This reading is about modern day community ties. It explains the changes in communication technology and the corresponding effect these changes have had on communities. Communities have changed on a local and global scale. On the local scale, people are associating themselves with individuals across towns, nations and oceans. This juxtaposes the perceived localized neighborly communities of past. The nature of personal relationships has also changed over time. People associate different social groups with different types of support. The context of these social communities has also changed. Over time, people have abandoned public spaces for communal gatherings for the privacy and intimacy of one’s own home.

According to the author, public gatherings have diminished and given way to more private gatherings. The house is the new bowling alley. It is used to hold social gatherings and bring a community of friends together. I believe homes are more used to bring the openess of public spaces into the privacy of homes. The advent of internet chat rooms and newsgroups has allowed people to seek out similar minded individuals and to communicate with these people from anywhere in the world. The home is the only place to have that outreach. Paradoxically, one’s ability to socialize can be diminished by going out. In this sense, people still meet in public spaces. The only difference is that now the public space is virtual and exists inside a computer inside a house. As for people holding private parties in their homes, I do not know if this is a relatively new trend. Certainly men were once more prone to drink after work with coworkers during “happy hour”. This seems more like a trend in a misogynistic culture. This trend seems to have been diminished with the advent of gender equality and social awareness of the consequences of drinking and driving.

The paper mentioned that social ties are sparser than they once were. People have segregated groups of social ties. Each group fulfills a different role in a person’s life. Some groups might offer companionship and others might offer emotional aid. I do not feel that I have created specialized relationships between different groups of my friends. I have a small group of core friends that I regularly talk to and my family. I treat each group roughly the same. I could simply be an exception to a macro trend. I am rather introverted, and that could affect my social ties.

I do not agree that community gatherings have become feminized. I have seen no evidence that wives are more likely to arrange social gathers than husbands in my personal life. I understand that this is a stereotype often describing urban housewives.
This reading introduces a theoretical model for communities and then applies that model on a macro scale. It defines all relationships between individuals as either weak or strong. The main focus of this paper is the usefulness of weak ties on society and individuals. It contradicts previous studies which extol the effects of strong ties at the expense of ignoring weaker ties. According to this paper, weak ties are essential in society. They serve to connect separated community clusters and open cliques to outsiders. They can help people meet new people as well as find work.

This paper outlined a few interesting studies. I was particularly interested in the booklet chain letter forwarding work. Participants were given a booklet and the name of a person and the instructions to get the booklet to that person. They were only allowed to mail the booklet to one person and give them the same instructions. They then calculated what percentage of their booklets arrived at the final destination and how many hops it took to get there. Weaker ties were found to be more reliable in interracial booklet forwarding. This seems like an oddity. I suppose stronger ties are less likely to know where to forward the booklet next. When two people have a stronger connection, they probably share more friends in their own personal networks. If a person resorts to sending the booklet to someone they have a strong connection with, then there is probably a greater degree of separation between the original person and the target person. This process can be seen as a hill-climbing algorithm. If the original person sends the booklet to someone they know well and that is the optimal connection, then there must be a ways to go to reach the intended target.

The model developed in this paper seems to rely on graphing theory. Individuals are all mapped out and connections are drawn between them. I believe these connections should be directed. They are undirected as presented, but this is an oversight. Relationships are not all reciprocal. Many people truly believe they share a personal connection with celebrities. This explains fan mail. Journalists have many followers who rely on them for information, yet the journalists do not know their readers personally. This is an example of a one way weak tie.

The ideas presented in this paper seem somewhat dated with the proliferation of digital communication. The internet has changed many aspects of community. Everyone is truly connected to everyone else with an internet connection. The idea of graphing weak ties is less fruitful when the graph is so dense. It is almost meaningless to see how everyone is connected when there is a weak connection between so many groups. Web filter sites like Digg or Reddit connect millions of diverse groups together. Everyone seems to be friends with everyone through Facebook. Twitter allows people to broadcast anything to everyone around the globe. Graphing theory makes sense when people have a finite number of weak ties, but it loses its meaning when there are too many connections. Every clique is weakly tied to every other clique through the digital medium.
Nigel Ray
Title: Visualizing Social Networks
Author: Freeman

This was a nice introduction into the evolution of social network visualizations. This paper first describes Moreno’s seminal work on graph visualizations. He connected data points, represented as circles, with lines. Eventually he evolved his approach to incorporate directed graphs. From this basis, the paper moves forward in time. It mentions the evolution of graphing visualizations. They have become more robust and more descriptive. The advent of computer assisted graphics has further developed the art of 3D graph visualizations. What once were real objects now are 3D representations flattened to a 2D screen.

I like the idea of extending the simple graph structure to convey more information. In this paper, several techniques are presented. Different shapes are used for the nodes, the graph is overlaid on top of a map, and pictures are used to represent the nodes. This added information is a nice change from the stale circles and lines view. It is also intuitive to group similar objects together. Representing different attributes based on some characteristic of a node is immediately useful. An outside viewer immediately recognizes the distinction between dissimilar nodes. Coloring the nodes also adds a level of freedom in describing a node. In my work with visualizing a newsgroup, I colored each node based on its group. I also used the geometric shape and size of the nodes to show how often they used the newsgroup and for what purpose. I felt that these added degrees of freedom were crucial in conveying meaningful social network data.

One aspect of a visualization that I have not paid much attention to is focus. A visualization should draw attention to its important aspects and data. In this paper, there is a section on using a bull’s-eye view of a chart. Concentric rings are drawn around the center of a graph. This focuses the viewer to the center of a graph. Another topic presented in this paper is shading. The focus of a graph has a lighter shaded background. These simple techniques can make a visualization more intuitive and spotlight the important details. My previous visualizations have treated their data equally. There was no focus being drawn. The center of the visualization for my newsgroup visualization was a meaningful as any other location. I should have arranged my graph clusters better and perhaps shaded the background to spotlight the center of each graph cluster. I believe this could have made for a more impressive presentation.

I like the factor analysis work. It is something that I should learn more about. Clustering was a big issue when I was trying to sort newsgroup users into groups. I used a simple Matlab script to do this work, but a more rigorous approach could provide a more accurate data visualization.