How to Avoid "Clique" Culture

Timnit Gebru

What is a Clique?

not a clique   non-maximal clique   maximal clique   maximal clique
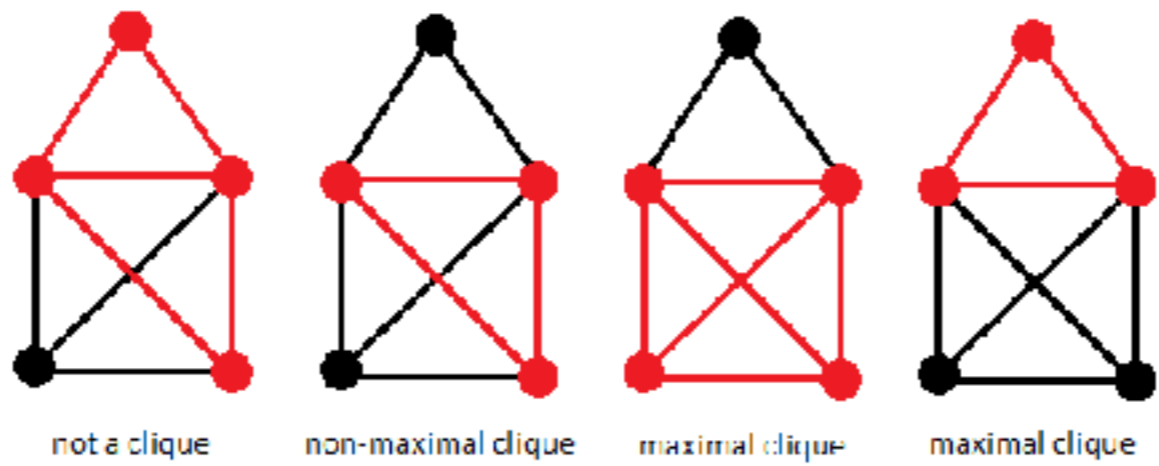
Adolescent cliques are **cliques** that develop amongst **adolescents**. In the social sciences, the word **"clique"** is used to describe a group of 2 to 12 (averaging 5 or 6) "who interact with each other more regularly and intensely than others in the same setting".

Social Interactions

- Poster session

- Coffee

- Lunch

- Reception

- Company parties

- Other meetings

Social Interactions

- Many collaborations are forged because of informal meetings

  - This affects research you cite

  - Who you invite to speak at workshops

  - Whose name you remember

  - Who you want to recruit

  - Who you think of as an expert

  - What types of works we should value (therefore review process etc)

fast.ai:

"One particular example is **Leslie Smith from the Naval Research Laboratory**, and his recent discovery of an extraordinary phenomenon he calls super convergence. He showed that it is possible to train deep neural networks 5-10x faster than previously known methods, which has the potential to revolutionize the field. **However, his paper was not accepted to an academic publishing venue, nor was it implemented in any major software**."

fast.ai:

"In particular, we've noticed a tendency of the community to **over-emphasize results from high-profile organizations** like Stanford, DeepMind, and OpenAI, whilst **ignoring results from less high-status places**."

Social Interactions

- Who are you meeting with?

  - Which institutions?

  - Which research areas/geographic regions?

  - Senior people, is it your friends who are other senior people?

  - Or your students/their friends?

  - Are you trying to broaden who you interact with?

Someone from Institution X said:

"We are only interested in interns from schools such as Stanford, Berkeley and MIT…." when someone approached him with a question about internships

Student said:

"I'm doing **real** computer vision research as opposed to XXX…."

Social Interactions

- Assume that everyone here has something great to contribute

  - Don't constantly gauge whether I'm worth your time or not… I can tell when this calculation is happening in your head

  - Don't try to ONLY approach famous people (Jenn Wortman Vaughn's great talk at NIPS)

  - If you're a group going to lunch/coffee/dinner and see some people who might be alone, invite them to come along

  - Be friendly. Be interested in what research people are working on. See if you can learn something from them.

Social Interactions

- People become famous partly because someone decides to make them famous

- When you invite people to give talks, don't just think of the people who are already famous or those who always get invited to give talks

- Think of the people who you think *should* be famous

- Do some research about the topic of interest and see if there are people you didn't know about who are doing great work

Social Interactions

- Senior people:

  - One of your responsibilities is to shape the community.

  - Pull people in don't push them out.

  - Make sure you interact with people from diverse backgrounds—not the same circle you're used to over and over again.

  - Make sure you interact with junior people in the field, especially those who might not have the opportunity to regularly interact with you.

Social Interactions

- https://www.recurse.com/manual light weight social rules from recurse center—best educational environment I've ever been in

  - No feigning surprise

  - No well-actually's

  - No back-seat driving

  - No subtle -isms

My First NIPS in 2015

- I never wanted to go back

- Saw "clique" culture

- Was harassed

- Did not feel like people were trying to pull me into the community

- One of the reasons I really wanted Black in AI to exist

- There are people who have decided to stop going to conferences & left academia because of these types of things

Questions?