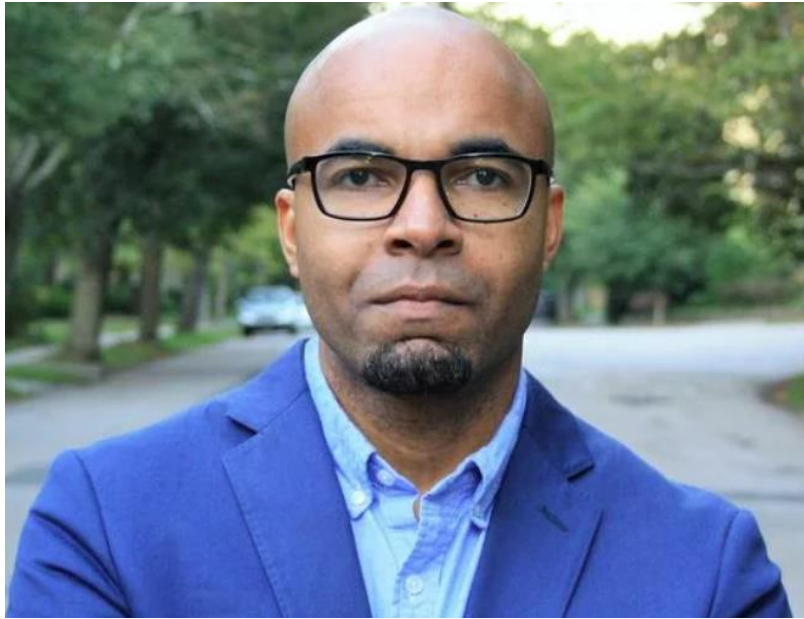


2021 MAYHEW LECTURE

SOMEONE TO TALK TO: NEW FINDINGS ON HOW PEOPLE MOBILIZE THEIR NETWORKS



DR. MARIO L. SMALL

When people seek emotional support, how do they decide whom to talk to? While network analysis and common sense would suggest that people will go to those they are closest to---their strong ties--- recent qualitative and quantitative work suggests otherwise. I examine these new ideas using nationally representative surveys of U.S. adults and online experiments, and find that, in practice, people do not relate to their strong ties as often believed, that avoidance is among the primary aspects of their relation to strong ties, and that experimentally inducing people to approach strong ties differently significantly improves their wellbeing. Results point to alternative strategies for understanding personal networks and for mitigating social isolation.

Dr. Mario L. Small is Grafstein Family Professor in the Department of Sociology at Harvard University. Small has published award-winning articles, edited volumes, and books on topics such as urban poverty, personal networks, and the relationship between qualitative and quantitative methods. His books include *Villa Victoria: The Transformation of Social Capital in a Boston Barrio* and *Unanticipated Gains: Origins of Network Inequality in Everyday Life*. His latest book, *Someone To Talk To: How Networks Matter in Practice*, examines how people decide whom in their network to turn to when seeking a confidant.



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