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An experiment to test ‘The Neighbour effect’

(Theme: Translating a rarefied context into a wider setting)

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Abstract

The previous literature on neighbour relations is in general positively biased, focusing on how neighbours cooperate to foster good community relations yet, the relations are not always positive and conflict can arise (Nieuwenhuis, Völker, & Flap, 2013). We suggest that in the realm of social influence an underlying *neighbour effect* exists whereby people are biased towards being positive to their direct spatial neighbours. We used the unlikely source of ‘The Weakest Link’ TV quiz programme to show a *neighbour effect*. Contestants significantly avoided voting their direct neighbours as the weakest member of the group (Goddard, Hylton, Parke & Noh, 2013). We designed an experiment to test whether this neighbour effect occurred in other scenarios. Participants (n=233) were year one undergraduates attending their first orientation lecture. Each P was given an instruction sheet that indicated their unique seat number and were asked to cast a vote for a fellow student in the lecture. Their vote conferred either a positive or negative outcome for its recipient (by increasing or decreasing the number of raffle tickets accrued for a subsequent lottery for course related materials.) Participants that cast a negative vote demonstrated a significant *neighbour effect* by avoiding voting their nearest neighbour. However, the reverse pattern was found for participants issuing a positive vote. We demonstrated the *neighbour effect* and suggest it is a robust and strong bias in social influence, operating at an unconscious and implicit level. It remains to be seen how this neighbour effect contributes to community based neighbour relations.

Reference

Goddard, P., Hylton P., Parke, A., & Noh, Z. (2013). Tit-for-tat voting by contestants in the TV game show “The Weakest Link”. In: SABE-IAREP-ICABEEP, Atlanta, United States of America.

Nieuwenhuis, J. (1.), Völker, B. (2), & Flap, H. (2.). (2013). "A bad neighbour is as great a plague as a good one is a great blessing": On negative relationships between neighbours. *Urban Studies*, 50(14), 2904-2921. doi:10.1177/0042098013482508