How to Avoid “Clique” Culture

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What is a Clique?
not a clique | non-maximal clique | maximal clique | maximal clique
Adolescent cliques are cliques that develop amongst adolescents. In the social sciences, the word "clique" is used to describe a group of 2 to 12 (averaging 5 or 6) "who interact with each other more regularly and intensely than others in the same setting".
Social Interactions

- Poster session
- Coffee
- Lunch
- Reception
- Company parties
- Other meetings
Social Interactions

- Many collaborations are forged because of informal meetings
  - This affects research you cite
  - Who you invite to speak at workshops
  - Whose name you remember
  - Who you want to recruit
  - Who you think of as an expert
  - What types of works we should value (therefore review process etc)
“One particular example is Leslie Smith from the Naval Research Laboratory, and his recent discovery of an extraordinary phenomenon he calls super convergence. He showed that it is possible to train deep neural networks 5-10x faster than previously known methods, which has the potential to revolutionize the field. However, his paper was not accepted to an academic publishing venue, nor was it implemented in any major software.”
“In particular, we’ve noticed a tendency of the community to **over-emphasize results from high-profile organizations** like Stanford, DeepMind, and OpenAI, whilst **ignoring results from less high-status places.**”
Social Interactions

- Who are you meeting with?
  - Which institutions?
  - Which research areas/geographic regions?
  - Senior people, is it your friends who are other senior people?
  - Or your students/their friends?
  - Are you trying to broaden who you interact with?
Someone from Institution X said:

“We are only interested in interns from schools such as Stanford, Berkeley and MIT....” when someone approached him with a question about internships.
Student said:

“I’m doing real computer vision research as opposed to XXX....”
Social Interactions

• Assume that everyone here has something great to contribute

• Don’t constantly gauge whether I’m worth your time or not… I can tell when this calculation is happening in your head

• Don’t try to ONLY approach famous people (Jenn Wortman Vaughn’s great talk at NIPS)

• If you’re a group going to lunch/coffee/dinner and see some people who might be alone, invite them to come along

• Be friendly. Be interested in what research people are working on. See if you can learn something from them.
Social Interactions

• People become famous partly because someone decides to make them famous

• When you invite people to give talks, don’t just think of the people who are already famous or those who always get invited to give talks

• Think of the people who you think *should* be famous

• Do some research about the topic of interest and see if there are people you didn’t know about who are doing great work
Social Interactions

• Senior people:
  • One of your responsibilities is to shape the community.
  • Pull people in don’t push them out.
  • Make sure you interact with people from diverse backgrounds—not the same circle you’re used to over and over again.
  • Make sure you interact with junior people in the field, especially those who might not have the opportunity to regularly interact with you.
Social Interactions

- [https://www.recurse.com/manual](https://www.recurse.com/manual) light weight social rules from recurse center—best educational environment I’ve ever been in

- No feigning surprise
- No well-actually's
- No back-seat driving
- No subtle -isms
My First NIPS in 2015

• I never wanted to go back

• Saw “clique” culture

• Was harassed

• Did not feel like people were trying to pull me into the community

• One of the reasons I really wanted Black in AI to exist

• There are people who have decided to stop going to conferences & left academia because of these types of things
Questions?