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AN INDUCTIVE STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

Although the concept "friend," is critical to both theoretical and empirical studies of social relations, it is a very ambiguous term. Most researchers seem to take its meaning for granted. This paper reports an inductive study designed to find out what aspects of real relations are correlated with applications of the label "friend." In a cross-sectional survey of 1,050 adults living in northern California in 1977, we obtained the names and descriptions of 19,417 associates. Of these, 59% were labelled "friends." Several regression analyses suggest that this label is likely to be applied: to an overwhelming majority of non-relatives in a largely unsystematic way; to associates lacking other, specialized role-relations; to people of the same age; to people known a long time; and to people with whom respondents had primarily sociable, rather than intimate or material, involvements.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "FRIEND"?: AN INDUCTIVE STUDY

Claude S. Fischer

The study of friendship has a long history in social psychology, but with the recent spurt of interest in personal relations—and in loneliness—social psychologists are focussing even more on the causes and consequences of friendship. Outside the field of interpersonal attraction, friendship studies are also booming: health researchers are examining friendship as "social support"; sociologists are studying friendships as strands in the "social networks" that structure society.

An important difficulty with this promising literature is that much of the research is built on a weak foundation: the concept of "friend." Theoretical discussions typically use the term in a taken-for-granted manner; research studies ask people about friends as if that concept were obvious. "Friend," however, is actually very ambiguous. Its ambiguity creates problems in trying to interpret reports of friendships and therefore in trying to explain it or to use it as an indicator of social involvement.

Formal efforts to define the term reveal some of this ambiguity. A standard American desk dictionary¹ gives as a first definition, "one attached to another by affection and esteem," but the next definition is "acquaintance." The classic Oxford English Dictionary reads as follows:

Friend—(1) One joined to another by mutual benevolence and intimacy. Not ordinarily applied to lovers or relatives, but cf. senses (3) and (4).

(2) Used loosely in various ways; e.g., applied to a mere acquaintance, as a mark of goodwill or kindly condescension.

(3) A kinsman or near relation.

(4) A lover or paramour, of either sex [indicated by the O.E.D. as obsolete, but recent usage by people living together may have revived it].

These conflicting definitions do not facilitate operationalization.

Also, there are cross-cultural differences in the meaning of the term. The French and English tend, for example, to use two words—*copain* and *ami*, mate and friend—when Americans typically just say "friend." Within British society, there is even a class difference in the use of these two terms (Allan, 1977).

Social scientists in the United States often end up making subtle distinctions with the term. For instance, Suzanne Kurth (1970) distinguishes carefully between friendships and "friendly relations." While you may have friendly interactions with coworkers or neighbors, those ties are not friendships until the relation has been extended in various ways beyond the workplace or neighborhood.

Most important, it appears clear to me—from research and everyday life—that Americans differ from one another, and probably also from one time to another, in what they mean when they use the word "friend." In the extensive pretesting and pilot surveys we conducted for the research project I shall describe below, we found that some people included kin within their lists of friends, some did not; some had very strict standards for using the label, others dispensed the title liberally; and often people were inconsistent from moment to moment in calling a particular associate a "friend."²

These observations lead to the conclusion that "friend" is probably too vague a concept to be used in scientific research. We cannot, however, abandon it. It is too important a "folk concept," an idea that people use to order their worlds. And, it is too much a part of our own intellectual apparatus. But we should at least have a systematic, empirical understanding of what Americans seem to mean when they call someone a friend.

This paper reports analyses conducted on a data set uniquely able to shed light on the way Americans use that word. We conducted a survey of 1,050 adults, each of whom described an average of over 18 social

relations they had. The respondents also answered questions about the behavioral contents and the social contexts of each of the 19,417 relations they named. For 4,179 of these ties, respondents in addition described the personal characteristics of the associate. And, most critically, for each relation, we know whether the respondent was willing to call the person on the other end a friend. In 59% of the cases (11,195), the respondent was.

The analytical strategy with this data is straightforward: to ask what characteristics of the relations, the associates, and the respondents were correlated with the application of the term "friend." To further highlight the features that particularly distinguish friendships, I also examined which characteristics were correlated with respondents' willingness to say that they felt "close" to an associate. Differences in the results between "friend" and "close" should indicate what, among people's more intimate acquaintances, is generally considered special about friends.

The next section of this paper describes the data set in more detail. Then the bulk of the paper is devoted to presenting the results of extensive regression analyses devoted to the question of what predicts the label "friend."

This is a baldly empirical and inductive study; no hypotheses are tested, except perhaps our commonsensical understandings of what people mean by "friend." And no *causal* claims are made, only claims of correlation. The fact that associates with whom respondents discussed their hobbies were especially likely to be called friends could mean that discussing hobbies determines whether an associate will be called a friend, or it could mean that respondents were especially likely to turn to people they called friends when they wanted to discuss their hobbies. Either causal interpretation would be appropriate.

DATA³

Sample. Between August 1977, and February 1978, we interviewed 1,050 adults living in that portion of northern California including San Francisco and the region 200 miles to the north and east of the Bay Area. The sampling frame involved, for reasons

tangential to this paper, overselecting respondents in small towns and underselecting those in the largest cities. It also excluded the following populations: people residing in towns of under 2,500 population; those residing in neighborhoods that were predominantly black (although we did interview blacks); and those who did not speak English. Within these constraints, the respondents were randomly selected through multistage cluster sampling with sampling units weighted proportionally to population. The response rate was seventy-six percent of eligible households. While not perfectly representative of the northern California population, the sample is reasonably representative of English-speaking adults living in predominantly white urban places in northern California in 1977. We can generalize from this sample with confidence. (Weighting our data to counteract the sampling bias toward smaller towns changes the results little.)

