

Title: High School Workshop Toolkit: Social Relationships Activity

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Introduction: In 2022, ASA assembled a workshop with high school sociology teachers and sociology professors to develop resources for a new “High School Sociology Toolbox.” The goal of the toolbox was to provide out of the box lesson plans and other materials to help high school teachers offer a high-quality sociology curriculum that is consistent with the National Standards for High School Sociology. The Standards introduce four learning domains for high school sociology and include assessable competencies and essential concepts for each domain. Through the toolbox, instructors have access to ready-to-use lesson plans and class activities that align with concepts in each domain.

Abstract: This lesson includes a class activity and its associated usage notes where students will learn about the social construction of groups and their impact on the life chances of individuals through the exploration of social relationships. This activity was designed with high school level or undergraduate sociology students in mind. The activity is a great supplement for lessons/discussions of socialization, the self, groups, and the functions of social capital in our society.

DETAILS

National Standard Domain and Competencies: Domain 3: Essential Concepts 3.3.1-3.3.3

Subject Areas: High School Sociology

Resource Types: Classroom Activity

Class Levels: High School/Higher Education

Class Size: This activity can be used/modified to fit any class size. As currently designed, it is best with classes of 10-60.

Objectives/Learning Goals:

- To develop or enhance a shared language, a shared analytical framework, and a shared history of the social relationships, social capital, and socialization
- To better understand the institutional and cultural construction of social networks/relationships
- To support and enhance research and analysis skills
- To reflect on how the construction of social relationships informs both personal and societal paradigms, policies, and values today
- To investigate ways in which students can personally and collectively resist, transgress, and/or transform the legacy of socialization and social capital
- To better understand social capital, as well as to explore our own social capital

Materials Required:

- Worksheet
- Pencil/Pen

- Can be completed online and if so, students/participants, will need to have access to a computer/laptop

Usage Notes: Generally, as it is currently designed, this activity is often used at the beginning of the lesson to help students start to think about what social relationships are and how their own social relationships function in our society as advantages for some and disadvantages for others before engaging more specifically with concepts like social capital; however, it can be used at any point during a lesson to help reinforce the concepts of social relationships, the self, groups, and social capital.

As for the duration, the activity timeframe can range anywhere from 20-30 minutes depending on the discussion that might occur as a result of the included discussion questions.

Each student should have their own activity sheet, so they can explore their own social relationships. It is up to the instructor to determine if they want to have students work on their sheets in groups or individually. In the past, I have found that it works well to have the students work on and complete the worksheet individually for about 10-15 minutes, and then get in groups to discuss the answers that they produced for the discussion questions for about 5-10 minutes. After small group discussions, having the class reconvene and discuss as a whole the activity and the answers produced for the discussion questions for another 5-10 minutes is a wonderful way to pivot into a lesson on social relationships, the self, groups, and/or social capital.

Considerations for this activity:

- **Strength of Relationships/Connections:** You may need to explain what strong and weak connections (often referred to as ties) are and what an acquaintance is while students are completing the activity. Once complete with the activity and reviewing discussion questions, you may need to discuss the importance of the strength of connections. A wonderful way to start this conversation is by asking your students this follow up question: “Which person is more important for spreading NEW information or opportunities to as many people as possible? The answer options are: (A) telling 1 of your 5 best friends, or (B) telling an acquaintance in class. The answer is B, though it may be counter intuitive. With strong connections or option A similar information is share with similar people, where with weak connections or option B (e.g., like a student who has a separate group of work friends and a separate group of non-work friends) a bridge can be created to spread information about new opportunities, like a job, across these friend groups. Students can look at their activity and see their own strong/weak connections on page 1 of the activity and the bridges, which may often be themselves, on the first page column 3 and on the second page where they draw lines between their connections. You can also expand this conversation to discuss what sorts of implications this could have on life outcomes as a whole.
- Please do not focus on one student during this activity, as it may be problematic for students to think about their social capital as an example for the whole class. There will be students with a lot of social capital and social relationships, and others with less social capital and social relationships especially in classrooms with marginalized students. Be mindful and considerate of the impacts that social capital can have on students’ mental

health during this activity, as they may begin to realize that theirs may be more likely to be disadvantageous.

- Make sure to provide many examples of how social capital can be leveraged in society, so that students with varying levels of social capital do not feel pointed out in a negative manner.
- Based on past usage of this activity, it tends to work best if you have students focus on the last 10 people that they have interacted with; in terms of the type of interaction, I have allowed students to include both in person and virtual interactions to account for pandemic related restrictions, as well as technological reliance in our society. Since most students have been at school for at least a few minutes it helps orient their social relationships to other students or school personnel, which should help provide a range of strong/weak connections for most students, as not everyone they encounter on a school campus will automatically be a strong connection.

Additional Resources:

Nicholas Christakis's May 2010 TED Talk, *The hidden influence of social networks*
https://www.ted.com/talks/nicholas_christakis_the_hidden_influence_of_social_networks

Nicholas Christakis's September 2010 TED Talk, *How social networks predict epidemics*
https://www.ted.com/talks/nicholas_christakis_how_social_networks_predict_epidemics

Step 5: Write all ten names below in any order. Once all the names are written, draw lines connecting people that know each other.

_____		_____
_____		_____
_____		_____
_____		_____

Discussion Questions:

1. What sorts of patterns do you notice with your relationships? Why are the strength of our social relationships/connections important?

2. How many connections did you have? Were they all connected? Were none of them connected?

3. Is it better to have more connections between within your relationships? Or less? Why? Be sure to explain your answer and provide examples from our society.