

Shrinking social circles

So, it's week 12 and lockdown is slowly being unlocked. This week's article touches on how our social circles have shrunk significantly. We haven't been meeting people at random outside of our immediate household or family, and this can be detrimental to our general wellbeing. Let's introduce the notion of 'strong ties' and 'weak ties' and why they matter

[What are weak ties and strong ties?](#)

'Strong ties' are valuable because they pull together closely knit groups that share specific things in common (*friends/family/close work colleagues*). 'Weak ties' (*acquaintances, friends of friends of friends, strangers*) glue together those closely knit groups mentioned before. Weak ties are in effect a bridge between groups of people that are closely knit with each other, but not with the other groups.

The breadth and depth of the 'ties' (strong, weak or absent) that we have in our life can substantially affect outcomes and wellbeing.

[Why do I need weak ties? Shouldn't I just focus on really strong ties?](#)

Interestingly, we benefit from **both** as they give balance and diversity to relationships in our lives.

Strong ties can sometimes make us weak - if you've ever argued with a partner/relative/close friend, think about how they can make you feel. How disruption to the relationship (tie) can zap energy, reduce resilience and lower personal resources.

Weak ties can make us strong – have you ever been a receiver of kindness from an acquaintance or a stranger that really turned your day around or gave you that warm inside glow?

[The value of weak ties](#)

The digital age that we live in has changed the way we communicate and socialise with one another. It's fair to say that never before have we relied so much on social media platforms to keep us connected with other people.

It may be the case that many connections across the cyber social spectrum (Facebook, Twitter, Insta etc.) are weak 'ties'.

They're not all people who you have very close relationships with, but research suggests that being in touch with many weak links can boost happiness levels within your life and bring a diversity of people from different backgrounds into your living space.

This in turn could benefit your personal growth, promoting flexibility of thinking or ideas generation (think about how many times you have been prompted to explore something you weren't aware of before, just off the back of a post or picture online)

Other weak ties like meeting strangers out and about and passing the time of day with them over mundane conversation can give us a boost. There are vastly reduced opportunities for us to do this, public transport is quieter, in supermarkets we're herded along quickly with no time for stopping. But these interactions can give us different thoughts, new ideas or novel ways of thinking.

So we miss out on these fleeting but valuable interludes in our daily lives.

Inspiration taken from: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/may/23/why-casual-chats-with-strangers-are-the-thing-many-of-us-miss-the-most-coronavirus> & <https://techcrunch.com/2016/04/26/weak-ties-matter/> & https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/are_some_ties_better_than_others

Coronavirus – Tips to support mental health & wellbeing – 9th June 2020

When life has been forcibly made smaller for such a long period of time i.e. isolating, shielding and locking down at home, it's easy to fall into being comfortable in that space. This is particularly difficult for people living with anxiety or low mood and depression.

We get used to seeing the same faces and maybe there is a little less confidence in ourselves and interacting with 'others'.

Maybe the sense of trust in the world and other people is constricted, because we've been in a sort of hibernation mode, keeping ourselves to ourselves; because at a point in time this was the best (only?) way to 'stay safe'.

So, unintentionally, we have cut out the 'weak ties' in our lives to a miniscule or non-existent level.

In conjunction with last week's article about growing a new normal around Coronavirus, perhaps thinking about how your own 'weak' ties could add value to your mental health & wellbeing; maybe even helping you to build your own pathway to re-integration.

We hope you can relate to this week's content; it's a bit left-field for us as the theories within it are more from a sociology field than psychology, but it felt fitting for right now. Do what is right for you and your family. Take care of yourselves.

Tash, Catherine, Rach, Frankie and Sarah x