The Interview. The heart of our one-hour, in-person interview⁴ is a series of questions designed to elicit from respondents the names and descriptions of the people in their personal social networks. The technique we developed (see Jones and Fischer, 1978; McCallister and Fischer, 1978) asks respondents to name the specific people with whom they are, or could expect to be, involved with in supportive social exchanges. We ask for the first names of those who:

1. respondents would ask to look after their homes when they go out of town;
2. had helped with tasks around the house in the previous three months;
3. they talk with about how they do their jobs (asked only of employed respondents);
4. they do various social activities with—sharing a meal, visiting, going out socially, etc.;
5. they get together with to talk about hobbies;
6. they date seriously or consider a fiancé(e) (asked only of unmarried respondents);

7. they talk with about personal matters of concern;
8. they rely on for advice about important decisions; and
9. they would or could ask for a sizable loan.

In answer to each question, the respondents name as many people as they wish, but interviewers record only the first eight names (actually, the first ten for question 4, the first four for question 9, and only one for question 6). Interviewers compile from these answers a master list of named associates, to which they add the names of the people in the respondent's household. Then the interviewer hands a copy of the list to the respondent and asks:

10. "Is there anyone who is important to you who doesn't show up on this list?"

Any new names are added on. In the end, the northern California respondents listed from two to sixty-five names, with an average of 18.5.

With both interviewer and respondent holding a copy of the master list of names, we ask a series of questions calling for descriptions of the named people. The first of those questions reads as follows:

"Please turn to page 6 of the [answer] booklet. This is a list of some of the ways people are connected with each other. Some people will be related in more than one way. So, when I read you a name, please tell me *all* the ways that person is connected with you right now. How is [name of person] connected with you know? Any other ways?"
[THE LIST OF "WAYS": Relative (How are you related?); Co-worker; Neighbor; Member of same organization (What organization is that?); Friend; Acquaintance; Other.]

It is in answer to this question that 59% of all named people were called, sometimes among other things, "friends." In addition, the questions ask for: the gender of the person (when not obvious); "Which of the people on this list do you feel especially close

to?;" which live within a five-minute drive; which live over an hour's drive away; which are in the "same line of work" as the respondent (or are also homemakers, if the respondent is); and similar questions.

This procedure yielded, in our sample, descriptions of over 19,000 social relations. For these ties, we know not only the role labels (co-worker, friend, etc.) and characteristics of the individuals, but we also know something about the social contents of the relations, because we recorded the exchange question(s) which elicited the names of the persons.

We gathered yet more information about a subset of these ties. The subsampling procedure involves selecting up to five names for each respondent from the people he or she named first in answer to six of the questions: (1) house care; (3) work discussions; (4) social activities; (7) personal discussions; (8) advice; and (9) borrowing money. (Household members are excluded.) Concerning each of these "intensive" associates we also ask: how the respondent had met the person; how long ago; where this person lives; how often they get together; and the person's age, employment, marital, and parental status. The names appearing in this subsample tend to be somewhat more active, intimate, and central members of the respondents' networks. Of these 4,179, sixty-nine percent were labelled friends.

Both sets of relations—the "intensive" subsample and the total sample, and parts thereof—are analyzed below.

Data Analysis. The question we ask is, What is a friend? By the logic discussed earlier, I translated that question into: What is correlated with someone being called a friend? I regressed a simple dummy variable—named person was called friend versus not—on a few sets of predictors: the exchange contents of the relation as measured by the eliciting questions (what about the things associates do makes them a friend?); the other role labels of the relation (what kinds of normative situations—kin, neighbor, etc.—are associated with a friend?); personal characteristics of the associate (what kinds of people get called friends?); personal characteristics of the respondent (what kinds of people call their

associates friends?); and a few combinations of these variables. I also regressed the dummy variable, associate listed as someone the respondent felt "especially close to" versus not, on the same equations. This allows us to contrast the factors correlated with a label of "friend" to those correlated with a label of "close." Overall, the two did not go together. (In the total sample of associates, $r = -.101$.)

Six specific samples will be used in the analysis: (1) a random twenty-percent subsample of the entire 19,417 names (with samples this large, there is little reason to use all the cases; $N = 3,804$); (2) the intensive subsample of 4,179 named associates; (3) the nonkin in the random subsample ($N = 2,210$); (4) the nonkin in the intensive subsample ($N = 2,696$); (5) the coworkers and neighbors in the random subsample ($N = 749$); and (6) the coworkers and neighbors in the intensive subsample ($N = 1,111$).

RESULTS

In this section, I will describe the results of the several multiple regressions. The findings are many and complex, and therefore I shall treat only the first of the six tables in any detail.

All Associates. Table 1 presents the regressions for all associates, kin and nonkin, represented in the random subsample of all the relations. Three equations were calculated for both "friend" and "close." The first includes as predictors only the questions that elicited each name—which I interpret as measures of the social exchanges involved in the relation. The second equation adds many other variables: the additional labels besides "friend," if any, that the respondent applied to the associate; characteristics of the associate; characteristics of the respondent; and joint characteristics. The third equation is a reduced, more efficient form of the second. It includes only the most significant predictors, thus avoiding multicollinearity and simplifying the interpretation.⁵

The main entries in the table are *unstandardized* regression coefficients, interpreted specifically as the increase in the probability that an associate was called a friend (or called close) for each unit increase in the

independent variable, holding constant all other predictors in the equation. For example, the .04 entry next to "Look After House" under the column "Questions Only: Friend" means that an associate who was named in answer to that question had a .04 greater chance of being called a friend than did an associate who was not—holding constant any other questions they may have been named on. In contrast, the .26 next to "Social Activity" indicates that to have been named on that question increased the odds of being called a friend by 26 percent over not being named.⁶

Turning to substantive results, note first the low explanatory power of the questions-only equation. The nine variables account for only 11 percent of the variance in associates' being labelled friends. That finding is, in part, a product of the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable, but not entirely.⁷ It also suggests that the content of the respondent-associate ties, as we have measured them, are not strongly correlated with the "friend" label.

