

Title: Overcoming the Distance Between The Social Life We Need and the One We Have

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People could talk to strangers, reach out to old friends, and make time for social engagements. In countries throughout the West, increasingly people are not as social as they should be for their own well-being. Social time is in decline across countries throughout the West, and solitary activities are on the rise. People often say that one of the primary barriers to social connection is a lack of time and energy – feeling too tired and too stressed to make time for others. What if a lack of energy is a consequence, rather than a cause, of too little social interaction?

In this talk, I will take a close look at the people who “keep the good times rolling.” Several studies have found that the patterns of sociality of people who are well connected defy simple explanations. Such individuals seem to be able to draw on a reserve of energy and time that those who are less socially connected don’t seem to have. They bounce from one interaction to the next, seemingly without energy loss. They even seem to enjoy being with other people to recover from being social. What do they understand about social connection that we don’t know?

I will share new empirical evidence that social interaction satisfies the need to belong, and, through that process, being social builds up our vitality between days. Although the need to belong has been long accepted as a fundamental need, it is rarely tested as a something to be satisfied, like hunger or thirst. Similar to physical nourishment, social nourishment gives us more energy. I will offer empirical evidence that although social interaction is energy depleting, living a life of greater social health both builds up our social battery and restores our vitality between days.