Friends of Urban Men: An Assessment of Accuracy in Reporting Their Socioeconomic Attributes, Mutual Choice, and Attitude Agreement

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Friends of Urban Men: An Assessment of Accuracy in Reporting Their Socioeconomic Attributes, Mutual Choice, and Attitude Agreement*

EDWARD O. LAUMANN
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This analysis of friends of urban men is guided by methodological and substantive considerations. Methodologically, we have assessed the accuracy with which respondents report social attributes and characteristics of their friends. Errors are less frequent for relatively objective characteristics (age, occupation) than for the less visible and public characteristics of the friend (political attitudes). Where errors occur, they are in the direction of the respondent ascribing his own characteristics to his friend.

Substantively, we have addressed ourselves to the question of estimating the degree of mutual choice of friends in an adult urban population, friends being named unconstrained by any criteria of selection, and of assessing the degree of attitude similarity between friends and the relevance of reciprocated choice in enhancing attitude similarity. Reciprocity of friendship choice is seen to be related to frequency of contact, closeness of the friendship, and spatial proximity. In addition, there is some support for the hypothesis that reciprocity of friendship is associated with a greater homogeneity of attitudes than is the case in nonreciprocated pairs of friends.

This paper is addressed to two broad tasks, the first methodological and the second substantive. For methodological purposes, we wish to examine the accuracy with which respondents report the social attributes of their friends. Many studies (Wilson, 1959; Herriott, 1963; McClosky and Dahlgren, 1960; Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955; Berelson, et al., 1954; Stark and Glock, 1968; Bell, 1963; Campbell and Alexander, 1965) have found the characteristics of an individual’s friends to be of considerable importance in

*I want especially to acknowledge the many helpful suggestions and advice of Howard Schuman, my collaborator on the Detroit Area Study, Paul Siegel, my colleague at the Center for Research on Social Organization, University of Michigan, and Stephen Cutler, my research assistant. The total study and this analysis were aided by grants from the Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies, University of Michigan, the National Institute of Mental Health (MH-13464-01), and the National Science Foundation (GS-1929).
helping to explain certain features of his behavior and attitudes. Unfortunately, they often have not been in a position to assess the degree of accuracy of the respondent's perception of their friends' attributes, thus running the risk of an unknown degree of contamination of their explanatory variable from their dependent variable. We are in a position not only to ascertain the accuracy of report of a number of important attributes of friends for a cross-section of urban white men, but also to determine whether some attributes of friends are reported more accurately than others. Some social attributes, such as occupation, are highly visible and likely to be known quite accurately by the respondent; while others, such as his friend's ethnic origin, specific religious denominational preference or membership, or political party preference, may be considerably less visible to the respondent. For some friendship pairs, political, ethnic, or religious attitudes play a very important role, being frequently discussed and mutually reinforced. For others, they may be specifically denied as relevant to the friendship as in the assertion: "We don't talk politics or religion: that's a private matter." Finally, we shall examine whether there is evidence of systematic distortion or bias in the reporting of friends' attributes. For example, it is easy to imagine the respondents tending to distort occupational or educational information about their friends toward a higher status or more "favorable" report, perhaps in an effort to impress the interviewer with the "quality" of their associates or even to inflate their own self-esteem. Moreover, if the respondent is in fact uncertain about a given attribute of his friend, he might be expected to "estimate" it from knowledge of his own attribute.

From a substantive point of view, we shall be able to make some estimate of the degree to which there is mutual choice or reciprocity in friendship choices for the adult male population. Presumably a mutually chosen pair of friends should differ in predictable ways from a unilaterally chosen pair in terms of their frequency of contact, level of intimacy, and agreement on selected attitudes (cf. Winslow, 1937; Williams, 1959).

Source of the Data. A randomly drawn subsample of the main sample

1 In this regard it would be profitable to consider the more social psychologically oriented literature on the "perception of others," including Taft, 1955; Lundy, 1956; McDavid and Harari, 1968:127–150.