Note, also, the constant in this initial equation: .46. This statistic means that the probability of an associate being called a friend if he or she was named in answer to *none* of the listed questions (and was therefore named either as a member of the household or to the "Is there anyone important to you" question) was 46 percent. There are certainly many kinds of social exchanges we did not tap and which may describe the involvements of associates in this 46 percent of the sample, but the high constant makes a *prima facie* case for the claim that "friend" is used promiscuously.

We turn next to the regression coefficients themselves. The estimates in the initial equation indicate that social activity (dining with, visiting, going out socially with, etc.) and discussing a pastime make the greatest difference in the odds of being called a friend. An associate who was named to the activity question had a .72 chance of being called a friend, to the hobby question a .68 chance. On the other hand, discussing personal matters and seeking advice did *not* mark friends. The pattern of questions that distinguish close associates is roughly the reverse of that which distinguishes friends: They tended to be named on the personal

matters, seek advice, borrow money, and romantic date items. We can, roughly speaking, conclude that friends were characterized by sociability and close associates by intimacy. (Causal direction—to warn again—is unclear. Perhaps respondents called some people friends because they were social companions, or perhaps they invited people whom they called friends to be their social companions, or both.)

But this discussion implies that the “friend” label reflects only the content of the relation plus a large dollop of error. When we turn to the second, full equation, we can see that other factors are also correlated with an associate’s being called a friend. Other role labels make a tremendous difference. Adding them in increases the adjusted R^2 from .11 to .38. Additional variables measuring respondent and associate traits then contribute a mere one percent to the adjusted R^2 .

In particular, relatives were especially unlikely to be called friends. Respondents were, for instance, .71 less likely to call one of their extended female kin—a grandmother or niece, say—a friend than they were to call an unlabeled nonkin associate a friend. There are interesting variations among types of kin. Fathers were ten percent more often friends than were mothers and fourteen percent more often than sons (all else constant). But the basic result is that a friend, to a great extent, means: not a relative.

It also tends to mean not a neighbor and not a coworker, either. In fact, a large portion of the associates fall into a category we could call “just friends”; they were given only the label of “friend”.

In sharp contrast to these results, relatives were especially likely to be considered close. Respondents were, for instance, .45 more likely to label a daughter close than they were so to label an unspecified nonrelative who provided the same exchanges.

Associate and respondent traits made almost no difference, though there was a tendency for older respondents to use “friend” less often than younger ones—about .03 less often for every decade of life.

Turning back to the question variables in the full equation, we observe that their effects are considerably weaker once other

role labels are controlled. Social activity is still the key predictor of the “friend” label, but now discussing hobby and discussing personal matters are about equally important. Again in contrast, the close label correlates more strongly with the intimacy questions -- personal matters, advice, and date.

The third pair of columns in Table 1 display the reduced equations, “cleaned up” versions of the full equations. They tell essentially the same tale: Being labelled a friend goes together strongly with not being a relative and a bit less strongly with not being any other specific relation, and in addition tends to correlate with sociable interactions. Being labelled close tends to go together with being a relative and with intimate interactions.⁸

Table 2 repeats the analysis reported in Table 1, but for the intensive subsample. This allows us to examine a few additional variables, but it also alters the comparisons involved in the correlations. The associates in this set were named in answer to at least one of the questions listed in the table (look after house, borrow money, social activity, discuss hobby, discuss personal, or seek advice). Excluded are any associates named in answer to the “Is there anyone important” question. And also excluded are any household members. Thus, we are comparing among associates who have at least some minimal interaction with the respondents (in contrast to many associates in the larger sample who may have been “merely” sentimental associates).⁹ I also simplified the kinship categories for this table.

I will refrain from discussing this table in detail. It basically recapitulates the central findings from Table 1. Sociability most characterizes associates with the label of “friend”, intimacy those with the label of “close”. There is more overlap here: To a certain extent, friends tended to discuss personal matters and to lend money, while close associates were seen socially. But the distinction remains. Kin were especially unlikely to be called friends, and neighbors somewhat unlikely.¹⁰

Yet, we do learn something additional from examination of the intensive subsample: Associates similar in age to the respondents were, all else equal, more likely to be

called friends than were those distant in age. For every doubling in the age span, the probabilities of being a friend dropped .02. A twenty-year gap meant a .06 lower probability than a two-year span. The age gap made no difference in being called close. There, the critical factor was the proportion of the respondent's life-span that he or she had known the associate. For each additional ten percent of the life, the probability of closeness increased .033. (Although the years known and proportion of life known variables are significant in the full equation for friend, the pattern is marginal and unstable because of multicollinearity. That full equation describes a tendency for young respondents to be strongly positively influenced by duration of the relation in calling associates friends and elderly respondents to be weakly negatively influenced, all else equal.) Finally, as before, respondent and associate characteristics were not especially important.

We can conclude from both Tables 1 and 2 that when respondents called people friends they were—besides using the word loosely and often—primarily referring to non-relatives, to non-neighbors or -coworkers, to people with whom they had sociable interactions, and to people relatively near to them in age.

Nonkin. The great tendency for people not to call their relatives friends suggests that we should examine the correlates of friendship among nonkin only. What seems to be associated with the probability of a non-relative being called a friend? Tables 3 and 4 address that question.

