

What Does Social Network Knowledge and Estimation Accuracy Get You?

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There have been a number of studies examining the extent to which there are ego biases in cognitive social networks or cognitive social structure (CSS). Most notably, actors tend to overestimate their importance in the network. Yet, other research has found that underestimation occurs when status differentials are prevalent with lower status actors tending to underestimate their importance. Bias, in the form of over-estimation, can have benefits, as argued by some evolutionary psychologists, in that it can contribute to an actor's increased fitness. Underestimation can be beneficial when a dyadic interaction between lower and higher status actors entails behavioral deference on the part of the lower status actor. However, there is a difference between bias and accuracy in cognitive networks and an important question concerns the benefits of accuracy. How does an actor benefit from having an accurate understanding of their social world? Additionally, in the course of meeting new people actors often "size-up" new acquaintances about their potential for closer relations, such as friendship. How good are actors at those estimations and how do they play out over time? More importantly, does accuracy in estimation have some benefit? This talk examines the benefits of accurate knowledge of the network for actors in a political network and crews at Antarctic research stations. Specifically, the relationship between accuracy of political connections and political influence and social connections and psychological well-being are explored. Finally, data was collected from South Pole winter-over crews in terms of their estimation of who they think they will be friends with over the coming year at the station. This estimation data is compared to data on the actual network evolution and individual psychological well-being and moral to gain an understanding of the effects of accuracy on group dynamics and individual well-being.