2 During the spring and summer of 1966, interviewers from the University of Michigan Detroit Area Study conducted 85-minute interviews with a sample of 1,013 native-born, white men, between the ages of 21 and 64, in the greater metropolitan area of Detroit. A multi-stage probability sample of dwelling units of that part of the Detroit SMSA that was tract ed in 1950 plus some small additions made to take into account recent suburban population growth was drawn. Within each dwelling unit having one or more eligible respondents, one person was drawn at random for the interview. A total of 985 actual interviews was obtained, of which 28 have been double-weighted, yielding a final set of 1,013 cases for use in analysis. These 1,013 cases represent 80 per cent of the
TABLE 1

Completion Rates for Telephone Interview Sample: Per Cent Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completed Interviews</th>
<th>59.0%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not Completed Interviews</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusals to be interviewed</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with wrong person</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three or more phone calls, respondent not contacted</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend's residence out of calling area*</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent had no one to name as friend</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or refused to give information on friend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete or incorrect information given by main respondent</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend moved with no forwarding address, died</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total N=200</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The calling area included all of southeastern Michigan (including Wayne, Macomb, and Washtenaw Counties), Windsor, Canada, and its surroundings in Ontario, and northern Ohio and Indiana.

b Excludes 46 cases in which the telephone interviewer never made an effort to verify the information provided or to telephone the friend. When it became apparent that limitations of time, money, and staff would necessitate reduction of the sample, we dropped the 46 cases on a random basis from those remaining cases that no effort had yet been made to contact.

(drawn at the rate of one in four) was asked at the conclusion of the interview to furnish the full name, street address, and telephone number of a randomly selected friend from the first two of the three closest friends described at length by the respondent during the interview. He was told that this friend would be called by an interviewer from the Detroit Area Study for a six- or seven-minute interview conducted over the telephone. Only 3.5 per cent of the subsample failed to give this information either because they did not wish to violate their friends’ privacy by revealing their names and addresses or because they did not name any friends in the interview. An additional 11 per cent provided incomplete or incorrect information on their friends so that the telephone interviewer was unable to locate them by phone.

eligible households sampled. Refusals to grant interviews accounted for 13.9 per cent of the eligible households (N=1,271); another 6.4 per cent was lost because no one had been found home after 6 calls (5.5 per cent) or for other reasons.

For further details concerning the sampling design and sample completion rates, the interested reader may write Professor Howard Schuman, Director, Detroit Area Study, for a copy of Working Paper #1, Project 938, “Sampling Memorandum for the 1965–66 Detroit Area Study,” January 1967.
Only 6.5 per cent of the friends refused to grant an interview over the phone; while another 8 per cent were not contacted after three or more phone calls. Table 1 summarizes the completion rates of the telephone subsample. The friends were phoned between two to four months after the main respondent's interview.

Table 2 shows that there are systematic differences in socioeconomic characteristics (as reported by the main respondent) between those friends who were successfully interviewed and those who were not. The noninterviewed were disproportionately likely to be of lower occupational status (primarily in unskilled and semi-skilled occupations) and educational attainment (especially likely to have only completed grade school or less), Protestant, and young (20 to 29 years of age). Such systematic discrepancies suggest that we will tend to overestimate the accuracy of report of friends' characteristics since the estimates are based on a sample somewhat biased in favor of the better educated and higher status men.

**FINDINGS**

**Accuracy in Report of Friends' Characteristics.** Table 3 summarizes a number of indicators of the accuracy of report of friends' social attributes by the main respondent. For those attributes capable of being measured by unidi-

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8 As Stephan and McCarthy (1958) have noted, nearly all large-scale surveys of the noninstitutional adult population consistently underenumerate certain categories of the population, especially those groups which have high rates of geographical mobility and reside in "group quarters" (e.g., boarding houses) as opposed to "family dwelling units." Such groups are characterized by their relative youth, high male composition, and lowly socioeconomic status (unskilled and semiskilled workers of poor educational attainments). In fact, a closer examination of the noninterviewed telephone respondents (on the basis of main respondent reports) reveals that they are concentrated in a group of young, recent migrants from the South (accounting for our underenumeration of Protestants) who are employed as unskilled or semi-skilled auto workers and who live in group quarters (where the telephone listing is not likely to be in their names).