Note first, in Table 3, the mean and the constant in the questions-only equation for friend. Of all nonkin named, 83% were called friends; 81% were called friends even if they were named to none of the exchange questions. The problem seems really to be, when will a non-relative *not* be called a friend? There is also a low R^2 for each of the friend equations. This may in part be a result of the skewed nature of the dependent variable, but we will see later equally skewed variables with much more explained variance (e.g., close in Table 5). It also seems to suggest that whether or not a respondent called a non-relative a friend was to a great extent simply chance.

The questions-only equation indicates who was not likely to be called a friend—people who looked after the house, predominantly neighbors, and people with whom respondents discussed work, predominantly coworkers, bosses, and colleagues. The reduced equation for friend summarizes the pattern: Friends were those who did not talk over work, who were not neighbors (and instead tended to live far away), who shared social activities or discussed personal issues with respondents.

In this sample, associates who were called close tended also to be called friends,¹¹ but the results for the two variables differ noticeably. Relatively few non-relatives, twenty-five percent, were labelled close, and it is somewhat easier to explain which ones were. They tended to be involved in intimate interactions with the respondents or to be available for loaning money, to live some distance away, and to be members of relatively large social networks.

In Table 4, with the intensive subsample, we find that eighty-eight percent of all nonkin were called friends. These people tended to be non-neighbors, involved largely in sociable relations, who were relatively similar in age, and whom respondents had known a good portion of their lives. (An old school buddy with whom one regularly goes out to dinner would be a perfect example.) Close associates—often the very same people—were distinguished much more strongly by intimacy. Although there is some overlap in the distinctive characteristics of the close associates and the friends, there are a few sharp differences: Romantic partners were definitely close, but not especially likely to be friends; advisors were likely to be close, but not particularly likely to be friends; and while proportion of life made a difference in both regards, similarity in age made a difference only for friend. Among this intensive set of nonkin, in sum, friendship seemed to mean, when it meant anything at all, a sociable non-neighbor, known a relatively long time, of relatively similar age.

Coworkers and Neighbors. One persistent finding to this point is that other role labels, or specialized role relations such as discussing work, seemed to inhibit the appli-

cation of the term friend. To control for this, I analyzed a yet smaller subset of associates: those non-relatives who were called either coworkers or neighbors (a few were called both). Since all the associates in this group were given a special role label, the effect of that distinction is eliminated. Also eliminated are the forty percent of nonkin who were only called friends. The issue in this section, then, is: What about associates who were called neighbors or friends was correlated with their also being called friends? Table 5 presents the familiar regression equations for coworkers and neighbors—divided roughly 50:50—within the random subsample, and Table 6 presents them for the intensive subsample, where the ratio was about two neighbors for each coworker.

In Table 5, the questions-only equation, we see once again the widespread application of the friend label. Seventy percent of coworkers and neighbors were called friends, even sixty-seven percent of those who were not named in answer to any of the eliciting questions. And again, the questions explain little of the variance, twelve percent. That this weak explanation is not simply a result of a skewed dependent variable is testified to by the adjoining column: Although the close variable is even more skewed, the equation there explains considerably more variance. Simply put, factors beyond the relations' contents—and even other variables measured here (see other two equations)—account for the "friend" label. Those factors are probably idiosyncratic or chance.

The variables which do correlate with calling coworkers and neighbors friends are by now also familiar: sociable interaction and discussing personal matters, and not much else. Fellow organization members were likely to be called friends, because, I suspect, the organizational activity was typically a sociable one (*e.g.*, being on a bowling team or in a choir together). Table 6 adds to that formulation similarity in age, relatively long acquaintance, and availability for a monetary loan.

Although there is some overlap between this list of variables and the list of variables which correlate with closeness—relative duration, social activity, and availa-

bility for a loan—the contrasts are more impressive. (They are especially impressive given the strong connection between being called close and being called a friend.)¹² The probability of being called close is only .30 and approaches zero for those with no specified exchanges (Table 5). The variance explained is quite high for a skewed variable of this kind. And the predictors differ from those for friend. Discussing personal matters was strongly and independently correlated with being called close ($\beta = .31$ in the reduced equation). Being sought out for advice is also important here ($\beta = .16$, $p < .01$, in Table 5's full equation; $.22$, $p < .001$, in Table 6's reduced equation), but is absolutely irrelevant in distinguishing who was called a friend. And, while age similarity is not a feature of close associates, network size and physical distance is.

What then were respondents indicating when they called coworkers or neighbors friends? To some extent, they were probably not indicating much besides politeness, since they called so many of them friends. And to some extent, they were probably indicating quite idiosyncratic interpretations of the label. Beyond that, they also seemed to use the term to point to those coworkers and neighbors with whom they relaxed socially, or discussed personal matters, or from whom they could borrow money, coworkers and neighbors about their own age, and ones they had known a relatively long time.

We also found, again, that personal characteristics of the associates and of the respondents had apparently little effect on the "friend" label—except for age. (This finding should not be misinterpreted: personal characteristics, especially age and education, are strongly and independently correlated with how *many* friends respondents had. Personal characteristics were not strongly and independently correlated with whether or not any specific associate was called a friend.) I explored the possibility that respondent characteristics interacted with relation characteristics, but found little along that line.¹³ Of course, there may be many other personal traits, especially cognitive or personality features, that I could not explore here which may account for some of the differences in labelling.

CONCLUSIONS

The issue of what Americans mean when they call someone their friend is, in part, a topic in the sociology of culture; it tells us something about the American view of the social world. It is also a methodological concern for social psychologists studying personal relations, since responses to the word "friend", are often operational measures of social bonds. And yet it is clear that this crucial word is an ambiguous one. The research reported here has permitted us to gain some grasp of "friend"'s folk meaning, by simply showing what characteristics of relations correlate with applying the label of "friend" to the other person. The results suggest the following conclusions.

