

The Network Community: An Introduction

Barry Wellman

In the first half of *The Network Community*, the author gives a historical analysis of social communities that have existed. The author states the *Community Question* whereby the activities of large scale social systems and smaller community networks affect the smaller (or larger) spheres of community they are a part of. Introducing the ideologies of communism and capitalism and the consequences of industrialization, bureaucratization and urbanization, the author proposes the different concerns over the loss of strong interpersonal relationships, establishment of superficial relationships, and as a result, a disheartening loss of community thereof, that have been debated over in the past. However, a point of token is that the author reaffirms, by sheer optimism that, "Wherever they have looked, researchers have found thriving communities." (Pg2). This reaffirms that fact that regardless of what revolutions occur, in terms of society, economy, polity or technology, communities will find new ways to re-invent itself and fit into the societal strata – such is human nature.

In the latter half of the chapter, the authors examine the community question from a network perspective stating that they are neither like communally or contractually tied, instead they redefine the concept of community from the previously held views. One significant feature of this network community is that they exist without being confined to geography and are typified by network members (nodes) and the strength of ties between these nodes. The author does a thorough analysis in characterizing the network community.

Throughout the reading, although this chapter doesn't allude to it, it was difficult not to relate this to "networking" as we know it today, be it in the physical or virtual sphere of communication. Each of these share similarities and differences and can make for interesting research topics. The proliferation of online social networking today has not resulted in a loss of community, in fact, it has led to newer definitions and reshaping of physical communities too. What is most interesting is that, this body of literature lays a foundation in understanding community behavior and networking that is necessary before embarking upon any study, as a researcher, or the construction of a social space, as a creator.

The final topic – Networks in the Global Village that illustrates Malvina Reynolds' verse about North American Life is myopic and prejudiced. Although the tacky-tacky boxes may refer to impersonal places where people live, what goes on inside these "boxes" is a world of difference to her claim of "all the same." If only people's lives were all the same, the world would be much easier to deal with.

The Strength of Weak Ties

Mark S. Granovetter

This paper explores interpersonal relationships and the generalizability of these person-to-person relationships over a broader set. The purpose of the author to carry out this research is convincing and almost opportune in this day and age of social networking. Also the applications of this research seem useful in an individualistic and a communal level. Meaning, it can attempt to map out interpersonal interactions that can throw light upon one's sociability in a larger setting.

What is interesting in this paper are the constructs that the author proposes to measure the strength of ties, namely, amount of time spent, emotional intensity, intimacy, and reciprocal of services. On a general level, these constructs seem internally valid, as these would be the considerations one would take while evaluating their ties to place friends, family, parents, relatives, coworkers and acquaintances in a hierarchy of importance or priority. However, the author makes an important point about negative ties. While the measurement of ties on time spent and similarities seem plausible, they are inadequate. As it is possible that time-spent and similarities-shared can be a measure for gauging the strength of a dyadic tie, it is inadequate to measure if that tie is indeed "strong." Examples of this could exist in classroom settings, high-school cliques, political parties and ties that exist when the individuals have never met in person (ties that are formed over geographically separated areas through the internet). Also there is a possibility that two individuals could spend large amounts of time and share similar tastes, and still remain acquaintances.

This research, most certainly, is a step towards exploring why and how people form relationships and what relationships grow from weak to strong over time, or vice-versa. Some questions that are worth asking and/testing are if the constructs used to measure the strength of relationships are variable and if they are, then could variations in measurements lead to a difference in the strength of ties?

Visualizing Social Networks

Linton C. Freeman

“Visualization is one of only two factors that are responsible for the explosive development of all modern science. The other is measurement.” – Alfred Crosby (1997)

This is an enlightening quote and is apt in bringing this article to perspective. *Visualizing Social Networks* is a historical documentation of the different types of social network visualizations that have been proposed and adopted over the years. It displays the various visualizations from the simplest hand-drawn ones to the most complex ones generated through programming. It was most interesting to see the different types of visualizations emerge with the advancement of technology and the progressive nature of scientific exploration.

I admit that although some of the visualizations were complex to comprehend, the ones I got most out of are the most basic point and line forms of display. This information helps one to understand the foundations of graphically representing social relationships and proves to be a simple yet systematic way to go about mapping social structures. As much of what is said about novel, hand-drawn, small beginnings, isn't enough.

I was impressed by most of the hand-drawn, or computer generated patterns that explicated social relationships, example: Friendship Choices Among Fourth Graders, Positive Negative Choices in a Football Team, Lady Bountiful and Cliques. Relationships attain a whole new meaning on viewing these structures when graphically represented.

This paper serves as a beginners guide or handy booklet of examples to anyone seeking inspiration in visualizing social networks.