

Paper submitted to the 29th Psychology Postgraduate Affairs Group Conference: Cardiff Metropolitan University, Cardiff, UK, 23rd July – 25th July, 2014.

Love-hate neighbour relationship: Shifts in neighbour effect of vote valence

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Keyword

The weakest link, Game show, Neighbour effect, Valence effect, Community

Word Count: 231 words

Abstract

An analysis of contestants' voting behaviours on the popular TV game show 'The Weakest Link' revealed a hitherto unknown *neighbour effect*. When contestants were asked to single out, and openly declare the 'weakest' member, they significantly avoided picking their direct neighbour (Goddard, Hylton, Parke & Noh, 2013). This study aimed to test whether this *neighbour effect* extends beyond the rarefied atmosphere of the TV studio. Participants (n=233) were year one undergraduates attending their first orientation lecture. They were each given an instruction sheet that indicated their unique seat number and they were asked to cast a vote for a fellow student in the lecture. Their vote either conferred a positive, neutral or negative outcome for its recipient, by either increasing, not-affecting or decreasing the number of raffle tickets accrued for a subsequent lottery for course related materials. The observed frequencies of votes were counted for each voter-candidate spatial relationship and then compared with the frequencies that would be expected purely due to chance alone. Participants that cast a negative vote demonstrated a significant *neighbour effect* by avoiding voting for their nearest neighbours. However, the reverse pattern was found for participants issuing a positive vote. We suggest that the *neighbour effect* is a robust and strong bias in decision-making, operating at an unconscious, implicit level. We consider the implications of these results for the wider community in the context of neighbourhood relationship.

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.