First, "friend" is a very common label. The average respondent in our survey called eleven people friends and called eighty-three of his or her non-relatives friends. This is considerably more people than he was willing to call "close"—seven and only twenty-five percent, respectively, of nonkin. And this is probably considerably more "friends" than Europeans would claim.

Second, relatively little about the relations is systematically correlated with whether or not they were labelled friendships. (Explained variance tended to be low.) Perhaps I failed to identify the key correlates, but since I was able to identify more successfully the distinguishing features of "close" ties, the lack of correlation may have a more substantive source. This source may be the absence of consensus among Americans on the meaning of "friend" (so that different groups use different rules), or their tendency to use the term loosely and idiosyncratically, or perhaps both.

Third, "friend" is to some extent a residual label, a description applied to almost all associates for whom no more specific title is available. Most important in this regard is kinship: a relative, even if he or she provides the same exchanges as a nonkin friend, will typically not be called a friend. (For example, only thirty-four percent of wives were called friends, compared to seventy-one percent of neighbors.) Other labels, such as coworker and neighbor, and specialized relations, such as romantic liason, work discus-sant, and home caretaker, also seem to inhi-

bit the use of the "friend" label. Although the "close" label was also affected by the role relations, it was less so and differently: kin tended to be called close.

Fourth, respondents tended to prefer similarity in age when calling someone a friend, irrespective of other features of the relation. This was not true of calling an associate close, which suggests that "friend" has a unique connotation of age-grading. (Alternatively, age similarity may capture something about the content of the relations that we did not measure, such as value homophily.)

Fifth, those associates whom respondents knew a long time—long in proportion to their own lives—were likelier than otherwise similar associates to be called friends. In this respect, close ties and friendships were similar.

Finally, there was something distinctive about the contents of relations with people called "friends." These ties tended primarily to be relations of sociability, ones in which people visited, went out together, discussed shared pastimes, participated in an organization together, and so on. To a secondary extent, they were also intimate relations, ones in which respondents discussed personal matters—but not ones, however, in which respondents sought serious advice from the other. And friendships did not appear to involve material exchanges to any great extent. In contrast, relations labelled "close" primarily involved intimacy—discussing personal matters (sixty-three percent of nonkin who did so were called close), seeking advice, being a steady date. Close relations secondarily involved sociability and also one major form of material aid—being available for a sizeable financial loan.

This study suggests, in sum, that when we ask Americans to tell us about their friends, they tend to tell us about almost all of their nonkin, -coworker, or -neighbor associates; they tend to be inconsistent about which few of those people they will not call a friend; they tend to label friends those associates they have known a long time and especially who are of the same age; and they tend to emphasize sociability as the substantive criterion of a friend. This study suggests, to conclude, that researchers should be

wary about using this vague term when trying to be precise about measuring social involvement. "Friend" clearly does not, for

example, distinguish an "intimate confidant and counselor" for most Americans.

NOTES

1. Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary.

2. Descriptions of our pretesting procedures and discussions of the use of "friend" as an operational term appear in Jones and Fischer (1978) and McCallister and Fischer (1978).

3. A complete description of this study's methodology and its rationale are provided in the appendix to Fischer (1982).

4. The field work was conducted by the Survey Research Center, University of California, Berkeley.

5. I employed the S.P.S.S. Stepwise Regression Program, instructing it to add variables sequentially only if they were significant at $p < .001$ and to remove any variables in the equation that came to exceed $p = .01$.

6. These coefficients can be compared to one another only in this probabilistic sense. To compare their *explanatory* power, we would want the standardized betas. Although there is some correlation between the two varieties of coefficients, there are notable discrepancies resulting from very different variances. The significance levels, indicated by the asterisks, do reflect explanatory power.

7. Dichotomous dependent variables violate the normality assumptions in regression analysis. But when the splits are 25:75 or less, or when there are many cases as there are here, it is not a particularly serious problem. Significance levels and explained variance will tend to be underestimated. (See Knocke, 1975; Gillespie, 1977.) The point to note here is the comparison among the R-squared estimates: When additional variables are added to the equation, the R-squared for friend increases substantially, and in subsequent comparisons we will see that the "close" variable achieves R-squared estimates notably higher than those for the "friend" variable.

8. In terms of the beta weights in the reduced equations, all the kin variables take precedence over social activity ($\beta = .14$) in predicting "friend." In predicting "close," discussing personal matters ($\beta =$

.20) takes precedence over the kin variables. The reader will also note that distant associates were, *ceteris paribus*, more likely to be considered close. For some theorizing about why this might be so, see Fischer *et al.* (1977: Chapter 9). Also, respondents with large networks more often used the "close" term. This may reflect personality differences—gregarious respondents with large and intimate networks versus reserved ones with small and less intimate networks.

9. Another distinction in this sample is that it reflects somewhat more equally all the respondents in the survey. In the total sample, some respondents contributed two or three times as many relations as others. In the intensive subsample, the range is considerably narrowed, since there is a maximum of five names any one respondent could contribute. There were, however, some respondents represented by only one or two associates in the intensive subsample.

10. Interestingly, within this sample there was not an independent effect of kinship on the "close" label, except for children. That is, relations that were equally intimate and equally long-lasting (see the "Prop. of Life Known" variable) were equally likely to be close—except for children.

11. The Pearson correlation is .183, but given the marginals of the variables, that represents 72% of the possible correlation.

12. The correlation, within the intensive subsample, is .256, which is 75% of the potential correlation with the given marginals.

