

CLOSEST FRIENDSHIPS OF BLACK COLLEGE STUDENTS: SOCIAL INTIMACY

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Literature focuses on the formation of friendship, largely in terms of similarities of attitudes and experiences. Some of it suggests the significance of social intimacy in the friendship structure and its influences on personality and social consequences. Using ego's perception of his closest friendship unit, the present study attempted to study social intimacy of closest friendships of black college students, and social intimacy based on structural characteristics of the group formed by members of the same and of the opposite sex. Results found different degrees in the range of social intimacy between closest friendships of same and opposite sex members. Among the structural networks of both heterosocial and homosocial friendships, dyadic forms of relations tended to be the most socially intimate.

La literatura sobre la formación de amistades se centran principalmente en la similitud de actitudes y de experiencias. Algunos de los autores sugieren la importancia de la intimidad social dentro de la estructura de la amistad y su influencia en la personalidad y en las consecuencias sociales. Este estudio trató de estudiar la intimidad social de amistades entre estudiantes universitarios negros utilizando la percepción del yo de la unidad de amistad más cercana. Se consideró la intimidad social basada en las características estructurales del grupo formado por miembros del mismo sexo o del sexo opuesto. Los resultados presentan grados diferentes en el rango de intimidad social entre las amistades más cercanas del mismo sexo y del sexo opuesto. Entre las cadenas estructurales de amistades heterosociales y homosociales, las formas diádicas fueron por lo general las más íntimas.

Simmel (1950) designated the dyadic and triadic relational structures as those tending to have the closest social interaction. In these simple relational networks, he proposed that understanding of each member by the other or others in the group enhanced the closeness of the relations. Durkheim (1951) maintained that a lack of social intimacy in groups can lead to isolation for individuals and lead them toward a state of anomie or normlessness. This condition can lead to disastrous consequences, such as suicide, however, consensual friendship can help to offset this state of being. Thrasher (1955) concluded social intimacy in dyadic and triadic groups can lead to greater potential for group growth. Gardner and Thompson (1956) as well as Cooley (1963) considered social relations in small groups and their influence on the nature of interaction and primary relationships. The more primary the relationship, the greater the probability of social intimacy.

Weinberg (1964a; 1964b) noted that during the stage of adolescence there tends to be a diminution of social intimacy between parents and children. Peer groups, especially friendship groups, can aid the emotional development of the youngsters by giving them the opportunity to be socially intimate with others in such associations. Social intimacy might be measured through increasing degrees of self-disclosure to others and through mutual activities (Taylor, 1968). As these increase, there tends to be more social penetration by the persons involved, and the probability of more social intimacy. Krieger and Wells (1969) found different aspects of friendship criteria differ from early to late adolescence. Social intimacy, along with other processes of friendship, can have different bases for its formation depending on the age of the group members in the adolescent period. Broom and Selznick (1971) consider the goal of groups as group sustenance. Friendship relations, reciprocity, the satisfaction of mutual needs, and social intimacy are some of the major factors in achieving this end.

The present study attempted to determine social intimacy of closest friendships of black college students as it was perceived from ego's perception of his (her) friendship unit. Social intimacy was also examined from the structural characteristics (dyad, double dyad, triad, etc.) of the association, and from closest friendships formed by individuals of the same sex and of those of the opposite sex.

Method

Subjects

One-hundred ninety-seven black freshman and sophomore students at Kennedy-King College, Chicago, Illinois. There were 77 males and 120 females ranging in age from 18 to 25 yrs. All Ss were single and living off campus.

Materials

One "closest friendship diagram" consisting of a paper on which Ss were asked to diagram their closest friend or friends. Lines were drawn between ego and other(s) and the sex of each person in the group was indicated. Ego and other(s) were illustrated as circles; labels were printed within them (such as m or f) to represent the sex of the persons. The technique representing a modified version of the sociogram (see Moreno, 1953) required Ss to delimit and structure their friendship group of closest friends. Analyses of this instrument were presented (Peretti, 1973) and the results suggested the influence of structural characteristics on closest friendship formation.

