

Students' social relationships in the last year of secondary education

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The Personal and Community Relationships Laboratory (Laboratorio de Redes Personales y Comunidades) at the University of Seville has published a project that shows the structural properties of high-school students personal networks and predicts the probability of those students maintaining (or not) relationships with their high-school friends when

they start their university studies. That is to say, the data obtained from individual personal networks can be used to predict positions in the complete networks. Specifically, having a less cohesive personal network (a more centralised one) means that the student is more open to new relationships.

Two types of analysis of social networks have traditionally been carried out: surveys of social networks from a sample of individuals or sociograms of a complete network. "The new idea in our research is that this is the first time that both types of data have been combined. On one hand, we evaluated the complete network of students in the last year of secondary education at a [high school](#) in Alcalá de Guadaíra (Seville), we drew up a sociogram of the 71 students in that year, and on the other, we carried out a survey among these students to know the social network of each of them. That is to say, the relationships that they have at high [school](#) and outside high school, in different contexts of interaction," says the University of Seville teacher Isidro Maya Jariego, head of the research project.

Methodology

The project, published in the review *Universitas Psychologica*, was carried out in two stages. First, the students were interviewed during their last year at high school to gather two types of information: friendships with schoolmates, compiled from a list of the students studying in the final year at the school, and they also completed a survey with information about 45 contacts from their interpersonal environment.

A year and a half later, when some of the students were already at university and studying on different campuses or at different universities, they were asked the same questions to see whether their relationships had changed now that they were no longer in the same

context of habitual interaction as at high school.

"The fundamental part of the methodology consists in analysing any changes or evolution in the relationships between the different individuals. In this way, we can describe the structural properties of the groups and communities," Maya explains.

Upon finishing [secondary education](#), the last-year students' relationship networks begin a gradual process of disintegration. "One of our study's contributions was observing a friendship [network](#) in decline, given that, until now, the most usual thing has been observing how they are created and how relationships develop. We have studied how they disappear (or how they pass from being active to a more latent state)", he adds.

Personal transitions are critical periods, when can be stressful and bring problems of adaptation. In the case of this study, the young people involved start a metropolitan lifestyle and begin to develop relationships away from the direct supervision of their families. It is important for them to distribute their support relationships among the different socio-geographic contexts within which they move. Establishing friendships in the university context helps them to gain independence and to manage their lives in their new environment with more self-confidence. For this reason, the students who were more rooted in the village or town that they came from were more likely to experience difficulties adapting to university life. Although they keep some of the original support figures in their lives, it is important to build [new relationships](#).

For their part, social networks and digital media help to maintain weak contact with their old schoolmates, either via the contacts list of their mobiles or by being Facebook friends. This helps them to remember the contacts and allows for these relationships to be reactivated if necessary, though the most usual thing is for there to be little day-to-day [relationship](#).

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