Thus, the sampling biases on age, occupation, education, etc., appear to have arisen, among other things, from missing a certain group of persons who are, unfortunately, especially likely to be missed in such surveys, particularly when the procedure of interviewing is based on the telephone contact. What we have to ask is whether this underenumerated group is so different from the rest of the population on matters of the study's concern and of sufficient numerical importance that our results are hopelessly distorted. I do not think so. Judging from the experiences of other large-scale surveys regarding coverage (cf. Stephan and McCarthy, 1958:150–151, 235–272, 298), I would regard the biases of this sample as being of the same order of magnitude of these other studies. The sample, in short, is probably reasonably representative of the vast bulk of the adult white male "settled" population of the Detroit metropolitan area.
## TABLE 2

**Comparison of Selected Perceived Characteristics of Interviewed and Noninterviewed Friends as Reported by the Main Respondents: Per Cent Distribution**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Occupational Status as Reported by Main Respondents*</th>
<th>Perceived Educational Attainment as Reported by Main Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intervewned Friends</td>
<td>Noninterviewed Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10–19</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–29</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–49</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–59</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60–69</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70–79</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80–89</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90–96</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Age as Reported by Main Respondents</th>
<th>Perceived Religious Preference as Reported by Main Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intervewned Friends</td>
<td>Noninterviewed Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–29</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–49</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–59</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 plus</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Party Preference as Reported by the Main Respondents</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intervewned Friends</td>
<td>Noninterviewed Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>44.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other, don't know</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The current occupation of the respondent was first coded into the 6-digit detailed occupation-industry code of the U.S. Bureau of the Census and then recoded by computer to the 2-digit code of Duncan's Index of Socioeconomic Status (Cf. Duncan, 1961).
mensional scales, we have reported the product-moment correlations of the main respondent's report of the friend's attribute and the friend's report on the attribute. Obviously age is reported with exceptional accuracy, while occupational status (as coded in the two-digit Index of Socio-Economic Status) 6 and educational attainment (a 7-category code ranging from "0–8 grades to "17 years or more") are reported with reasonably high accuracy. Indeed, the correlations approximate those normally desired for two coders' reliability in coding the same open-ended material. Only political party preference (a 7-category code ranging from "strong Republican" party preference through "independent" [inclined toward neither party] to "strong Democratic" party preference) has a relatively low accuracy of .513.

As Robinson (1957:19) has cogently argued, however, the product-moment correlation can easily mislead the investigator by overestimating the degree of agreement between two judges or reports because: ". . . . it measures the degree to which the paired values of the two variables are proportional (when expressed as deviations from their means) rather than identical." Thus, one could obtain, for example in the case of age, a Pearsonian coefficient near unity indicating "perfect agreement" despite the fact the main respondents consistently overestimated their friends' actual ages by five years. He argues that the intraclass correlation is a better measure of agreement (accuracy) than the Pearsonian correlation because it penalizes the Pearsonian for differences in the origin or level (differences in the means) and in the scale or unit (differences in the standard deviations) between the two variables under examination. When the means and standard deviations are equal, the Pearsonian and intraclass correlations are also equal; when either one or both are different, the intraclass correlation will be lower. Column 2 of Table 3 reports the intraclass correlations. In every case, we see that they are nearly identical with their corresponding Pearsonian correlation, reflecting the fact that there are essentially no differences between the means and standard deviations of the main respondents' estimates of their friends' attributes and their friends' reports on their own attributes.

With regard to the categorical information of religious preference and ethnic origin, we found only 4.2 per cent of the main respondents were completely wrong in reporting their friends' religious preference and 9.3 per cent were definitely incorrect in reporting their friends' ethnic origin. It is in the cases of party preference and ethnic origin that the main respondents are least knowledgeable ("don't know" responses, 14.4 and 15.2 per cent, respectively)

4 For a very interesting treatment of the problem of measurement error, see Siegel and Hodge, 1968.
5 See footnote a, Table 2.
### Summary Indicators of the Accuracy of Report of Friends' Social Attributes by the Main Respondent \((N=118)\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Attributes</th>
<th>(1) Product-Moment Correlation</th>
<th>(2) Intraclass Correlation</th>
<th>(3) Percent Main and Friend Identical Reports</th>
<th>(4) Means of Main Respondent's Reports</th>
<th>(5) Means of Friend's Reports</th>
<th>(6) Significance of Difference between Means</th>
<th>(7) Percent of Main Respondents Who &quot;Don't Know&quot; Friend's Attribute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.984</td>
<td>.980</td>
<td>31.4*</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation(^b)</td>
<td>.890</td>
<td>.886</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.839</td>
<td>.815</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political party preference</td>
<td>.513</td>
<td>.495</td>
<td>53.4*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious preference</td>
<td>.980(^d)</td>
<td>.980(^d)</td>
<td>68.6*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic origin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>57.6*</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) Another 54.2 per cent were within two years of the friend's reported age.