A second questionnaire to determine group stability was devised to find out to what extent the Ss perceived the closest friendship group with reference to maintaining and sustaining the relational network over time. Specifically, it posed the question: "In time, will the closest friendship stay about the same; will it get closer, or will it deteriorate? Explain". Ss wrote essays giving their perceptions of ideas, attitudes, and behaviors associated with their predictions of the future outcome of the group. Operationally, their responses provided a measure of group stability. Analyses of this instrument are presented elsewhere (Peretti, 1973).

Social intimacy, measured by a third questionnaire, was used as a basis for the research presented in this paper. It was devised to measure what degree of social intimacy the Ss perceived in their closest friendship unit. It was composed of 13 items found through pretesting to be related to social intimacy. Operationally, social intimacy is the extent to which members of the group have close, personal, intimate sharing of information between them. Items on the "social intimacy ques-

tionnaire" ranged from statements such as "I feel very much at ease and relaxed with my friend" and "My friend and I have common interests based on our common experiences," which were among the more socially intimate items, to "I continue to relate with my friends because I cannot cultivate other friends" and "My friend and I often make cutting remarks at each other which becomes irritating," which were among the less intimate.

Items were chosen for the instrument by using 50 students as judges and having them rank the statements according to the Thurstone method. Weighted scores, ranging from 1.00 to 10.60, were calculated in determining a measure of social intimacy along a continuum. The same instrument was used to measure social intimacy between *same* and *opposite* sex closest friendships.

Students volunteering to participate in the research first completed the "closest friendship diagram" and group stability questionnaire (specific details of these procedures are discussed elsewhere: Peretti, 1973). The social intimacy questionnaire for *same* and *opposite* sex closest friendships was given the Ss one week later than the other two. Ss were asked to rate their degree of perceived social intimacy with their closest friends. These friends were the same persons detailed in the "closest friendship diagram" and considered on the group stability instrument. Rating was done by the Ss ranking the 13 statements from 1 to 13 with the Lowest numbers suggesting the greatest intimacy; the highest numbers the least social intimacy. Each number used in ranking the items was used only once. No time limit was given for the instrument's completion. Completed forms were handed in to the researcher.

Results

Degree of Perceived Social Intimacy of Closest Friendships of the Same Sex. In relation to the structural characteristics of the group, as indicated in Table 1, those closest friendship units of the *same* sex having the greatest degree of social intimacy included the dyad (46.67%); triple dyad (40.00%); double dyad (37.84%), and triad (25.00%). Each of these categories of relational network can be found to have at least 8 responses in the range of intimacy from 2.00 to 2.99 (the most intimate range).

Collectively, the first three most socially intimate categories include the closest friendship structures of the triple dyad (84.00%); dyad (71.67%), and double dyad (70.27%). This might suggest that the most socially intimate closest friendships tend to be structures of friends in some form of dyadic relationship. Among responses having at least 10 total replies, collectively, the first two least socially intimate relational structures were the triad (28.14%) and the triad and dyad (23.08%). Of note is the cross-tie of a third person in each of the triadic association within the friendship unit.

Considering the total number of responses, in Table 1, at the bottom of the first four most socially intimate categories (2.00-2.99 to 5.00-5.99), the respective scores in this range: 35.53; 13.71; 17.23, and 14.21 account for 80.68% of the total responses on the social intimacy scale. Moreover, over one-third (35.53) of the replies can be found in the first range. The last four categories (6.00-6.99 to 9.00-9.99) contain a combined total of 19.32% of the data.

Degree of Perceived Social Intimacy of Closest Friendships of the Opposite Sex. Closest friendship structures of the *opposite* sex having at Least 10 replies in the first two most intimate categories were the dyad (86.87%) and the double dyad (73.70). It can be seen in Table 2, that the dyad structure alone has almost two

TABLE I

DEGREE OF SOCIAL INTIMACY IN RELATIONAL NETWORKS OF CLOSEST FRIENDSHIPS OF THE SAME SEX
AMONG BLACK COLLEGE TRAINED YOUTH 18 to 25 YRS. OLD