13. In particular, I tried to see whether age, gender, and education interacted with relation content in the nonkin sample. There was a marginally significant ($p < .05$; $N = 2,210$) tendency for college graduates to connect discussing personal matters with the label of "friend" more than other respondents did, but in all, there is little to report. A fuller effort to find interaction effects—e.g., by replicating these analyses within subsets divided by respondent traits—might, however, yield interesting findings.

Table 1. Regression of "Friend" and "Close" Labels for All Associates in the Random Subsample (unstandardized Coefficients;^a n = 3,804)

		Questions Only		Full Equation		Reduced Equation ^f	
		Friend	Close	Friend	Close	Friend	Close
	Mean:	.59	.38	.59	.38	.59	.38
	Constant:	.46	.36	.79	-.06	.89	.14
	Adj. R ² :	.11	.12	.39	.24	.39	.23
<i>Independent Variables</i>		<i>Means</i>					
QUESTIONS NAMED ON							
Look After House	.14	.04	-.09*	-.02	.02		
Helped in House	.07	.03	.08	.07	.04		
Borrow Money	.11	-.06	.16*	.05	.10		.10*
Discuss Work	.09	.09*	-.19*	-.08	-.04		
Social Activity	.34	.26*	-.08	.15*	.02	.14*	
Discuss Hobby	.13	.22*	-.06	.07*	.04	.08*	
Discuss Personal	.14	.02	.33*	.08*	.24*	.08*	.28*
Seek Advice	.08	-.03	.21*	.02	.15*		.17*
Date	.09	.16	.20	-.04	.34*		.31*
OTHER ROLE LABELS^b							
Husband	.02			-.46*	.32*	-.45*	
Wife	.02			-.53*	.30*	-.50*	
Father	.02			-.48*	.34*	-.45*	.25*
Mother	.03			-.58*	.30*	-.54*	.25*
Son	.03			-.62*	.54*	-.62*	.44*
Daughter	.03			-.62*	.45*	-.59*	.39*
Brother	.04			-.53*	.33*	-.53*	.25*
Sister	.04			-.55*	.29*	-.52*	.27*
Male In-Law	.04			-.53*	.18*	-.53*	
Female In-Law	.05			-.58*	.10	-.55*	
Other Male Kin	.04			-.62*	.20*	-.63*	
Other Female Kin	.05			-.71*	.18*	-.69*	.12*
Coworker	.10			-.09	-.06	-.14*	-.10*
Neighbor	.12		-.11*	-.08	-.11*	-.08*	
Organiz. Member	.10			.05	.02		
Shares Home	.07			.15*		.27*	
ASSOCIATE'S TRAITS							
Male/Female	1.51			.03	.05		
Within 5 Minutes	.32			.02	.02		
Over One Hour	.29			.05	.10*		.10*
RESPONDENT TRAITS							
Male/Female	1.54			-.00	-.02		
Age (+ 10)	4.0			-.03*	.00	-.03*	
Education (1-5)	2.8			.00	-.00		
Fully Employed	.56			.00	.02		
Partly Employed	.12			.01	.02		
Married	.57			-.00	.00		
Never Married	.21			-.02	.08		
Household Income ^c	9.0			.00	.00		
Non-Anglo	.13			-.06	-.02	-.06*	
Total Assocs. (+ 10)	2.3 ^d			.01	.04*		.03*
RESP-ASSOC TRAITS							
Same Gender	.58			.00	.02		

* p < .001.

a Regression coefficients; to be read as probability of associate being called "friend" or "close," given independent variable, all else constant.

b base = "other" label, acquaintance, or no label *besides* "friend."

c 17-category scale for household income.

d This mean of 23 does not equal the mean reported in the text of 18.5, because the units here are associates and their mean will necessarily be skewed upwards (more associates come from larger networks).

e Equation established by stepwise entry of only those variables significant at p < .001 and removal of those that become significant at p > .01.

Table 2. Regression of "Friend" and "Close" Labels for All Associates in the Intensive Subsample (unstandardized coefficients, n = 4,179)

		Questions Only		Full Equation		Reduced Equation	
		Friend	Close	Friend	Close	Friend	Close
	Mean:	.69	.49	.69	.49	.69	.49
	Constant:	.58	.25	.74	-.01	.93	-.01
	Adj. R ² :	.11	.19	.35	.28	.34	.27
Independent Variables		Means					
QUESTIONS NAMED ON							
Look After House	.33	-.03	-.04	-.04	.01		
Helped in House	.12	-.04	.10*	.03	.06		
Borrow Money	.30	-.12*	.19*	.04	.09*	.05*	.09*
Discuss Work	.10	.07	-.01	-.05	.06		
Social Activity	.55	.17*	.07*	.12*	.09*	.11*	.10*
Discuss Hobby	.28	.18*	-.00	.06*	.04	.06*	
Discuss Personal	.36	.04	.30*	.06*	.24*	.05*	.26*
Seek Advice	.20	-.01	.18*	.01	.15*		.15*
Date	.02	.13	.15	-.05	.31*		.31*
OTHER ROLE LABELS							
Parent	.11			-.55*	.12	-.45*	
Child	.06			-.50*	.30*	-.52*	.25*
Sibling	.08			-.53*	.08	-.47*	
In-Law	.07			-.48*	.03	-.47*	
Other Kin	.03			-.55*	.03	-.51*	
Coworker	.09			-.02	-.05		
Neighbor	.21			-.06*	-.10*	-.08*	-.09*
Organiz. Member	.12			.05	.07		
ASSOCIATE'S TRAITS							
Male/Female	1.51			.01	.05		.05*
Within 5 Minutes	.46			-.01	.06*		
Over One Hour	.19			.04	.08*		
Age (+ 10)	4.2			.01	-.01		
Fully Employed	.53			.00	-.01		
Married	.61			-.01	-.01		
Never Married	.18			-.01	.04		
RESPONDENT'S TRAITS							
Male/Female	1.57			.01	-.01		
Age (+ 10)	4.0			-.01	.01	-.02*	
Education (1-5)	2.8			.00	.00		
Fully Employed	.53			.03	.00		
Partly Employed	.11			.03	.00		
Married	.52			.01	-.01		
Never Married	.22			-.00	.01		
Household Income	8.6			.00	-.00		
Non-Anglo	.15			-.05	-.03	-.06*	
Total Assocs. (+ 10)	1.9			.01	.04*		.04*
RESP-ASSOC TRAITS							
Same Gender	.64			.01	.02		
Age Difference ^a	3.0			-.02*	-.01	-.02*	
Same Marital Status ^b	.65			.01	-.03		
Years Known (+ 10)	1.6			-.04*	-.00		
Prop. of Life Known ^c	.39			.23*	.28*		.33*