\(^b\) See footnote a, Table 2, for description of occupational code.

\(^c\) An addition 17.8 per cent were cases in which the main respondent reported an "independent" for party preference and the friend reported a specific party preference. Only 14.4 per cent of the cases reported different (incorrect) party identifications.

\(^d\) In order to calculate this correlation, we treated religious preference as a dichotomous variable, Protestant or Catholic, and deleted Jews and persons of no religious preference from the analysis.

\(^e\) An additional 14.4 per cent were cases in which the main respondent reported "Protestant, denomination unspecified," while the friend reported the specific Protestant denomination. Only 4.2 per cent were incorrect (e.g., the main respondent reporting Protestant, while the friend reported Catholic). Since Protestants could report one of a number of specific denominational affiliations, we determined the actual agreement between the main respondent and his friend on the friend's specific denominational membership. In a sense, this procedure requires considerably greater precision of report (and, consequently, greater opportunity for error) than simply treating the broad religious preference as Protestant or Catholic as was done in calculating the product-moment and intraclass correlations. Columns 1 and 2 for the row on religious preference are, consequently, not comparable to Column 3.

\(^f\) Another 17.8 per cent were cases in which the main respondent reported an ethnic origin from a given country, but the friend reported an origin from a neighboring country (e.g., the main respondent reported Yugoslav, but the friend reported Serbian). Only 9.3 per cent were definitely wrong about the country of origin (e.g., reported German but actually Italian.)
and most inaccurate (incorrect reports, 14.4 and 9.3 per cent, respectively).

With regard to systematic biases in reporting friends' attributes, we found no evidence of such distortions in the cases of age, occupation, educational attainment, and religious preference (see Columns 2, 4, 5, and 6 and footnotes e and f in Table 3). There is some evidence that main respondents tend to report that they "don't know" the ethnic origin of friends when the friends are third generation or more Americans of northwest European origin (including English, Welsh, Scotch, Irish, and German)—in short, such friends' ethnic identity is essentially "majority American," their original country of origin is of exceptionally low visibility and often there is a mixture of "nationalities" in the background of the friend adding to the difficulty of knowing the "correct" identity.

There is, however, evidence of systematic distortion in the case of party preference. Disregarding those of "independent" party preference because there are too few cases to sustain analysis, Table 4 clearly shows that Democratic main respondents are especially likely to perceive their friends as being Democrats when in fact they are Republicans. This is a clear instance of the main respondents' projecting their own political attitudes onto their friends. Republican main respondents, on the other hand, are much more accurate in reporting their friend's party preference, but even they perceived 19 per cent of their Republican friends as having a Democratic party preference.

Given the moderate associations of Republican party preference with higher educational attainment and occupational status (product-moment correlations of .291 and .425, respectively), it is quite plausible to argue that the greater inaccuracy of Democratic respondents might be attributed to their relatively lower educational attainment on the grounds that the more educated (and presumably more sophisticated) would be more likely to be accurate in reporting their friends' characteristics. While insufficient numbers preclude our explicitly testing this hypothesis with the data in hand, we can note

### TABLE 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actual Party Preference of Friend</th>
<th>Republican Main Respondents</th>
<th>Democratic Main Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>Democrat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$p=.0007$, Fisher's Exact Test, N=27</td>
<td>$p=.2384$, Fisher's Exact Test, N=37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
that our efforts to show a general relationship for the whole sample between
accuracy of report and educational attainment were unsuccessful in uncover-
ing significant relationships (although they were usually in the predicted
direction).