Structure	Total F and Percent Per Social Intimacy Range								
	2.00— 2.99	3.00— 3.99	4.00— 4.99	5.00— 5.99	6.00— 6.99	7.00— 7.99	8.00— 8.99	9.00— 9.99	Totals(Percent)
1) Dyad	28(46.67)	6(10.00)	9(15.00)	11(18.33)	3(5.00)	2(3.33)	1(1.67)	0(0.00)	60 (100.00)
2) D. Dyad	14(37.84)	7(18.92)	5(13.51)	5(13.51)	3(8.11)	2(5.41)	0(0.00)	1(2.70)	37 (100.00)
3) Triad	8(25.00)	5(15.63)	7(21.88)	2(6.25)	1(3.13)	5(15.63)	1(3.13)	3(9.38)	32 (100.00)
4) Trple Dy.	10(40.00)	4(16.00)	7(28.00)	1(4.00)	0(0.00)	3(12.00)	0(0.00)	0.0.00	25 (100.00)
5) Trd.& Dy.	5(38.46)	1(7.70)	2(15.38)	2(15.38)	0(0.00)	1(7.70)	0(0.00)	2(15.38)	13 (100.00)
6) Quartet	2(25.00)	1(12.50)	2(25.00)	1(12.50)	1(12.50)	0(0.00)	1(12.50)	0(0.00)	8 (100.00)
7) Quint Dy.	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	2(66.67)	(33.33)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	3 (100.00)
8) Sextet	1(33.33)	1(33.33)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1(33.33)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	3 (100.00)
9) Quart Dy.	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	2(100.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	3 (100.00)
10) Trd. & D.Dy.	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1(50.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1(50.00)	2 (100.00)
11) Qrtet. & Dy	2(50.00)	1(25.00)	0(0.00)	1(25.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	2 (100.00)
12) Quintet	0(0.00)	1(25.00)	1(25.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	2(50.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	4 (100.00)
13) Double Trd.	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1(100.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	4 (100.00)
14) Trd. & 3 Dy.	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1(100.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1 (100.00)
15) Septet & Dy.	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1(100.00)	0(0.00)	1 (100.00)
16) Octet	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1(100.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1 (100.00)
	70(35.53)	27(13.71)	34 (17.23)	28(14.21)	11(5.58)	16(8.12)	4(2.03)	7(3.55)	197 (100.00)

-thirds (60.65%) of the responses in the most intimate category. In comparing the same dyadic structure with friendships of the *same* sex member (see Table 1) the frequency of response is 46.67. Greater social intimacy between opposite sex members is suggested.

In comparing the first three social intimacy ranges (2.00-2.99 to 4.00-4.99) the greatest frequency of responses are found in the dyadic (93.42%) and double dyadic (78.46%) relational networks. Frequencies of response in comparable areas for *same* sex closest are 70.27% for the dyad; 71.67% for the double dyad.

Note might be made that the social intimacy ranges of 8.00-8.99 and 9.00-9.99 have no data for *opposite* sex friendship groups. In fact, the 6.00-6.99 and 7.00-7.99 ranges have only 3 responses each. For *same* sex closest friendships, the

TABLE 2
DEGREE OF SOCIAL INTIMACY IN RELATIONAL NETWORKS OF CLOSEST FRIENDSHIPS OF THE OPPOSITE SEX AMONG BLACK COLLEGE TRAINED YOUTH 18 to 25 YRS. OLD

Structure	Total F and Percent Per Social Intimacy Range									
	2.00-- 2.99	3.00-- 3.99	4.00-- 4.99	5.00-- 5.99	6.00-- 6.99	7.00-- 7.99	8.00-- 8.99	9.00-- 9.99	Total	Percent
1) Dyad	37(60.65)	16(26.22)	4(6.55)	2(3.30)	1(1.63)	1(1.63)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	61	(100.00)
2) D. Dyad	8(42.10)	6(31.60)	1(5.26)	1(5.26)	2(10.52)	1(5.26)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	19	(100.00)
3) Triad	5(71.42)	0(0.00)	1(14.28)	1(14.28)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	7	(100.00)
4) Triple Dy.	1(33.33)	0(0.00)	1(33.33)	1(33.33)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	3	(100.00)
5) Trid. & Dy.	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1(100.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	1	(100.00)
	51(56.04)	22(23.08)	7(7.70)	5(5.49)	3(3.30)	3(3.30)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)	91	(100.00)

social intimacy range from 6.00-6.99 to 9.00-9.99 contained 19.28% responses; the same range for *opposite sex* friendship units was 6.60%.