* p < .001

a The square root of the absolute difference in age between respondent and associate.

b Scored 1 if both respondent and associate were married or if both were unmarried.

c The number of years the respondent said he or she had known the associate divided by the respondent's age.

NB: See also notes to Table 1.

Table 3. Regression of "Friend" and "Close" Labels for Nonkin Associates Only in the Random Subsample (unstandardized coefficients, n = 2,210).

		<i>Questions Only</i>		<i>Full Equation</i>		<i>Reduced Equation</i>	
		<i>Friend</i>	<i>Close</i>	<i>Friend</i>	<i>Close</i>	<i>Friend</i>	<i>Close</i>
	Mean:	.83	.25	.83	.25	.83	.25
	Constant:	.81	.21	.75	-.07	.80	.08
	Adj. R ² :	.08	.15	.11	.18	.09	.18
<i>Independent Variables</i>	<i>Means</i>						
QUESTIONS NAMED ON							
Look After House	.18	-.14*	-.06	-.07	.03		
Helped in House	.06	.05	.01	.04	.00		
Borrow Money	.06	.09	.16*	.09	.16*		.16*
Discuss Work	.14	-.19*	-.13*	-.13*	-.07	-.18*	-.10*
Social Activity	.44	.09*	-.03	.11*	.01	.11*	
Discuss Hobby	.20	.05	.02	.05	.05		
Discuss Personal	.12	.09*	.37*	.08	.35*	.11*	.37*
Seek Advice	.06	.01	.19*	.01	.20*		.19*
Date	.02	-.02	.27*	-.03	.28*		.29*
OTHER ROLE LABELS							
Coworker	.16			-.08	-.05		
Neighbor	.19			-.13*	-.06	-.14*	
Organiz. Member	.15			.03	.02		
Shares Household	.01			-.03	.08		
ASSOCIATE'S TRAITS							
Male/Female	1.49			.03	.05		
Within 5 Min.	.42			.05	.01		
Over One Hour	.19			.10*	.17*	.09*	.17*
RESPONDENT'S TRAITS							
Male/Female	1.52			-.01	-.00		
Age (÷ 10)	3.9			-.01	.01		
Education (1-5)	3.0			-.01	-.00		
Fully Employed	.59			-.02	.05		
Partly Employed	.13			.03	.04		
Married	.52			-.00	-.01		
Never Married	.26			-.00	.05		
Household Income	9.2			.00	-.01		
Non-Anglo	.12			-.01	-.01		
Total Assocs. (÷ 10)	2.3			.02	.04*		.03*
RESP-ASSOC. TRAITS							
Same Gender	.65			.01	.01		

* p < .001

NB: See notes to Table 1.

Table 4. Regression of "Friend" and "Close" Labels for Nonkin Associates Only in the Intensive Subsample (unstandardized coefficients, n = 2,696)

		Questions Only		Full Equation		Reduced Equation	
		Friend	Close	Friend	Close	Friend	Close
	Means:	.88	.38	.88	.39	.88	.39
	Constant:	.75	.11	.74	-.14	.78	-.10
	Adj. R ² :	.12	.25	.16	.29	.15	.28
<i>Independent Variables</i>		<i>Mean</i>					
QUESTIONS NAMED ON							
Look After House	.37	-.08*	-.02	-.03	.04		
Helped in House	.09	.01	.04	.01	.04		
Borrow Money	.16	.08*	.12*	.06*	.10*	.06*	.10*
Discuss Work	.13	-.03	.01	-.03	.04		
Social Activity	.62	.15*	.12*	.12*	.10*	.12*	.11*
Discuss Hobby	.37	.08*	.06*	.06*	.05*	.07*	.06*
Discuss Personal	.36	.08*	.34*	.06*	.30*	.05*	.32*
Seek Advice	.17	-.00	.19*	-.01	.18*		.18*
Date	.04	-.07	.23*	-.05	.28*		.28*
OTHER ROLE LABELS							
Coworker	.13			-.02	-.04		
Neighbor	.29			-.10*	-.09*	-.10*	-.06*
Organiz. Member	.16			.03	.05		
ASSOCIATE'S TRAITS							
Male/Female	1.49			.03	.08*		
Within 5 Min.	.54			.03	.04		
Over 1 Hour	.10			.03	.12*		.10*
Age (÷ 10)	4.0			.01	.01		
Fully Employed	.55			-.00	.01		
Married	.55			-.01	-.00		
Never Married	.22			-.04	.06		
RESPONDENT'S TRAITS							
Male/Female	1.53			-.00	-.02		.07*
Age (÷ 10)	4.0			-.02*	.02		
Education (1-5)	2.9			-.00	.01		
Fully Employed	.56			.01	-.01		
Partly Employed	.11			.02	.01		
Married	.49			.01	-.02		
Never Married	.26			.01	-.01		
Household Income	8.9			.01	-.00		
Non-Anglo	.14			-.02	-.03		
Total Assocs. (÷ 10)	2.0			.01	.04*		.04*
RESP-ASSOC. TRAITS							
Same Gender	.68			.01	.00		
Age Difference	2.4			-.02	-.01	-.02*	
Same Marital Status	.69			.02	-.03		
Years Known (÷ 10)	.80			.05	-.09*		
Prop. of Life Known	.19			-.03	.70*	.20*	.34*

*p < .001

NB: See notes to Tables 1 and 2.