The Reciprocation of Friendship Choices. Implicit in the notion of
friendship is the assumption that it is a symmetric relation in which both
ego and alter should choose each other as friends—what the sociometric
literature refers to as reciprocated choice. Most sociometric studies are able
to evaluate the extent to which there is reciprocation because they typically
study populations which are in some sense conceptually closed, such as a
high school (cf. Alexander and Campbell, 1964; Alexander, 1966), a house
shared by college students (cf. Newcomb, 1961), a governmental agency
(cf. Weiss and Jacobson, 1955), a small rural community (cf. Duncan and
Artis, 1951; Lundberg and Steel, 1938; Loomis and Davidson, 1939), the
medical profession in several moderate-sized communities (cf. Coleman, et al.,
1966), an Air Force unit (cf. Zeleny, 1947), or even the elite of a
community power structure (cf. Hunter, 1953). In such populations it is
expedient or at least feasible to gather the relevant sociometric data on the
entire population, thus facilitating the identification of reciprocated choices.

When, however, one utilizes data on friends nominated by respondents in a
cross-sectional sample of a large population universe, such as the Detroit
metropolitan area, the determination of the degree of reciprocal choice is
indeed highly problematic. In view of the more or less explicit assumption in
the sociometric literature that the relationship between mutually chosen
friends is probably of greater intimacy and saliency and, consequently, more
likely to lead to greater similarity of attitudes toward the world, some assess-
ment of the degree of reciprocity of choice in such a cross-sectional sample
and of its significance for attitude similarity would seem to be imperative.

In an effort to determine reciprocity of choice, we asked the friend in the
course of the telephone interview to think of his three closest friends and to
tell us their ages, occupations, employment status (self-employed or em-
ployee), and kin relationship (whether they were related to the friend and, if
so, in what way).6 The characteristics of these three friends were then com-
pared to the characteristics of the main respondent for a "match." When all

6 It should be emphasized, first, that the telephone respondent was not informed that
his name had been given to us by one of our main respondents and, second, that he was
phoned at least two months after the main respondent had been interviewed in order to
minimize the possibility of recalling that the main respondent may have mentioned that
we would be calling him for an interview. We had asked the main respondents not to
mention to their friends that we would be calling them for interviews, but we do not
know whether we enjoyed complete cooperation with this request.
four characteristics exactly matched the main respondent's characteristics, the coder was instructed to code this as "highly likely to be the same person." If only the age reported was "off" by three years of the main respondent's and all other characteristics were identical, the coder coded the case as "probably the same person." Table 5 presents the results of this procedure. Over 20 percent of the friends were highly likely to have reported the main respondent as one of their three closest friends, while another 22.9 percent probably reported the main respondent as one of their friends.

In order to put this estimate of 43.2 percent reciprocated choices in some perspective, we referred to two recent studies having some relevance to this problem: First, in Coleman's et al. (1966:77) study of the diffusion of a medical innovation among doctors in four moderate-sized communities, they asked their respondents to name three doctor friends whom they saw most

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Percent Distribution of Reciprocated and Non-Reciprocated Choices of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Respondent and Telephone Respondent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly likely to be the same person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably the same person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely not the same person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient information to make any judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (N=118)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

often socially. Thirty-seven percent of the 430 friendship designations were reciprocated. Secondly, in a sample of 1,410 senior males in 30 high schools who were asked to name up to five students of the same sex that they "go around with most often" (Alexander, 1966:46), 59.8 percent of these choices were reciprocated. Since the only demographic characteristic of our respondents that is significantly correlated with reciprocation of choice is age (.274, p<.001, the older the respondent, the less likely the reciprocation of choice) and since the second study permitted a higher likelihood of reciprocation (five friends reported rather than three), it would appear our estimate is at least a reasonable one and not excessively low or high.

As already noted above, such attributes as occupational status, educational attainment, religious preference (Protestant or Catholic), and party preference are unrelated to reciprocity of friendship choice. It would be reasonable to expect, however, that reciprocation be related to higher frequency of contact of the two friends, closer proximity of the friend (i.e., common residence
in the same neighborhood), and a higher self-reported assessment of the closeness of the friendship. And indeed this is precisely what we do find—all of these hypothesized relationships are significant at the .05 level or better (one-tailed test), with product-moment correlations of .202, .152, and .148, respectively.

