

Discovery

Research breakthroughs across the University



OXFORD UNIVERSITY IMAGES/ROB JUDGES

Your friendships are numbered

Different layers of friendship charted by research team using student phone data

Our friendships sit in a complex hierarchy of ever-decreasing familiarity, according to Dr Felix Reed-Tsochas, James Martin Lecturer in Complex Systems. Felix and his team tracked the mobile phone data of students over an 18-month period as they made the transition from school to university or from university to work; periods chosen to see what happened when people were given the opportunity to meet new people. Analysing their communications and cross-checking these with survey responses allowed the team to gauge the quality of each relationship.

The findings reveal that most of us have between five and eight intimate

friendships: a number which stays relatively constant. "We found that even though this was a time when social relationships were in flux, for any given individual there was a particular social signature which remained constant over time," he says. So, if one becomes less friendly with a close ally, another, more distant, acquaintance is ushered into the inner circle; by contrast, if a good new friend is made, one is pushed out.

"We all have a fixed time constraint on close friends, and our mental and emotional capacity to deal with them is limited," posits Reed-Tsochas. "We don't have an infinite ability to invest in social relationships." 🧠



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Finding paradise

The location of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon has puzzled scholars for centuries, but now Dr Stephanie Dalley of the Oriental Institute has identified it. By piecing together information from ancient texts and sculptures, Stephanie has placed the garden 200 miles north of the ancient city of Babylon, in Iraq on the citadel of Nineveh.

Currently the site is too dangerous for westerners to visit, but "it's the most convincing place for it to be," she explains. "More research is required at the site, but sadly I don't think that will be possible in my lifetime."



FAZONI/ISTOCK

Political house pricing

London house prices don't just rise and fall with the national economy: they follow turmoil in other parts of the world, according to research by Professor Tarun Ramadorai and Dr Cristian Badarinza from the Saïd Business School. They've analysed the correlation between unrest in other countries and London's housing market. "The results provide firm evidence which supports the anecdotal belief that investors view London properties as a safe haven for their cash," says Tarun.