Table 5. Regression of "Friend" and "Close" Labels for Nonkin Coworkers and Neighbors in the Random Subsample (unstandardized coefficients, n = 749)

		<i>Questions Only</i>		<i>Full Equation</i>		<i>Reduced Equation</i>	
		<i>Friend</i>	<i>Close</i>	<i>Friend</i>	<i>Close</i>	<i>Friend</i>	<i>Close</i>
	Mean:	.70	.17	.70	.17	.70	.17
	Constant:	.67	.08	.52	-.04	.57	.05
	Adj. R ² :	.12	.21	.14	.23	.11	.21
<i>Independent Variables</i>							
	<i>Means</i>						
QUESTIONS NAMED ON							
Look After House	.38	-.12 ⁺	-.04	-.10	.00		
Helped in House	.05	.12	.10	.13	.11		
Borrow Money	.06	.13	.13	.11	.14		.18*
Discuss Work	.32	-.11 ⁺	-.05	-.11	-.05		
Social Activity	.34	.18*	.13*	.19*	.15*	.23*	.16*
Discuss Hobby	.20	.08	.08	.05	.09 ⁺		
Discuss Personal	.13	.19*	.31*	.18*	.29*	.19*	.35*
Seek Advice	.06	-.01	.15*	-.00	.16 ⁺		
Date	<.01	-.07	.24	-.08	.26		
OTHER ROLE LABELS							
Coworker	.48			.16	-.04		
Neighbor	.56			.11	-.09		
Organiz. Member	.13			.14 ⁺	.03	.19*	
Shares Household	<.01			.24	-.13		
RESPONDENT'S TRAITS							
Male/Female	1.46			.06	.05		
Within 5 Min.	.63			.08	.05		
Over 1 Hour	.06			.20 ⁺	.21*		.19*
ASSOCIATE'S TRAITS							
Male/Female	1.47			-.06	-.04		
Age (+ 10)	3.9			-.02	.01		
Education (1-5)	2.9			-.02	-.02		
Fully Employed	.67			-.04	.04		
Partly Employed	.12			.02	.09		
Married	.55			.04	-.01		
Never Married	.23			-.01	-.01		
Household Income	9.3			.00	.01		
Non-Anglo	.12			.04	-.03		
Total Assocs. (+ 10)	2.3			.02	.03		
RESP-ASSOC. TRAITS							
Same Gender	.68			.02	-.02		

⁺ p < .01

* p < .001

NB: See notes to Table 1.

Table 6. Regression of "Friend" and "Close" Labels for Nonkin Coworkers and Neighbors in the Intensive Subsample (unstandardized coefficients, n = 1,111)

		Questions Only		Full Equation		Reduced Equation	
		Friend	Close	Friend	Close	Friend	Close
	Mean:	.79	.30	.79	.30	.79	.30
	Constant:	.65	.06	.62	.01	.65	-.08
	Adj. R ² :	.14	.32	.16	.35	.15	.34
<i>Independent Variables</i>		<i>Means</i>					
QUESTIONS NAMED ON							
Look After House	.60	-.05	-.01	-.03	.01		
Helped in House	.08	.03	.07	.03	.09		
Borrow Money	.12	.15*	.19*	.13*	.16*	.13*	.17*
Discuss Work	.18	-.00	-.00	-.01	.01		
Social Activity	.51	.16*	.11*	.13*	.09*	.15*	.12*
Discuss Hobby	.33	.09*	.07+	.08+	.05	.10*	
Discuss Personal	.32	.14*	.36*	.12*	.33*	.13*	.36*
Seek Advice	.14	-.02	.23*	-.03	.23*		.22*
Date	.01	-.01	.12	.02	.16		
OTHER ROLE LABELS							
Coworker	.32			.09	-.12		
Neighbor	.72			.04	-.16		
Organiz. Member	.15			.06	.08		
ASSOCIATE'S TRAITS							
Male/Female	1.51			.02	.07		
Within Five Minutes	.76			.05	.04		
Over One Hour	.03			.03	.03		
Age (÷ 10)	4.1			.01	-.01		
Fully Employed	.52			-.02	.02		
Married	.63			-.04	-.02		
Never Married	.17			-.07	.02		
RESPONDENT'S TRAITS							
Male/Female	1.51			.00	-.04		
Age (÷ 10)	4.1			-.04+	.02		
Education (1-5)	2.9			.00	-.01		
Fully Employed	.59			.00	-.03		
Partly Employed	.11			.02	.04		
Married	.55			.01	-.01		
Never Married	.20			.01	.02		
Household Income	9.0			.00	-.01		
Non-Anglo	.12			-.02	-.01		
Total Assocs. (÷ 10)	2.1			.00	.04*		.04*
RESP-ASSOC TRAITS							
Same Gender	.71			-.01	-.01		
Age Difference ^a	2.7			-.02+	-.02	-.03*	
Same Marital Status	.66			.02	-.00		
Years Known (÷ 10)	.67			.01	-.08		
Prop. of Life Known	.15			-.03	.81*	.27*	.46*

+ p < .01 * p < .001

NB. See notes to Tables 1 and 2.

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