

# The Gendered Transition to College: The Role of Culture in Ego-Network Evolution

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# Stratification and the College Experience

- College education matters for strat outcomes, but mechanism for influence less clear
  - Focus on enrollment and graduation; college experience a black box (Stevens et al. 2008)
  - Gender gap seems related to behaviors *during* college (Buchmann and DiPrete 2008)
  - Few leads for theorizing strat. processes

# Network Approach to College Experience

- Tie formation is crucial to adjusting to college (Stevens et al. 2008; Clydesdale 2007)
  - The #1 concern of freshmen
- Tie formation is ego-network evolution
  - An area of increasing interest to network theorists (Doreian and Stokman 1997)

# New approach to net evolution

- Qualitative approach to tie formation can inform the rational-actor theories that drive evolution models (Doreian 2006)
- Understanding ego-network evolution can inform variety of sociological issues
  - Some important social issues are specific to ego-network change
    - E.g. Sageman 2004
    - Transitions in higher education

# Culture and Network Formation

- Ego net evolution undertheorized, but culture seems to influence network formation (DiMaggio 1987; Lizardo 2006)
  - This literature has focused on tastes
- Gender norms shape tie formation
  - ‘Network know-how’
    - Encouraged in girls more than in boys
    - In early grades, girls have more social skills which contribute to their academic success (DiPrete and Jennings 2008)

# Institutional Culture and Network Formation

- A network structure can be a cultural priority
  - “It takes a [dense network] to raise a child”
  - Want to go to school with “people who share my values” [homogeneity]

Elite universities have 2 cultural priorities with network ramifications

1. Diversity (itself a network structure)
  - Availability (Fischer 2008)
  - Ideology/value

## 2. Elite U's Foster Sparse Networks

- Individual Achievement

- Qualities leading to individ. achievement can be at odds with maintaining bonds that sustain dense networks

- “I can’t take this midterm because I stayed up with friends last night”

- Incentives (grades, social approval) promotes this network structure & its values

# Reproduction of Network Advantage

- Elite U's foster sparse, diverse networks
  - Incentives create pressure on all students to adopt this structure
- Sparse, diverse nets are those of the adult upper-class (Goldstein and Warren 2000)
- Analagous to Bourdieu's (1984) argument for cultural capital

# Who Is At Risk for a Difficult Transition?

- Students with sparser, more diverse nets advantaged
  - Relative to dense, homog nets will experience rupture
- For dense-net students, men more disadvantaged than women
  - Gender norms encourage ‘network know-how’ in women

# Hypotheses

1. After one year at an elite university, students' networks should be sparser and more diverse
2. Men should experience a more difficult transition than women, and
3. Men from dense networks should have the most difficult transition of all

# Data and Methods

- From a larger study of social networks and attitude change
- Includes 2 survey waves from an initial sample of 512 incoming students at elite university
- E-survey data from a subset of 100 and interview data from a further subset of 43
- Measured network density and diversity
  - Diversity uses Agresti's IQV

# Density Decreases, Diversity Increases

**Table 1: Network Change in Sample.**

	Time 1		Time 2	
Density	.72	(.25)	.57	(.25)
Racial Diversity	.26	(.27)	.39	(.29)
Relig. Diversity	.44	(.30)	.56	(.27)
Sex Diversity	.69	(.34)	.72	(.34)
World Diversity	.22	(.29)	.56	(.27)

# Nets and Cultural Mandates Produced Differences in Adjustment

- Men and women responded to network change in different ways
  - Response patterned by networks, especially for men
- Women were “tie entrepreneurs,” invested heavily in a few ties
  - “I have two best friends here that I spend all of my time with.” (Edith, density=1.0)
  - Often invoked familial or romantic metaphors

# From “superficial” to “well-meaning”

- Developing ties not easier for women, but more likely to persist
- Reframe to move from reaction to “meta” or philosophical approach to Ivy students’ shortcomings
- “People are afraid to talk to each other. I realized that they want to talk but just because it is not a social norm they avoid doing it. But once you start talking to them, they are nice.”

“I try to teach them something from my culture. For example that giving is more important than taking. I show them how I can get satisfaction by doing or giving to them... I help them with [their] papers. First I noticed that one of them was just using me. My roommate told me that she definitely thinks I am stupid, and she [the other friend] is just using me. But I was patient, and she realized that I am a real friend, and [now] we are very close to each other.” (Elif, density=.17)

- Having fewer ties to maintain seemed to work better in the university environment
  - Quicker to set up a buffer to stress of transition
  - Fewer people to make demands on you
  - You can be choosier and hence have more satisfying ties

# Dense-net men had most difficult transition

- Related to tie formation strategy
  - Men from dense nets relied on big group
- Tried to reproduce the dense nets that felt most comfortable
  - Often were disappointed, sometimes embittered
- Difficult to reproduce group in university environment

# Dense-Net Men Seek Dense-Net Social Life

“I miss the group. And I think that’s shown by the fact that as soon as I go home I fall back into the group. Like, I was home over the weekend, and I called each one of my close friends again. We wanted to all get together ...yeah, I miss that...I’ve been here for nine months, and I haven’t found like *even five or six* people that I’m that close with, so I’ve got like one or two...yeah, I miss that about home.”

--Aaron (density=1.0)

# Ivy's Individual Achievement Norm Impedes Tie Formation for Dense-Net Men

About the people I met here I do not spend much time with them. They are different because most of them are goal-oriented and somehow selfish...I do not try to communicate with new people. I am not sure whom I should trust as a friend...

(Ivan, density=1.0)

I feel like I'm a meaner person here, actually...I feel like I was a lot nicer in high school, but here I feel like if I'm nice people are gonna take advantage of me, so I...feel more aggressive towards people here. I don't like that. (Brett, density=1.0)

“One of my Hong Kong friends is actually quite a fake person. [He laughs.] I wouldn’t be friends with him, but um, but it’s like...um...[pause] I don’t know, it’s just that...because you’re from Hong Kong, therefore, you know, we chill together sometimes. I mean, it just becomes a reason; like, it wouldn’t be a reason when we were back in Hong Kong. I would just say, ‘okay, I’m not going to be your friend because, you know, you’re fake.’ It wasn’t an issue, like being Hong Kongese in Hong Kong. It’s very interesting – I never thought about this before.”

(Alistair, density=1.0)

“It’s not Ivy’s fault; it’s totally my fault...The environment is fine... and it’s just, like, me who’s closing myself, and there are abundant opportunities for basically whatever things you want to do... And it’s just me who’s, like, saying no, I’m not going to do that...Ivy is such a dynamic place, it’s not boring like [the British town where he attended boarding school] – we had to turn to the friendships there ... but Ivy is – Ivy and the world – is so dynamic, so unconstrained, that probably wouldn’t happen.”

# Conclusion: Dense-Net Men Are Doubly Disadvantaged

- Net structure makes transition jarring
- Gender norms leave men ill-equipped to form friendships outside of a big group
- Dense networks disproportionately found among working-class, lower income, & ethnic minorities (Goldstein and Warren 2000)
  - New direction for higher ed stratification?
- Culture and networks interpenetrate to produce gender differences in the transition to higher ed