

PROPINQUITY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF FRIENDSHIPS

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Introduction

Connections are not mere coincidences; they develop gradually through time and the serendipity of shared experiences. The concept of propinquity illustrates how closeness, whether in person or in the digital realm, facilitates the development of connections. While physical proximity refers specifically to being geographically near someone, propinquity is broader, encompassing not only physical closeness but also psychological, social, and even digital nearness that increases opportunities for connection. This concept, while appearing straightforward, significantly influences the ways in which individuals connect, trust, and form relationships with one another. This paper explores the concept of propinquity as described by psychologists and examines how research in this field enhances one's understanding of how friendships begin in various contexts.

Understanding Propinquity

Propinquity refers to a feeling of closeness that has a number of different forms, including both physical and mental ones. Furthermore, in the social context, it can increase the likelihood of frequent encounters among specific individuals. Early studies by Festinger, Schachter, and Beck in the last century showed that such people are more likely to form friendships (Lazard, 2023). Location emerged as a key determinant, measured by the frequency of unexpected encounters.

From Neighbourhoods to Networks

The Internet has transformed the concept of closeness, rendering it more fluid and accessible than ever before. Increasingly, individuals connect with one another through glowing displays, regardless of their physical presence or timing (Lazard, 2023). Young individuals cultivate intimate connections in the digital realm, expressing their joy through written words instead of audible laughter (Choi *et al.*, 2021). Digital closeness represents a

continuous interaction pattern that subtly transforms human relationships in ways that often go unnoticed.

Perceived Similarity and Cognitive Alignment

Being near someone increases the chances of forming a connection, yet it does not guarantee that you will have positive feelings towards them. Lazard (2023) states that perceived or actual similarities serve as a connection, fostering a sense of belonging and motivating individuals to reach out. In 2019, Hampton, Fisher Boyd, and Sprecher conducted an experiment revealing that individuals tended to favour strangers even before any conversation, provided they believed those strangers shared similar feelings (Lazard, 2023). The anticipation evolved into a force that united individuals. Similarly, White, Schroeder, and Risen (2021) discovered that individuals tended to form stronger online friendships when they had aligned cultural or moral values, despite potential disagreements on other matters. The brain appears to constantly discover connections and create them as well.

Proximity in Divided Contexts

Being near to another person can bridge significant divides in communities. A study conducted by White, Schroeder, and Risen (2021) focused on Israeli and Palestinian youths at a peace camp. The findings revealed that individuals who shared bunks or engaged in personal activities were significantly more inclined to form genuine friendships. The sense of unity served as a counterbalance to the collective bias in this instance. However, as noted by Lazard (2023), proximity alone does not resolve past issues. The camp was a unique and nurturing environment to experience.

Friendship and Well-being

Mental well-being depends, among other factors, on friendships. They can influence both behaviour and academic performance, even in stressful situations, such as changing schools (Lazard, 2023). Another study found that being surrounded by family and friends

reduces stress and increases resilience (Alsarrani *et al.*, 2022). Accordingly, such support is exclusively positive in its impact on this determinant.

Rethinking Propinquity in Contemporary Life

Nowadays, propinquity goes beyond merely sharing streets and buildings. In the realm of movement and connectedness, intimacy typically manifests on three interconnected levels: geographical, virtual, and emotional. When compared to the mere number of contacts, the quality of the relationships is of far larger importance (Choi *et al.*, 2021). One can reside beside another without exchanging a word, yet still experience a profound connection with someone distant.

Conclusion

A simple but long-lasting way for people to form bonds with one another is to maintain a close proximity to one another. The arrangement of student accommodations and the functioning of social media illustrate how relationships can begin with proximity, consistency, and the slow accumulation of common experiences. Genuine friendship flourishes in an environment where all individuals feel secure, treated justly, and share common aspirations.

Reference List

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