**Friendship and Attitude Similarity.** But, we may ask, is there any difference in attitude similarity between those friendship pairs which are reciprocated and those which are not? Or more generally, are friendship pairs more likely to agree on attitudes than randomly paired persons? From a substantive and methodological point of view, one can readily see that these are difficult questions to answer adequately. The most critical difficulty arises from the fact that any given actor will have myriad specific attitudes toward many objects in his "life space." The saliency of given attitudes, their centrality to the person’s general orientation to the world, the degree to which they are organized into a "belief system" of some consistency or coherence, and the degree to which the person is affectively committed to a given orientation, among other considerations, will affect the importance and relevance of a given attitude to a friend relationship. Indeed Newcomb (1961:16 ff.) provides an excellent discussion of the interrelations among orientations between persons (A and B) and attitudes toward objects, X, in his ABX theory of balance. Given these considerations, the simple hypothesis that agreement among friends (whether identified by reciprocated choice or simple unilateral nomination) on specified attitudes toward the world will be higher than "agreement" between randomly paired individuals is almost certainly incorrect without further specification. Only if one can assume that the attitudes in question are salient and affectively important to both parties and of common relevance, can one expect that processes of mutual influence,

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7 This information on frequency of contact, proximity to the main respondent, and assessment of the closeness of the friendship was reported for each friend by the main respondent.

8 Philip Converse (1964) provides an exceptionally lucid and stimulating discussion concerning the nature of belief systems in mass publics. He (1964:207) defines a belief system as "a configuration of ideas and attitudes in which the elements are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence." The burden of his argument is to show that these belief systems vary considerably in the degree to which their idea elements are constrained to co-vary and the extent to which these constraints are operative in different subpopulations. He presents evidence to show that the belief systems of the political elite, for example, are considerably more coherent and organized than among the mass public where idea elements, which from the standpoint of the elite's understanding of "what goes with what" should or should not belong together, are almost randomly combined.

9 Newcomb (1961:13), defined the concept as follows: "Common relevance refers to joint dependence of A and B (as perceived by A, in the case of individual systems) upon
perhaps as conceptualized in "balance theory" (cf. Newcomb, 1961; Heider, 1958; Festinger, 1957), will be operative.

The investigator employing a survey technique and a general population sample is faced with the difficulty of identifying attitudes that are likely to be broadly distributed, of general saliency in the population, capable of arousing significant affective commitments, and, consequently, that are likely to be the "stuff out of which friendships are made or broken." Political values and attitudes would seem to be the best candidates for possessing such characteristics. Accordingly, we selected six questions from the main interview schedule to ask the friends in the telephone interview: three were intended to tap educational values and three were drawn from the political domain.

For the purposes of testing our hypothesis that friends should have higher agreement on attitudes than randomly paired individuals, let us consider the subsample of main respondents and of friends as two independent samples from the same population of white males residing in the Detroit area.\(^{10}\) The probability of agreement between randomly assigned pairs is equal to the sum across the set of alternative answers of the probability of choosing alternative \(A_i\) in sample 1 times the probability of choosing alternative \(A_i\) in sample 2:

\[ \sum \Pr(A_{1i}A_{2i}). \]

Table 6 presents the percentages of agreement on the six attitude items as estimated according to the "random pair model" and the actually observed percentages of agreement between friends. Although the random pair model tends consistently to underestimate the actual degree of agreement for the six attitude items, discrepancies for the first five items are all quite small and can easily be accounted for in terms of the fact that the pairings are not random with respect to selected attributes (e.g., education) which are also related to the attitudes in question. Consequently, one need not take into account the additional fact that the pairs are in fact friends. Only in the case of party preference does there appear to be substantial evidence that the friendship nexus itself may be enhancing attitude similarity. Of course, disproportionate agreement on political preferences may result from two quite

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\(^{10}\) We, of course, know that the second sample is in fact dependent on the first. In choosing friends, there is quite clear evidence that individuals are choosing individuals who are similar to themselves in such characteristics as age, occupation, education, and religious preferences. Indeed these characteristics of reported friends and main respondents are correlated .501, .431, .316, and .485, respectively—in brief, friends are not being randomly selected from the population residing in Detroit. (cf. Laumann, 1966:63–87).