Among closest friendships of the *same sex*, there were a total of 80.68% responses among the first four most intimate categories, however, among friends of the *opposite sex*, there were a total of 86.82% responses in the first three most intimate response categories. Moreover, if the fourth category is included for the latter Ss than the combined total is 92.31%.

Discussion

In closest friendships of members of the *same* and of members of the *opposite sex*, the most socially intimate structures tend to be dyadic in nature (dyad, double dyad, triple dyad, etc.). In fact, the most socially intimate of each group is the simple dyadic structure. Such results suggest that relationships in which there are no cross-ties, such as in the triad or in the quartet, tend to contain the greatest intimacy. This might be due to the one-to-one situation in which each person communicates directly only one other. In multiple dyads, such as the double dyad, only one other is directly associating with ego. Ego can maintain and sustain each relational network independently of any other in which he might be involved.

Where multiple associations are formed not of a dyadic nature, even in closest friendships at least some of the members might be likely to form coalitions. In coalition formation, the interactions can lead to destructive associations with others in the group decreasing social intimacy between members, and, in some cases, lead to deterioration of the closest friendship. In *same sex* groups, about one-third of the relationships were in the greatest social intimacy range; in *opposite sex* groups, this figure was up to almost 60 percent. The first conclusion is that there does seem to be a number of black closest friendship groups of the *same sex* which tend to be very intimate, however, one can further conclude that there is an even greater number of such groups among *opposite sex* members.

In *same sex* groups, more associations were found that were among the least intimate, as compared to the *opposite sex* units, and it might be concluded that these relations were based on more secondary goals, or goals external to the personal, intimate nature of the relationship itself. For *same sex* males, for example, some of their closest friendships might be a result of "playing ball" on the same team, riding to school in the same car, or having the same classes. These could be similar for females, although one might also find they associate because they don't want to go out alone, or they feel more comfortable having another girl as a companion.

Of the total *same sex* closest friendships, about one-third of the Ss engaged in associations of greatest social intimacy; at the other extreme about one-sixth had associations of least intimacy, and, about one-half developed intimacy in the remaining middle ranges. The greater part of the friendship formations tend to be perceived as socially intimate for *same sex* members. Since physical intimacy would not be considered to be a major factor in such a relationship, it might be concluded that these individuals relate well to each other, on a personal level due to mutual sharing of ideas and experiences. Here the intimacy might be less involved with associations of manipulation for sexual favors or sexual exploitation than if it were structured of *opposite sex* members.

Social intimacy between *opposite sex* members was found to be closer than between *same sex* members. Moreover, there were greater numbers of dyadic forms of structural relations between persons in the former group. Possibilities of physical

sexual contact or at least manipulation for sexual favors might be a factor in such differences. Aside from dyadic networks for *opposite* sex units, other structural networks had only five or less respondents, which further accents the dyadic forms for these associations. In being intimate on a personal level with an *opposite* sex person, a dyadic structure might lead to less jealousy, conflict, and all-around problems for the members. Even though multiple-dyads were fewer than the simple dyad, ego can relate to each other in much the same way as in the simpler form with each dyadic relationship being relatively discrete from the other(s).

The range of social intimacy for *same* sex closest friends was much greater than the range for *opposite* sex units. For the latter group, the range of social intimacy was clustered about the more socially intimate categories. This would suggest *opposite* sex closest friendships are either very socially intimate, or at least moderately so, or they tend to deteriorate; for *same* sex friendships relations of little social intimacy tend to be endured and might be maintained for reasons other than the friendship itself. In the *opposite* sex relationship between man and woman, the courtship process as well as aspects toward a marital relationship might be developing. These would tend to enhance the social intimacy of the group and lead toward greater personal contact. Self-disclosure and commitment might be found in the heterosocial structure as compared to the homosocial, and each of these tends toward increased social intimacy for the group.

Although the triad received few responses in the *opposite* sex group, most of them were in the area of greatest social intimacy. In this form of relationship, in order to maintain the structure because of the differences in sex, it would be almost beneficial to have some degree of social intimacy between and among all members. Degrees of intimacy among members would determine the direction of the future of the group structure.

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