year old man from San Fransisco could be typical for that area, but contrast highly with a 50 year old woman from Boise, Idaho. I think this is a detraction from the benefits provided by a personal study. By basing a study around one person, you are subject to any discrepancies in that one person's social life. These discrepancies could be highly interesting and lead to valuable findings, but only if you take them into consideration.

There is a diagram in this paper about the typical personal network of an East Yorker. I found this diagram to be confusing. I would not place images of the people on the diagram, as it clutters the lines. Also, by having the lines come from one hand or another it lends significance where there is none. The lines cross over each other multiple times where it is unnecessary. Also, the divisions are mutually exclusive. If a person is both kin and a friend where should they be placed? Or if you work with with a neighbor?