**TABLE 6**

*Comparison of the Percentages of Agreement According to the Random Pair Model and the Actually Observed Agreement between Friends*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude Item</th>
<th>(1) Actual Agreement between Friends</th>
<th>(2) Expected Agreement (Random Model)</th>
<th>(3) Discrepancy (1–2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1. Least education required for boy*</td>
<td>39.0%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>+6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2. Least education required for girlb</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3. Main goals of educationc</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>+3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4. Fire a high school teacher who is admitted Communistd</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>+1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5. Fire a high school teacher who is admitted KKK membere</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>+4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6. Political party preferencef</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>+12.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*What is the least amount of schooling that you think a young man needs these days to get along well in the world?*

*bWhat is the least amount of schooling that you think a girl needs these days to get along well in the world?*

*cWhat is the more important goal of higher education? (a) To learn about new ideas and broaden one's mind or (b) to get the training and degree necessary for a first rate job.*

*dSuppose there is a man who admits he is a Communist. Suppose he is a teacher in a high school. Should he be fired or not?*

*eSuppose there is a man who admits he is a Ku Klux Klansman. Suppose he is a teacher in a high school. Should he be fired or not?*

*fGenerally speaking do you think of yourself as a Republican or a Democrat? If Republican or Democrat: Would you call yourself a strong (Republican/Democrat)? If independent or other: Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic party?*

different processes. Men may actively befriend others who agree with them politically. Political agreement may, on the other hand, be the resultant of a long-term process of mutual influence in a friendship relationship formed for quite different reasons, such as common interests in recreation or common residence. We, unfortunately, do not have the relevant information to examine the adequacy of these two rival models. In a subsequent paper, however, we shall attempt to devise a model that systematically takes into account the fact that the friends are similar in a number of important social respects, such as occupational, educational, and religious backgrounds, which are, in turn, important "determinants" of party preference. On the basis of the results reported in Table 6, however, such further elaborations appear to be unnecessary for five of the six attitudes considered.

We still must attempt to answer the question posed above, to wit: is there any difference in attitude similarity between those friendship pairs which
are reciprocated and those which are not? There is some very slender evidence that reciprocated pairs tend to have higher agreement on attitudes than unreciprocated pairs. In the questions regarding the more important goal of higher education (Q3) and the firing of a high school teacher who is an admitted Communist (Q4), reciprocated pairs had higher agreement than unreciprocated pairs (correlations of .115, \( p \approx .115 \), one-tailed), and .148, \( p \approx .05 \), one-tailed). But there was no apparent patterning for the other questions.

**SUMMARY**

In this paper, we have addressed ourselves to two principal tasks. After briefly indicating some of the sampling biases that might impose qualifications on the generality of our results, we discussed the important, but often neglected, methodological questions concerning the degree of accuracy with which respondents report their friends' socioeconomic and other characteristics and the extent to which these reports are subject to systematic distortions or biases. Our evidence suggests that while certain attributes of friends are reported with quite satisfactory accuracy and minimum systematic distortion, these tend to be relatively "objective" or public facts about the friend, such as his age and occupation. As soon as one considers less visible and public attributes, such as political attitudes, there is evidence of considerable distortion in the direction of assimilating the friend's attributes toward those of the nominator (ego).

Secondly, we have addressed ourselves to the substantive questions of estimating the degree of mutual choice of friends in an adult urban population, friends being named unconstrained by any criteria of selection,\(^{11}\) and of assessing the degree of attitude similarity between friends and the relevance of reciprocated choice in enhancing attitude similarity. While approximately 43 per cent of the friends reciprocated in the main respondents' choices, there is only slender evidence to support the notion that reciprocated pairs have greater agreement on attitudes than nonreciprocated pairs. Indeed there is little evidence that attitude agreements between friends are higher than chance expectations for most of the attitudes measured. Of course, as noted in our discussion of these findings, the results do not necessarily refute the hypothesis

\(^{11}\) By "unconstrained," we mean that the respondents could name as friends whomever they pleased, including kin, work partners, neighbors, school friends whom they still regarded as their closest friends, and so on. Specifically asking people to name friends who must share common residence in a housing development or common membership in the same work organization or occupation, of course, serves to constrain the character of the friends mentioned. For many purposes, this latter strategy is a reasonable one to take, but it did not seem appropriate for our study.
that friends, under certain conditions, will have greater attitude similarity than randomly paired individuals.

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