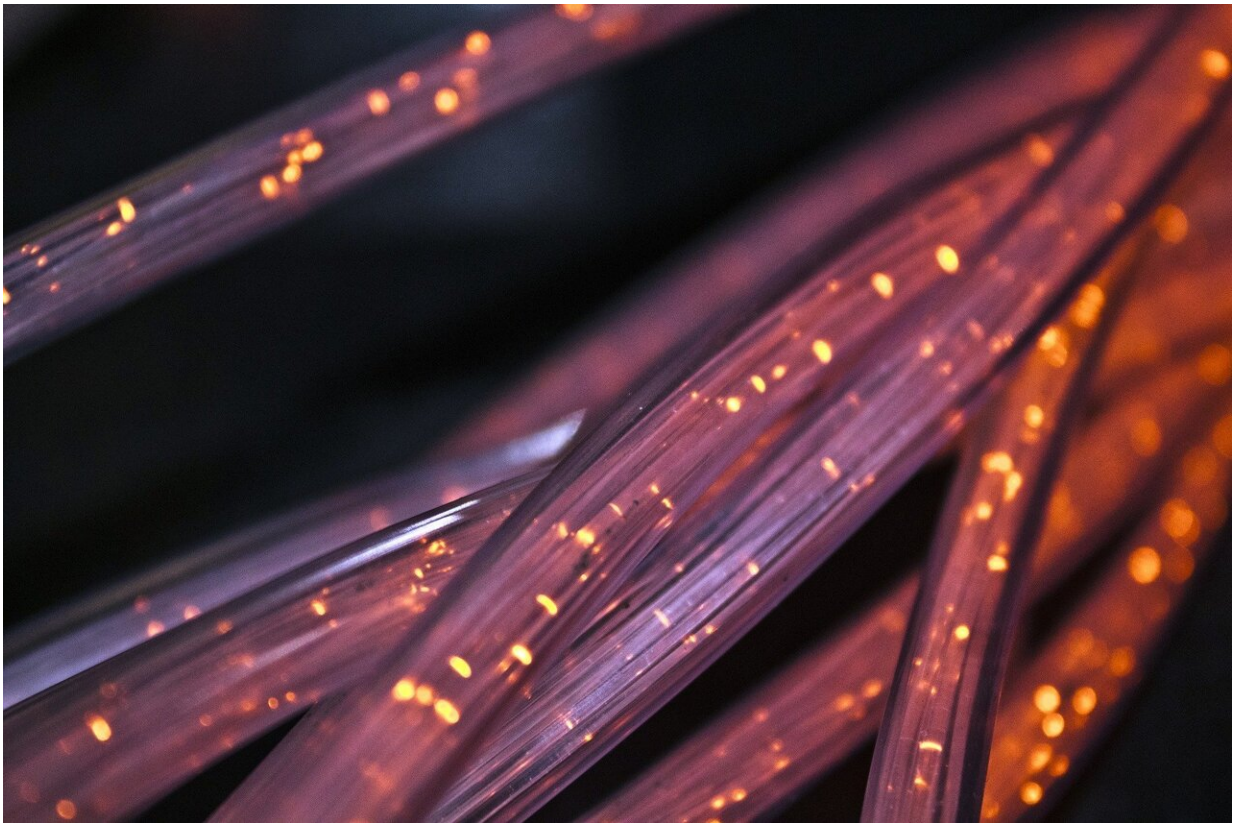


Success is all about making social connections—or is it?

January 20 2021, by Evan Curran



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There's a common adage that knowing the right people holds the secret to wealth and success. The flip side of that, however, is reminiscent of the country song, "Friends in Low Places": Sometimes social

connections can prove detrimental.

In a new study published in *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Lijun Song, associate professor of sociology in Vanderbilt University's College of Arts & Science, examines how the theories of "social capital" and "social cost" predict an individual's life satisfaction. Further, she explores how these dynamics operate differently across collectivist cultures in urban China and Taiwan versus more individualistic systems in the United States.

"One of the oldest ideas is that it's not what you know, but who you know," Song said. "Knowing people in high and diverse positions should be a good thing and increase an individual's life satisfaction if we go along with social capital theory."

More recently, however, Song proposes social cost theory, which has predicted the downside consequences of these [social connections](#), such as triggering negative comparisons or investing in relationships that don't have a beneficial outcome.

Accessed status, that is, the status of people an individual knows, Song wrote in the paper, "plays a double-edged—protective and detrimental—role for health and wellbeing." That is, supporting both theories of social capital and social cost, accessed status has positive and negative impacts on life satisfaction, regardless of the cultural setting.

However, does a person's cultural context amplify (or mitigate) the explanatory power of social capital and social cost theories? That's the question Song explores by studying the life-satisfaction outcomes in urban China and Taiwan versus the United States.

In the survey conducted in the three societies in 2004 and 2005, respondents rated their satisfaction within six domains: financial

situation; current job (for the employed); relationship with boss and colleagues (for the employed); relationship with neighbors; marital life (for married or cohabitating respondents); and relationship with children (for those with children).

Song found more evidence for social cost theory in the Asian societies she studied than in the U.S. Conversely, her findings suggested that social capital theory played a greater role in [life-satisfaction](#) outcomes in the U.S. In both cultures, accessed status was most closely related to two domains of personal satisfaction: [financial situation](#) and relationships with neighbors.

"Theoretically speaking, [social cost](#) theory pertains most to the financial domain and social capital [theory](#) pertains most to the domains of relationship with neighbors and marital life," Song wrote.

More information: Lijun Song. Social Capital, Social Cost, and Relational Culture in Three Societies, *Social Psychology Quarterly* (2020). [DOI: 10.1177/0190272520939880](https://doi.org/10.1177/0190272520939880)

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