Thesis Proposal:

Belongingness in at-risk adolescents: A social network approach

**Proposed committee:**

1. Mentor: Kim Henry
2. In program: Jennifer Harman? Unsure.
3. Out of program: Bailey Fosdick

**Research Questions:**

1. What is the relationship between an adolescent mentee feeling belongingness and their social network within a program centered around mentorship? As the Campus Connections semester continues, and an individual’s network, friendships and closeness with others changes, how does this relate to a mentees sense of belongingness?
2. Which aspects of relationships matter most when measuring a mentees sense of belonging to the Campus Connections program? In other words, how do we define embeddedness in the program? Is the overall number of relationships a good understanding? is it the closeness of these relationships? Is there an ideal relationship count?
3. Does the type of relationship matter? For example, in a program aimed at providing mentorship and allowing for social interactions with other youth – is the bonding experience with the mentor the most important aspect? Or is forming positive friendships with other youth have more of an impact?
4. Because measuring the social network serves as a complex and burdensome task, is belongingness a good indicator of a mentees embeddedness in the network?

**Outline:**

* 1. Explain the importance of studying at-risk adolescence
     1. The changing, influential and plastic adolescent brain (Many references in steinberg book; Costa-Robles, Caspi)
        1. Highest risk for risky health behaviors (drugs, unprotected sex, pregnancy, etc.)
     2. Adolescent behaviors serve as a good indicator of adult behaviors.
        1. Therefore, intervention is key (Dubois)
        2. Theory of life course persistence (Moffit)
     3. Importance of positive influence in adolescence (Erdem)
        1. Mentorship is a strategy to provide positive influences (Rhodes, DuBois)
        2. Rhodes Model of Youth mentorship (Rhodes, Dubois, et al.)
     4. Theories regarding adolescent research
  2. Social Network Analyses
     1. A general description
        1. Key terms: Density, inbound relationships, outward bound, reciprocity
     2. It’s usefulness in social science research
        1. Group influences have been studied in past research (Peer contagion, Latene’s social impact theory)
     3. It’s usefulness in health research and an indicator of health outcomes (Valente)
        1. Importance from a public health perspective
     4. The complexity of gathering data and analyzing
  3. Adolescents and their network
     1. Adolescent peers’ behaviors are a good indicator of their own behaviors (Dishion, Tipsord)
     2. The evolution of adolescent networks is not widely understood.
        1. Most studies take a cross sectional approach to understanding the network (Dubois)
        2. However, there are studies out there that support it being an applicable methodology: RSIENA models (snijders, valente, Veenstra)
     3. Peer contagion, deviancy training (Dishion)
  4. Understanding belongingness
     1. Define belongingness
     2. Indicate the extent to which belonging matters
     3. Wilms belongingness study
        1. Sense of belonging is affected by students’ experiences in community and school experience
        2. 1 in 4 students in developed countries have a low belongingness in school. Which in turn is shown to affect participation.
  5. Campus Connections
     1. Provide description of program
        1. Mentor family mentorship style
        2. Schedule and dosage of exposure to program
        3. Importance to the Fort Collins communities (and other communities is serves)
        4. Evidence-based approaches
     2. Past research (Henry, Haddock, Weiler)
        1. Benefits towards mentors, staff & youth (Weiler, Haddock)
     3. Unique, structured platform to perform research
     4. Description of the social network
        1. Longitudinal data
           1. Which is a huge benefit to this thesis
  6. Research Questions
     1. Explain methods to answer them
     2. Data, and variables that will be incorporated
     3. Hypotheses associated with research questions
     4. Proposed analytical methods
        1. Multi-level model approach
           1. Random effects: Semester, night, condition, room
        2. 2 models
           1. Modeling the growth of network connections across the course of the program
           2. Modeling the growth of belongingness across the course of the program
           3. Compare models, explain similarities and differences.
           4. Limitations and strength of each model.



