

Granovetter M S. The strength of weak ties. *Amer. J. Sociol.* 78:1360-80, 1973.
[Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD]

Because one's acquaintances are less likely linked than one's close friends, they connect individuals to other social circles, providing a vital resource for such tasks as finding jobs. Cliques are bridged by weak ties, which are therefore crucial for transmission of information and for social cohesion. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI)® indicates that this paper has been cited in over 285 publications.]

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Like other mid-1960s Harvard sociology graduate students now identified with the "social networks" perspective, I was fascinated by Harrison White's lectures. I was especially struck by White's description of work by Rapoport and Horvath¹ showing that if you traced a network through the seventh and eighth sociometric choices of junior high students, you reached many more people than when tracing through first and second choices, who tended to choose one another.

I saw an important undeveloped theme—that weak ties were crucial for individuals' instrumental needs and for overall social cohesion. This idea was reinforced by my knowledge of analogous physical phenomena: weak hydrogen bonds that hold together large molecules, and weak forces in particle physics. (These physical analogies never found their way into my papers; I saw no obvious general principle common to the social and physical structures and was wary of appearing megalomaniacal.) The clincher came while carrying out interviews for my thesis on how people found jobs; my question about whether the person whose information led to a job was "a friend" often provoked the rejoinder: "No, just an acquaintance."

I submitted a long, discursive paper, "Alienation reconsidered: the strength of weak ties," including material on social psychology, labor markets, community organization, and anthropology, to the *American Sociological Review* in August 1969. The crushing reply

came in December from two referees apparently chosen for their expertise on "alienation." One chided me for making recourse to this concept only because it had become an "eximious sociological *cul-de-sac*" (some day I shall look up "eximious") and concluded that the paper should not be published.

Still a graduate student, I was terribly discouraged. Yet, the paper was very popular and enjoyed a vigorous underground circulation for several years. Wisely dropping "alienation" from the title, I resubmitted it to the *American Journal of Sociology* in 1972. When the paper appeared in May 1973, it provoked a stream of correspondence exceeding my greatest expectations. My revisions for the journal changed the paper in what I have come to think of as a typical way: many interesting detours of the original paper were trimmed out in favor of a tight, logical argument. Though the result was no doubt better in many ways, the original version continued to have its adherents and was itself published in 1982 in *Connections*.²

I think the paper has been widely cited because it appeared at a time of rapidly growing interest in the social network perspective and was one of the few such papers to take a broad theoretical approach. Abstracting away from the content of ties means that there is an almost endless set of relevant topics; moreover, the fundamental argument is extremely simple yet counter-intuitive and paradoxical, thus giving the impression, deserved or not, of a simple, self-evident truth not previously understood. Because I avoided measurement issues, many writers could use my argument to interpret their results without a complex empirical verification procedure. (This may be a case of what my colleague, Stephen Cole, calls the functions of "limited obscurantism.")

The paper had a second life when discovered in the mid- to late-1970s by the discipline of communications, which interpreted the argument in terms of the "information-redundancy" of strong-tie networks. In 1980 Everett Rogers, then president of the International Communications Association (ICA), invited me to prepare a paper assessing the empirical status of the weak-ties hypothesis for a special session of the ICA meetings. This paper was published in 1983 in *Sociological Theory* as "The strength of weak ties: a network theory revisited."³ Interest continues, and serious work on measurement has finally been taken up.⁴

1. Rapoport A & Horvath W. A study of a large sociogram. *Behav. Sci.* 6:279-91, 1961.
2. Granovetter M. Alienation reconsidered: the strength of weak ties. *Connections* 5:4-16, 1982. (Cited 1 time.)
3. ———. The strength of weak ties: a network theory revisited. *Sociol. Theory* 1:201-33, 1983.
4. Marsden P & Campbell K. Measuring tie strength. *Social Forces* 63:482-501, 1984.